

DRAWING DEMOCRACY

DEFINING REPRESENTATION BY FAIR REDISTRICTING

THE PROJECT

The goals of the Drawing Democracy Project (DDP) were to promote a transparent and accountable redistricting process and to empower communities to create fair districts. The project provided financial and technical support to community-based organizations in Massachusetts involved in redistricting issues as part of their overall civic engagement activities.



Drawing Democracy Project Grantees educating at the State House.



Paul Watanabe, center, Director of the Institute for Asian American Studies

The project sought to fund groups that represent people who have been historically underrepresented in the redistricting process, including low-income individuals, people of color, immigrants, and former prisoners in numerically significant regions of Massachusetts.

Besides funding, the project provided technical assistance to grantees, including access to mapping technology, tool kits, legal support, training, brown bag lunches, and a network of advisors who guided and amplified their work.

Drawing Democracy was able to grant \$200,000 to community-based organizations across the state. With limited resources and upfront costs to participate in the redistricting process, the strategy consisted of two levels of giving. Technical assistance grants (\$100,000) were invite-only grants to provide knowledge capacity to support community-based organizations to advocate at a sophisticated level with the legislature. Organizing grants (\$100,000) were given to organizations with an active membership base and a history of community activation.

The expectations of the organizing grantees were to execute their approved funding proposal and participate in several grantee convenings including: a site visit and training, three strategy meetings and public hearings. These touch points provided ongoing check-ins with all grantees and group knowledge exchange.

Our technical groups were tasked with creating funding proposals that would allow them to service the communities targeted; including data, cartography and political strategy advisement. The TA team traveled to each community and introduced the process, explained the shifts in population, and highlighted the opportunity to help underrepresented communities.

The model successfully empowered communities to propose maps that gave their communities an expanded voice. Here are some highlights:

- Raised \$300,000 for the project
- Hired a Drawing Democracy Project Consultant
- Hosted six strategy meetings with TA and organizing grantees
- Retained a PR firm to ensure the Drawing Democracy story was expressed
- Created and presented over 60 maps to the redistricting committee
- The House map was an improved DDP map, structured like the DDP map, and doubled the number of majority minority seats from ten to twenty.
- The State Senate map which increased the number of majority minority districts by one was identical to grantee proposals, nearly precinct for precinct.
- A majority minority district was created for the Congressional maps and reflected grantee proposals.
- The redistricting committee granted a two-week public review process leading up to the release of all maps.

REDISTRICTING REFORM

A goal of any future redistricting reform should be to allow for more community voice. In many ways the DDP model achieved this goal. A more expanded funding base would have allowed for more communities to participate. With a longer lead time for the project, groups could have advocated for reforms to the redistricting process.

Authentic participation of any community needs the following characteristics:

1. Deepening of education of all stakeholders of the process
2. Reduction of the barriers of entry to the process
3. Enough resources to allow community-based organizations to participate

Current redistricting reform is focused on political gerrymandering and removing the power of incumbency. Independent commissions as agents of reform are popular and a few states have adopted different models of commissions.

While removing political partisanship is an important reform, felon disenfranchisement and census undercount are reforms needed to allow full inclusion of all citizens. This section will explore the CA commission model, felony disenfranchisement, and census undercount.

CALIFORNIA

After a successful ballot question vote, The California Citizens Redistricting Commission was created to take the responsibility of drawing maps out of the legislature. It established an independent, bipartisan commission to draw the maps. Each commissioner would be elected and the website provided a platform for a fully transparent process.

The progressive community funded community participation at every touch point of the reform. Communities were mobilized for the ballot questions to set up the independent commission.

Once the commission was established as law, several donors began to fund community-based organizations to find candidates to run for the commission seats. There was a lot of activity around the election and it raised the importance of paying attention to redistricting. There was a chilling effect in some communities when it came to running for the commission. With the transparency mandate, a lot of personal information of potential commission candidates was placed on the commission's website. The Asian community was probably the most culturally affected by this piece of the process.

FELON DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Felon disenfranchisement dilutes the minority voting population. Supporting reforms that allow prisoners to be counted for redistricting purposes in their neighborhood, New York passed "prison gerrymandering reform" through legislation.

Prison gerrymandering hurts the one person, one vote intention. It counts prisoners as residents of prisons, unfairly padding their votes as well as diluting the vote in the neighborhoods to which the prisoners return. This legislation was upheld by the courts.

There are ways a legislative campaign could empower the grassroots and provide an entry point for participation of some of the hardest-to-reach communities. It might be worth investigating all ways to support a reform like this in Massachusetts.

Boston Workers Alliance is working with Demos on this effort. The DDP collaborative attempted to raise money from some national foundations who care about felony representation, but did not have success.

CENSUS UNDERCOUNT

Census undercount is a very similar problem and particularly affects new immigrants and the poor. For many reasons it is hard to count the migrating communities of the poor. With the undercounts in underrepresented communities there are more individuals in their districts than counted.

This space seems to be held by legal and traditional civil rights organizations. There may be room here to help community-based organizations activate for these laws.

WHAT WAS LEARNED . . .

On the model

The model of the Drawing Democracy Project is one that could be applied to other granting processes where there is a need for outside expertise as well as authentic community-based organizations.

START EARLY, DO NOT WAIT FOR THE REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE TO ANNOUNCE THEIR PLANS, GRANTS NEED TO GET INTO THE COMMUNITIES EARLY.

Having a staff person for any donor collaborative is necessary. Grantees must be held accountable and management of the process cannot be done solely by the grantees. Hiring a consultant helped all grantees remain aligned and kept the communication flowing between the grantees, the technical team, and the donors.

Providing a clear outline of the model and expectations allowed all the technical grantees to focus on their deliverables and services. A concept paper created by the donors laid out their expectations. That provided shared language for the RFP, proposals, and process.

Play in your lane. The model allowed all stakeholders to do what they do best. The TA grantees did not need to focus on organizing and the organizing grantees had the assistance to empower their communities with cutting edge technology.

Don't scrimp on the technical assistance. The money we spent on Maptitude redistricting software, a cartographer, and a public relations firm allowed our project to be taken seriously. When we talked to the redistricting committee, we understood the process as much as they did.

On The Process

Start early. Do not wait for the committee to announce their plans. Grants need to get into the community early.

More effort must be made to focus on geographic areas that may not have grantees. Because we were not able to provide funding everywhere, DDP relied on the networks of members of the TA team. This was not adequate outreach. The project should have created a state-wide communication plan to educate on the importance of community lobbying. There was an activity drop-off once the maps were released and DDP was content with the outcome.

The Congressional Map was too big for effective lobbying from all communities. Every region had an idea of what they wanted and it made for a mixed bag of the released maps. It became hard to influence the committee as a project versus an individual organization. We needed more than one mandatory meeting once the congressional maps were released.



Underrepresented communities need to fully understand what the redistricting win means for them in tangible terms. The redistricting process has created many opportunities to continue to fund civic engagement efforts beyond just voter registration. Nonpartisan candidate training, voter education, and voter engagement work all need to be increased in many areas throughout the state. Public education is necessary to help community-based organizations translate what the redistricting victory means for underrepresented communities.

A DONOR COLLABORATIVE SHOULD CONVENE AND WORK OUT A SET OF GOALS FOR THE SEATS CREATED BY THE REDISTRICTING PROCESS.



Kelly Bates, third from right, Executive Director of Access Strategies Fund with Technical Assistance Grantees

Over the next ten years, there are many ways for donors to support communities taking advantage of redistricting wins. Simply put, if there is no grant money to encourage people to run for office, majority/minority districts will have no meaning. A donor collaborative should convene to work out a set of goals for the seats created in the redistricting process.

Some activities could include:

- Educating communities on their new voting districts and how their voting power has been expanded.
- Exploring a nonpartisan way to target open seats initially; creating a long-term plan for all new majority minority districts.
- Promoting education on how to leverage the increase of voting power for underrepresented communities to incumbents.
- Using the redistricting victories to educate issue-based donors on how to best get elected officials to support their issue-based investing.
- Supporting the new civic engagement models directly at the grassroots level.
- Looking outside of Boston for models. UTEC and Teens Leading the Way in Lowell, for example, should be fully resourced to do civic engagement.

Looking ahead, it would be advantageous for the donor collaborative that created DDP to reach outside of their comfort zone and begin to explore how to reduce the apprehension of issue-based and national donors to fund civic engagement. The DDP donor collaborative highlighted expanding the pool of civic engagement donors as a goal. To those ends DDP conducted a few interviews with issue, state, and national donors. There are some recurring fears and donor desires that should guide how the Drawing Democracy Project donors expand their collaboration. Here are some themes:

Issue-Based Donors

- 1** Civic engagement donors must display a true return on investment for issue donors to see why there is added value in civic engagement giving.
 - Issue-based donors feel they are fighting to end a crisis. A larger vision must be created in order to suggest that some monies should be redirected from direct funding to solve the problem. A vision should spell out how civic engagement will end hunger and homelessness, and help children read.
 - Create a cost benefit analysis on why deeper civic engagement helps all social giving.
 - It's all about the children; many donors/foundations like to give to youth groups. Tying leadership development to begin a critical citizen can be a bridge to help donors support civic engagement. The act of children getting their parents to become civically involved seems to be a comfortable space for donors to go beyond voter registration.
- 2** Less innocuous civic engagement efforts must be couched in a safe space.
 - If donors/foundations are interested in how to enter the space of civic engagement, it is critical they see themselves as not doing anything more political than the giving in which they are currently engaged.
 - Creating a pool of ongoing civic engagement giving to issue-based organizations may be a safe space for issue-based donors to participate.

- 3** Funding must go to the issue groups they already support.
 - DDP's model of supporting civic engagement by funding organizations with active membership bases can be an entry point for donor overlap. It would be worth letting donors know how DDP built capacity for organizations they support.
- 4** Civic engagement donors must understand that political retribution is in the back of issue donors' minds.
 - Regardless of the legality of ongoing civic engagement, in many ways issue-based efforts show a belief that whoever is in office should be worked with to push for change. Getting into the messy game of "politics" is not inviting. It is critical that this fear is incorporated into the larger vision of civic engagement highlighted in the first bullet above.

National Donors

Massachusetts is not traditionally considered a swing state. Beyond federal elections there is more room to talk about the need for increased civic participation. There were a few opportunities gleaned from conversations that might prove helpful when reaching out to national donors.

Opportunities

- State civic engagement donors understand how best to get their state civically engaged. It is critical that state donors do not give up that space to national donors.
- Massachusetts is not targeted by national donors. Massachusetts has created models for expanded civic engagement and should be highlighted by state donors.
- Use national platforms like Funders Collaborative for Civic Participation to promote this Massachusetts' donor collaborative and their outcomes.

THE OUTCOMES REFLECT THE GREAT WORK DONE ON THE GROUND — HAVING INCREASED THE NUMBER OF MAJORITY MINORITY SEATS, AT ALL LEVELS, FROM TWELVE TO TWENTY-FOUR. HOWEVER, IT IS NOT ENOUGH JUST TO CELEBRATE THE GAINS. FURTHER PLANNING AND SECURING OF RESOURCES ARE CRITICAL TO ENSURE THAT THE GRASSROOTS CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THESE VICTORIES.



Malia Lazu, Myron Miller of the Miller Foundation, Cheryl Crawford of Mass VOTE

The Drawing Democracy Project was successful. Increasing participation of underrepresented communities throughout the state, deepening organizations' capacity in civic engagement, and creating a strong donor collaborative were just a few of the highlights. The outcomes reflect the great work done on the ground — having increased the number of majority minority seats, at all levels, from twelve to twenty-four. However, it is not enough just to celebrate the gains. Further planning and securing of resources are critical to ensure that the grassroots can take advantage of these victories.

This donor collaborative has a desire to expand their numbers by targeting issue-based donors, national donors, and new philanthropists. Explaining the possible returns on their investment by giving some resources to civic engagement is a starting place. Resources should be directed at making this case through education, relationship building, and amplifying civic engagement outcomes.

Celebrate this victory by building off of it!

FUNDERS AND GRANTEES . . .

TECHNICAL SUPPORT GRANTS

OISTE, MassVOTE, Common Cause
(Collaboration)

University of Massachusetts Boston Institute
for Asian American Studies

Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights of Boston

ORGANIZING & ADVOCACY GRANTS

Boston Workers Alliance

Casa Latina

Coalition for a Better Acre with Cambodian
Mutual Assistance Center

Fall River Joint Tenant Council

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee
Advocacy Coalition

Union of Minority Neighborhoods

Universal Voices Eliminating Disparities

DRAWING DEMOCRACY FUNDERS

Access Strategies Fund

Barr Foundation

The Boston Foundation

Burgess Urban Fund of the
Episcopal City Mission

Haymarket People's Fund

Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation

The Hyams Foundation

New England Blacks in Philanthropy

Roxbury Trust Fund

Solidago Foundation