

Socialists In Office District Organizing Implementation Proposal

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Overview

At this year's NYC-DSA convention we passed a resolution to prioritize district organizing. This proposal is an extension of that resolution and lays out a plan for how we can make that happen.

NYC-DSA's successful electoral work has demonstrated that there is substantial support for socialist ideas and socialist policies among working people in New York City. We have built on our electoral efforts by mobilizing our members, coalition partners, and regular people through campaigns around legislative demands in Albany and City Hall. Now we face an urgent challenge to build on these mass campaigns with longer-term deep organizing and

relationship-building that can develop a more resilient, committed and representative working-class base for the socialist movement. District organizing in the areas where we have won elections holds this potential, but we need to develop an organizing program and structure for a program of volunteer-led deep organizing. We have already developed and scaled our electoral work, building institutional knowledge that rivals most professional electoral organizations in NY State. We should seek to build similarly robust and large-scale structures and mechanisms for district organizing, which holds even more potential for relationship building and mass mobilization.

Currently, there are six state socialists in office, with two about to step into city council seats in 2022. All of these elected officials are committed to organizing working people in their districts.. While every office is different, with different district dynamics, priorities, needs, and relationships with other organizations and community groups, it is imperative that NYC-DSA develop an infrastructure to help our members easily plug into the work and make sure that the work is scalable.

DSA should not expect our members to be involved in the entirety of the organizing work that district offices engage in, but we should formalize a structure for DSA member engagement in this work. All of the offices have relationships with other organizations that they work with and refer constituents to, have volunteers who are not DSA members, have needs that DSA members may not be able to meet, and we don't expect that to change. This document is specifically addressing how NYC-DSA builds the volunteer infrastructure to take on organizing work in partnership with the district offices.

Right now, almost all of the district organizing happening through the socialists in office is being run by staff members of each office. They are working on organizing projects like knocking doors in the district to introduce the office to constituents, tabling at events, tenant organizing, specific legislative campaigns, recruiting and training volunteers to help with constituent cases, and more. Particularly in the assembly, budgets and staff numbers are very limited, making district organizing work a challenge to sustain and grow. In many cases, there are volunteers interested in supporting this work in the community but the offices lack the infrastructure to manage volunteers. We hope that this plan can begin to build a structure that will allow NYC-DSA to help take on some of the leadership and coordination of district organizing work.

This is not a one-size-fits-all approach, but rather the beginnings of a structure that will allow us to try different projects and approaches and refine our understanding of how best to do this work. We hope to propose organizing structures based on work that has happened through the offices already. We expect that as NYC-DSA and the offices engage in more projects, we will expand and improve on these details. Ultimately, what we are trying to do is build power that lasts beyond our electeds' terms. This work is a big piece of what sets our Socialists in Office project apart from other political projects outside of DSA.

Organizational Structure

Carrying out this project will require a leadership structure to coordinate and move the project forward. This body should be accountable to membership, but also flexible and inclusive of representatives from necessary branches and working groups. We propose:

1. A District Organizing Committee (DO Committee) that sits adjacent to the current SIO committee, with point people from each of the branches represented by socialists in office, the labor branch and working groups as needed.
2. The DO Committee would work directly with offices, branches and working groups to help establish priorities for the chapter's district organizing work.
3. Branches can either have an OC member join the District Organizing committee or they can appoint someone who joins and reports back to the OC. Appointing a representative opens up new leadership opportunities and removes some of the additional burden of work on branch OC members.
4. If a branch has more than one SIO (currently NBK and CBK each have two), then they can appoint or send more than one representative to the DO committee.
5. At least two members of the DO committee will also attend the regular SIO calls to make sure there is communication and coordination across these two committees.
6. In addition to branch and working group representatives, we propose that the DO committee also have 3-5 coordinators who are responsible for helping offices, branches and working groups navigate district organizing. Having coordinators not attached to a single campaign is important to make sure that successful tactics are being shared across the organization.

Four Organizing Tracks

We envision four tracks of potential organizing. Tracks 1 and 2 are easier to plug new volunteers directly into and are more likely to be built and scaled quickly, with an eye towards Track 3 when circumstances align. Each track has the potential to lead to another track depending on volunteer interest, the projects that are being prioritized, and the development of the deeper organizing projects.

Track 1: District Outreach - Proactively reaching out to constituents and introducing them to the offices, events, legislative priorities, volunteering opportunities and any constituent needs. This can look like door-knocking, tabling, phone banks, etc.. This work can be organized by DSA volunteers, with constituent cases passed along to offices. There are many opportunities here to invite constituents to upcoming events, trainings, socials, volunteer opportunities and more. If DSA is effective in this outreach, it will generate an increase in constituent cases for the SIO offices.

Track 2: Constituent Services Volunteer Team - Building a team of consistent volunteers who help offices manage constituent cases. Such cases can include residents with problems in their

apartment, difficulty accessing unemployment, or other immediate needs. Volunteering in a district office to assist constituents is sensitive work that requires direct supervision from the office staff.

Track 3: Deeper Organizing Projects - As DSA members build relationships in the community and identify pressing constituent concerns, there will be opportunities to move into deeper, more specific projects, such as tenant organizing, labor organizing, or organizing around a specific issue or piece of legislation. These projects could connect constituents to the important campaigns DSA working groups are involved in, and would depend largely on DSA campaigns being developed in a way that easily allows new people to join the work. Wherever possible, this work would be planned and performed in coalition with local grassroots organizations.

Track 4: Legislative Analysis & Political Education - As DSA members look to get involved with socialists in office, we can also point them toward our legislative analysis and political education team. The legislative analysis team researches and develops perspective on upcoming and potential legislation so that we can make recommendations to socialists in office. The political education work builds events, materials and trainings on topics typically only understood by the professional political class. This past year, DSA organized multiple trainings on the budget, the budget process, how Albany works (the Albany 101 call). This work and these events are important as we seek to grow and bring more people into this work. DSA can invite socialists in office to share these events and resources with constituents.

Track 1: District Outreach

This is the organizing track that will be most familiar to our members and is important if we want to proactively reach out and connect with constituents who otherwise would never connect with the offices of their socialist legislators (i.e. most constituents). The District Outreach work could happen in the “off-season”, when DSA’s electoral and legislative campaigns are not active in the field. Typically this is from mid-June, when the Democratic primary and legislative session are both over, until the end of December. It is possible for there to be variations by district (for example, if a general election in one part of the city happens to be competitive), and based on what works best for the priorities of the chapter. In some cases, it might be beneficial to combine district outreach with field work supporting the shared legislative priorities of DSA and the SIOs. Overall, the district outreach should be complementary to our chapter’s other priorities and not in competition with them.

A strategic district outreach model could develop volunteer field teams for an office, training members to lead volunteer events, recruiting canvassers and sending people out as volunteer representatives from the offices to knock doors to a specific part of the district. The DO committee and staff team could work together to identify a specific issue to talk to constituents about, with a script and follow-up asks that invite the constituent into a deeper conversation, event or project. This is an initial touch that can open the door to larger conversations and longer term relationships, and it can be designed in a way that works for the district’s needs. The specifics regarding scripts, locations, followup and recruitment can all be coordinated with

the DO committee and the offices. Scripts can include questions around housing, employment, education, union affiliation and more based on what projects are being considered through the office. An example of a district outreach project:

1. Marcela's office would like to reach out to the part of the district that has historically been underrepresented, where residents are poor and working class and needs are greater.
2. Marcela's office works with the DSA District Organizing committee, which includes branch and possible working group representation, on a script and layers into that script any specific work that Marcela's office is engaged with that relates to constituents in this area. This could be a specific service the office can help residents access, legislation that affects them, or anything else the office and committee think are important.
3. The DO committee puts together a small group of people to test out the script. The office also sends staff or any interested volunteers.
4. The script is refined and the DO Committee creates a Lead training and event(s) to recruit new leads to.
5. The DO committee recruits leads through DSA. The office recruits leads through office channels (community board sites, the office mailing list, word of mouth, constituents, etc...). All leads attend a training event(s) that have been created.
6. The DO committee helps organize the training and signs up the new leads for specific canvassing shifts.
7. The DO committee then recruits canvassers through DSA. The office recruits canvassers through the channels listed above. There is promotion of these events through branches, through the offices, etc...
8. The Canvasses are carried out. During the canvass, materials are distributed and any new cases (unemployment, housing repairs, falling trees, employment, sanitation issues, etc...) are collected by canvassers.
9. The leads debrief with canvassers and work with the DO committee and the offices to adjust the scripts and processes for the next canvass.

Track 2: Constituent Services Volunteer Team

If we are engaging in proactive and consistent outreach through the district, we will be generating many new cases for the offices, so finding a way to support staff in managing cases and managing them well is critical to the success of our district organizing work. Working with constituents to connect them to services, legal support, information and sometimes just a person to talk to are all important steps in building trust and building real relationships in the district.

Organizing volunteers to help manage constituent cases is more time-intensive and requires more training and nurturing than district outreach, but it absolutely can be done. This work has to be closely supervised by staff in the offices, as the legislative offices are responsible for addressing constituent concerns. However, DSA can help recruit and even train new volunteers. Building a team of volunteers for this will strengthen the offices' constituent services, allowing

them to take on more cases as well as more easily connecting constituents with bigger organizing projects that might address issues at work or their buildings or in their family's lives that they are dealing with. Additionally, bringing DSA members into this work can really help develop their understanding of how our government works and the incredible challenges people in the city are facing. This can have a positive impact on our campaigns, what we choose to prioritize as an organization and legislation we write or support. It will give us greater capacity to organize people in the district, not just because we are talking to more people but because we are building our understanding of how the the city and state meeting (or more often don't meet) the needs of working people. Since offices are ultimately the ones responsible for resolving constituent cases, they need to have oversight over the entire process. The District Organizing Committee's role would be to help develop the volunteer infrastructure to support them. For Example:

1. The DO Committee works with all the offices to compile a centralized bank of constituent resources; service providers, how-to guides, contacts, etc... How-to guides are designed to take someone step by step through the process of helping a constituent with a specific issue.
2. The DO Committees work with offices to develop an onboarding training for new volunteers who want to help manage cases. They work together to train someone from the DO committee to lead the onboarding session (with office oversight, so perhaps staff lead them at first and hand them off to someone eventually).
3. The DO committee and the office both recruit for volunteers, signing people up to a centralized form for an upcoming onboarding event.
4. New volunteers are trained and those who are ready to take on a case are assigned one of the easier cases if possible on the spot (unemployment cases are often pretty straightforward at first).
5. New volunteers are added to whatever communication channels the offices decide to use for constituent services volunteers (A WhatsApp thread, Slack, etc...) and given access to the supportive How-to documents they need.
6. When staff or volunteers interact with a constituent regarding their case, they must log these as interactions with the office's database Logging interactions gives office staff oversight on how volunteers are doing with each case.
7. Office staff and/or lead volunteers will regularly scan through active cases to make sure they are all being managed. They will also one-on-one volunteers who need help with next steps, or can co-manage a case with volunteers who are learning.
8. Office staff and/or DO committee members will bring constituent volunteers together for trainings, discussions or anything else deemed useful and developing volunteers.
9. DO committees will coordinate ways for volunteers to share resources with each other and make sure that this work is organized in a way that expertise does not get siloed by office but shared across all offices.
10. Working Groups can also send members to help with specific constituent cases so that if a case is related to a potential tenant organizing opportunity or labor campaign, volunteers from the Housing WG or Labor Branch (just as examples) can manage the

cases, build relationships with constituents and work to bring them into larger organizing projects.

Track 3: Deeper Organizing Projects

When constituents connect with legislative offices, either through outreach events or by emailing, calling or coming across the office in other ways, it is common practice for them to be referred towards more specific campaigns or projects connected to their concerns. As NYC-DSA's working groups expand our effective organizing on a range of issues, there is a major opportunity to be in communication with offices about how they can connect interested constituents to these efforts.

This is the organizing track where the office and DSA can most effectively work in coalition with other organizations. How offices and NYC-DSA navigate these relationships and opportunities should be flexible, and will depend on the extent to which the priorities of the offices, DSA campaigns and local community organizations overlap and complement one another. Often the office will be best positioned to start or further working partnerships with local organizations. Deep organizing projects can be built around already existing DSA priority campaigns or new projects can be developed by working groups in coordination with the offices. The organizing projects can be citywide (ie: a campaign around Good Cause Eviction or The NY Health Act) or local (A campaign against a local pipeline). The projects can plug people into existing work (ie: tenant or labor organizing) or working groups and offices can develop new work based on the needs of the district. For example:

1. The DO committee in Zohran's district knocks doors one Sunday. From this canvass, they have 20+ interactions with residents and collect 15 new potential constituent cases.
2. The Field Leads for the canvass share the intake forms with staff and together they determine which cases are straight-forward constituent cases and add those to the tracker they are using to be assigned to constituent volunteers and staff.
3. There are a couple intake forms that could clearly be best addressed through local organizing projects.
4. There are three constituents in the same building who are having an issue with repairs. All of them have gotten nowhere with the landlord. These tenants are given the option to connect with a tenant organizer with the Housing WG.
5. There is one constituent who is employed in a nursing home that was recently privatized. Since this happened, the conditions for residents have dramatically deteriorated and working conditions for the constituent and her colleagues have gotten worse. She wants to know what can be done. This constituent is given the option to connect representatives from both the Labor branch and the Healthcare Working Group, as they are currently organizing around this issue.

There are unlimited ways that the offices and DSA can work together to amplify and energize around any number of campaigns or issues that overlap with these different organizing tracks,

but the hope is that as the offices and our chapter work more closely together, organizing opportunities will become more clear and this will be an opportunity for us to build bigger and stronger campaigns throughout the city.

District Office Organizing and Working Groups:

It will certainly be the case that DSA working groups will need to create or develop infrastructure to start a deeper organizing project with an office, but this will be an immediate way to connect with workers, tenants, and other constituents who can connect to something like this. If DSA does not have the infrastructure to support a deeper organizing project but wants to, then the office and the DO Committee should communicate about a timeline for this development.

District Office Organizing and Branches:

There is also the obvious potential to really grow and help further develop branches through district organizing work as there will be many ways for new members attending branch meetings to plug into immediate work that will often be connected to their own or a directly neighboring district.

Track 4 - Legislative Analysis and Political Education

Constituents and DSA members who are interested in getting involved with policy development can be plugged into work with the legislative analysis team. The legislative analysis team will carry out regular analysis of bills introduced in Albany and political education internal to and external to the organization. There is enormous potential for the legislative analysis team to also work in partnership with working groups to recommend or develop new legislation to socialists in office. This team will review bills introduced in Albany and deepen political education among members and constituents through regular work, teach-ins, and the creation of resources about the legislative process. By providing an avenue for constituents to learn more about policy development and the legislative process, we are helping empower constituents and DSA members to become more powerful advocates, demystifying the state government, and creating a pipeline for the introduction of legislative ideas directly from constituents. Examples of this work can include:

1. Regular weekly review of bills introduced in session;
2. Political education events in-district or online about the legislative process, the budget, or power dynamics in state government;
3. Inclusion in slate or organizational actions or discussions centered on policy advocacy or lobbying.
4. Working in partnership with a working group to develop new legislation or amendments to existing legislation around the working group's priorities.

Compliance

1. NYC-DSA is committed to following the letter and spirit of the law in all areas related to our electoral, legislative and political organizing work. We will consult with legal counsel at each step of this program to ensure that any actions taken are legal and compliant with any relevant regulations.
2. Prior to engaging in any projects, the DO Committee will consult with appropriate counsel to develop written legal compliance guidelines, and will ensure that all volunteers and staff engaging in this project have been properly trained for full legal compliance at all times.
3. Lists and personal information obtained by the offices through their government emails, forms, official government channels or staff will never be given to NYC-DSA or any other organization.
4. The simplest way for us to make sure we are always in compliance is to make our organizing work event-based. Our main focus will be pointing people to events and training they can sign up for.