

Braver Angels New England Regional Alliance

April 16, 2021

Summary

The Braver Angels Alliance of Northern New England renamed itself as the New England Regional Alliance in March 2021 and is acting as an overarching “super alliance” for the six New England states. The Regional Alliance’s roles include:

- continue to serve as an active alliance
- provide an entry connection for new members and activists from the six states (esp. for those who do not have an active alliance in their area)
- attract new members to Braver Angels
- serve as an incubator for developing new local alliances and growing vibrant/thriving alliances
- help to revitalize alliances that have been dormant
- cultivate and develop new Braver Angels leaders
- support alliance leadership transitions to help ensure alliance sustainability
- promote adherence to the Braver Angels pledge and core values in all alliance activities
- provide support to local alliances, organizations and volunteers seeking to sponsor workshops and other events
- host and jointly market workshops/events in collaboration with local alliances
- support alliance leaders and state coordinators
- network and seek synergies among Braver Angels members and activists from throughout New England
- sustain energy to support the growth of Braver Angels as a movement for national change
- make being a volunteer fun and manageable.

The New England Regional Alliance will continue to provide opportunities for respectful conversation and connection, while enhancing the growth of Braver Angels. We believe that thinking both small and big are necessary for Braver Angels to achieve its full potential and bring our message to scale, strengthening both individuals and our nation as a whole. We must attract more people to our organization, inspiring them to get (and stay) involved and invite others to join us. We believe the regional alliance model will help create and sustain the energy to support the growth of BA as a movement for national change.

Background

Braver Angels Alliances have traditionally been groups of BA members from a fairly small geographic area that regularly met and planned activities in person. The emergence of COVID halted in-person meetings, but created the opportunity for a new paradigm of how alliances could organize and operate.

In early 2020, there were five alliances in New England – 4 in Massachusetts, 1 in Vermont, and none in the other 4 states. After COVID began to expand in March 2020, three of the five became dormant. However, what would eventually become the Braver Angels Alliance of Northern New England (a three-state alliance) emerged organically under the COVID restrictions and has met exclusively online using Zoom. This online model has allowed for broader participation compared to the traditional alliance structure based on a limited geography.

The Northern New England Alliance started when two BA members (Jay Wilgus from Maine and Samantha Lewandowski from NH) planned an in-person March 2020 showing of the Braver Angels documentary in Kittery, Maine. After they canceled that event due to the emergence of COVID, the pair made the key decision to instead set up a Zoom event on March 27, 2020 (the first such documentary showing in the country).

During discussion right after the online film showing, several enthusiastic participants decided to meet on line. They soon planned another online film showing with more active publicity, including press and personal networking. That second event occurred on May 28, 2020 with 97 people registered and 56 attendees. This attracted more people to the growing planning group which met weekly and decided to form the Braver Angels Alliance of Maine and NH. Wilgus has served as blue co-chair with Doug Teschner, who became NH state coordinator in April, serving as red co-chair. The first formal alliance meeting was conducted online on July 28, 2020 with 26 attendees.

At the request of several folks from Vermont, the group hosted a third online documentary showing on September 22, 2020 that attracted 74 registrants. Given the high interest in Vermont, the alliance renamed itself as the Braver Angels Alliance of Northern New England. (At the request of BA leadership, Teschner agreed in July to also serve as acting state coordinator for ME and VT so the inclusion of all three states in the alliance had an organizational symmetry.)

For the remainder of 2020 and early 2021, the three-state alliance continued to hold regular alliance meetings, all using Zoom (on September 15, October 10, November 17, January 5, 2021, February 16, and March 30) and built a mailing list of nearly 400 people. Alliance members attended a pilot of the on-line version of Depolarizing Within and sponsored the Family and Politics workshop on February 6, 2021 with 132 registrants (including a waiting list). At the same time, the previously formed Franklin County, VT alliance has continued to meet (including organizing Skills for Bridging the Divide workshops on March 4 and March 24) and a new alliance has formed in the state of Maine.

The three-state planning group now meets biweekly with 12 to 25 in attendance. While most of the group have never met the others in person, strong bonds have formed that many never would have thought possible using Zoom -- a technology most of us were unfamiliar with at this time last year!

Moving to a Six State Alliance

In December 2020, Doug Teschner was asked to step-up as Braver Angels Regional Leader for New England. Having served as part of the Northern New England Alliance planning group from the beginning, he quickly found talented members to replace him as NH and ME state coordinators (Shawn Martin and Chip Morrison, respectively) and is still in discussion about a VT replacement. Teschner assessed the status in the other states and found one state lacking a coordinator, another ready for replacement, and a third with brand-new coordinators. He is actively working to fill the vacancies and help support new state coordinators.

Teschner quickly realized that there was no alliance activity at all in RI, limited alliance activity in Massachusetts (where 3 of the 4 alliances were dormant), and a single new alliance was just starting up in southern Connecticut. Given the great need, he began to wonder if the Northern New England group could take on a broader role. (At the suggestion of BA field leadership, he reached out to a member who is helping to form a Southern California "super alliance.")

At the urging of the Northern New England planning group, Teschner invited people from MA, CT and RI to the February 16, 2021 alliance meeting, and a number enthusiastically attended. Now, one of them is starting a new Greater Boston alliance, and two others are reactivating one of the dormant MA alliances.

Reformulating the Braver Angels Alliance of Northern New England to act as an overarching “super alliance” for the six New England states, was discussed with the planning group on February 23, 2021. The group prefers a formal name that does not include the term “super” (as we don’t want to come off sounding superior) and settled on a tentative name of the New England Regional Alliance.

Roles of the Braver Angels New England Regional Alliance

The new/reformulated six state alliance anticipates engaging in the following activities:

- (1) continue to serve as an active, online, registered alliance (those with a local alliance in their area can choose to attend either or both)
- (2) provide an entry point for new members and activists from all 6 states to connect and engage with BA (especially for those who do not have an active alliance in their area at present)
- (3) attract new members to BA, knowing that they will have a place to meet others and learn more about the organization
- (4) serve as an incubator for developing new local alliances, offering support and role modeling on positive alliance functioning
- (5) help revitalize alliances that have been dormant during the COVID era
- (6) cultivate and develop new Braver Angels leaders
- (7) support alliance leadership transitions to help ensure alliance sustainability
- (8) promote adherence to the Braver Angels pledge and core values in all alliance activities
- (9) provide support to local alliances, organizations and volunteers seeking to sponsor workshops and other events
- (10) host and jointly market workshops/events in collaboration with local alliances
- (11) serve as a support and resource for alliance leaders and state coordinators
- (12) network and seek synergies among BA members and activists from throughout the six states
- (13) sustain energy to support the growth of Braver Angels as a movement for national change
- (14) make being a volunteer fun and manageable.

The Braver Angels New England Regional Alliance will continue to provide small group opportunities for respectful conversation, learning, connection, and activity planning, while supporting growth of BA as a movement for national change. While these two aspects may seem contradictory, we believe both “thinking small” and “thinking big” are fundamentally necessary for Braver Angels to achieve its full potential as an organization that can strengthen both individuals and grow to serve our nation as a whole.

Bringing the Braver Angels message to scale requires us to attract more people to our organization, inspire them to get involved (and stay involved), encourage them to attract others and thus create and expand energy like an atomic reaction! We believe our proposed regional alliance can help serve this purpose.