

A graphic consisting of two horizontal bands of stars, one above and one below the text. Each band has a red top border, a blue bottom border, and a white center containing a row of small white stars. The text 'INDIVISIBLE MA' is centered between these bands. Behind the text is a faint, light gray silhouette of the state of Massachusetts.

INDIVISIBLE MA

Indivisible MA 2018 Year-End Report

Prepared by Michael Ansara, Wayne Davis, Mark Dyen, Jess Nahigian, Michelle Olson, Debbie Paul, Rina Schneur, and Marguerite Suozzo-Gole

Introduction

In this report we share the organization's brief history, as well as information about the current structure of Indivisible MA. Most importantly, as you will read in the final paragraph, we are committed to restructuring the statewide organization going forward. We want to engage in open exploration of what local Indivisible groups across Massachusetts need and want from a statewide organization going forward. In doing so, we can work together to create a more representative structure for Indivisible MA that will set its direction, determine priorities, and gather the resources to build infrastructure that supports all the local groups. You may send questions or a reply to the entire group by contacting info@indivisible-ma.org or Deb Paul at debi.cpaul@gmail.com.

A Condensed History

As with so much of Indivisible across the state and the nation, Indivisible MA was a product of volunteers stepping forward to organize our opposition to the current administration. In December of 2016 and January of 2017, Indivisible groups were forming across the state (and country) including several in towns just west of Boston. Group leaders from Concord, Carlisle, Acton, Harvard, and Lexington organized a meeting to see if there was a way that their groups could work together and not duplicate efforts. Other groups joined, leading to the formation of what became known as the "Group of Groups" to support the region's Indivisible groups, share best practices, and seek to cooperate wherever possible.

That Group of Groups, since renamed Indivisible Metrowest, decided to hold a regional conference of activists in June 2017. We expected 75-80 participants; instead we had over 200 people attend from groups all over the state. Our follow-up survey to participants revealed a clear message: organize another conference in the fall, make it explicitly statewide, and hold it in a central location.

That led to the November 2017 conference with over 500 participants from more than 100 local groups across the entire state. The conference offered training workshops as well as networking opportunities. At a hastily thrown together lunch meeting we asked if people wanted to continue and create a statewide umbrella organization for support, sharing, and amplification. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

The first (June) conference had been organized by a volunteer group primarily from groups in MA-03 and Lexington. For the November conference, people from Western Mass and Greater Boston joined, but it was still an informal working group that never met in person, only through Zoom video conferences and on Slack. The November conference was the first time many of the conference organizers met in person! The feedback from the conference was tremendous. Many expressed interest in more statewide organizing to disseminate best practices and to gather resources to help local groups organize and support their members.

After the conference, we tried to expand and formalize a statewide steering committee. In March 2018, group leaders from across Massachusetts gathered in Worcester at a statewide meeting and voted to create Indivisible MA. There we decided to form Regional Organizing Committees (ROCs). Those ROCs were supposed to elect a statewide organizing committee to oversee Indivisible MA and be the umbrella organization's decision-making body. Unfortunately, that effort failed. Some ROC meetings happened, but they were not as representative as had been hoped. Some never happened. Unless there was a pre-existing regional coalition, the ROCs

were not sustained. Although many group leaders expressed a desire for a statewide umbrella body, there was not a lot of interest in participating in the process to make it happen.

At this point, the small working group was in a quandary. The critical midterm elections were looming. What we heard from so many local group leaders was:

“We want there to be statewide organizing, we want help coordinating with other groups, we want amplification of our activities, we want a regional newsletter, organizing tools and training, but we don’t have the bandwidth to add another set of meetings and work on top of our existing local work.”

We decided to continue as a working group doing the best we could fulfilling these articulated needs. We continued to meet primarily through video conferences. We found we were spinning our wheels. While there were no obvious political disagreements, we could not seem to get on the same page as to how to proceed and became somewhat dysfunctional. A few members of the group said that they were wasting their time and needed to focus on their local campaigns, and stepped away from the steering group.

By early summer we reorganized into a smaller group, with clear rules for engagement. As part of the 501 c-4 formation, we adopted formal bylaws and board structure. We did what we could to support local groups through the elections. We raised money for training, field staff and expenses of the newsletter, Slack channel and the like (more on that below). Along with our small volunteer team, we hired Jeff Rousset as organizer and trainer, and Jess Nahigian to build our website and other tech tools. We worked closely with Swing Left Greater Boston and Force Multiplier, held a series of training sessions and worked to support groups’ electoral efforts. *At every step along the way, we have felt acutely the absence of a participatory decision-making structure. With the elections behind us, now is the time when we can all work together to build a forward-looking and representative statewide umbrella organization.*

Mission of Indivisible MA

(as voted upon by the statewide gathering body in Worcester):

The mission of Indivisible MA is to build, support, and amplify the network of Indivisible groups throughout Massachusetts in order to build a strong and effective resistance movement against racism, authoritarianism, and corruption.

Existing Indivisible MA Assets

The organization has assembled some important assets:

- A formal legal entity (Indivisible MA, Inc.) registered with the state and the IRS as a 501(c)(4). Note, this legal designation requires a Board of Directors (see below).
- A detailed database of more than 200 local groups and over 1,000 activists across the state
- Communication tools including a regular newsletter, Slack workspace and organized Zoom calls for group leaders

- A website and Action Network infrastructure that enables the organization to promote activities
- Training resources and manuals
- Partner relationships with Swing Left Greater Boston, Rise Up Mass, Progressive Mass, MIRA, Power Forward MA, 350.org and MassVote
- A small bank account of about \$800 to cover operating expenses, plus access to \$9,000 for voter education. (See the financial and legal section below.)

All these are assets that will go towards a new structure that better represents active local groups across the state, to be built by all of us working together.

Existing Indivisible MA Board

As of today, the Indivisible MA board consists of:

- Debbie Paul, Wellesley Neighbors United (joined Ind MA Aug. 2018)
- Michael Ansara, Carlisle Rising to Action (founding member)
- Michelle Olson, Lexington, Minuteman Indivisible (founding member)
- Rina Schneur, Lexington, Minuteman Indivisible (joined Ind MA Jan. 2018)
- Mark Dyen, Newton, liaison to other statewide groups (joined Nov. 2017)
- Wayne Davis, Carlisle Rising to Action, Treasurer (joined Ind MA Sept. 2018)

Financial and Legal

Again, in the interests of transparency, we provide you the details of how much money has been raised, how it has been spent and the current legal structures.

When we first started organizing for the November 2017 conference, we set up a 527 organization under the banner of Indivisible Metrowest (the name used by the original network of Indivisible groups). Many participants in that conference made contributions above the minimum suggested level, and so we had net proceeds of about \$4,000. The conference organizers decided to use the proceeds for building the strength of the local groups through an umbrella organization.

After obtaining legal advice about different organizational structures, we set up Indivisible MA, Inc. as a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization to focus on civic education. This is distinct from the 527, which is the form used for electoral advocacy. We also reached an agreement with MassVote, which is a registered 501(c)(3) charitable organization, regarding tax-deductible donations in support of the Massachusetts Civic Engagement Project.

In terms of fundraising, the 527 and the 501(c)(4) groups raised about \$10,000 each in donations from individuals, and one generous donor contributed \$20,000 to the Civic Engagement Project.

The 527 utilized its available funds primarily on direct services to local groups for training and organizing in support of electoral campaigns and communications (website design, IT, and advertising) and much smaller amounts on office supplies, legal, and other administrative costs. There is almost no money remaining in the 527. It will be closed out. If there is a need for raising further elections-related funds then we will consider establishing a new 527 entity.

The Indivisible MA 501(c)(4) contributed a portion of its funds (<50%) to the 527, and spent most of the remaining funds on developing civic engagement training support to local groups and communications expenses. Approximately \$800 remains and will be dedicated to keeping the website and our database tools alive.

The Civic Engagement Project funding has gone towards IT support and the development of a soon-to-be-published Civic Engagement Manual. About \$7800 is available to support further civic engagement training and education.

Anyone wishing further detail may contact our Treasurer, Wayne Davis, at wdavis422@gmail.com.

Going Forward

We have asked Marguerite Suozzo-Gole, the New England regional organizer on staff with Indivisible National, to spearhead a process of bringing together local groups to figure out what comes next. We look forward to working together with Marguerite and all who want to participate in this process. We think there is a need for an umbrella organization, Indivisible MA, that meets the needs articulated by local groups. This organization must operate transparently and consist of a representative group of leaders selected by local groups to set direction and policy. As part of that process, we hope and expect to elect a new board.