

Metro Justice Strategic Plan




Metro Justice
January 2017



Introduction

Throughout 2016 long-developing and massive political shifts in US and world politics became evident in a number of major moments. The results of the Presidential election in favor of Donald Trump is likely the key moment in the minds of many. But there have been clear swings in support of both the far-right and far-left all over the world.

The far-right seems to be gaining steam throughout much of the world, with electoral gains in many European nations. In Brazil, the center-left Workers' Party leader was pushed out in what many on the ground call a coup. In the UK, to the surprise of many, the Brexit vote passed.

At the same time, we see movements like the Fight for 15 and Black Lives Matter gaining a level of energy and militancy that hasn't been seen for years in progressive movements. A self-identified socialist nearly won the Democratic Party primary. Similarly far-left political parties are growing in many parts of the world.

Just over one year ago, Metro Justice leaders felt the shifting political winds. We saw signs that something different was fast-approaching and that we needed an organization that could effectively lead in the coming years. With 51 years of experiences in the battle for social, economic and racial justice, we've had many successes. But the organization needed to take a moment to think deeply about the coming days and what it would take for us to be on the leading edge of popular struggles.

Over the course of 2016, we have gone through an intentional Strategic Planning Process. The goal of this process has been to help us develop a

clearer sense of political and tactical unity, refine our own thinking on how positive change can occur, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our organization, and plot a path forward programmatically and ideologically.

The difficult task of holding many conversations at once and identifying from them a path forward was taken up by a Strategic Planning Committee brought together by the Council in 2015 and adapted along the way. This committee held public meetings, coordinated space at Council meetings for further conversation, brought together a meeting of many past Presidents of the organization, developed and analysed a membership survey on our Theory of Change, and invited outside speakers for our members and leaders to hear and enrich our internal conversations.

These many conversations have led us to some critical conclusions. A number of potential paths forward have emerged from this process, some of which we've already begun exploring. However, this plan should not be written in stone. Rather, the coming years will require us to be intentional and serious but also flexible and quick thinking. This document will provide a roadmap, with a caution that "the only thing permanent is change."

Social Movements

At the core of Metro Justice's outlook is that social movements are the major catalyst for change. Rather than simply moving through the increasingly flawed legislative and electoral processes, we believe that significant change will come through the rise of social movements. The problem, as we see it, has more to do with a question of on-the-ground power dynamics than it does with representation in a political system that has never adequately represented everyone.

Social Movements: Collective grouping of individuals and organizations that come together for the purposes of particular social, economic, and political changes. Typically these changes are meant to favor those on the bottom of social hierarchies through an assertion of their collective importance and strength with expressions inside and outside of established institutions. True social movements go beyond single issues or organizations.

At the current moment in the United States, the development of social movements that have as their goal a hope

to seek justice must stand on two key pillars: class struggle and challenging white supremacy. Additionally, the continued impact of patriarchy, homophobia and transphobia are clear, constant and oppressive forces in all areas of social, economic and political relations. Metro Justice will continue to look and act on these issues through an intersectionality lens, as we maintain our commitment to full equality.

Class Struggle as a Framework

On one hand, the social movement should be seen as a tool for advancing the interests of poor and working class people through a framework of class struggle. Poverty and all its resulting consequences are the product of wealth inequality and exploitation. They are not accidents or failures of our economic system, they are the natural consequence. Social movements of poor and working class people should understand and assert their own interests, which are usually in direct contradiction to those of the elite, wealthy and politically powerful.

Challenge White Supremacy

The legacy of white supremacy is profoundly woven into the foundation of the United States. These threads aren't simply historic, but are formative to the society we live in today. The results of white supremacy can be found repeatedly in our daily lives from the disparate outcomes in wealth and health to the powerful political reactions against the popular demands emanating from communities of color. Understanding the roots and current impacts of white supremacy is critical for any social movement to hope to succeed in the United States. While white supremacy means that people of color face multiple layers of economic, social and political oppression, it also acts as the primary barrier to unity among the broader working class of our country.

Metro Justice believes that the best way to move towards genuine economic justice and the end of white supremacy is through fostering the creation and development of multi-racial social movement organizations that strive to fight all forms of political, economic and social oppressions. We believe in a process of collective liberation where all marginalized and oppressed peoples strive to find solidarity with one another.



Mass organizations of workers, students, renters, neighbors and others need to build their own sense of power through political and disruptive action. Our work should be the development of these organizations and support for their leadership as they build them. The power of everyday people lies in being organized and then taking collective action. Building the power of these organizations will be central to alleviating the broader power imbalances that lead to inequality and oppression. So how are we going to do this?

There are now critical openings for us to see a significant shift in political perspectives and activity throughout the United States. The rising millennial generation is growing into a totally new political and economic world and has already shown significant signs of political openness. The organizing initiative, in response to the election of Donald Trump, seized by women around the world, is an additional indicator of new social and political dynamics. Also, a global series of political and economic crises, fueled by the impacts of the climate crisis have made the status quo visibly untenable. Nearly everyone is looking for a new way forward and we have the vision and the values that can help to lead the way.

Mass Organization:

An organization formed of members with a specific interest and social or economic position with the purposes of defending and advancing their collective interest. Examples include workers unions, tenant associations, student unions, etc. These organizations are typically open to all people in that specific group. While they may focus on issues, they are usually not issue-specific but are people-specific.

To get there will require serious commitment to doing the necessary work of movement building. Simply put, we know that our work will need to

simultaneously get broader and deeper. We need to connect with greater numbers of people and, together, we need to find real answers that go beyond progressive slogans. We need to develop true vision and leadership throughout our communities.

Broadening

It is clear that we need more people. Broad public support is critical if we hope to achieve meaningful change. At the same time, as our social movement analysis points out, building this broad base will not be an immediate process and has to be done in thoughtful ways.

Revolutionary Edge of Reform:

A term coined in the article *Demand Everything: Lessons of the Transformative Organizing Model* by Steve Williams. In basic terms it speaks to identifying those fights that are critical victories to popular and exploited classes while also helping to seed the ground for more powerful and impactful efforts in the future.

There are tens of thousands of progressives in the Rochester area. Yet there are over 200,000 people in the county living below the self-sustainability income line. The people who already believe in, or will be positively impacted by a strong social justice agenda in our area are there. We must proceed in the most effective way to mobilize them — to mobilize us all — into action in broad terms.

It is necessary to continue to build and maintain committees of activists dedicated to working on particular demands. In this manner progressive values move forward and people are engaged in the active process of social change. However, we are challenged to bring in more people and think through new demands on the “revolutionary edge of reform”. Our goal in winning a demand must also serve as a step forward for our organization towards future victories and future fights.

Our organization and leaders must consistently challenge themselves to bringing the vision of Metro Justice into new populations within our region, and through that work identify and develop new leaders in social justice. We cannot rely only on the same segments of the active population to continue pushing forward our ideas. We need to take on the challenge and opportunity

that significant growth will mean. The clear organizing paths that we will take on mean that we could expect a growth in communities of color. This will, in part, require more consistent membership drives to get new members to Metro Justice as well as greater member-to-member outreach.

But we also must not limit our outreach to the personal one-on-one conversational model that much of our most effective organizing takes now. While this one-on-one recruitment model will certainly continue going forward, we also need to start thinking about our capacity to speak to broader populations.

What is our media capacity? Social media provides both openings and limitations in this arena. Thus, we have to take on the challenge of creating our own media outlets to expand our reach. We also have to take on the challenge of creating a mass communications strategy that is not solely reliant on organizing staff. Such a strategy is monumental because effective organizing hinges upon coherent communications. If the masses do not know that we are engaging in amazing work, they cannot join us in the public square in the demand for social change.

Deepening

Leadership development and building a broad base of community support is going to require that we dive deeper into our understanding of the issues and their solutions. Slogans and good messaging are enough to mobilize large numbers of people, but are not sufficient for developing real leaders. Movement leaders need to have a deeper political, economic, historic, and strategic analysis which requires a serious commitment to education, specifically *popular education*.

We need leaders who have a profound understanding of white supremacy, capitalism and the movements that have significantly challenged them in order to elicit greater action from the participants. So the educational efforts themselves must not stop at just a deeper

Popular Education:

Popular education is an educational approach that collectively and critically examines everyday experiences and raises consciousness for organizing and movement building, acting on injustices with a political vision in the interests of the most marginalized.

— Paolo Freire

understanding of the issues, but must also focus on the strategies and models that movements are using to address these issues and the skills necessary to be effective organizers.

A clear commitment to ongoing political education and skills training will be a serious undertaking that will require a great deal of resources and support from our membership. We expect this commitment to education will help us to grow our membership and impact us all in new and meaningful ways.

Taking the popular education framework seriously will also mean taking seriously the populations of people that we work with in these endeavors. The popular and exploited classes — the working class and communities of color and women — should be those primarily involved in the process of popular education as a framework of liberatory action. It is critical to focus on the Millennial generation and younger in outreach and recruitment. Within these communities, we understand our education work as a two-way street. We don't simply intend to teach, but to learn in collaboration with people about their daily experiences and the larger political context that shapes these experiences.

Ultimately, this work will mean that we can no longer ignore the deeper ideological conversations. We will need to assist our communities in developing alternative world views that have a strong enough foundation to help drive their long-term active engagement in movement work. This will mean real conversations about different ideological frameworks and what they mean for our vision and organizational direction as well as that of our community.



Programs Going Forward:

Education for Liberation

As described above, we will undertake the development of political education and training programs for community members, activists and organizers. These programs will strive to use a popular education framework in their curriculum and will be offered throughout our communities. The desired outcome of each program will be some expectation of action in regards to the issue discussed.

In most cases, these will not be just one-day teach-in's, but rather a few weeks with significant dialogue.

Some of the topics that we expect to address will include:

- **White Supremacy — then, now, and getting rid of it.**
- **Capitalism, exploitation and class struggle.**
- **Popular education methodology for trainers**
- **Movement histories.**
- **How to be an effective community/workplace/school organizer.**
- **Solidarity**
- **Economic power/unionizing/resource control**
- **Mainstream Education vs Organizing Education**
- **Environmental Justice**

Using the methodology of “popular education” as theorized and practiced by Paulo Freire and other like-minded educators, we aim to facilitate frequent sessions examining different aspects of systemic oppression and how it relates personally and interpersonally.

Successful popular education seeks to make connections between on-the-ground life and complex systems such as White Supremacy, economic

Building the Future

inequality or other systemic issues for individuals. Another goal of popular education is to politicize the individual. The individual and larger group come to realize and internalize both our current collection of knowledge and resources, and our level of power. Most importantly, the individual, through this communal and collective stretching for knowledge and power, is educated away from the solitary or individualistic approach to world-view forming and problem solving.

We hope, through these sessions, to not only raise engagement with the ideas and concepts at hand, but to empower individuals to action, and to build a supportive learning community.

Goal 1: In first half of 2017, build core group of at least 5 members, leaders and staff trained in political popular education facilitation.

Goal 2: In second half of 2017, hold at least 3 public popular education sessions as pilots.

Goal 3: By the beginning of 2018, release annual calendar of popular education programming with fully developed curricula and resourced trainers identified.

Youth Organizing Initiative

The importance of youth organizing cannot be underestimated. On the one hand they will grow into the leaders of tomorrow. But, more importantly, there is no reason they shouldn't be the leaders of today. The child poverty rate in Rochester is the highest in the state and one of the highest in the country. The impacts of injustices often impacts youth first and hardest — especially youth of color. In our current moment, young people are growing into a political and economic crisis for which they need serious solutions.

In the coming months, we will launch a program to provide a limited number of young people who show a potential for long-term leadership with paid internships to engage in real organizing activity. These youth organizers will participate in educational and training programs as well as engage in specific long-term organizing projects.

We need to raise the necessary funds to make each youth position a year-long commitment, and may work with other programming to expand for a larger group each summer. This initiative will serve as a transformative way that we challenge race and inequality.

Goal 1: Provide an opportunity for three youths for 2017. Double the opportunity for 2018. Prioritize working class youth and youth of color.

Goal 2: Coordinate joint efforts with Teen Empowerment's youth organizers and other community allies.

Goal 3: Facilitate a pathway for youth organizers to work on the organization's issue campaigns with mentoring assistance from Metro Justice volunteers.

Low-Wage Worker Organizing

There are a number of new projects in town to develop the organized power of low-wage workers. Each of these programs has their own individual goals. They also collectively have a great deal in common. Metro Justice is committed to dedicating resources to help coordinate the efforts of these various groups and build a coalition of community partners to support those collective efforts.

Despite all of the talk about poverty in our community, low-wage work would not be on the table as an identifiable problem were it not for the Fight for 15. At the same time, workers throughout the country are demanding wage increases, often while working for some of the most massively profitable companies in the world. A coalition of workers asserting that an end to low-wage work and extreme exploitation is one essential answer to addressing poverty that our community needs.

Goal 1: Coordinate joint efforts between low-wage worker organizing in Rochester.

Goal 2: Establish coalition of 25 community partner organizations in support of low-wage worker organizing by end of 2017. Include 40 Organizations by the end of 2018.

Goal 3: Actively promote organization, unionization and raising wages as the primary ways to battle poverty in Rochester.

Membership Orientation

What does it really mean to be a member of Metro Justice? Is the organization democratic? If so, how do members participate in the decision making? What more can you do as a member to help push forward to vision of our organization? These are some of many questions that we get from members, both new and old. The answers are going to be even more important as our analysis and vision become deeper.

In the coming year we will develop membership packets to send incoming individuals to help them understand more deeply what it means to be a member of a movement organization. These packets will have resources to help them more fully understand our perspective as well as give some pointers about how to be more involved and become an organizational leader.

We will also begin regular membership orientation meetings for incoming members. These will be opportunities for more in-person learning, for new members to get to know some of the leadership and to discover how to put their skills to use in building a stronger and more effective movement.

We expect to see a growing Metro Justice membership in the coming years, and will be doing all we can to make that happen. We want to do everything we can to embolden those members to help in every way they can to build a powerful and effective movement organization in Rochester.

Goals of the New Member Orientation process: The membership Committee will organize and host 6 new member orientations a year (every other month). The initial goals of these orientation meetings will be:

Goal 1: To build a greater sense of “relationship” with the organization by helping to facilitate a sense of ownership over and responsibility toward the organization that membership entails.

Goal 2: To introduce new members to the organizational structures and procedures.

Goal 3: To facilitate deeper political engagement broadly by introducing new members to other campaigns, issues or world views that they may not have considered prior to becoming a member.

Affiliation with the nationwide organization People’s Action

In the coming years, we expect to see many regressive initiatives coming out of the federal government. These initiatives could have devastating local consequences, but must be fought at a national level. Working alongside similar organizations at the national level will be a critical component of our work going forward.

We also believe that greater connection to a national community of organizers and activists will open a greater pool of resources, skills and ideas from which we can learn and grow our own organization. In 2017 we will begin a direct affiliation with People’s Action to begin building these connections.

People’s Action:

A nationwide organization of progressives formed through the merger of US Action, National People’s Action, and the Alliance for a Just Society. The newly formed organization has local organizations like ours in 29 states across the country and combined 600 organizers and tens of thousands of members.

Communications Committee

Metro Justice faces several challenges in this area. The need to strengthen our communications reflects the importance of other goals described in this strategic plan. Stated generally, better communications must support our efforts to broaden externally and deepen internally.

With regard to broadening, Metro Justice needs a consistent real-time presence on social media. Whether this is the task of a formal committee or an informal group of trained members, this group should maintain ties with ongoing campaigns, committees and the Racial Justice Initiative so that information flows freely in both directions, and we improve our outreach and public presence. We will also need to develop strong lines of communication with our affiliates at the national and state level, as well as local organizations like B.L.A.C.K. and the Rochester People's Climate Coalition for the purposes of coordinated action.

With regard to deepening, Metro Justice has a growing number of committees, task forces, and campaigns — including groups like the Racial Justice initiative and the newly formed Election Rapid Response and Membership committees. It is vital that the Executive Committee and Council put into place structures and means by which these bodies regularly inform each other. In the coming years we can anticipate a growing membership, but the challenge for us will be to engage new members with an understanding of the scope of Metro Justice's activity, connect them with the campaigns and movement work to which they are most dedicated, and bring them into positions of leadership.

Goal 1: Develop a volunteer-run Communications Committee in the early part of 2017 that can begin to explore various media methods to spread our message.

Goal 2: Develop methods to measure the audience size and impact of our means of communication by late 2017.

Goal 3: Project a program for sustained growth in audience year-to-year by the beginning in 2018.

Climate Justice Committee

The urgency of the climate crisis itself, in many respects, makes the case for our immediate and complete engagement in this work, joining together with other community allies. We accept the view of Naomi Klein that “this [the climate crisis] changes everything.” We are the beneficiaries of the work of other groups, principally the Rochester Peoples’ Climate Coalition, for their deep commitment to community education and the implementation of concrete ways to dramatically reduce our carbon footprint, engage in community education and outreach, and to organize and model alternatives. While many of our members have been individually associated with environmental organizations for many years, Metro Justice has not engaged as a whole in this critical work. Through Council discussions and the engagement of our leaders, we have been moving informally for over a year to strengthen our ties. Furthermore, we understand that our organization stands at a critical juncture within the labor and environmental communities, and that we have a unique role to play in that regard. And, our organizational commitment to racial and economic justice will inform our actions. We believe that our emphasis needs to be in the areas of “climate jobs” campaigns and engagement in the ideological and practical implications of a “just transition.”



Goal 1: Convene a working group of Metro Justice members and allies that develops consensus on a local approach to “climate jobs” and the local interpretation of “climate justice.” We will seek to educate ourselves rapidly on best practices and forge working relationships in year one.

Goal 2: Develop a work plan for Metro Justice that will represent our engagement in climate crisis work. We will seek the active participation of members from labor and environmental organizations. Specific campaign initiatives would be developed within the Working Group and elaborated upon in the work plan.

Goal 3: Prepare an educational and outreach program around the implications of the “just transition” as it applies to our community. This will include the preparation of materials for engagement and dissemination and the training of presenters. Key to this approach is the linking of the struggle for racial justice and wealth redistribution with climate justice.



Appendix

- Calendar of Strategic Planning Process:
http://www.metrojustice.org/2016_strategic_planning_process
- Analysis of the Moment Document:
http://www.metrojustice.org/analysis_of_the_moment_document
- Theory of Change Document:
http://www.metrojustice.org/theory_of_change_document
- Theory of Change Membership Survey Results:
<http://prezi.com/ifzqllmscy3w>

Key Readings:

- No Shortcuts, We Need Strategy by LeftRoots:
<https://leftroots.net/no-shortcuts>
- Towards a Transformational Strategy by LeftRoots:
<https://leftroots.net/towards-strategy>
- Change Everything or Global Katrina by Naomi Klein:
<http://www.naomiklein.org/articles/2015/08/change-everything-or-face-global-katrina>
- From a Place of Love, Catalyst Project:
<http://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Catalyst-Project-From-a-Place-of-Love.pdf>
- Demand Everything: Lessons of the Transformative Organizing Model by Steve Williams:
http://www.rosalux-nyc.org/wp-content/files_mf/williams_transformative_organizing.pdf



metrojustice.org

If there
is no
struggle,
there
is no
progress

Black Lives Matter

FIGHT
Hands Up Don't Shoot