



Introduction to the Organizing Universe

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Making change doesn't always look like this.



**What is an
Activist?**



**What is an
Organizer?**



**What is fighting
for your life ?**

Intro: Definitions

Activist

Focus is on action / participation

Showing up to support actions

Activists multiply power by
being present in numbers

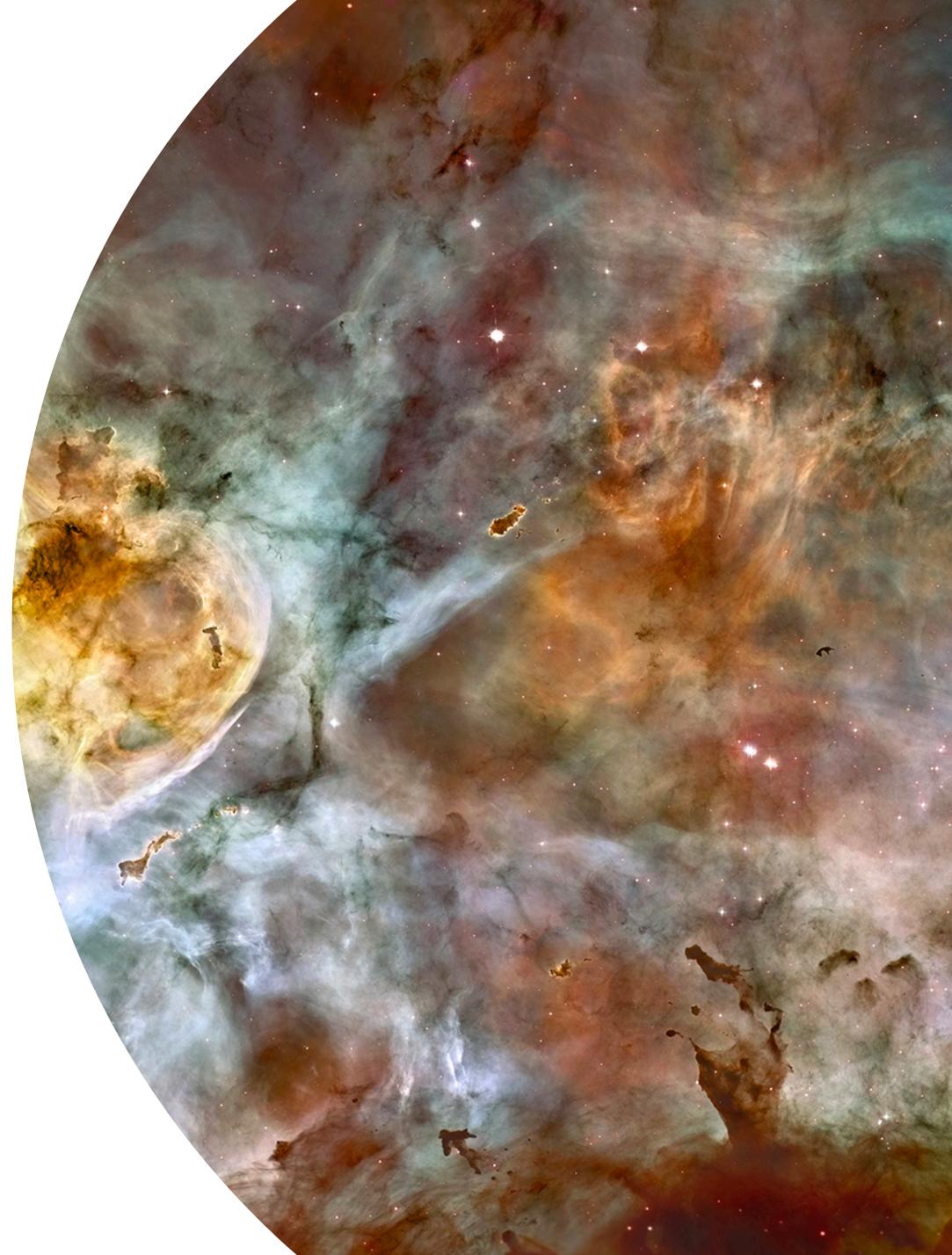


Organizer

“Mobilizing people for the
movement” *- Ariel Atkins*

Focus is on building the base,
talking to people

Organizers multiply power both by
mobilizing people, and by making
new organizers



Fighting for your life

Many people who engage in activism and/or organizing are doing so because **their survival and ability to thrive depends on it.**

They may or may not **identify** as activists or organizers.

They may or may not want to speak on their **experiences** with you.



What is the goal of activism & organizing?



Make change!

Activists: add numbers, be noisy, show up

Organizers: bring new people in, build power

You can be either or both

This talk is to encourage you to ultimately pursue **organizing** because that is what builds movements

The role of reading

(a.k.a. political education)



Political education is for writing your playbook - it is not the play

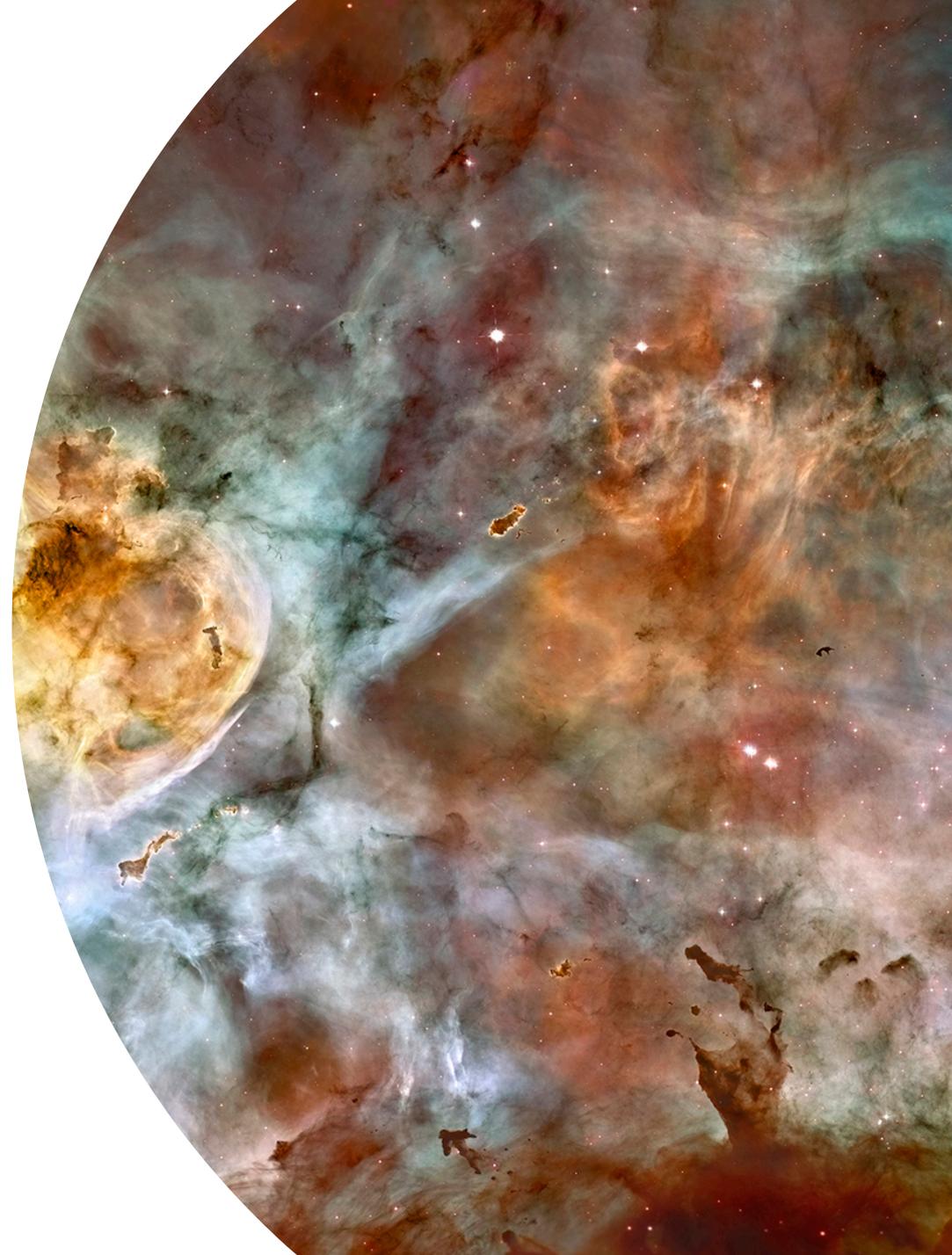
Reading can be helpful for:

- identifying others with similar interests
- building a shared understanding of problems and their causes

When is the right time?

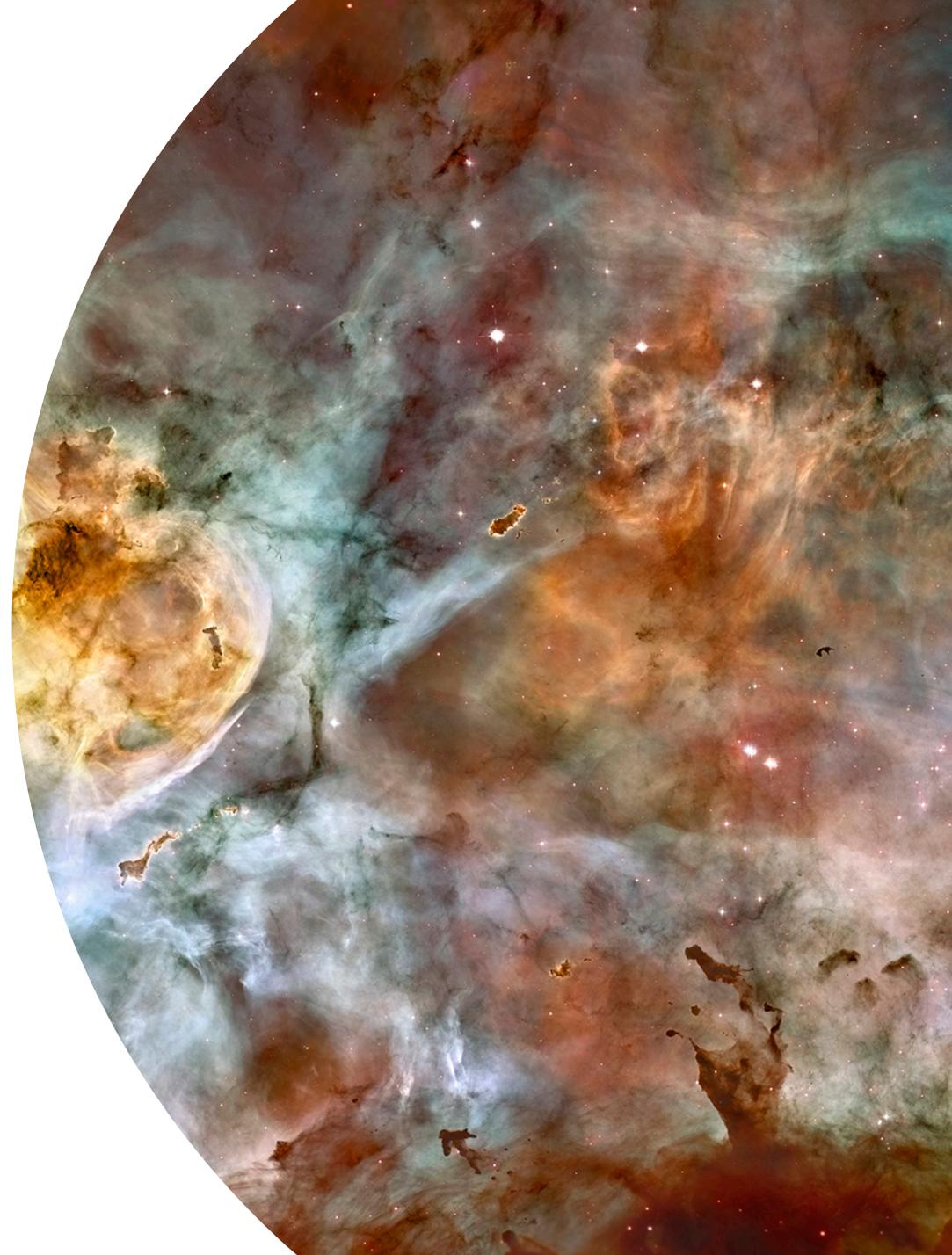
We often think of “crisis” as something that is bounded in time or place, but **overlapping crises are unfolding all the time.**

While this reality can seem daunting, it is **not much more difficult** than trying to comprehend the universe.



Scientists are practiced in tackling complex problems systematically

- We don't try to solve every problem in astrophysics at once.
- We pick something, and focus on that.
- In taking action, we are absorbed by the practical aspects of working the problem and their attendant frustrations.



Getting Started



“Nothing that we do that is worthwhile is done alone.”

- Mariame Kaba

Your first step is to find your people!

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Mariame Kaba's 4 Questions



**What resources
exist so I can better
educate myself?**

Mariame Kaba's 4 Questions



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Who's already doing work around this injustice?

Mariame Kaba's 4 Questions



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Do I have the capacity to offer concrete support & help to them?

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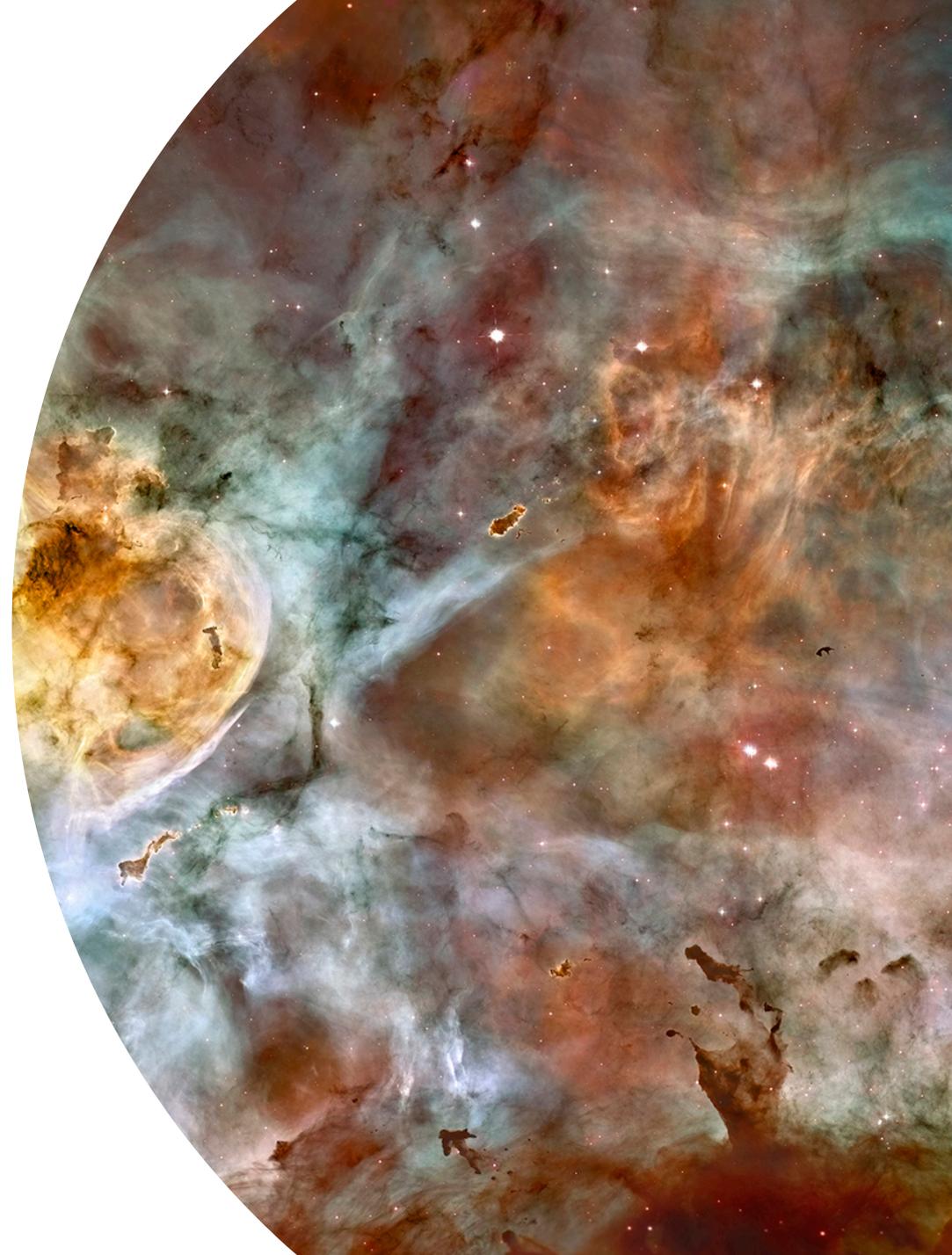
How can I be constructive?

Where to Start

Pick something.

Use your analytical skills.

Find your leverage points.

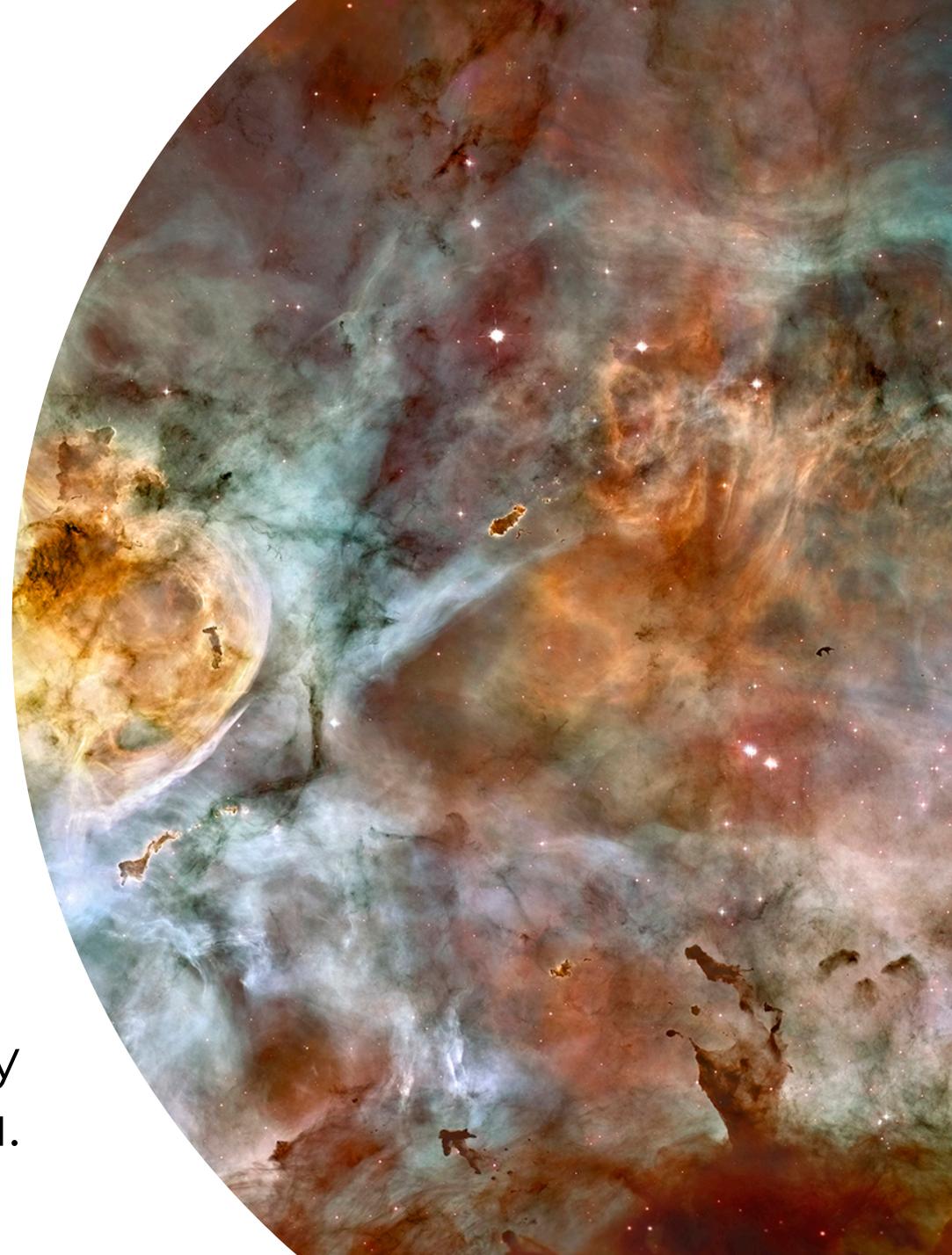


Who do I talk with?

Start talking with people with whom you have a **shared understanding of the problem.**

Academics tend to have **decentralized networks**, which can be powerful

Amplify your numbers through **coalition building**: Showing up for others in solidarity will help build a base who shows up for you.

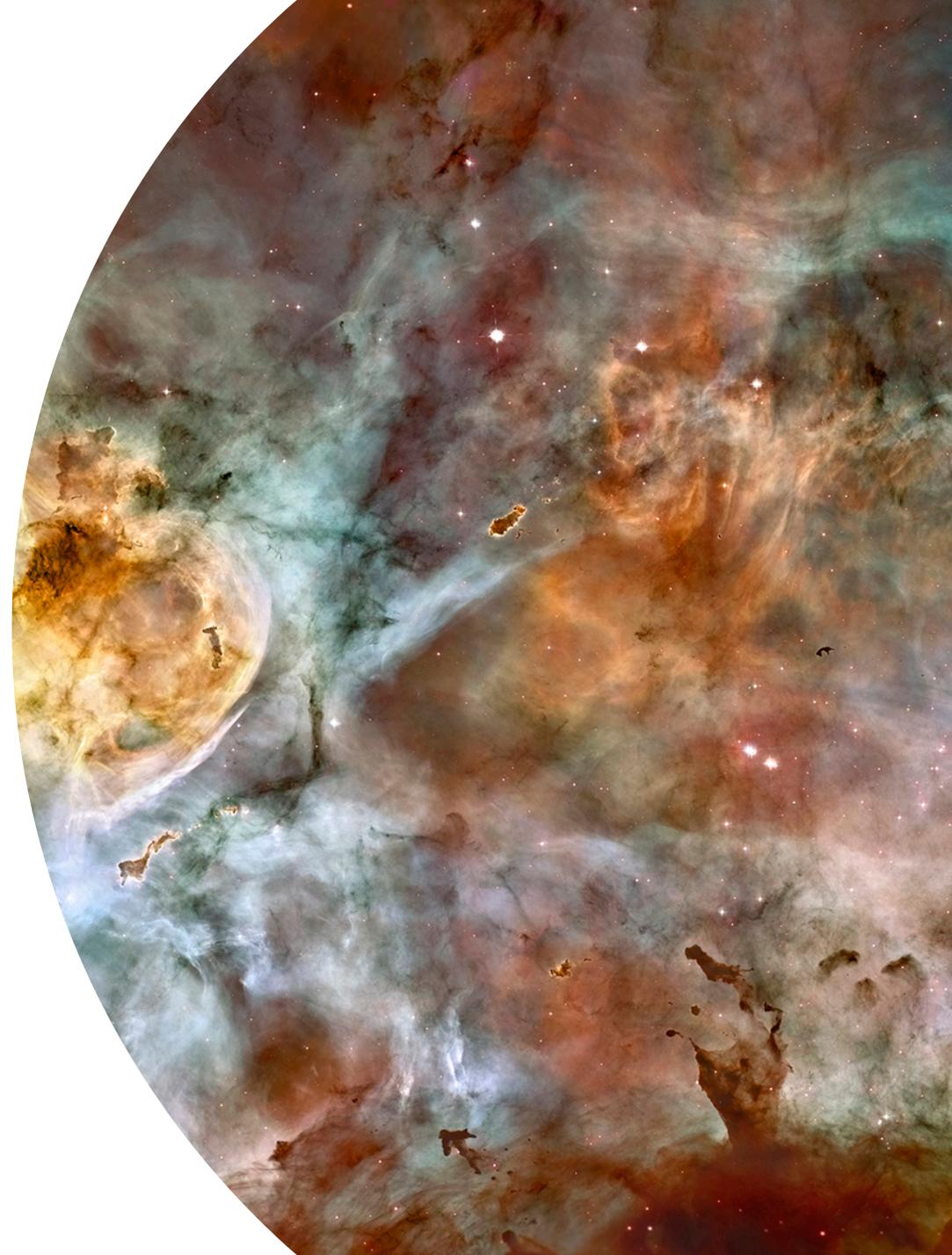


Get clear on your approach:

change people in power, or
build power in people?

Grassroots organizing is about bringing people to a shared understanding around an injustice, in order to create will and action to address it

My personal opinion: focusing on changing the minds of individuals who have power can be effective short term, but is a fragile approach



How? Think Creatively!

Strikes - protests - occupation- boycotts

Public statement/petition writing

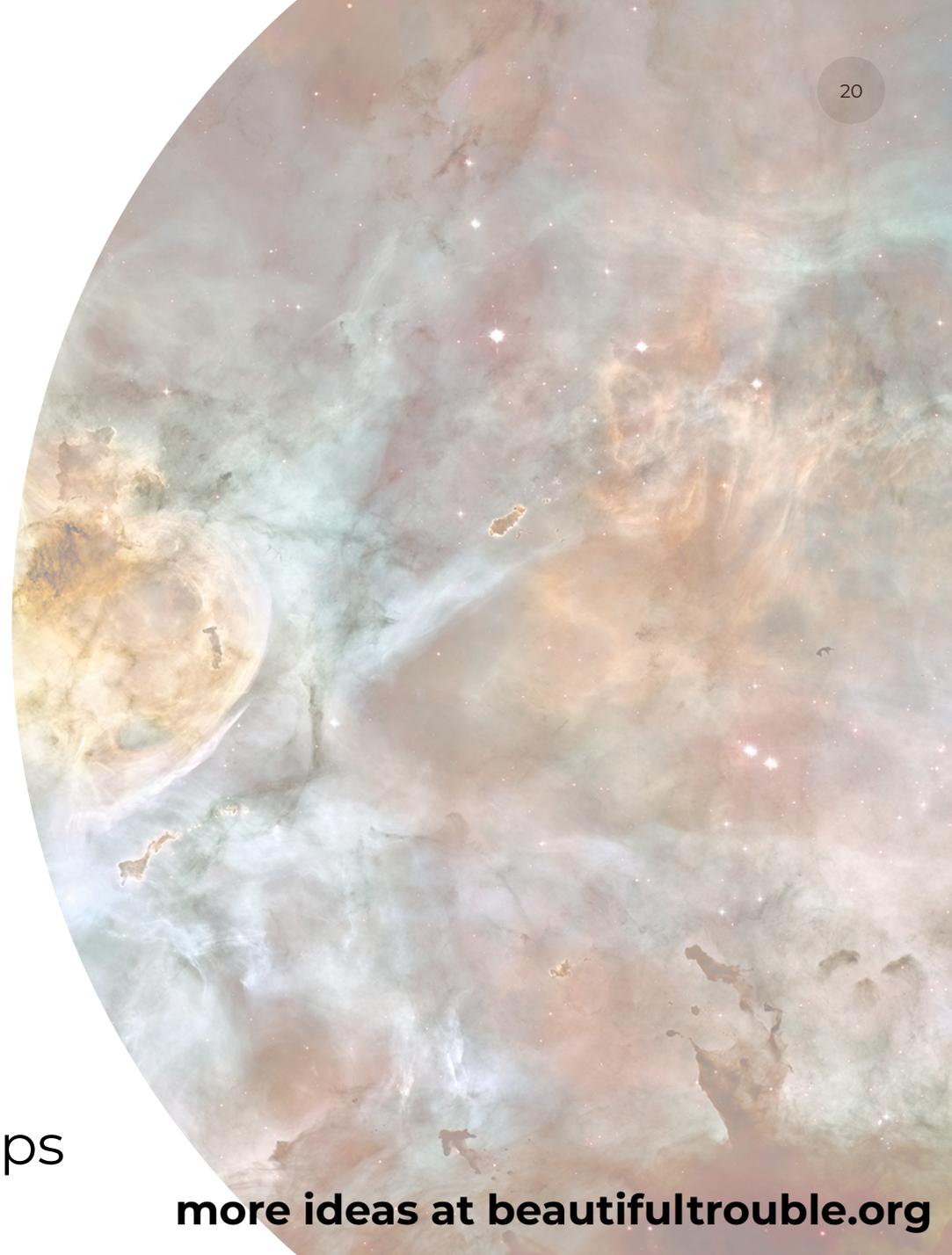
Public speaking - bird-dogging

Collective refusal/non-cooperation

Spectacles - banner drops - flash mobs

PR campaigns - phone or social media zaps

more ideas at beautifultrouble.org



Choose tactics according to goal

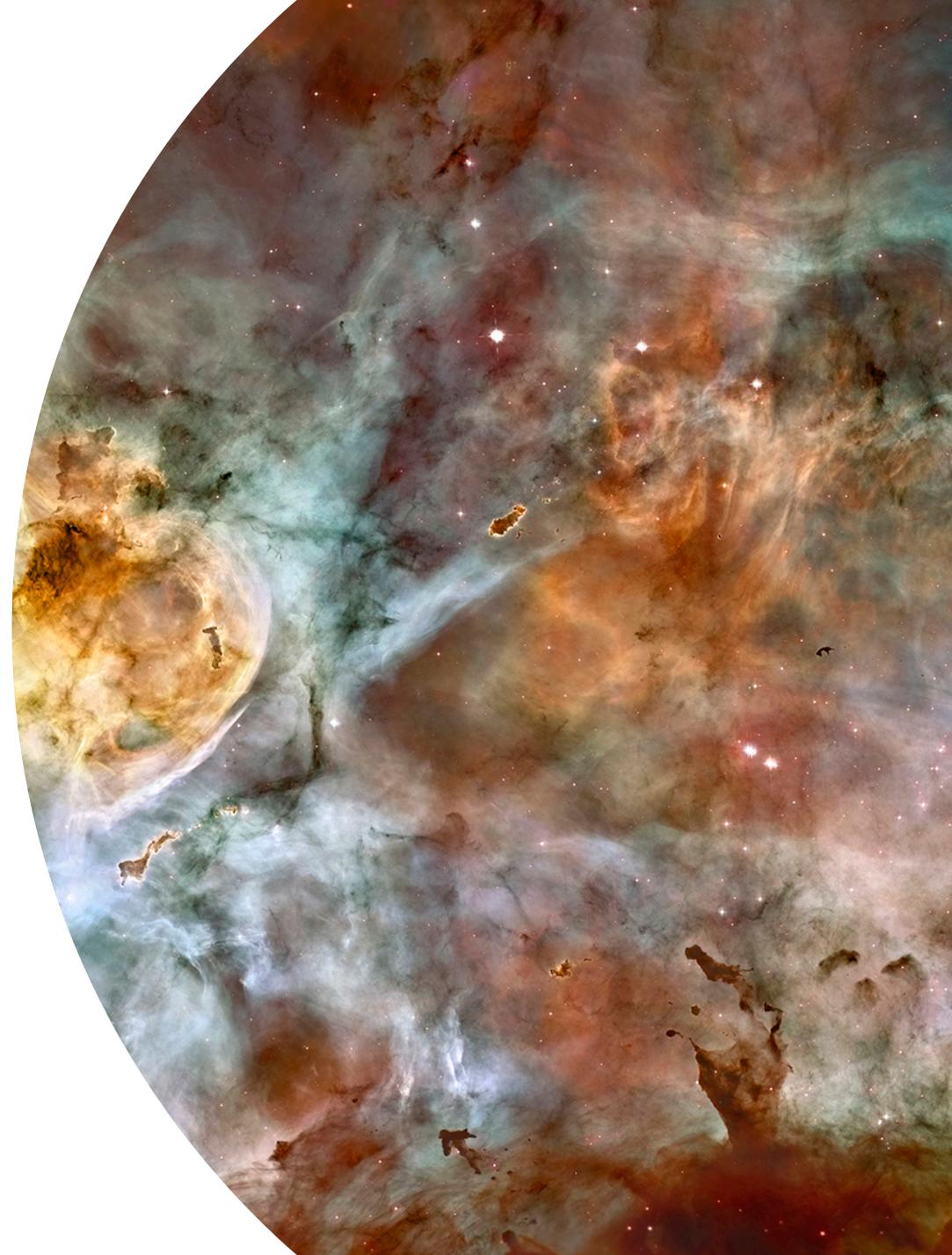
Is your goal...

- raising awareness / getting press attention / activating people?
- building or demonstrating community support or opposition?
- putting pressure on someone who holds the ability to make a significant decision?
- disrupting something specific from happening?
- sowing chaos or internal strife in the opposition?

A concrete action is usually easier to get people to participate in

Usually many tactics are needed, so people can tap into what appeals

Can mix and match to create escalation “menu”



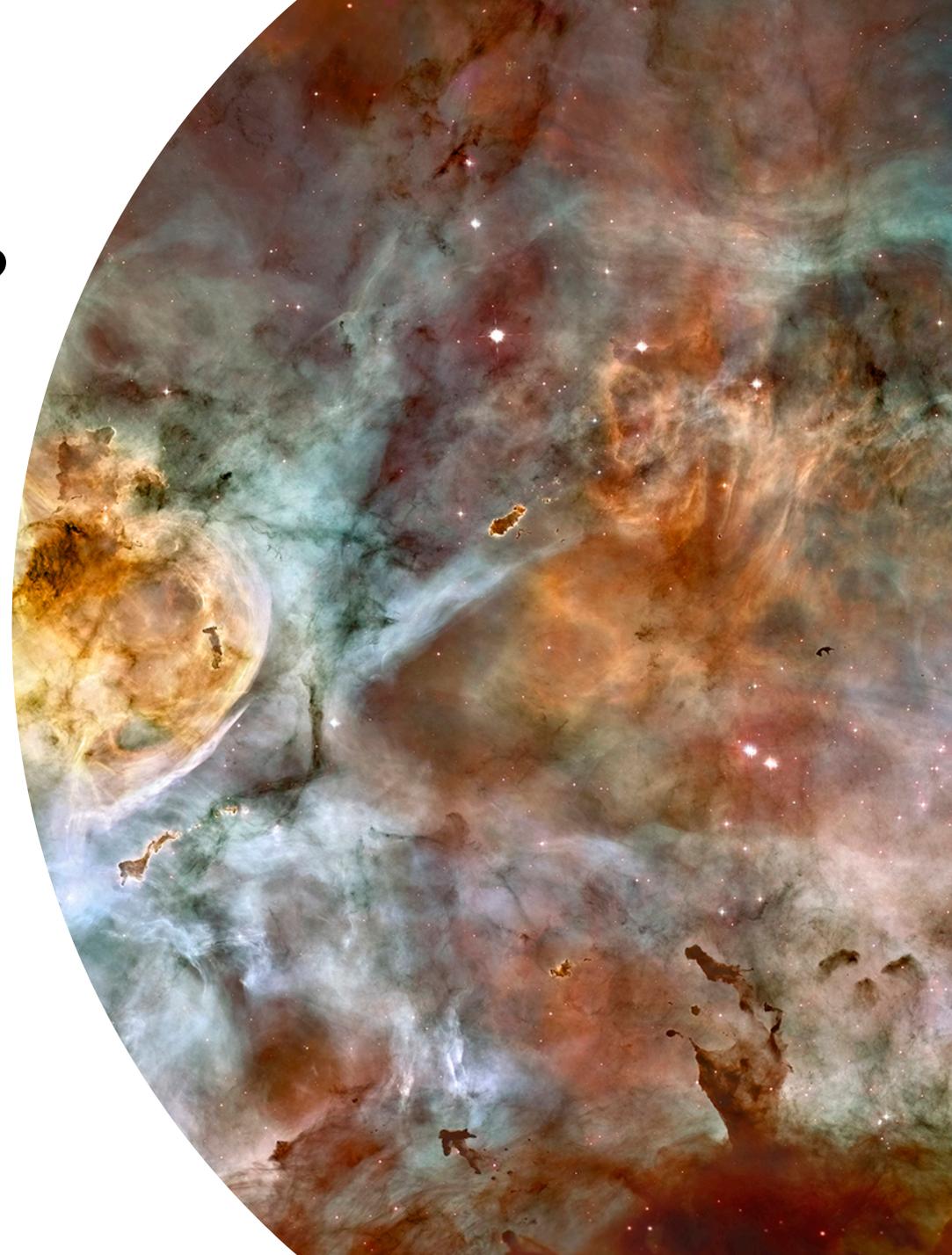
Defining goals

What is failure, what is success?

Fail constructively: use outcomes to learn and iterate on your experimental design

As in astrophysics: set goals that are both **aspirational** and **practical**

The universe does not fail.



Solidarity in the university and beyond

“Who’s already doing work around this injustice?”

Interrogate your expectations about who you will organize with: they may be in very different positions from you

Organizing doesn’t always mean leading



YOU HAVE POWER... USE IT.

“Change means **movement**.
Movement means **friction**.
Only in the frictionless vacuum
of a nonexistent abstract world
can movement or change occur
without that abrasive friction of
conflict.”

- Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*



Police protecting Homan Square torture site, across the street

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Thanks!



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tangledfields.com

beautifultrouble.org

“Shut It Down” by Lisa Fithian

“We Do This Til We Free Us” by Mariame Kaba



Back up slides I probably won't get to

**Alliances bloom, go dormant,
and may bloom again**



If anyone with more power than you (your institution, the police, etc) seems pleased with you, **your demands aren't strong enough.**

