“White supremacy is unrelenting.” That was the first text in the Michigan Voices staff group chat of 2021. It was sent on January 6 at 2:39 PM, the same time that The Capitol was going into lockdown and the Speaker of the House was being taken to a secure location. The entire country was witnessing white supremacy in action as the rioting mob broke into The Capitol in an effort to overturn the 2020 election. For us, the writing on the wall was clear: even though there was no presidential or midterm election, 2021 would be unlike any other “off-year.” So much uncertainty hung overhead, yet we still had to make crucial decisions about funding, staffing, and programs.

There were other organizations that made the decision to scale down, but Michigan Voices made the decision to not only keep ALL of our staff in place, but also fundraise to expand our team. With so much at risk we didn’t see a choice. Access to the ballot, the ongoing pandemic, reproductive justice, our opportunity to have a reflective democracy, and the 2021 municipal elections that were quickly approaching. This was no time to scale back.

Expanding our reach meant looking at our partners and seeing where they are and what communities they serve. We identified gaps in geographies and constituencies and then looked for table partners to fill those gaps.

To build upon the momentum created by the 2020 election, we set up rigorous training programs on everything from voter registration, relational organizing, volunteer engagement and retention, deep-canvasing, social media engagement, data, tools, and redistricting.

We convened a Democracy Workgroup to organize our partners to fight against 39 voter suppression bills, engage in the redistricting process, and run a full election protection program.

Our Integrated Voter Engagement team worked with partners to run voter registration, an Absentee Voter Chase, and GOTV programs for our municipal elections.

We facilitated a Reproductive Justice Workgroup to explore all options to protect comprehensive reproductive health in Michigan, and to ensure that BIPOC and LGBTQ voices were centered in the conversation.

We worked with partners to start the Voices For Vaccines coalition that engaged in door-to-door canvassing and phone and text banking in communities with a high social vulnerability index, low vaccination rates, and high density of BIPOC residents, to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates.

2021 also marked an important milestone for us: on June 1, we finalized our transition to Michigan Voices and became fully independent from State Voices.

This Impact Report celebrates the work that we were able to do because of the contributions of so many: our incredible staff, each one of them committed to our partners and the goal of liberation for BIPOC communities and people; our board, which provides incredible thought-partnership and guidance; our partner organizations; State Voices and the leadership and mentorship of Alexis Anderson-Reed; our funders; and our community allies.
No one knows what opportunities and challenges lie ahead in 2022, but we are clear and resolved in our goals:

Reimagining our progressive infrastructure and moving from transactional work to transformational work.

Funding partners in a more holistic way that will allow them to plan and honor the interconnectedness of our work.

Investing in relationship-based, year-round, multi-cycle organizing and engaging in every election, every time.

Investing in the strategic leadership and the participation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous People, particularly women of color, and queer and gender non-conforming people.

As we continue our journey to collective liberation, it's our great honor to build this movement with you!

Onward Toward Justice,
Sommer & Tameka
Michigan Voices is a backbone organization that seeks to help build civic engagement capacity in progressive nonprofit groups that are led by and engage BIPOC people. Our table partners consist of grass-seed, grassroots, and grass-tops organizations looking to build progressive power for BIPOC people in the State of Michigan. They range in age, race and financial capacity, but they are aligned around a specific set of values. Our purpose is to provide resources to help nonprofit organizations that are led by and engage BIPOC people become self-sustaining in their mission to bring social justice to their communities.
Our 2021 Programs

DEMOCRACY WORKGROUP

2021 was the year that we showed the power of relationship-based organizing, every year and year-round. In 2022, instead of getting ready for the November election, our partners will be ready. That is the power of “off-year” organizing.

In 2021, we streamlined our Democracy department by creating one workgroup to house all redistricting, voters’ rights, and election protection work. As a result, Michigan Voices’ Democracy Workgroup had the most staff and in-house expertise that we have ever had. This allowed staff to adequately support our partner organizations and bring them valuable redistricting and voting rights information in a digestible and timely way. This added capacity allowed us to participate in statewide coalitions of other stakeholders and grass-tops leaders where we played an important role in fighting anti-voter legislation in real time. Our workgroup organized our partners to fight against 39 voter suppression bills, engage in the redistricting process, and run a full election protection program.

REDISTRICTING

In 2018 Michigan voters approved a constitutional amendment to appoint the first-ever Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) to redraw district lines. In 2021, the Michigan Voices Democracy department’s staff played an integral role in the redistricting process by closely monitoring the MICRC through their year-long map drawing process. Our Democracy Workgroup partners were engaging with MICRC right up until they approved the final maps on December 27. On multiple occasions, the MICRC changed course and edited their maps in real time, directly impacted by our partners’ public comments.
ENGAGING WITH THE MICRC
Michigan Voices worked to make sure our partners had the necessary tools to make their voices heard and their Communities of Interest centered in the redistricting process. The Democracy team worked with the MICRC to hold trainings for partners and we included them in the town halls that were hosted by Michigan Voices partners. We supported partners with one-on-one coaching on how to engage the commission, helped them create public comments on not only the mapping process at public hearings, but to influence the redistricting process as a whole. We also worked with them to host Town Halls for the commissioners to learn more about the communities and for the community to learn more about the commission. We worked with talented training partners like the Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights, Common Cause, and All on the Line, partner trainings included topics such as Communities of Interest, the Voting Rights Act, and also guidance on how redistricting maps are drawn and how to give public comments. Each training had 35-60 organizations participating. This was in addition to our biweekly Democracy Workgroup meetings.

In 2020, we had our mind set on GOTV in Grand Rapids. WE DID IT! With a whole lot of support from Michigan Voices, we were able to do just what we set our minds to get everyone to vote. Our numbers increased drastically in every precinct! That would not have happened if we did not have the backing that Michigan Voices gave.

- Kathi Harris
Grand Rapids A. Philip Randolph President and PROACTIVE Project, Inc. Executive Director
Our 2021 Programs

DEMOCRACY WORKGROUP

REDISTRICTING HEARING HIGHLIGHTS
Michigan Voices has had over a dozen of our partner organizations provide a total of at least **60 public comments over the course of the first round of the commission hearings**.

Moving into the second round of public hearings, our partners continued to have an impact on the commission’s process and map drafting. One of the major constitutional requirements the commission was tasked with was to take Communities of Interest (COI) into account when drawing district lines. Michigan Voices and our partner organizations understood the importance of grassroots input on COI and were active participants in the commission’s solicitations of submissions from the general public. We not only turned out members at the hearings themselves, our input helped to persuade MICRC to add additional hearing locations after an early plan was unveiled that would have based districts on geography rather than population, biasing the process in favor of rural areas.

ELECTION PROTECTION
Michigan Voices has been a long-time leader of voting rights and election protection work in Michigan. This is the program that energizes the greatest number of our partners to get out and educate their communities. We partner with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and also operate a local, in-house rapid response program to support our statewide grassroots poll monitor volunteer program. **As a result, Michigan Voices Democracy Workgroup partners and the communities they represent are now better prepared in 2022 to not only combat misinformation, but to be proactive about providing voting rights education.** This work is layered onto Michigan Voices’ Integrated Voter Engagement team’s voter registration and GOTV programming to offer the most holistic support for our partner organizations. Again, we are committed to statewide, continuous voting rights programming all year, every year.

---

**Measurable Impact**

- **18** Partners Engaged
- **179** Public Comments
- **88** Comments at Redistricting Meetings From Aug. - Nov.
- **91** Comments at Redistricting Hearings in October

---

07 | 2021 Impact Report
To prepare partner organizations and their volunteers for 2022, Michigan Voices ran a unique in-depth election protection program for an often overlooked municipal election year. With the aim that partners will be able to activate the same volunteers for the 2022 election, the 2021 program emphasized education for poll monitors and poll watchers, including being aware of issues that may arise due to changes to election law and COVID-19 era precautions.

Michigan Voices held eight voting rights and election protection trainings, one of which was cosponsored with the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation (DHDC) with live Spanish interpretation. 20 partner organizations recruited and trained over 170 volunteer poll monitors statewide across roughly 16 cities. They distributed over 10,000 voting rights handouts and posters in English, Spanish and Arabic.

**Stats for Election Protection**

**Elections: August + November (TOTAL)**

- 20+ Participating partner organizations
- 250+ Volunteer poll monitors across the state
- 8 Counties & 16+ cities
- 20k+ Pieces of voter rights & education literature distributed in 3 languages (English, Arabic, & Spanish)
- 12 Voter rights trainings held for volunteers and the general public.
- 1 Training in Spanish thanks to interpretation provided by our partner DHDC.

**Elections: General November (BREAKDOWN)**

- 20+ Participating partner organizations
- 170+ Volunteer poll monitors across the state
- 8 Counties & 16+ cities
- 10k+ Pieces of voter rights & education literature distributed in 3 languages (English, Arabic, & Spanish)
- 4 Voter rights trainings held for volunteers and the general public.
- 1 Training in Spanish thanks to interpretation provided by our partner DHDC.
Continuing to engage the BIPOC and marginalized communities that we mobilized in 2020 was crucial in order to maintain momentum and communicate that civic engagement must be a year-round endeavor, especially since anti-democratic efforts and voter suppression are constant. The Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) department was created in January of 2021 in order to build upon 2020’s increase in voter turnout.

Recognizing that early engagement is key to voter mobilization, the IVE Workgroup focused on voter registration and updating registrations for the August primary. Particularly successful were our Juneteenth celebrations which we integrated with voter registration. Through these Juneteenth events, MV was able to re-grant $35,000 in mini-grants to 10 partner organizations to support creative and community-centered events that were attended by over 1,500 people. On Juneteenth over 300 voters were registered, 3,240 doors were canvassed, and thousands of voting rights and materials including posters and flyers in Spanish, Arabic and English, were distributed for placement in local businesses and communities.
With over half of voters choosing the no-reason absentee ballot option, approved by voters in 2018, and the COVID-19 pandemic still raging on, the IVE Workgroup focused on encouraging voters to utilize absentee voting and executed an absentee voter chase program for 2021’s municipal elections. When we found that a large percentage of absentee ballots from our target communities had not been returned, MV coordinated an AV chase program alongside GOTV outreach through a $55,000 grant to three partner organizations. These organizations had the infrastructure and internal capacity to quickly absorb the work to chase all outstanding ballots of BIPOC voters, newly registered voters, young voters and first-time 2020 voters, as well as make multiple rounds of GOTV calls to all BIPOC voters statewide.

Training was key to the success of IVE and MV had a number of invaluable partners:
- America Votes provided an in-depth organizational plan writing workshop.
- Michigan United provided an intensive canvassing training.
- Detroit Disability Power Network and LGBT Detroit facilitated training to deepen our collective understanding of progressive issues and create inclusive environments within our organizations.
- SMG Strategies provided a Backyard Civics 101 training that prepared participants to educate voters about all levels of government and build relationships with local elected officials.

### Measurable Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outreach Attempts</th>
<th>3,874,537</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversations</td>
<td>446,336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Attemps</td>
<td>1,716,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Contacts</td>
<td>31,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door Attempts</td>
<td>113,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door Contacts</td>
<td>32,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit Drops</td>
<td>227,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts Sent</td>
<td>516,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Responses</td>
<td>12,198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As community leaders, Michigan Voices partners sprang into action as first responders when the COVID-19 pandemic hit our communities hard. The deep commitment of our partners to meeting the needs of their communities put us in a unique position to administer a $1 million grant from US Health Resources & Services Administration with the goal of reducing vaccine hesitancy and increasing vaccination rates.

The program was designed to target BIPOC-dense communities with low-vaccination rates who are medically underserved with the message that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective, and free. Six partner organizations were identified who have historically served as trusted messengers in the identified municipalities in five counties: Detroit Action, The Detroit Change Initiative, CARES, The Michigan Coalition on Black Civil Participation, Better Men Outreach, Michigan United, and Our Own Wall Street. These organizations created the Voices for Vaccines (V4V) coalition and undertook a massive outreach effort to contact 320,000 households through layering door-to-door canvassing, phone calls, text messages, mail, and social media outreach.

With support from Michigan Voices, we were able to put 50 canvassers on the streets in Detroit and Flint to persuade residents to get vaccinated for COVID-19 and put a dozen phone canvassers on the task of calling Wayne, Genesee, and Ingham county residents to persuade them to get vaccinated for COVID-19.

- Ken Whittaker, Executive Director, Michigan United
The program required the hiring of over 120 outreach workers and 11 managers, as well as extensive training, tracking, and reporting of data. *The Voices for Vaccines program utilizes deep canvassing methods to have safe, non-judgmental, informative conversations and promote healthy communities through vaccination.* This V4V program will wrap up in the summer of 2022 and has provided an incredible opportunity for our front-line, community-service based organizations to not only meet the immediate needs of our communities during a difficult and uncertain time, but also create the deep relationships to grow within communities for continued power building.

**Measurable Impact**

- **89,915** Doors Knocked
- **27,866** Face to Face Conversations
- **9,469** Phone Conversations
- **6,474** Text Responses

"As a youth pastor, I tell it like it is. You can't just pray COVID away. It's on us to take care of our families and our community. Kids always want to be part of something big, and protecting grandma, the new baby, at church... that's as big as it gets. Let's set the right example—spread the word."
In January 2021, the Michigan Voices’ Reproductive Justice Workgroup (RJW) started as a conversation centering BIPOC voices around reproductive care, with the previous administration’s Supreme Court justice appointees quickly shifting RJW from conversation to action.

In March 2021, RJW formed the Policy & Legislative Tracking Committee to track local, state and federal laws on reproductive matters. The committee created a list of bold policy proposals to protect reproductive rights including a ballot initiative to protect Roe v. Wade.

Two months later, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, a case that could overturn Roe v Wade and trigger Michigan’s 1931 law criminalizing abortion. The Policy & Legislative Tracking committee members collaborated with Planned Parenthood of Michigan and the ACLU of Michigan to craft inclusive ballot petition language.

On October 6, 2021 RJW launched the partner-led Education & Outreach committee to take a holistic approach for reproductive justice outreach initiatives that includes societal factors like understanding cultures, communities, and religions when performing outreach.

On December 1, 2021, the day of the U.S. Supreme Court’s oral arguments hearing on Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, the Education & Outreach committee hosted a Dobbs v. Jackson listening session with the clear takeaway that Roe v. Wade was in imminent danger. In response, the Reproductive Justice
Education & Outreach committee will host a series of trainings, discussions, and workshops in 2022.

As the new year arrived, Michigan Voices, Planned Parenthood of Michigan, and the ACLU of Michigan submitted the Reproductive Freedom petition to the Michigan Board of State Canvassers to protect reproductive rights in Michigan, and our partners were there for every step of the way.

Table partners changed the conversation around reproductive freedom and centered BIPOC and LGBTQIA people in Michigan. This coalition has inspired other states to model their workgroups and subcommittees after ours. Our partner organizations started this journey to bring attention to abortion access, and successfully created ballot language to eliminate barriers for reproductive care in the state of Michigan.

**Stats**

- **30** Partner Orgs Participated in Workgroup Meetings
- **10** Ally Groups Participated in Workgroup Meetings
- **21** Meetings Held for Reproductive Justice
We live in a world where a lone voice, no matter how urgent or crucial the message, is too often drowned out. **At Michigan Voices, we amplify the voices of people who are doing transformative work.**

Through strategic partnerships with progressive nonprofit groups that are led by and engage with BIPOC people, we make sure the organizations that have spent months or years growing roots in their communities get the support they need to create lasting transformative change.

That means listening to the people on the ground and trusting the people who know their communities best.
Our Team

The Michigan Voices staff are all experts in their field and our dedicated team will continue to help support, train, and work with our partners to build capacity, membership, and power.

We ask our partner organizations: What do you want to achieve and how can we help you succeed?

Every voice in the communities we serve is singular, unique, and deserves to be heard. By investing in grass-seed, grassroots, and grass-tops organizations, we help assemble a chorus of change makers working every day to build an equitable and just community.

We ensure that our partners who have made social justice their mission know that they are not doing the work alone. That together we have exponential power to create lasting change. That with our voices combined we will be heard and cannot be silenced.

Sommer Foster
Co - Executive Director

Tameka Ramsey
Co - Executive Director

Jacinda Cason
Integrated Voter Engagement

Sharvin Lee
Data & Targeting Manager

Lindsay Maas
Integrated Voter Engagement Director

Melanie McElroy
Democracy Director

Baldomero Gonzalez
Board Co-Chair

John Keserich
Board Co-Chair

Kathryn
Board Secretary
WE ARE MICHIGAN VOICES. AND THE POWER IS IN US.
LOOKING FORWARD IN 2022 AND BEYOND...

No one knows what opportunities and challenges lie ahead in 2022, but we are clear and resolved in our goals:

- Reimagining our progressive infrastructure and moving from transactional work to transformational work.
- Funding partners in a more holistic way that will allow them to plan and honor the interconnectedness of our work.
- Investing in relationship-based, year-round, multi-cycle organizing and engaging in every election, every time.
- Investing in the strategic leadership and the participation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous People, particularly women of color, and queer and gender non-conforming people.
IN CLOSING

How You Can Support Us

The people closest to the problems have the **POWER** to solve them; and the people closest to the community are the ones who should be engaging those communities. Contact us for information on how you can become a funding ally at info@michiganvoices.org or www.michiganvoices.org