



DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE

ANNUAL REPORT

2017



MOBILIZING MILLIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

The November 2016 election disrupted and ignited everyday Americans to take action to stand up for democracy on a national and local level. At the Democracy Initiative, that energy has fueled real opportunities to build a winning strategy for 2018 and beyond.



From Our Executive Director Wendy Fields

We live in a new reality with all that we've faced this year. This reality didn't start with the November 2016 election. For many their eyes were finally opened then to the fact that **we cannot win unless we act collectively** and place democracy reform higher on our agenda.

We began 2017 mobilizing on national and local levels. First with direct actions in Iowa on cabinet and Supreme court nominations, then on voting rights in Illinois, and ending the year on citizens' funded elections in Maryland and Washington, D.C. We've seen the energy from the resistance movement translate into action on climate, healthcare, workers' rights, and more. It is clear that to advance the kitchen table issues that matter to us (the grassroots) we must move beyond a 3-month

electoral strategy to a 365-day-a-year governance and civic participation strategy. That means increased action from our membership groups to win on voting rights, remove the corrupting influence of corporate money, and create fair representation for all Americans. This is a tough political climate – one many of us have not experienced before – but the grassroots are ready to take action!

Many of our Democracy Initiative (DI) partners are positioned to win reforms, but we must build greater solidarity across race, class, and gender. It means we must move from shared values to mutual interests and scale up the work of our coalition to create a demand for democracy reforms. We know that democracy reforms are not the end game, but a means to addressing economic injustice, racial inequality, environmental attacks, and threats against workers. That's what will inspire our memberships to act.

It is my belief that by creating a strong outside organizing strategy, elected leaders will stand up and deliver on the promise of democracy. **Our ability to win reforms in 2018 sets the stage for winning in 2019 and 2020** and will determine redistricting, 21st century voting rights, and who is counted in the census. The anti-democracy movement is well-funded and focused on shrinking the power of our grassroots by keeping people off the voter rolls and letting big money into our politics and policies. Now is the time to redouble our efforts in 2018.

I appreciate your support in my first year as ED. I look forward to strategically aligning our partner engagement and leveraging our collective assets to win the fights in the states in 2018. That means we must train thousands of grassroots members through our popular education program, Democracy Champions, to contribute to creating a sustainable grassroots movement. **Together, we can meet this urgent political crisis with the power of our mobilized base demanding a democracy for everyone.**

STAFF

Wendy Fields, Executive Director
Michelle Whittaker, Communications / Digital Media Director
Getachew Kassa, Senior Campaigner
David Sanchez, Outreach and Engagement Coordinator
Linda Ewing, Senior Policy and Training Fellow
Elana Orbuch, Program Assistant and Office Manager
Raven Keenan, Grassroots Mobilizing & Communications Intern

Mobilizing Committee Anchor Groups

Andrea Brown Gee, Vice President of Strategic Partnerships, NAACP
Marilyn Carpinteyro, Director for State Operations, Common Cause
Charlie Cray, Senior Research Specialist, Greenpeace USA
Aquene Freechild, Co-Director, Democracy is for People Campaign, Public Citizen
Courtney Hight, Director, Democracy Program, Sierra Club
Jessica Newman, Legislation, Policy & Human Rights Coordinator, CWA
Jamal Watkins, National Outreach Director, Campaigns, AFL-CIO



Photo: DI Staff pictured with Small Planet Institute leaders Frances Moore Lappe and Adam Eichen at the Daring Democracy book event on October 24.



From Our Board of Directors Co-Chairs: Karen & Annie

In this moment of existential threats, the mission of the DI is relevant, simple, and clear: **Democracy is a 365 days / year-round endeavor, and we are fighting to advance political, social, and economic justice for all.** The good news is it's clear from the activism of the resistance movement that people are ready to act on a large scale! Since we began in 2013, our

coalition has grown to 64 organizations and over 35 million members across the country. We are everyday Americans who want to see our people and our planet thrive, and that begins with a democracy where every voice is heard and every vote is counted.

We're excited for the next phase of our coalition as we build a comprehensive strategy to win 20 reforms by 2020. The DI is stronger than ever and poised to be a key strategic player in winning reforms across the country that expand democracy for more Americans and advance our core economic and social issues. **We are excited to have you as a partner on this journey toward a more reflective and inclusive democracy!**

Karen Hobert Flynn
Common Cause President
DI Co-Chair

Annie Leonard
Greenpeace USA Executive Director
DI Co-Chair

Michael Brune
Sierra Club Executive Director

Larry Cohen
CWA Former President
Our Revolution Board Chair

Tefere Gebre
AFL-CIO Executive Vice President

Derrick Johnson
NAACP President & CEO



Our Partners



2017 Key Accomplishments



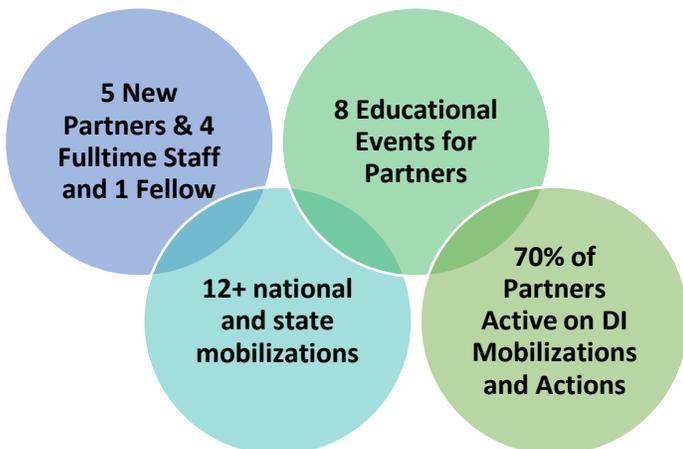
The Democracy Initiative is a dynamic coalition and democracy umbrella for social- and economic-focused groups who know that a stronger democracy is critical to advancing core kitchen table issues (worker’s rights, criminal justice, immigration, clean water and clean air, and more). Our coalition applies a race, class, and gender lens into democracy campaigns in transformative ways that creates a reflective and powerful movement.

By the Numbers

Over the last year, the DI has expanded our coalition, mobilized members on national and state campaigns, and conducted trainings and webinars on critical reform engagement opportunities, research, and messaging on democracy organizing. We are building a movement of diverse leaders who recognize that we are stronger together when we stand in solidarity to make sure everyone can participate in democracy.

In 2017, we added **5 new DI partners** and **4 fulltime staff and a policy fellow**; we held **8 trainings** and numerous **webinars** for partners on reforms and upcoming actions; and we engaged memberships in more than **a dozen national and state mobilizations**. We supported partners’ engagement through bi-weekly strategy sessions with our core mobilizing committee of partners and expanded coalition-wide mobilizing meetings with all partners.

Victories! Even in a year of existential threats, where corporate polluters are spending millions to rig democracy, the DI was part of **victories** for automatic voter registration in Illinois (the 10th state to adopt “AVR”) and small donor matching in Howard County (where the County Council successfully passed budget to fully fund Citizens’ Election Program passed in 2016 with DI’s involvement).



Empowering & Educating Partners

Neil Gorsuch Tele Town Hall

On February 6, 2017, the DI hosted a national Tele-Town Hall on then-SCOTUS nominee Judge Neil Gorsuch. DI Executive Director Wendy Fields was joined by Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Greenpeace USA Executive Director Annie Leonard to discuss critical concerns with Gorsuch's nomination. Over 1,000 people joined the call in advance of action days on Gorsuch and other Trump Administration nominees.

No Fossil Fuel Money Webinar

Oil Change International presented on how dirty fossil fuel money is corrupting our political system and ways DI partners can blunt the influence of corporate polluters to create a climate-safe future. Oil Change International presented at the DI expanded mobilizing meeting on August 30.

Queer+Trans Forum on Voting Rights and Money in Politics

DI co-sponsored a DC forum on voting rights and money in politics specifically for the queer+trans community during Pride Week. The forum was held on June 25 and around 50 people attended.

DumpDourson

Center for Environmental Health (CEH) informed and mobilized partners to oppose the appointment of Michael Dourson as the official overseeing toxic chemical regulations at the EPA. CEH presented at the DI expanded mobilizing meeting on August 30 and provided excellent messaging connecting environmental issues with democracy.

Democracy Champions Training in Connecticut

DI's Getachew Kassa and Linda Ewing conducted a Democracy Champions training for UAW Local Union presidents from Region 9A that covers the states of NY City, Puerto Rico, CT, ME, NH, VT (pictured below). Thirty-five participants attended this pilot training – a preview to our refined popular democracy trainings for 2018.



Pence-Kobach Mobilization & Launch of Solidarity Pledge

In May the President launched the Pence-Kobach commission to try prove his false claim that millions voted illegally in 2016. The DI joined the Leadership Conference and Hip Hop Caucus to organize actions on the commission's first meeting (July 19) with hashtags **#RespectMyVote** & **#DontMessWithOurVote**. DI hosted a partner webinar in August on Kobach's dangerous Interstate Voter Registration Crosscheck Program. The DI played a central role in mobilizing 5 state actions for the next meeting on September 12, using **#DontMessWithOurVote**. We provided partners with a comprehensive messaging packet and hosted a Facebook Live event. We stand ready to charge forward with messaging and strategy for partners as soon as the commission rears its head again (it's currently stalled by litigation). In addition, the DI launched an online "solidarity pledge" as an outreach tool to mobilize millions on voting rights.



Main Street not Wall Street – AFL-CIO

Executive Director Wendy Fields presented at the AFL-CIO pre-convention workshop to union members and leaders. During the packed session, Wendy connected the work of union members as the frontlines defenders of economic and social justice to the vision of a reflective democracy that gets money out of politics and centers our governance on everyday people, not corporate interests. Wendy was joined by Carlos Jimenez, Executive Director for Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO.

Daring Democracy Book Discussion

On October 24, the DI hosted Small Planet Institute leaders Frances Moore Lappé and Adam Eichen at Busboys & Poets in DC to discuss their new book *Daring Democracy*. The packed crowd participated in a lively and wide-ranging discussion on the anti-democratic movement and standing in solidarity to make the connections between issues and democracy. *Daring Democracy* features quotes and narratives from DI partners, including Wendy Fields.

Mobilizing Members



Photo: Greenpeace USA photo of a RESIST banner that was displayed on a construction crane near the White House in early February.

Resistance Movement: Many DI partners have seen an increase in membership and action since the November 2016 election and a growing resistance movement to the Trump Administration's harsh attitude toward marginalized communities and lack of transparency. This energy is translating into action on democracy reforms to fuel transformation in 2018.

#StopSessions and #FireSessions

Donald Trump's nomination of Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General is a threat the rights of all Americans. The Democracy Initiative actively opposed his nomination and supported direct actions by NAACP, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement Action Fund, and AFL-CIO in Iowa (home state for Sen. Chuck Grassley, chair of the Judicial Committee). Former NAACP President Cornell Brooks and Greenpeace USA Executive Director Annie Leonard helped to mobilize members to call in opposition to Sessions following the Women's March. After Sessions was narrowly approved, the Democracy Initiative and many partners have continued to hold Jeff Sessions accountable for his lies and deceptions as the Department of Justice under his leadership threatens to enable white supremacy groups while targeting black protest groups for surveillance.



The country's highest officer for **truth** and **justice** has **lied** to the American people.

#FIRESSESSIONS

Neil Gorsuch #DonorsOrVoters

The DI was part of efforts to oppose the nomination of Neil Gorsuch for the U.S. Supreme Court. Along with holding the Tele Town Hall, we helped to amplify money in politics messaging on Gorsuch that showed how his judicial record favored corporations over workers, corporate polluters over the environment, and would shrink the power of voters to advocate for their rights.

DON'T BE FOOLED

**Judge Gorsuch is wrong
for the Supreme Court.**

His judicial record shows he would
weaken protections for workers,
voters, and our environment.

March on Mississippi

On Saturday March 4 2017, Nissan workers at the Canton, Mississippi plant marched for their right to organize. Actor Danny Glover, Senator Bernie Sanders, Sierra Club president Aaron Mair, and then-NAACP President Cornell Williams Brooks spoke at a pre-march rally organized by United Auto Workers against Nissan's attempts to block workers from organizing and ignore safety issues in the plant. Thousands descended on Canton, supported by two-thousand viewers online, to demand that Nissan halt their intimidation tactics and allow workers to freely vote to form a union.

Howard County (MD) Fair Elections

In 2016 the DI mobilized thousands in Howard County to support fair elections. A citizens' initiative passed on the ballot in November 2016 and in 2017 the critical work of implementation began. The DI remained a steadfast partner helping to support educational events around the legislative implementation phase to pass a budget to support the Citizens' Election Fund in Howard County. DI's work included turnout for an April 19 hearing, a July 5 day of action, and the July 3 veto override vote. The hard work of the Fair Elections Maryland coalition paid off and their first fair elections will be in 2022.

DC Fair Elections Mobilization

The DI helped to pack the DC Council hearing on June 29, 2017 on the Fair Elections Act of 2017 to make sure the Council knew that everyday people want fair elections. DC presents a unique opportunity to introduce and establish a People's PAC that builds more power for everyday people in our democracy.

AVR in Illinois

The DI mobilized members to urge Governor Rauner to support automatic voter registration after an AVR bill passed unanimously in both houses of the Illinois General Assembly. The DI amplified messaging for the diverse broad-based Just Democracy Illinois coalition during the final push to engage more organizations to pressure Rauner. On August 28, 2017 Rauner signed SB1933 and Illinois became the 10th state to adopt automatic voter registration, expanding voter registration for nearly 1 million eligible voters in the state.

Protecting Small Donor Matching in Connecticut

The DI supported efforts by DI partners, Common Cause and Every Voice, to protect the Citizens Election Program (CEP) from budget cuts. Connecticut's small donor program has worked for nearly a decade to curb the influence of big money and bring more diverse candidate into politics.

People's Climate March



The DI mobilized "Democracy Defenders" for the People's Climate March on Saturday, April 29, 2017. The DI hosted a Teach-in and Art Build the Friday before the march with over 40 people coming out to hear from DI groups about local efforts to expand democracy.

Over 150,000 people marched in Washington, D.C. and thousands of others in sister marches across the country. Labor unions, civil rights, and good government groups joined in solidarity for a sustainable planet.

Coalition Expands

64 DI Partners

As the need for a stronger grassroots-focused, issue-based democracy movement continues, groups are joining the DI. This year we welcomed Center for Environmental Health, WaterKeepers Alliance, Small Planet Institute, Working Families Party, and New American Leaders Project.

DI Staff Expands

To meet our ambitious vision for 2018 and beyond, the DI staff added four (4) fulltime staff: Michelle Whittaker (Director of Communications and Digital Media), Getachew Kassa (Senior Campaigner), David Sanchez (Outreach Coordinator), and Elana Orbuch (Program Assistant & Office Manager).

Our Executive Director Wendy Fields is frequently asked to speak on panels and at various conferences. In addition, several of our DI staff members have spoken at conferences or before internal high-level committees within our partner organizations. Below are some notable speaking events by staff in 2017:

Common Cause Blueprint Conference, Money in Politics panel (Wendy Fields)

NAN Advocacy Workshop: Working and Building Coalitions in the States (Wendy Fields)

U.S. Rep. Don Beyer's (VA-13) Moving Forward, Together: Impact & Influence – Fair Representation Panel (Michelle Whittaker)

NAACP Environmental Justice Training for National Board of Directors (David Sanchez)

Prince George's County Public Safety and Fiscal Management Committee Hearing on Public Financing of Elections (David Sanchez)



Raising Our Hands for a Democracy for All!

Platform - 20 Reforms by 2020 that lay the path to:

OUTCOMES

INCREASE PARTICIPATION	BLUNT INFLUENCE OF MONEY	CREATE A REPRESENTATIVE & REFLECTIVE GOVERNMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Registration 100% • All voters vote within 30 minutes • 100% of votes cast are counted and verified • 75% Voter turnout • Rights restored to returning citizens • Achieve equity in voting access and equipment • Recruit thousands of activists to play a role in civic engagement and election oversight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens-funded elections (ultimate goal) • Campaign contribution limits on corporations and companies that engage in privatization contracts or lobbying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent processes for drawing district lines • Independent and third-party candidates • Increased representation for citizens and effective ways to hold elected leaders accountable • District lines and election systems no longer protect incumbents • Competitive elections • Open primaries

Potential Path of Reforms

AVR, SDR, early voting, Election Day Holiday, Restoration of Rights, vote by mail and vote centers, paper ballots, audits	Those reforms that move us closer to national public financing, overturning “Citizens United” and other moneyed interests’ influence in government, and build transparency and accountability.	Other reforms and campaigns to be considered: National Popular vote, Compact, Redistricting reforms (including fair representation models), important to keep the Census in mind
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How We Educate & Mobilize Millions for Democracy

Popular Education Democracy Champions	The DI piloted the Democracy Champions program in Howard County, training 36 champions as part of the effort to support fair elections. In 2017, the Democracy Initiative brought on Linda Ewing to refine the curriculum, and we are planning 3 trainings beginning in January 2018 to train new leaders on the ground in key states where we are looking to win reforms.
Communications Collaborative Launched	Our Communications Director launched the Communications Collaborative, a DI working group focused on messaging and sharing resources within the coalition to help us effectively mobilize millions of members across the country. We held 3 meetings in 2017 and anticipate a total of 6 meetings for 2018. We are launching our new podcast in mid-December and will host regular social media conversations to raise the profile of democracy reform conversations.
Field Guide to Democracy Movement	In collaboration with Small Planet Institute, a new DI partner, the DI is launching the Field Guide to the Democracy Movement, an interactive online hub that will feature campaigns across the country and across the democracy movement, helping activists connect locally and nationally to democracy groups and illustrating the growing power of the movement.

WE BELIEVE

the voice of every voter should be heard and counted, so all of us have an equal say in a democracy **of, by, and for the people.**

Our Statement of Principles

The Democracy Initiative's mission is to build a powerful and diverse democracy movement to **enhance voting rights** and blunt the influence of corporate money by **getting money out of politics**. Robust democratic institutions are the essential means to improve the lives of our families, our communities, our environment, the working class and our nation. Each of our organizations must transcend our own silos to **mobilize millions of people** in communities across the country to **expand and protect our democracy**.

We commit to embracing a convergence of reform issues including both expansion of voting rights and increasing participation as well as the reduction of the power of wealthy individuals and corporations.

Vision

Through collective action we have greater power, and with greater power will come greater justice.

In 2014 labor, civil rights, voting rights, environmental, good government and other progressive organizations representing 30 million members came together to form the Democracy Initiative to stand united for our nation's fundamental democratic tenets.

Solutions

The Democracy Initiative will act as a catalyst to mobilize coalition partners' members on democracy issues. This can be achieved by structural reforms that give more power and influence to our citizenry, like: citizen-funded elections, campaign finance reform, blunting the influence of moneyed interests in governing, restoration of rights for returning citizens, voting by mail, same day voter registration, automatic voter registration, and ending gerrymandering.



We Mobilize Millions to

Expand voting rights, rebuilding trust in elections, and equal access.

Blunt influence of corporate money.

Ensure Fair and Just Representation in governance.

Democracy Solidarity Pledge

We invite all Democracy Initiative partners to stand in solidarity with everyday Americans across the country. Our democracy pledge is an opportunity for you to offer a positive vision for what we want for democracy and to take action against those who want to shrink the power of the people.

Today, we raise our hands to take collective action against those who try to mess with our vote. We stand together for a democracy where:

All eligible voters can register to vote,

Every vote is cast and counted securely, and

All communities have the freedom to participate equally in the democratic process.

This is our democracy.

Signature



Democracy Initiative is grateful to the individual donors who supported our work in 2017!

Special thanks to the United Auto Workers, Small Planet Institute, and Common Cause Board member Marilyn Melkonian for 2017 financial support and to the organizational partners mobilizing their staff and resources to make a stronger democracy *together!*

JOIN US!

Help us mobilize millions for democracy!

DONATE at
www.democracyinitiative.org/donate



The Democracy Initiative Education Fund (DIEF) is a 501(c)(3) charitable research and education organization dedicated to public education about the necessity of broader democracy reform so that we can fully realize the promise of American democracy; a government of, by, and for the people.

DIEF works with Democracy Initiative to implement educational and research efforts that are building a movement for democracy. DIEF has created new leadership development curriculum to increase the capacity of issue organizations to be active on democracy reforms; undertakes message research to better engage varied audiences on the importance of civic engagement; and provides thought leadership to the movement on the power of grassroots education in achieving democracy reforms.

Thank you to the institutional funders that granted support or program guidance to DIEF in 2017:

Ford Foundation • Gaia Fund • Johnson Family Foundation • Lisa & Douglas Goldman Fund • MacArthur Foundation • Mertz Gilmore Foundation • Overbrook Foundation • Wallace Global Fund

(list as of November 2017)

We welcome your partnership and investment in a stronger democracy! Please contact David Sanchez at 202-567-6101 for more information on our educational programs.