

Voices From Democracy's Front Lines

**Report From Our Second
Community Listening Tour**



**VOTING
RIGHTS
LAB**

MARCH 2022

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From Us, To You

Dear Reader,

Coming off the heels of one of the most important elections in modern history, conducted through a brutal pandemic that altered our lives and the world around us in ways we cannot yet fully comprehend, our movement dove headfirst into a fresh decade confronting a new but familiar threat: systemic attacks on our freedom to vote and the growing political power of Black, brown, Indigenous, AAPI, and working class communities.

These attacks on our power are rooted in the same white supremacy our country has always known, and the fight back continues to be led by the same communities with the most to lose. While we have been knocked back time and time again, there was never a question of whether we would fight, whether we would dream of – and create – a brighter future.

To confront this critical moment and best serve the movement I am proud to call home, our team at the Voting Rights Lab decided to commit ourselves to the most fundamental movement tenet of all – listening. In April 2021, we embarked on our second deep listening tour, with more than 70 organizations across 19 states contributing their time, expertise, and wisdom.

This report analyzes 70+ hour-long interviews. It identifies trends, opportunities, needs, and solutions across the voting rights movement at a pivotal point in history.

Perhaps most importantly, this report endeavors to ignite a deeper conversation not just about this moment, but about *the future* of a movement that is far too often putting out fires instead of fully pursuing the transformational change so many of us dream of. There is such a deep hunger for real, groundbreaking wins that ignite and deliver for communities across the country. Here we provide some clear ideas on how to get there.

Throughout this listening tour, we also bore witness to incredible stories from countless organizers, activists, and advocates. Their testimonies are what guided this report. We sincerely hope that we have done justice to the power all participants have built for themselves, for their organizations, and most importantly, for their people. We cannot thank our participants enough for all you are and all you do – and we hope that you find meaning, vindication, and true belief in a better future in the following pages.

Thank you. Gracias. La lucha sigue.

Randy Perez
Program Director, Voting Rights Lab

Methodology

This report is based on qualitative interviews with 70+ organizations across the country, all with distinct program areas in the democracy and civic engagement sector. Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom for one hour using a standard set of questions (see appendix I for the survey instrument). They were conducted by one individual member of our team, with up to three interviewees from participating organizations at one time. Participating organizations received compensation for staff time (\$500 for state-based organizations; \$250 for national organizations).

For the purposes of this report, we use “democracy” to encompass a broader definition of the word and the movement associated with it – one that recognizes any organization, community, or individual working to expand who has a voice in the present and future of our country. This can include organizations who engage in traditional voting rights efforts, like voter education and registration, but also groups who organize the many communities that make up the American population, from immigrant rights to reproductive justice organizations.

Limitations

This report is not intended to be a declarative statement, the only way forward, or even falsely claim to fully capture the massive scope of our movement. Our analysis is by nature informed by our own personal experiences, and we recognize that we have not fully captured every intersection or identity-based perspective.

Our quilt is by necessity incomplete, but we are proud of the tapestry we have woven and the opportunities it lays before us. As a national organization with a commitment to working in the states, this has and will continue to require us to look in the mirror and have hard conversations about who and what we are accountable to, what our vision for the future is, and how we can best serve you.

7 Steps to Build a Powerful Movement for Democracy

If you take only one thing from this report, we hope it's these themes our participants hit time and again about the features of a powerful and intersectional movement for democracy.

- ☐ **Combat disinformation targeted at communities of color through relational organizing – and fully fund the BIPOC organizers who can do it.**

- ☐ **Invest in state and local campaigns to deliver real wins that impact people's daily lives.**

- ☐ **Expand the map beyond the “battlegrounds,” and invest enough resources to develop lasting infrastructure.**

- ☐ **Center state leaders and those with proximity to impacted communities in strategic planning, and give them space for long-term visioning.**

- ☐ **Create a narrative that uplifts new trusted messengers, speaks to diverse communities, and brings organizers to the communications table.**

- ☐ **Dismantle outdated funding structures, including short-term funding, that perpetuate and exacerbate inequities.**

- ☐ **Unite around something to fight for, not just against.**

And truly – take these key points away! Post this page at your desk, make it your Zoom background, or share it with your colleagues during campaign planning.

Visit this as often as is helpful to ensure your program is as robust, inclusive, and powerful as your community deserves. Download this one-pager at bit.ly/7stepsvrl.

Building a Powerful Movement for Democracy

From Georgia to North Carolina, Mississippi to Michigan, the conversations we had throughout this listening tour brought us to a core set of takeaways – learnings we hope can guide the ecosystem of organizations with democracy programs together into a more powerful, intersectional movement.

1 **Combat disinformation targeted at communities of color through relational organizing – and fully fund the BIPOC organizers who can do it.**

Targeted, large-scale disinformation campaigns and lack of trust in our country's institutions are hurting our participants' ability to effectively communicate with not just conflicted voters, but with their own base – a concern felt in nearly every interview we conducted.

“There is so much disinformation in our community, and we know that we are best equipped to fight that. When [BIPOC] step up, the opportunities to engage with democracy completely shift. We innovate, even with few resources. We connect to our community differently, create new opportunities for our people to engage civically. We give them the chance to practice democracy in their everyday lives.”

— AMANDA LUGO, ALL VOTING IS LOCAL ARIZONA

From Wisconsin to Arizona to Montana, organizations worry that disinformation has done great harm and will continue to do so in 2022 and beyond. Many partners expressed concern about their ability to communicate not just with new voters, but with the base they have been building for years. While there is important and groundbreaking research being done into disinformation and how to combat it, organizations across the country are expressing significant unease with how deep this issue has permeated their communities and how they are under-resourced to solve it – especially while electoral or legislative clocks are ticking.

In order to inoculate their base against disinformation, many participants said they need deeper investment in sustainable organizing – particularly in BIPOC and working class communities most targeted and harmed

by election falsehoods – to rebuild trust, conduct voter education, and build long-term relationships with community members.

A consistent frustration named in interviews was what some dubbed a “digital-first focus” on communicating with voters and community members on the receiving end of disinformation. While the COVID-19 pandemic has, and in some ways continues to, necessitate a digital-heavy strategy for communicating with large numbers of voters, it was nearly universally acknowledged in our interviews that participants cannot solve disinformation purely through digital advertising campaigns. While made with good intentions, decisions against large-scale, in-person campaigns due to the impacts of the pandemic in 2020 – particularly in BIPOC and low-income communities – have only exacerbated the issue.

Participants stated over and over again that they cannot combat disinformation and its deleterious effects on democracy with digital advertising alone. It’s time to get back to basics and organize, they argue.



A lot of national orgs push the states to focus on elected officials, not building power... For people who we are trying to get involved, it is not exciting to engage around a person or a moment in time. How do we shift the narrative to bring it back to collective power, bring it back to the stories we were just talking about, [of] why voting rights matters?



Luis Avila
Instituto

2 Invest in state and local campaigns to deliver real wins that impact people's daily lives.

Many interviewed for this report expressed frustration that federal legislation on a variety of key issues has drained the movement's volunteer base and dollars – and has yet to deliver the results voters and communities urgently need. While divisions on this point remain and were reflected in hours of spirited conversations throughout our listening tour, we found that among participants, there was a clear general belief that it is time to refocus on winnable state and local policy fights that deliver for our people.

Despite the flood of money to push forward federal legislation last year, partners noted that many of the investments made were for short-term programs focused on individual politicians or moments, rather than building long-term power and capacity. This fit-and-start funding that only invests in big national campaigns, short moments in time, or individual politicians misses the critical opportunity to fund work that is winnable *and* supports groups in building power so they're more successful when national moments arise.

“We cannot organize people to participate in our democracy if they are not having their basic needs met.”

— ANGELA LANG, BLOC

“How can I ask a single mom of two to three kids to show up for political education when [she is] worrying about making rent or putting food on the table? If people are able to have their basic needs met, that is when we really get into how we expand.”

— NATALIE HERNANDEZ, MAKE THE ROAD NV

Partners consistently advocated for a more targeted and local approach for increasing access to our democracy, including on issues beyond just voting rights and election administration. Through campaigns focused on local school boards, as well as city and county councils and other government offices, we could spend on year-round, nonpartisan voter education programs and outreach, as well as run campaigns with a wider democracy lens to reduce civic barriers like economic wellbeing, transportation access, and criminalization. This would allow us to broaden our coalitions, deepen our base, and deliver tangible results for our people.

Funding this critical body of work would allow organizations to fully leverage the full breadth of government institutions in building power and protecting voter access from the ground up – delivering real change for communities.

I believe the South can be the blueprint for the rest of the nation.... We were always the bellwether of what was to come. We not only need more funding here, to elevate the voices of people who have been fighting anti-democratic regimes for decades and centuries, [but also] more acknowledgment that our strategies can go elsewhere. We need to elevate the South's leaders to the national level.



Sailor Jones
Southern Coalition for Social Justice

3 Expand the map beyond the “battlegrounds,” and invest enough resources to build lasting infrastructure.

Democracy lives or dies everywhere – not just in the “battleground” states. Our participants asserted that the traditional strategy of emphasizing presidential or Senate battleground states fails to meet the scale of the threat facing voters, does not align with the professed goal to empower the most impacted communities, and represents a strategic miscalculation with long-term ramifications. Indeed, often the most egregious violations of human agency and dignity are happening in states where investment has been the most minimal and discriminatory barriers to civic access remain purposefully high.

Our participants argued for an expansion of the traditional map for civic engagement – with robust, long-term investment to include states that are on a longer path towards being traditionally “competitive” but whose communities are hurting right now.

Throughout our listening tour, we were constantly confronted by leaders within these states on the difficult reality for communities omitted from Washington, D.C. power maps and too many funder investment strategies. This is true for Mississippi, where only one person got their voting rights restored in the year 2021. Just one. It is true for Montana, where popular and voter-led same-day registration was eliminated by the governor, and students are now faced with new burdens in using their student ID cards to vote. And it is true for South Dakota, where egregious and racist violations

of the National Voter Registration Act have disenfranchised an untold number of voters.

“People are outraged at voter suppression, as they should be, but the tactics used are about making it more difficult to vote in order to veil their racism. But county officials act with impunity in Indian Country. In South Dakota, they forced Native voters to vote out of a chicken coop. People are shocked, but it’s not shocking to us.”

— JACQUELINE DE LEÓN,
NATIVE AMERICAN RIGHTS FUND

While we are having important debates nationally about systems of automatic registration, improving vote-by-mail processes, or guaranteeing drop box access, some states are simply fighting for a single day of early voting or to have the ability to register to vote online in the year 2022. ([Voting Rights Lab made a similar argument in our December 2021 report, A Tale of Two Democracies.](#))

Resourcing overlooked states aggressively now will not only help local organizations build the power they need to influence policy – it will also prepare them to become the next Arizona, Georgia, or Texas.

Talk to state-based organizations to make a plan by first asking, ‘What do you need? What is missing?’ Not just telling us what has worked elsewhere.



Val Benavidez
Texas Freedom Network

4 Center state leaders and those with proximity to impacted communities in strategic planning, and give them space for long-term visioning.

Organizations and the people behind them have big dreams for their communities, yet throughout our listening tour, we were told far too many times about missed opportunities to run big, bold campaigns and build powerful, lasting infrastructure.

The most consistent obstacle to this critical work seems to stem from a deeply felt lack of alignment on strategic direction between state and national organizations – as well as funding tied to national strategies and programs that are too often inconsistent with state organizational priorities.

“Trust the people on the ground to make the decisions, to make the plan.”

– ERIKA WASHINGTON, MAKE IT WORK NV

This challenge is not just apparent in the lack of alignment between state and national partners on legislative, advocacy, or campaign strategy, but also in resetting the expectations that national and funding organizations have for their state partners. Throughout our listening tour, staffers described roles they had taken on that quickly became the work of two or three people, careening from one crisis to the next without clear offramps. Organizations described a major disconnect between the sheer scale of the crisis in front of them and their actual capacity to meet it, versus the capacity imagined by those far removed from their day-to-day reality.

Even more troubling were the reactions we heard in asking leaders about their 10 and 20 year visions for the communities they serve, their organizations, and the world at large, a question we felt was prescient at the turn of a new decade. While not a small ask, it is one that just about everyone who enters movement work has spent time dreaming of, visualizing, and yearning to bring to fruition. Yet, at some point along the way – between electoral pressures, politics, and funding crunches – we found that many people working at organizations with democracy and civic engagement programs were only able to dedicate fleeting moments to refining and realizing the dreams that brought them into the work in the first place.

It is the responsibility of funding entities large and small to not just fund short-term gaps or campaign programs, but to also ensure that local and state organizations have the breathing room to dream big – and build their next big campaign to realize it.

Around 40% of veterans, including myself, are disabled. We are directly impacted by voting rights legislation, yet there are virtually no organizations connecting disabled veterans and voting rights to ensure our ability to fully participate in democracy. This current lack of existing infrastructure leads to many other struggles for our community that politicians claim to support.



Esti Lamonaca
Common Defense

5 Create a narrative that uplifts new trusted messengers, speaks to diverse communities, and brings organizers to the communications table.

As this report has repeatedly noted, organizing and deep listening in impacted communities remain essential. To fully accomplish this, national organizations must work in true partnership with leaders from impacted communities.

This effort must include communities of color, rural communities, veterans, the disabled community, faith leaders, and tribal communities, with whom democracy organizations may not have yet made the inroads they need to build power, develop strong leaders, and highlight trusted messengers with new perspectives. Only then will they be able to speak to the broad, diverse coalition that makes up the movement in an authentic way and meet people where they truly are.

“In order to do this kind of work – shifting the narrative, talking about power – we have to be very bold in tribal communities. Indians don’t speak in soundbites, you have to tell a story. Even though we want to reduce it down to a meme or a PSA, what I try to do is engage people with statements that will resonate with them.”

— DEE SWEET, WI NATIVE VOTE

Throughout the past few years, we have seen that anti-democracy forces are willing to go to incredible lengths to organize and move their bases to action based on conspiracy theories and outright lies about our elections. As we continue to strategize how to fight back against this cascade of attacks, we must think about who is missing from our tables as trusted messengers and partners in the fight for our democracy.

Throughout our listening tour, organizers also lamented how “complicated” the conversation about voting rights has become and that advocates have become lost in the weeds on particular issues, when in reality there are many concrete barriers in individuals’ daily lives preventing them from participating

civically – namely the need to simply survive. Organizations who do not have voting rights as their sole focus also expressed a desire to connect fights about voting rights to the ability of their base to make change on issues they are working on, from reproductive and climate justice to healthcare access.

The “Freedom to Vote” framework has been an effective values-based narrative that informs and links work across states and counters the narrative of ongoing anti-democratic attacks without yielding to anti-voter talking points. Yet, while

organizations we spoke with were both grateful for and often in the midst of utilizing this narrative, many expressed a demand for more support in creating, tailoring, and executing narratives focused on person-to-person organizing – showing that organizers need to be able to tailor narratives to even the most hyperlocal needs.

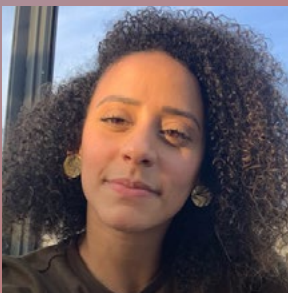
Organizing will always be about the empowerment of people and communities to make meaningful change on the issues that impact their day-to-day life, offering democracy organizations the clearest opportunity to center power when advocating for the freedom to vote.

Many listening tour conversations centered on the particular need to organize alongside and within the faith community, particularly for BIPOC communities. While this has remained a critical component of organizing across the South in particular, there is a sense of an underwhelming investment in organizations that are doing this important work.

By uplifting organizers and their daily experiences talking to the community into these conversations, including those with a democracy focus at organizations across issue areas, the conversation around voting rights can be reinvigorated.



External funding comes in even years to hire people to administer election protection and poll monitoring programs, but because the money is only even years, we are remaking the wheel every two years. You have to let that person go, hire someone else, [then] they have four months to get up to speed. Election administration program funding that is so focused on even years is detrimental to the actual elections administration efforts and serving of people.



Yaheiry Mora
Community Change

6 Dismantle outdated and harmful funding structures, including short-term funding, that exacerbate the very same inequities within our movement that we work so hard to dismantle outside of it.

As the progressive movement has grown and developed across the country, many of the same inequities being fought against externally often rear their ugly head when it comes to how institutions and individuals do – or don’t – fund BIPOC-led organizations that have been on the front lines of building power. Throughout this listening tour, we heard constant and deep frustration with the role that gatekeeping – the controlling of access to any kind of resource, be it information flow, services, money, and/or advancement – and whiteness play in the funding world, as well as the sense that organizations are forced into last-minute or half-thought-out programs they have to take on simply to remain funded.

“If you want people of color to lead, then you need to give people of color money to lead.”

— LEO MURRIETA, MAKE THE ROAD NV

As organizations discussed their budgets and the seeming flood of cash that has come into play in various states over the past few years, the cognitive dissonance between what funders think organizations are working with financially and what they are actually working with became clearer and clearer.

Even premiere organizations with excellent reputations in battleground states, whose budgets grow exponentially for voter registration and electoral activities, suffer from at best lean off-years and slim margins for general operating funds.

Organizations also clearly communicated time and time again that they know what they need to be successful – year-over-year, general operating funds that give them the flexibility and opportunity to program how they best see fit in the communities in which they live and work, not grants and programmatic dollars designed for short-term political and electoral outcomes ill-suited to building long-term power. They need direct access to the donors themselves, not the many layers of bureaucracy it takes to get there. And they need the space and time to develop in-state donor and revenue programs that give them the independence and power they need to be less reliant on top-heavy, national funding structures.

When organizations are so clearly articulating solutions for the most pressing and systemic problems they face, it is not just time to listen, it is time to act. Funding as it exists today is an unsustainable model that leads to burnout, instability, and poor outcomes on the issues that we care about most. Funders have a responsibility to open their doors, give access to donors and information, remain transparent, and hold white organizations accountable the same way they would BIPOC organizations.

People are tired. There is so much fatigue in just existing in Mississippi. People want better, they want to see better, and they have fought for better for most of their lives.... We want to help create or help cultivate this Mississippi that we all can be proud of. That starts with people being able to see young people take center stage and shaping and reframing what we can be.



Arekia Bennett-Scott
MS Votes

7 Unite around something to fight for, not just against.

This listening tour made abundantly clear that organizations, activists, and communities in the democracy movement are tired of fighting against the latest damaging proposal from those who seek to do them harm and are clamoring for something tangible they can fight for. Despite all of the very real attacks voters have been faced with, when possible, organizations with democracy programs cannot abandon proactive, innovative campaigns that expand, promote, and protect ballot access and promote a narrative focused on empowerment. They need to be able to build, uplift, and invest in campaigns large and small that chart a new path forward for our democracy and truly deliver for the communities that call it home.

2022 is shaping up to not only be a difficult electoral and legislative cycle, but one where there are [real concerns](#) about the potential subversion of our elections in states that have passed harmful laws in the wake of 2020. From Georgia's new ability to replace Boards of Elections in four key counties, to Florida's restrictions on mail-in voting, to the potential for new Arizona-style sham election reviews in states like Wisconsin and elsewhere, it can feel like the world is spinning all around us.

"I want people to feel empowered to just live. To feel stoked to live, empowered to take action and be involved in their community. To feel comfortable in where they live. A lot of young people call Montana home but don't call it safe anymore."

— KIERSTEN IWAI, FORWARD MONTANA

This forces an important question – one that comes up in conversations repeatedly: Is it the best use of organizations' time to respond to every fire, every attack, every attempt to subvert the will of the people? Or could their time be better spent simultaneously building a new, exciting, and proactive vision for our democracy that moves their communities to local action when possible?

We are not framing this as an either/or. Rather, we are communicating a pervasive feeling across the country that democracy organizations' base is exhausted from only fighting back. What other reforms can be advanced now that engage, empower, and

deliver for voters in a substantive way? While so many have become incredible at playing defense, it is not a sustainable situation.

As anti-democracy advocates cover seemingly every piece of policy ground to destabilize our democracy, from school boards on up, it is incumbent upon pro-democracy forces to do the same to strengthen it.

Even in the face of great threats, national partners must take a long look at how resource allocation and strategic planning does or does not emphasize proactive wins large and small, and honestly gauge the capacity of partner organizations to be pulled into national fights or coalition spaces that are not directly aligned with their mission, as previously noted in this report.

While it may take large amounts of funding to get bills over an at best uncertain finish line in Washington, D.C., targeting and investing in proactive state and local campaigns with more definitive results for voters may ultimately help build the narrative and power we need from the ground up to eventually achieve national wins.



Our Commitment to Keep Listening

This report is not a roadmap for the future of voting rights and democracy work – but we hope that these learnings serve as a compass for you. They sure have for us.

Our listening tours have been transformative for Voting Rights Lab, helping to guide our strategic planning and ground us in communities across the country that are fighting for our freedoms. They inform our decision-making processes about the ways in which we, as a fairly new organization, can contribute meaningfully to the lives of voters – no matter who they are, where they live, or what they believe.

Importantly – due to the incredible work of the partners who informed this report, and so many more – pro-democracy advocates have made incredible progress. Even in this last year.

Though voters suffered some significant setbacks last year, it is worth noting that advocates and organizers successfully stopped many of the most restrictive policies introduced in 2021 from enactment. Efforts in Georgia and Texas to restrict Sunday early voting – a popular time for “Souls to the Polls” events, in which congregants at predominantly Black churches go vote after services – were defeated last year. Bills to ban drop boxes – which became so popular, after years of use, that fully one in five mail ballots in 2020 were returned in a drop box – were defeated in Florida, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. And bills to limit absentee ballot return were defeated in Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

But more than that, voting rights advocates advanced policies across the country that expanded voter access in red and blue states alike. Whether these were policies related to early voting, mail voting, restoring the rights of the previously disenfranchised, or strengthening our system to ensure it is more modern, transparent, and trustworthy, much more progress was made on our elections than the dominant headlines may convey.

Voting advocates can achieve big wins, even in the most unexpected of places – but only if they are empowered to lead us out of the darkness. That is why we are committed to continuing to listen to our partners, to honor their work on behalf of the communities they serve, and to support the progress they are forging for generations to come.

Onward,



Megan Lewis

Executive Director, Voting Rights Lab

Acknowledgements

We want to express our deepest gratitude to every single individual and organization that spent time dreaming big with us and sharing with us the hopes you otherwise might only whisper, for fear of them slipping away. Your passion, your vision, your leadership, and your commitment are so much more than we could ever hope to recapture in this report and are a desperately needed reminder that there is a light at the end of this long, dark tunnel.

This report intentionally was not limited to just think tanks and traditional democracy institutions, despite their important role in ensuring our movement has access to the analyses and resources we need to win. We required this report to reflect, uplift, and attempt to understand how democracy and voting rights are the truest throughline between every movement partner and every issue area, and how strong our coalition truly is when we all come together for a common goal.

This report is for all of the participants, for the voting rights movement, and for the world that we are going to live in someday.

Participating Organizations

All On the Line	Chicago Votes
Alliance for Youth Organizing	CHISPA Arizona
All Voting is Local Arizona	Coalition for Texans With Disabilities
All Voting is Local Wisconsin	Common Cause
America Votes FL	Common Defense
Andrew Goodman Foundation	Community Change
Arizona Center for Empowerment	Corazón (AZ)
Arizona Democracy Collaborative	Disability Rights Wisconsin
Arizona Democracy Resource Center	Dream Defenders
Asian Americans Advancing Justice	Engage Miami
Black Leaders Organizing for Communities	Fair Fight
Brennan Center for Justice	Faith in Action Alabama
Center for Popular Democracy	Faith in Minnesota
	Faith in Public Life (FL)

Florida Rising	National Vote at Home Institute
Florida Watch	New Georgia Project
Forward Montana	Next Up Oregon
Hispanic Federation	North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections
Instituto	Ohio Organizing Collaborative
Intertribal Council of Arizona	Poder Latinx
Impact Project	Progress Arizona
JOLT Texas	R Street
Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights	Rural Arizona Engagement
League of Women Voters Wisconsin	SEIU
Loud Light	Sentencing Project
Make it Work Nevada	Sister Song
Make the Road Nevada	Southern Coalition for Social Justice
Make the Road Pennsylvania	Stand Up America
Michigan United	Texas Civil Rights Project
Mijente	Texas Freedom Network
Mississippi Votes	United We Dream
Missouri Jobs with Justice	Voces de la Frontera
MOSES	Voters Not Politicians
MOVE Texas	Western Native Voices
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice	When We All Vote
National Urban League	Wisconsin Conservation Voices/ WI Native Vote
Native American Rights Fund	Wisconsin Democracy Campaign
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice	Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice

Appendix I: Survey Instrument

Our objectives for these interviews were to create a space for organizations to feel comfortable to share their true vision for the future; think critically about their past, present, and coming engagement on voting rights; and share opportunities to support their infrastructure and power building to achieve those goals. Finally, we wanted to thoughtfully consider the narrative landscape on voting rights, including how our base is consuming information related to this issue.

The survey instrument we used is below and edited for clarity. It does not cover any follow-up or clarifying questions asked as part of the interview process.

General Organizational Overview

1. Tell us about your organization. How did you come to fruition? What was the catalyst moment that brought you into existence?
2. What would you say your biggest success as an organization has been?
3. How has your organization previously engaged in voting rights and democracy work, if at all? Has this experience and engagement been positive? If not, how would you have looked to do it differently?

Long-Term Vision

1. When you close your eyes, and picture our democracy in 10, 15, 20 years, what do you see? Who is there? What have we accomplished together and achieved? What does that mean for you and your community?
2. Thinking back to that vision and the world you want to live in, what is the difference in how an individual personally feels going about their day-to-day life in that world versus this one?
3. Once again, thinking about your long-term vision and the world you want to live in, when you walk out your door onto your street in that world, what looks different? What has changed in a tactile way outside your door?

Infrastructure and Capacity

1. We are working to assess the capacity of organizations to engage fully in voting rights and democracy work. What capacity does your organization currently have, if any, for voting rights and democracy work?
2. Is this capacity sufficient to execute your vision and have the impact in this issue area you want? If not, can you describe the impact you are looking to have and what it would take to fully realize it?
3. What would you need to engage further in voting rights and democracy work? What areas would you emphasize as being most important to your organization?

Narrative Building and Activation

1. What is the narrative you most often hear about our democracy and right to vote? Do you feel it meets more than the needs of short-term fights?
2. Do you see our current narrative as one that is able to activate and engage impacted communities? How would you, or do you, already approach activating community to organize around this issue?
3. Who are the trusted messengers and experts you take your messaging cues on for voting rights? Are there specific gaps for validators and experts on voting rights issues that you could name?
4. How can national organizations better support partners closest to the communities most impacted in building a sustainable, long-term narrative about voting rights and democracy?

Appendix II:

Urgent Funding Needs

Throughout our listening tour, we asked organizations about the capacity needs they have to fully realize their long-term vision. These ranged from investments in state infrastructure development to funding for one or two roles or campaigns at an organization. As part of our commitment to our partners, we have compiled a list of these resource needs and encourage prospective donors to invest in these clear and compelling opportunities right now.

Our movement knows what it needs to build sustainable power and engage our communities in the fights ahead – but it needs you to help it get there. Below you will find a list of urgent funding needs we have the collective power to meet right now.

We stand ready to connect you to the appropriate organizations to fill these urgent needs – please reach out to Randy at randy.perez@votingrightslab.org.

This listening tour identified four key areas that organizations are looking for funding support in:

Organizing personnel

Organizing remains the most persistent need and opportunity to grow the movement's base, number of leaders, and power across the country. Funding to hire democracy organizers and directors was the number one request we fielded during this listening tour.

Administrative personnel

Too often overlooked, organizations, especially those that are in periods of growth or change, consistently mentioned administrative, operations, and human resources support as being an investment that would drastically improve their efficiency, effectiveness, and stability.

Communications and digital personnel

Communications and digital continue to be an important supplementary component of successful campaign and organizing strategies, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as communities have moved more online. Organizations are looking for funding to support their communications and digital capabilities, particularly in the fight against advanced and highly effective disinformation campaigns.

Long-term capacity building

Organizations also need long-term, year over year funding support to not just survive, but to build the infrastructure that will enable them to win in the future. This ranges from general operating dollars to long-term funding commitments to build entirely new pieces of infrastructure.

Please note, some organizations that were interviewed are not listed, whether specific requests were not shared or other funding requests from their partners were uplifted instead. Additionally, the following organizations are all 501(c)(3) charitable organizations; funding opportunities for 501(c)(4) organizations are available upon request.

Organization	State	Need
Faith in Action Alabama	AL	People's Agenda Campaign Organizers
Arizona Center for Empowerment (ACE)	AZ	Democracy/State Legislative Organizers
Arizona Democracy Resource Center	AZ	Arizonans for Fair Elections Campaign + Adjacent Programs
CHISPA Arizona	AZ	Democracy Organizers
Corazón Arizona	AZ	Democracy Organizers
Instituto	AZ	Leadership Development Fellowships
Intertribal Council of Arizona	AZ	Tribal Election Protection Program
Progress Arizona	AZ	Voting Rights Coalition Coordinator
Rural Arizona Engagement	AZ	Policy and Research Coordinator

Organization	State	Need
Florida Rising	FL	Voting Justice Organizers
Florida Watch	FL	Election Administration Organizers
Engage Miami	FL	Democracy Done Right Organizers
Dream Defenders	FL	Democracy Organizers
New Georgia Project	GA	Digital Organizers
Chicago Votes	IL	Operations Coordinators
Loud Light	KS	Operations & Advocacy Director
Michigan United	MI	Movement Politics Coordinators
MOSES	MI	Democracy Organizers
Voters Not Politicians	MI	Community Organizers
Missouri Jobs with Justice	MO	Community Organizers
Mississippi Votes	MS	Community Organizers
Forward Montana	MT	High School Community Organizers

Organization	State	Need
Western Native Voices	MT	Indigenous Community Organizers
Southern Coalition for Social Justice	NC	Community Organizers
North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections	NC	Operations Coordinators
Make the Road Nevada	NV	Community Organizers
Make it Work Nevada	NV	Community Organizers
Ohio Organizing Collaborative	OH	Ohio Voting Rights Ballot Initiative + Program Support
Next Up Oregon	OR	Regional Organizers
MOVE TX	TX	Texas Organizing and Training Institute
JOLT TX	TX	Communications Staff
Coalition for Texans with Disabilities	TX	Advocacy Coordinators
Texas Freedom Network	TX	Operations and HR Coordinators
Texas Civil Rights Project	TX	Digital Managers
Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOC)	WI	BLOC Ambassadors and Field Director

Organization	State	Need
Voces de la Frontera	WI	Operations and HR Staff
League of Women Voters WI	WI	Communications Managers
WI Conservation Voices/WI Native Vote	WI	Tribal Organizers
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice	WI	Development Director
Poder Latinx	Multiple	Democracy Organizers (Multiple States)
Native American Rights Fund	Multiple	State Directors
Community Change	Multiple	MI Defend Black Voters Campaign
Sister Song	Multiple	Community Organizers
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice	Multiple	National Data and Coaching Manager

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