

# Field Notes for transformation



**“As we free our imaginations from the constraints of what is ‘feasible,’ our actions—rooted in hope and determination—are creating new possibilities.”**

PATTI LYNN | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Imagining what’s possible

Dear friend,

When I talk with Corporate Accountability partners like you around the country, we often discuss the importance of re-thinking what’s possible. To create meaningful change, we must find ways to transcend the limits of our political and social imaginations. Along similar lines, in “Emergent Strategy,” adrienne maree brown urges us to create more possibilities in order to shape the kind of future we need.

Often when we think about what’s possible, we confuse it with what’s politically feasible, or fundable, or even expedient. Then, we find we are held back—not only by lack of resources, too many competing priorities, or a challenging political landscape, but also by the limits we put on our very imaginations.

Rebecca Solnit traces one facet of this problem to what she calls “naïve cynicism.” We often want change to be straightforward, quantifiable, and simple—and we are disappointed when it’s not. So instead of trusting that small changes will lead to larger ones, or seeing the value in an action that doesn’t work out exactly as we hoped, or sorting through complexity, we adopt a cynical attitude as a defensive posture. “The openness of hope is dangerous,” she writes. It feels safer to reach for what we know we can achieve, rather than what is actually possible and risk disappointment.

### Perpetuating the status quo

I believe the prevalence of this mindset is no accident. The status quo relies on limiting possibilities in order to perpetuate itself. Myriad systems and cultural norms, like naïve cynicism and corporate power, ensure our aspirations are kept within bounds.

For example, when we expose and challenge corporate actions that seem inevitable, we can change the status quo. But corporate executives do not want us to see that.

Take, for instance, our campaign that took on GE’s lead role in the nuclear weapons industry. When GE moved out of the nuclear weapons-making business, its executives did not publicly acknowledge the tens of millions of dollars it was losing from Infact’s medical equipment boycott, nor the Oscar-winning film that documented its abuses. But our campaign built enormous social and financial pressure that forced GE’s changes. Similarly, we know from the tobacco industry’s internal documents that executives were advised to never attribute changes in practices to the pressure that resulted from our movements.

### Challenging boundaries

Today, the status quo of transnational corporations’ externalization of costs is threatening global survival. They are allowed to extract resources, pollute, pay low wages, push harmful products—and never pay the costs of the harms they inflict.



Just a few years ago, Big Polluters' influence was the great elephant in the room at the U.N. climate treaty. Together with our allies we imagined a world where the fossil fuel industry has no say in climate policy. Today, this demand has caught fire: it was a central issue at the most recent U.N. climate treaty negotiations (pictured).

This norm has resulted in the devastation of communities and climate catastrophe, while Big Polluters and other industries continue to reap enormous profits.

Addressing climate change and the corporate power at its root requires us to believe beyond what we can currently see. It requires us to believe in more possibilities than what naïve cynics, transnational corporations, and those in power would have us imagine. It requires us to understand that we can “shape tomorrow toward abundance,” as adrienne maree brown writes.

And today, more and more people are doing just that, reaching for change far beyond the boundaries set by the powers that be. The indigenous Water Protectors in South Dakota challenging the Keystone XL pipeline taught us old and new ways of uniting our spirits, bodies, and communities when taking on transnational corporations. Last year, at the U.N. climate treaty negotiations—perhaps the most unlikely of places—people from across the globe came together around a set of People’s Demands. These demands lay out a clear vision for climate justice and policy free of the deeply entrenched corporate power we are mired in today.

All around the world, people are freeing their imaginations from the constraints of what is “feasible.” Rooted in hope and determination, their actions are growing many possible futures.

### Expanding possibilities

For more than four decades, Corporate Accountability, side by side with philanthropic partners like you, has imagined what is truly possible. We believe that we have the power to hold corporations accountable. We know that when hundreds of thousands of people join together across differences to shift the political and public climate, we can change what’s possible. We can create a reality where democratic institutions representing almost every nation on earth can set international law that binds transnational corporations to obey the will of the people. That is truly a radical imagination.

This expansion of what’s possible—and the corresponding actions to manifest those possibilities—is what inspires me when I talk with members like you. And it assures me that we’re making progress, even when the status quo would have us believe otherwise—because we know transformative change is unpredictable and unexpected.

I am honored to do this work with you and am grateful for your beautiful imagination. We are creating the future together—not the most feasible one, but the most profoundly just and life-affirming future we can imagine.

Onward,

PATTI LYNN | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



### CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

10 Milk Street, Suite 610 • Boston, MA 02108  
617.695.2525 • [CorporateAccountability.org](http://CorporateAccountability.org)

