

# OUR POWER

OFFSHORE WORKERS' DEMANDS  
FOR A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

# METHODOLOGY AND LESSONS LEARNED

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**Platform** is an environmental and social justice collective based in London with campaigns focused on the global oil and gas industry, fossil fuel finance and building capacity toward climate justice and energy democracy. Platform’s North Sea Just Transition campaign seeks a well-managed, worker-led phase-out of oil and gas production in the North Sea.



**Friends of the Earth Scotland** campaigns for a world where everyone can enjoy a healthy environment and a fair share of the Earth’s resources. Climate change is the greatest threat to this aim, that’s why we’re calling for a just transition to a 100% renewable, nuclear-free, zero-fossil-fuel Scotland.

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# INTRODUCTION

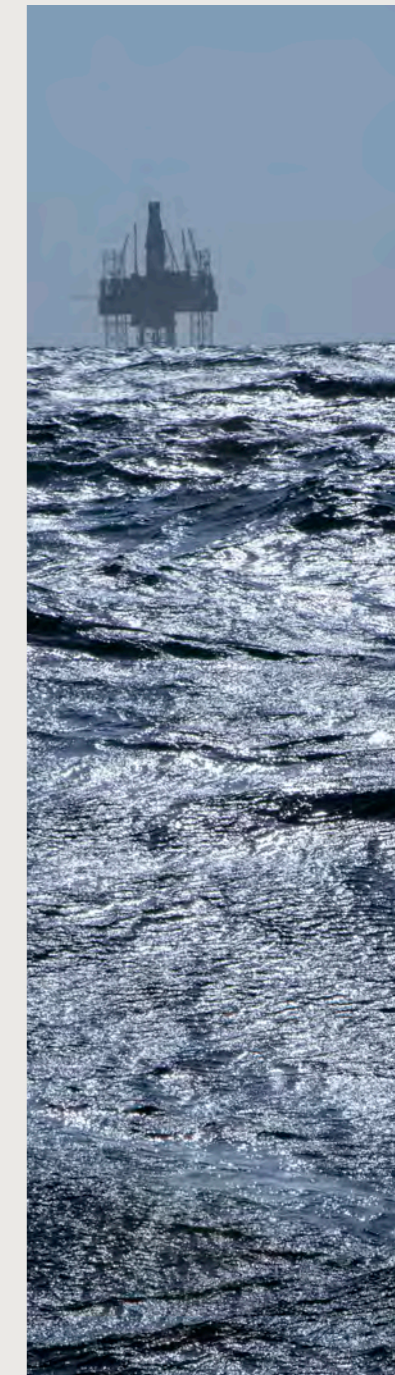
Since May 2020, Friends of the Earth Scotland and Platform have conducted surveys, telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings with people working in offshore oil and gas. These efforts have deepened our understanding of the industry, informed our policy demands and shaped future plans within our just transition campaigns. We have organised spaces for oil and gas workers to meet with MSPs and MPs, the Just Transition Commission and the North Sea Transition Authority (formerly the Oil and Gas Authority). We’ve supported the lodging of motions and holding of debates at the Scottish Parliament as well as amendments to bills in the UK Parliament. Furthermore, we’ve shared our organising efforts with others in the climate and trade union movements to build awareness and support for just transition.

As climate justice organisations, we believe that a just transition is essential. Climate breakdown is being driven by the exploitation of fossil fuels that benefits corporations and elites and is enabled by acquiescent governments. Shifting to a renewable energy system on a timescale that avoids catastrophic warming is vital. Rich, historical polluters like the UK have the responsibility to move fastest. Here in the UK, oil and gas has played a major role in our political and economic structures beyond shaping our energy systems. We have repeatedly seen the power of fossil fuel companies in influencing governments and politicians. As rhetoric on climate action grows, we

continue to see industry representatives around the policy-making table rather than the workers and communities who will be affected.

Our organisations campaign for a rapid shift away from fossil fuels to prevent climate breakdown. We believe planning this transition must actively involve the people affected. Just transition is rooted in the trade union movement and sets the framework for how this should happen, with workers organising alongside the communities they are part of to change their industry to do no environmental harm. A just transition true to those origins should bring workers, communities and climate activists together against the corporate greed and government intransigence that is leading to climate breakdown and threatening jobs and livelihoods.

Over the course of 2022, we held a series of in-person workshops with offshore workers to develop their demands for a worker-led just transition. *Our Power: Offshore workers’ demands for a just energy transition* outlines the 10 demands developed by workers and the pathways to realise them. This briefing paper sets out the process undertaken by Friends of the Earth Scotland and Platform leading up to and throughout the workshops over the last three years. In addition to setting out the process, this briefing also seeks to share the lessons we have learned throughout that time. We are sharing the process and outcomes of our building relationships with offshore oil and gas workers to support others in our movement considering a similar approach.



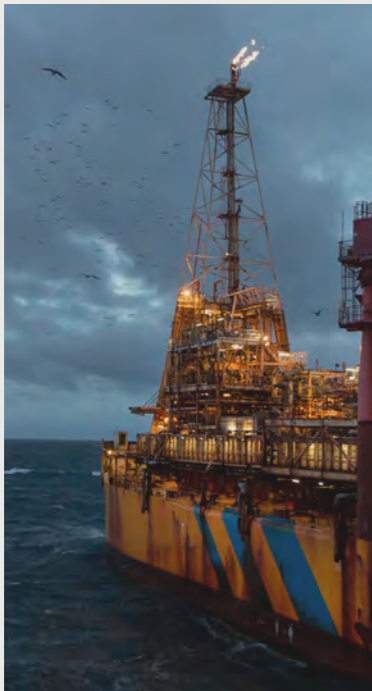
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# CONSULTATION FOUNDATIONS

## OFFSHORE REPORT

Until the consultation process, the most substantial output of our engagement with offshore workers was a report in 2020, *Offshore: Oil and gas workers' views on industry conditions and the energy transition*, written alongside Greenpeace UK. The content and findings of the report were based on our survey of almost 1,400 offshore workers, followed by hours of follow-up calls with respondents.

Offshore showed workers were increasingly disillusioned and concerned about their employment in oil and gas, which was often precarious. At the same time, workers were interested in moving out of oil and gas, particularly to offshore wind and other renewables, with job security being their primary concern in any move.



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## OFFSHORE SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The survey included a series of 19 questions. After determining what information we hoped to gather, we worked with a few individuals who were familiar with the offshore oil and gas industry to ensure the framing and line of questioning would resonate with workers. It was important to take the time to understand the language and context familiar to offshore workers.

Through basic searches, we identified a range of Facebook groups for offshore workers. These searches also revealed that many offshore workers rely on LinkedIn for new contract opportunities in the energy industry.

When it came to publishing the survey, we laid out three key routes for promotion; posts in Facebook groups and LinkedIn channels relevant to offshore workers, targeted Facebook adverts in geographical areas of higher oil and gas employment density, and communications shared by offshore trade unions to their members. Of the nearly 1,400 responses, each of these routes led to roughly a third of the responses with a small, additional amount from organic online sharing and word of mouth.

## BUILDING BEYOND THE DATA

Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they were happy to be contacted and follow up phone calls were crucial to incorporating workers' views into *Offshore*. Over a period of a month, we called nearly 200 workers and spent hours discussing their responses to the survey and their time offshore. We attempted to incorporate all the nuances of these discussions into the *Offshore* report.

The survey work demonstrated that we were prepared to learn from workers. We entered the survey and initial calls with trepidation, believing that many wouldn't be interested in talking to campaigners from climate organisations. We were wrong. Nearly 1,400 people responded to the survey and our main challenge was finding the time to call everyone, where each call would last between 30 - 60 minutes.

## TRAINING & TICKETS BRIEFING

In the original *Offshore* survey, workers were able to list barriers to transitioning into other industries and their solutions for addressing them. This section of the findings informed our next focus which tackled the issue of training and tickets. It was clear throughout *Offshore* that workers faced significant costs for training and these were often duplicated if they wanted to seek work in other industries such as offshore wind.

Our Training & Tickets briefing, also carried out with Greenpeace UK, laid out the results of a further survey of 610 workers on training issues, highlighting an average annual cost to workers of £1800 and unreasonable expectations from employers to repeat in-date training for new contracts. 94% of those surveyed backed a proposal for an Offshore Training Passport (OTP) to standardise training requirements in the energy sector as far as possible to reduce duplication.

## OFFSHORE TRAINING PASSPORT CAMPAIGN

We have since campaigned for an OTP, seeking to reduce duplication and prohibitive costs of training for workers looking to move from oil and gas into wind. With the backing of RMT, Unite Scotland, and a number of politicians in both Holyrood and Westminster, the OTP became a clear demand from a workforce looking for ways to be part of the transition.

Running the follow-up Training & Tickets survey, and our subsequent campaign for an OTP, showed workers we were committed to working together on issues they identified as the most pressing. Through all our phone conversations, training as an issue within their industry and as a barrier to transition arose again and again. We believe our focus on training won the trust of many workers we contacted, since they saw us prioritise the issue they felt the most strongly about. It also provided the opportunity to build relationships with trade unions already raising training issues on behalf of their members.

## CONCLUSION

The *Offshore* report and subsequent campaigning was largely successful because we took a curious and patient approach to building relationships with offshore oil and gas workers, asked for help to shape the initial survey, spent time calling respondents and listened to their concerns. This forged strong relationships with individual workers and trade union representatives.

Throughout our campaign for an OTP, we made sure to centre case studies written by workers, prioritised workers speaking to the press and focused on securing meetings with decision-makers for workers instead of ourselves. We gave up space for our organisations in the interest of workers sharing their views directly.

As a consequence of these projects, we built trust and relationships with offshore workers. We were well versed in the issues facing workers as well as increasingly confident in workers' support for an energy transition that secures new opportunities on decent terms and conditions. With the training campaign well developed and making significant progress, we felt it was the time to develop more comprehensive demands for the transition.



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# THE WORKSHOPS

## INTRODUCTION

In this section, the process of the consultation workshops is explained. From the initial building blocks to creating the workshop structure, through to the logistics, delivery, analysis and demand formulation.

Our objectives through the consultation process were to:

- Organise in-person group meetings for workers to be able to discuss issues collectively;
- Develop worker-led demands for a just energy transition; and
- Create costed implementation pathways for each demand.

The workshop's basic structure involved workers discussing the current barriers to the energy transition and then moving to potential solutions. After the workshops, we developed implementation pathways to turn the solutions into clear and actionable demands. These demands underwent a process of testing and development in collaboration with the workers present in the workshops, workers who were unable to attend, trade union representatives and expert researchers.

## BUILDING BLOCKS

We wanted a workshop that was sufficiently structured to draw out concerns and potential solutions, but not so formulaic that it would limit the scope or topic of potential conversation.

When designing the structure of the workshop we used the online Action Catalogue tool, which allows the user to alter 32 criteria depending on their project, including objectives, expected participant numbers, and environment where the workshop would be held. Action Catalogue then matches the criteria against 57 inclusive research methods and lists them for the user based on their compatibility. From the Action Catalogue tool, we adapted and created a structure based on the 3 most compatible methods.

With a structure in place, we held a series of meetings with workers we had remained in close contact with following *Offshore*. We met with them to discuss our objectives and to hear their views on how best to carry out the process; particularly with an eye on timings and locations based on their understanding of work offshore.

To help us finalise and deliver the workshops, we commissioned independent facilitators with backgrounds in inclusive and participatory training. For the workshops to be genuinely worker-led, we wanted independent facilitators to ensure our presence, and the presence of our organisations, was as minimised as possible. We were present to take notes and greet the participants, but only intervened in the discussion to ask clarifying questions.



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## LOGISTICS AND DELIVERY

The workshops were held throughout Spring 2022, ahead of the offshore shutdown season over the summer months. We staggered workshops over March, April and May, and in different parts of the UK, to make the workshops available for all interested workers, regardless of their shift patterns.

We organised workshops in Aberdeen, Newcastle and Edinburgh, recognising the importance of making the workshops as familiar and accessible as possible. Some actions we took to realise this were:

- Holding multiple workshops in Aberdeen because workers were used to travelling to Aberdeen for work;
- Staggering workshops to take into account shift patterns the majority of workers followed;
- Identifying venues that were familiar to workers, such as Station Hotels in Aberdeen and Newcastle where offshore training events had been held in the past and;
- Providing a £100 stipend and optional travel and accommodation expenses

The discussions in the workshops were structured loosely. Three frames for initiating discussions were identified based on our previous work and the different outcomes imagined for the workshops:

- 1) Current industry conditions, including topics such as contracts, morale and health and safety;
- 2) Future prospects in the energy transition, including topics such as training, transition support and job creation; and
- 3) Power and who has it, in order to think about how decisions are made.

Including a discussion of power was important for encouraging workers to view themselves as part of the conversation about the energy transition. A consequence of significant disenfranchisement of workers across the UK, the offshore industry included, is a general feeling of political disappointment and apathy. It was important to break through these feelings and focus on what power workers held and how decisions are currently made.



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## ANALYSIS AND DEMAND FORMULATION

Following the conclusion of the workshops, we were left with over 100 pages of verbatim notes and over 20 flipchart pages of information captured by the facilitators.

We organised a meeting with a handful of people who had not been present at the workshops but were familiar with energy transition issues. The goal of the day was to review notes and identify the common themes, concerns and solutions. Those who had not been at the workshops were given an outline of the project objectives and the format of the workshops, but were broadly there as more neutral reviewers to ensure outputs were consistent with the workshop notes, rather than any pre-existing assumptions by the project team.

The review session began with an analysis of the notes for cross-cutting concerns and issues identified across the six workshops. These concerns

covered a range of workplace issues including the precarious nature of contracts, lack of power held by the workforce in decision-making and frustrations with the training regime. Alongside these were a series of concerns more focused on the energy transition, such as the lack of opportunities in alternative industries, a lack of a coherent plan and the lack of public ownership and intervention in the energy system.

When the cross-cutting concerns and issues were identified, we moved on to reviewing all of the solutions and demands put forward by workers. We found that each workshop went in its own direction, where potential solutions for most issues were raised, but participants tended to focus on a few demands in more detail. This was not a problem, as the potential solutions were raised consistently, but each workshop developed detail on the specific issues they found most interesting to talk about.

For instance, specific, detailed conversations about demands for the training regime, public energy and a universal wage floor were raised in every workshop. Whereas, while the tax system was discussed as an issue in every workshop, not all of the workshops spent concentrated time developing a solution to the problem. We attributed this to workers' personal experience and interests, as well as how much time the industry specific issues - such as training - took up in the day.

Once complete, these demands were gathered and discussed in terms of their prominence in discussions across the workshops, their capacity to address key issues and themes raised by workers and how they fit as a collective vision. We were looking for a set of demands that covered workers' concerns across different locations, experience levels and departments. On this basis, a clear set of 10 demands emerged.

## TESTING DEMANDS

After identifying the 10 demands, we wrote a short description for each one based on the framing and context of the workshops. As a further round of verification, we phoned all the workshop participants to ask whether they agreed with the workshop outputs. These calls provided additional direction to the focus of the demands through small changes to the short descriptions. There was unanimous agreement that the demands reflected the discussions in workshops and would address the main concerns raised.

A number of additional calls were held with workers who had been interested in the workshops but unable to attend. Those unable to attend supported the package of

demands and were pleased to hear of the direction the workshops took in their absence.

To support this verification process, we also sought additional input and guidance from allies around the oil and gas industry. Specifically, the RMT trade union provided a sense check and direction for structuring the demands. This input provided a foundation for further research, rather than having any impact on the content of the demands themselves, given that the officials were not participants in the workshops. Their expertise was vital in ensuring that the demands and descriptions were not only legitimately worker-led, but would also have the desired effect.

We then made a Typeform survey of the demands to send out to the wider workforce. Using Facebook advertisements, LinkedIn, RMT and Unite membership lists, and our networks of workers, we tested the wider workforce's agreement with the demands. We received over 1000 responses, where 90% agreed with the whole package of demands.

We set the survey up so that a respondent could either agree with the whole package of demands, or individually select the demands they agreed with, so that they could express their preferences if they disagreed with a specific solution. As such, agreement with each individual demand was even higher than 90%.

## BUILDING OUTPUTS

With a verified set of demands and descriptions we moved on to creating implementation pathways. A common battle within just transition campaigning has been a lack of clear and identifiable targets or demands that would significantly progress the cause. Many demands cover the entire economy, for example calls for Just Transition plans in every sector. More specific demands that could progress a just transition within specific workplaces or industries, either created with or by workers, are much less common.

Clear implementation pathways would lay out the decision-makers responsible, the potential benefits and the expected costs for each demand. We also included examples within the UK or elsewhere in the world of the proposed solutions for additional context.

Given their extensive work in this area and their commitment to ensure the demands remained consistent with the workers' discussions, we commissioned Transition Economics to carry out this research. To enable Transition Economics to keep the research aligned with the workers' priorities, they were given the demands and descriptions, a document containing key quotes from workshops and phone calls as well as the full 100 pages of workshop notes for context and nuance within conversations. Where appropriate we also engaged other experts in key areas, for example working with an expert on training to support the development of that specific pathway and another organisation that is focused on whistleblowing procedures.



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## CONCLUSION

This process was extensive, with multiple rounds of analysis and verification. To ensure demands were worker-led it was imperative that those who participated in the workshops were repeatedly brought into the process. However, it wouldn't be reasonable to expect workers to participate in all of these analysis rounds. There is an onus on the organisers to create accessible opportunities for influencing the content without creating unreasonable burdens and barriers.

In addition to the input through follow up phone calls, centring worker voices through quotes and case studies helped to keep the demands in their voices. After the follow up phone calls, we asked eleven participants to act as case

studies for the report, which included a 30 minute interview. We also asked four participants to be in a film about the process. It was very important that workers only participated in these additional activities if they felt comfortable and motivated to do so.

Workers see other countries preparing for an energy transition, and they are angry that the UK and Scottish Governments repeatedly choose to drag their feet. Workers were invested in building a plan for an energy transition through this process because they know how essential it is for their livelihoods and communities.

We believe *Our Power* contains a coherent and comprehensive vision for a just energy transition

that is legitimately worker-led. By publishing a full report alongside individual briefings on each demand, we hope that any worker, trade union official, climate activist or community campaigning group can pick up the demand relevant to their work and fight for it.

When verifying the demands through phone calls, it was possible that workers could have rejected the demands and ground the project to a halt. We see it as testament to the process that a group of offshore workers with diverse political views and backgrounds could create a set of demands they all agreed with. The final round of verification, in the form of another workforce survey, adds weight to the legitimacy of each demand.

# LESSONS LEARNED

Our work with people in offshore energy started more than three years ago. The project has had several false starts, amended plans and unexpected events. We set out with the intention of co-creating a set of just transition demands for the offshore oil and gas workforce that we could fight for together. We thought we would have these demands by the end of the first year. We had no idea it would take two surveys, a year of campaigning on training, and months of outreach to get us into a room with workers developing solutions to the energy transition.

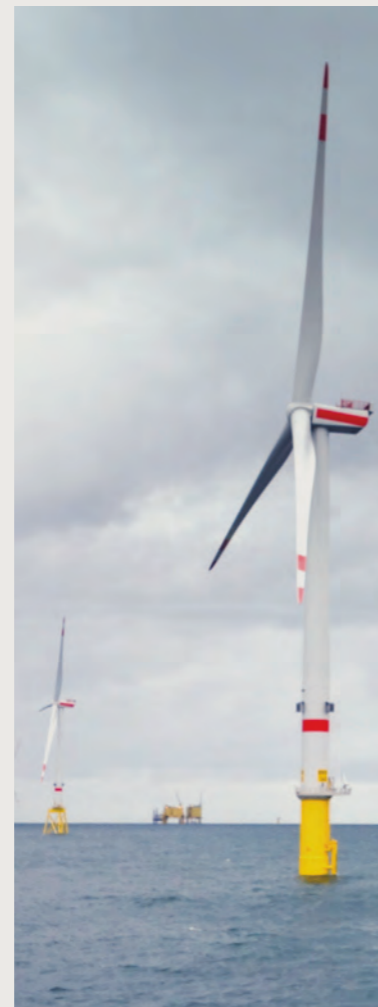
Examples of this kind of work from environmental organisations are rare. We want to encourage other organisations to think about their approach to campaigning, and consider how they can find common cause with workers and communities who will be affected by climate change or mitigation policies.

We share our process here as a potential guide and starting point for others. Primarily, we want to demonstrate that this work is possible for any organisation prepared to dedicate the capacity to it. It doesn't require expert prior knowledge. We have learned a lot over the last three years. Our perceptions have been challenged. The process we undertook was one of many options and others will see flaws and weaknesses where we didn't.

The key factor is to commit the time and resources to building your understanding. Be open to the idea that you might be wrong, that you might have to stop and re-strategise multiple times, and that the issues related to transitioning a whole industry of people, infrastructure and companies are going to be extremely complicated. If you are committed to working with impacted workers and

communities to vision a new world, you will find a way that works. Ours is just one way.

In this final section, we outline relevant lessons learned for others undertaking similar work, whether they are building a campaign co-created with an impacted community or workforce, or looking to embed worker perspectives in their climate campaigning. We hope sharing these lessons can help others to avoid similar mistakes or at least to be better prepared for challenges we had not anticipated.



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## FIND A COMMON LANGUAGE

Our organisations have an existing understanding of just transition and its importance to our principles and campaigns for climate justice. However, these concepts are not necessarily well-embedded in people's lives or the industries they work for. For instance, communities and workers in Aberdeen were actively worried about what climate change and industrial shifts meant for their futures, but they did not have these conversations using 'just transition' language.

To be able to hold repeated conversations and build trust, it is essential to identify the common ground you share with the community you are engaging with that justifies or explains your presence. For us, we understood that in our campaigns on fossil fuels, we regularly faced a powerful oil and gas industry lobby that held the ear of the government and actively restricted opportunities to move away from their use and supply. For workers, their own concerns and fears were overlooked in favour of those same lobbyists and executives - their voices were unheard. We communicated that in our view, for as long as the industry voice remained dominant, neither we as climate organisations nor they as workers could win. A victory for either of us in our struggles meant a defeat to the industry lobby. This explanation was understood by workers and built their initial trust for having further conversations.

## PREPARE FOR FALSE STARTS

Throughout the three years of work, there have been several plans that have been abandoned because input from others has shown them to be unworkable or ill judged. Only with hindsight is it possible to say that we were wrong to set out to do certain tasks or ideas at the time we chose. Being able to start planning but ultimately stopping plans before they are delivered is necessary.

In our initial plan for this work before the pandemic, we set out to hold in-person workshops with workers without any networks. The pandemic prevented us from this, but it would have never worked without some serious relationship building and better understanding of the sector. In 2021, after completing the *Offshore* report, we held an online workshop with the intention of building transition demands. With over 150 registrations we entered this workshop confident and well prepared. Six workers joined out of the 150 registrations. We learned that most offshore workers are not familiar with meeting online and we had not considered whether we had the trust needed to get people to attend.

## GET THE KNOWLEDGE FIRST

It was important for us to develop a baseline understanding of the way the industry functions and the problems within it before trying to build relationships. Understanding industry jargon and the common problems for offshore workers allowed us to maintain a useful conversation when meeting someone new.

Relatedly, it is important to understand the timings and ebbs and flows of whatever industry you are engaging with. 'Shutdown season' is a good example of a quarter of the year where offshore workers are essentially unavailable for meetings.

## COMMIT TO PATIENT CAMPAIGNING

For the first year and a half of the project, we tried to engage in worker consultation while also keeping up with traditional NGO outputs - such as searching for media hits, intervening in policy debates and externally promoting the campaign. We quickly learned that organising with workers to co-create demands is an intensive process. To ensure it is done well requires devoting time and energy to inward facing, strategy-building work, and leaving the outward facing work to later down the line.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EXCHANGING INFORMATION AND EXTRACTION

As paid campaigners working for NGOs, we knew there was a power dynamic we could not avoid when speaking with workers. The success of the demands would impact their lives directly. If someone is identified by their boss in a case study, they could lose their job.

When designing the process we tried to think intentionally about what could be of practical benefit to the participants and what we were able to offer. We sought to lessen barriers to participation, change our strategies to fit the priorities workers identified, and offered a stipend for attending a workshop since it was a day of time workers gave up to be in the room. There is no perfect way to engage in consultation with impacted workforces, but there are ways to lessen the extractiveness of the relationship.

