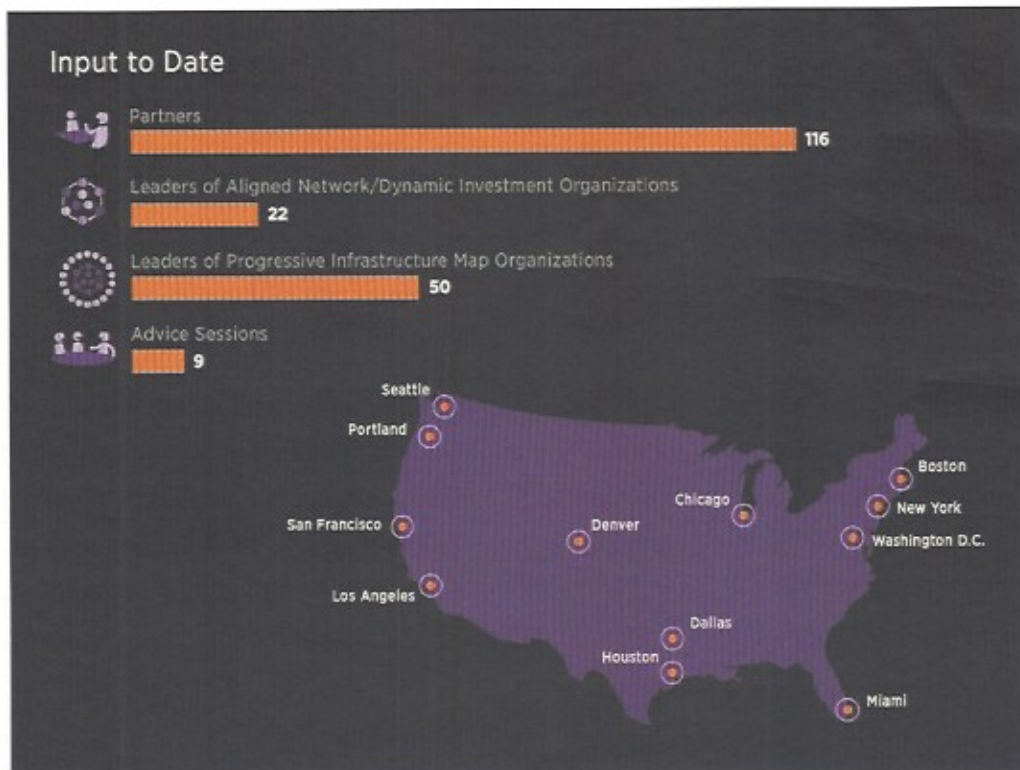


I'm very glad we have these few hours together, before the DA conference widens to include other participants, for partners to talk, with only Julie Kohler and me from staff, about the current state of the Democracy Alliance and the challenges and opportunities for its future.

I've been on the job here for five months. During that period, and particularly in the last few months, I've been traveling all over the country to meet and talk with those who have a stake in the strength and vitality of the Democracy Alliance.



I've met with 116 partners and partner representatives, and the few I haven't talked with it's not for want of trying! I've talked with a dozen or so former partners, too.

I've met with all 22 of the progressive movement organizations in what we call the Aligned Network and Dynamic Investments.

I've met with another 50 groups on our larger "progressive infrastructure map."

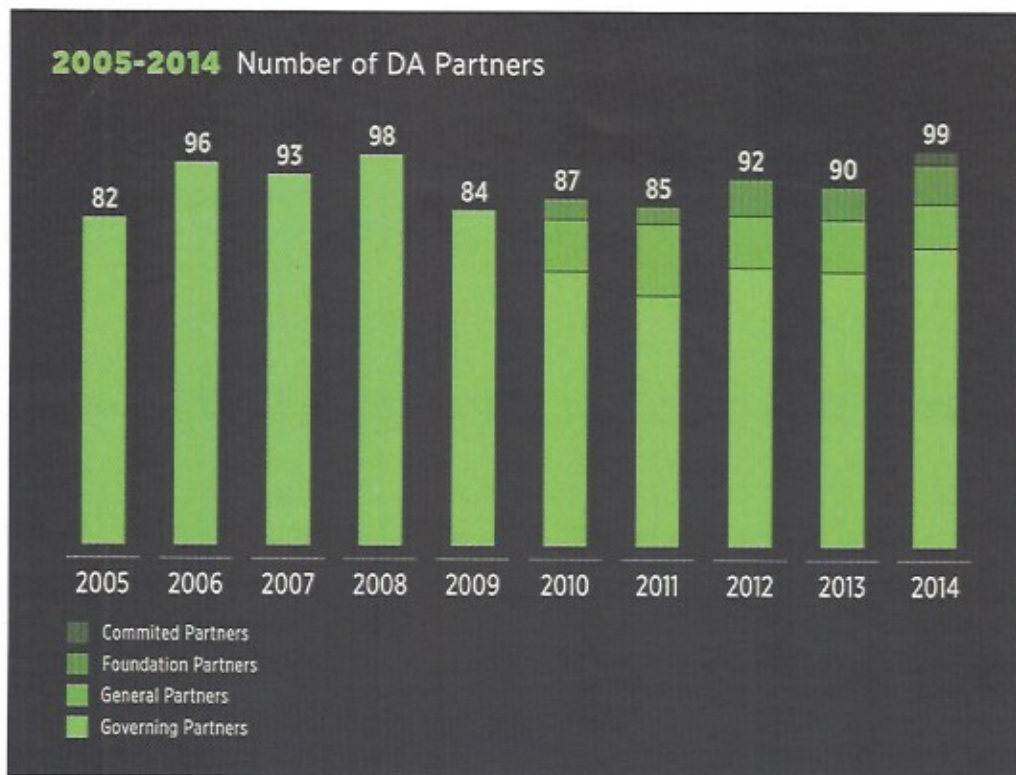
We've held daylong retreats of the board and the staff.

I've held nine informal advice meetings with groups of progressive leaders from Washington, DC to Portland, Oregon, from labor to women to political operatives.

I've worked closely with the board's membership committee and a very hardworking staff to recruit new partners to the Democracy Alliance, and I'm pleased to say we have added ten since the beginning of this year, X of whom are with us here today. This matches our all-time membership high from 2008 and we are on track to top 100 partners, for the first time ever, very soon.

All the conversations I've had – with partners and ex-partners, movement leaders and staff, political figures and prospects – have been invaluable to me in forming a picture of what the DA means to people, what it has done well, and where it needs to do better.

I want to talk a bit about what I learned, and then begin a conversation about where the DA should go in its second decade, which begins next year.



The single biggest takeaway from my talks with partners is how deeply they value the community that has been built – a community based on values, where individuals of wealth come together with labor leaders representing the voices and dollars of working people, where donors mix with progressive movement activists, building relationships that advance the progressive movement well beyond our semi-annual conferences.

This sense of community, and how it enriches us all, has been testified to by partners from Maine to Texas, San Francisco to New York. We must do what we can to protect and build that sense of community, including more opportunities like this one for partners to talk with and learn from one another.

The second big takeaway is a sense of accomplishment in what we have built in the progressive world during the last nine years, and what impact it has had. Key elements of our infrastructure, from CAP to Media Matters to Catalist, have been built, virtually from scratch, with considerable assistance from DA partners. Others, from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities to the Brennan Center to the Center for Community Change, have been strengthened by increasing and diversifying their funding.

Moreover, we've played a big role in helping these groups to work more closely together. Many elements of the progressive infrastructure envisioned in Rob Stein's influential PowerPoint presentation, which inspired many of you in this room to form the DA, have come into being, from policy capacity to data to media monitoring to coordination of state campaigns.

Many, however, remain to be built and need to be strengthened. That leads me to the final takeaway from my discussions, which is a sense among many partners, though not all, that we have become a bit stalled.

While this is a challenge for the DA, it is of course not peculiar to the DA itself, but a widely shared concern in the broader progressive community. One aspect of this feeling, though, has to do with the basic metrics of the DA. We haven't grown enough as a partnership to keep pace with the challenges before us, primarily a resurgent and resilient right wing that has steadily opened its checkbook to block progressive change.



An even more important metric is that the dollars we are raising haven't grown enough, and a number of policy decisions we've made – for example, allowing contributions to any group on the Progressive Infrastructure Map, now grown to 180 organizations, to count toward a partner's DA commitment – have made it harder to marshal the money we pledge to raise for the much smaller number of groups in the DA's Aligned Network.

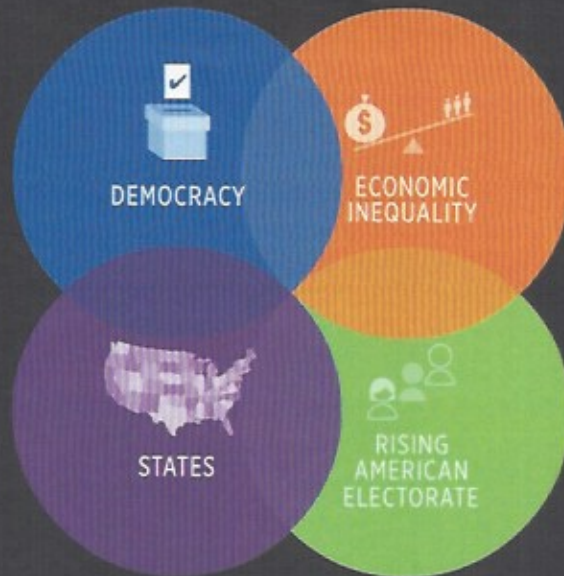
Many partners have told me that for the first few years of the DA's existence, they knew what our strategic focus was, but in recent years they are less sure of that. They know we vet the groups we support well, but what unites the 22 groups on our preferred list – as opposed to some other 20 groups – is less clear to people, inside the partnership and out. At times it has seemed that the DA is more about the list, and who makes the cut, than the larger goals that a list is meant to represent.

That leads me to the second part of my remarks, which is about what the Democracy Alliance might do in its next decade to refresh and advance the progressive vision that animates us all.

I've thought about this a lot, as someone who has spent almost forty years as a progressive advocate and funder. In what the DA needs to do in the coming years, I think we have to lift our sights from an organization-focused lens to a movement-focused lens.

Don't get me wrong – I recognize that, in addition to the community we have created, there is no more important function of the DA than to marshal resources for progressive organizations, and we must and will continue to do that. I think we can do a better job of it, though, if we ground our work in a more compelling strategy about what it takes to build and keep progressive power, and enact progressive policies, in the years ahead.

Pillars of a DA Strategy



What I'd like to suggest is that our strategy going forward - what I call our 2020 Vision, since it will take us to the start of the next decade, and I don't think that catchy label has been copyrighted by anyone else yet - align our work in four key areas that draw heavily from what the DA and supported groups are already doing, but take them to the next level. These are democracy, inequality, work in the states, and mobilization of what many call the Rising American Electorate.

DEMOCRACY

- ➡ Restoring and expanding voting rights
- ➡ Reducing the influence of money in politics
- ➡ Assuring fair redistricting and representation in 2020
- ➡ Protecting the courts



The first area centers on the infrastructure of our democracy – the rules of the game, if you like. The right has been extremely effective in manipulating those to perpetuate its power and preserve an advantage that is often at odds with its actual voting strength.

What we would emphasize here starts with voting rights – both the steady dilution of minority voting strength as a result of the court's chipping away of the Voting Rights Act and the suppression of the vote through Republican schemes to install voter i.d. requirements and roll back practices to modernize and expand participation like same-day registration and early voting.

It continues with a serious effort to prepare for the redistricting that will follow the 2020 elections, so that the state legislatures and congressional districts that emerge from it fairly reflect our voting strength. The impact of the Tea Party's gains in 2010, and the distortion in district lines that followed it, can't be overstated – among other things, it is why it is a struggle to take back the House of Representatives despite the fact that Democrats polled more votes for House members than Republicans in 2012.

In repairing the infrastructure of our democracy, we also have to focus heavily on the role of money in politics, a movement that has been re-energized by the Citizens United, and more recently, the McCutcheon decisions. Increasingly, elections in the U.S. are in the grip of a handful of our version of the Russian oligarchs. The money in this room does its best to compete in our current broken system, but unlike our conservative counterparts, we want a new system in which all voices and votes are equal.

If we can't succeed in turning this around, and it will take some years to do it, we will never make the progress we need to make on critical issues facing the country and the world like climate change and gun violence. In that crucial sense, dealing with the distorting effect of money on our politics is a prerequisite to every other advance we seek.

Finally, as the campaign finance and voting rights decisions demonstrate dramatically, when the right controls the courts, their impact lasts well beyond a few election cycles. They've shown enormous discipline in shaping the judiciary to their ends – through aggressive use of the appointment power when they're in office, and through obstruction tactics when we are – and we need to take the courts as seriously as our opponents do.

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

- Increasing wages for low-income workers
- Restoring the social safety net
- New thinking about a fair economy



If the first area of emphasis, underlying every other issue we care about, is the structure of our democracy, then the second, and closely related, is the structure of our economy, because the voices and votes of the wealthy and corporate interests are drowning out the voices and votes of most citizens.

The growing inequality of wealth and income has risen, for most of us, to the top of the national agenda. In talking with partners, I sense that there is more concern and consensus about this as a priority than any other single issue, and no issue is more threatening to the stability of the democracy or to the lives of millions of working people and their families.

There is considerable momentum and movement on this, from the minimum wage campaigns in Seattle and other cities and states, to campaigns for other benefits for working Americans like paid sick leave and health care enrollment, to the resonance of candidates like Bill de Blasio and Elizabeth Warren. There is considerable evidence that progressive messages on these issues are breaking through and that the public shares our concern about income and wealth disparities and their particularly profound impact on people of color and women. Yet our policy agenda on this most critical of issues is a little thin, and the capacity of leading groups in our movement needs serious and sustained investment.

There are two other areas I would like us to consider for greater emphasis in the DA's strategies going forward. The first has to do with places and the second with people.

STATES

- ⇒ Strengthening and expanding state infrastructure
- ⇒ Building for the long term in the south and west
- ⇒ Advancing progressive policies in blue states
- ⇒ Countering ALEC with a network of progressive lawmakers



When the DA was started nine years ago, states and cities were barely on our radar screen. In the years since, that picture has changed dramatically. Not just because of dysfunction and stalemate at the federal level, which seems unlikely to change for at least the next few years, but because what happens in states matters, a lot. When Tea Party candidates prevail in statehouse races, women's rights suffer, protections for working Americans are gutted, voting rights are constricted, the social safety net is slashed, and conservative victors make sure they consolidate their power through redistricting, judicial appointments, and attacks on key sources of progressive power like labor and Planned Parenthood.

I don't need to make that case to the people in this room, who include visionaries who turned around Colorado and Minnesota, and are working to build enduring progressive power in Florida, Texas, North Carolina, Maine and other states. The Committee on States, in which many partners participate, has been an important leader in these efforts. But we need to raise resources which are commensurate with the task ahead in the states, and we need to expand the model to additional states - indeed, the majority of states. Traditional battleground states remain crucial, but demographics and other trends give us openings in much of the south and west, and a long game should be investing there, too. Not to mention that we can make real progressive gains for people in traditionally blue states like California and New York where we have many of the reins of power.

It's still difficult, most of the time, to raise funds for key states from donors outside those states, and the DA can do a better job of making that case and marshaling the funds. We still lack any capacity at the scale of ALEC that can promote progressive policies in the states and block conservative ones in a coordinated way. We need to make the network of groups that we have helped to build, from America Votes to State Voices to Progress Now, work even better together, and we need to fund them at scale.

RISING AMERICAN ELECTORATE

- ➔ Integrating engagement funds to work better together
- ➔ Including constituencies like Asian-Americans & working class whites
- ➔ Linking electoral strength to policy wins



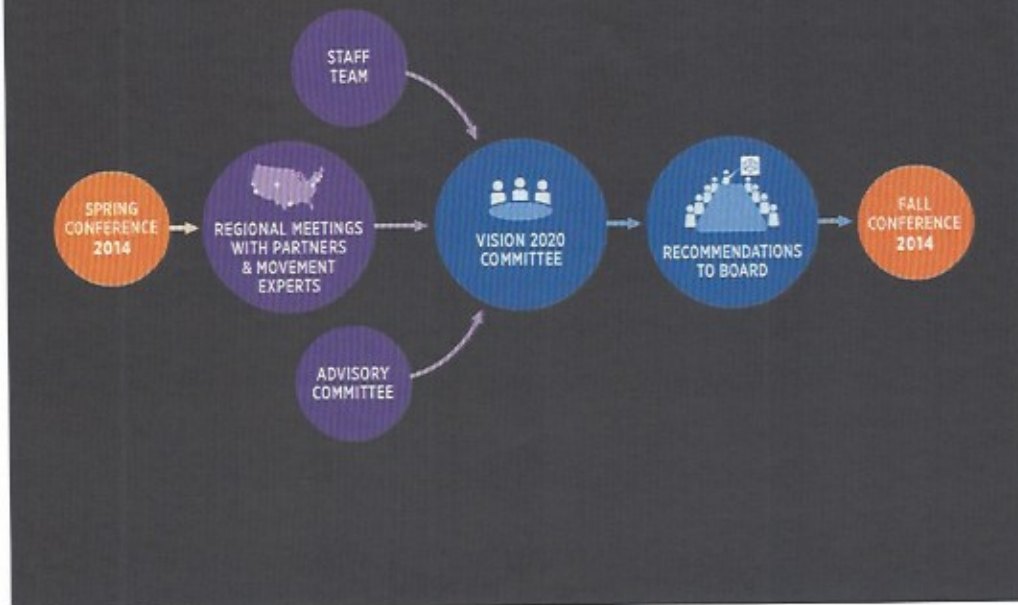
Finally, as to people. Another relatively recent development in the DA is the growth of engagement funds focusing on key elements of what are often called the Rising American Electorate – Latinos, African-Americans, young people and women. These are essential to expanding and preserving progressive power. One of the things that makes these efforts strong and distinctive is that, as with the state donor tables, those who have invested in the engagement funds that the DA has been instrumental in helping to establish and support work together to make the allocation decisions, so it democratizes involvement and decision-making.

I have talked with a lot of people about these funds, and while we need to build on their strengths, we also need to integrate them more closely so they are not standing in silos, nor are they the only way the DA reflects the centrality of race and gender – or the leadership of young people – in our work. We need to find better ways to expand our lens, so that we no longer leave out important constituencies like Asian Americans and the white working class. And we must elevate the role of key constituencies in our funding not because women, people of color and young people will tactically help win elections – though there is no effective path to progressive power without them – but because the progressive agenda is inextricably linked to the strength and health of these communities.

These, then, are the four pillars that I believe should support the DA's strategies in the years that will bring us to 2020 on a new political alignment. They overlap, as they should. The precise architecture that unites them remains to be determined, along with many important questions about how resources would flow.

For that reason, it is extremely important that we get right the process we employ to bring us to a place, by the time we next meet, to adopt the DA's investment strategies for the rest of this decade. So let me say a bit about what the board and I propose.

Investment Strategy Process



We want to start today with small group discussions about the future of the DA. Is there agreement with the basic premises I have set forth about where the DA has been successful, and where we still fall short? Do partners support the idea of organizing our work around a small number of key focus areas? Democracy and inequality, states and the rising electorate – are these the right ones? What might be missing from the list, and how might these areas be deepened and refined?

That conversation begins today, but will continue through the spring and summer in a series of regional forums for partners and movement leaders, so everyone gets a chance to participate in the discussion and planning, and not just once, but as the conversation proceeds.

This process will be overseen by a small board/partner committee, aided by a slightly larger advisory committee of movement leaders with greater expertise and diversity that the process demands, and managed by a small staff working group.

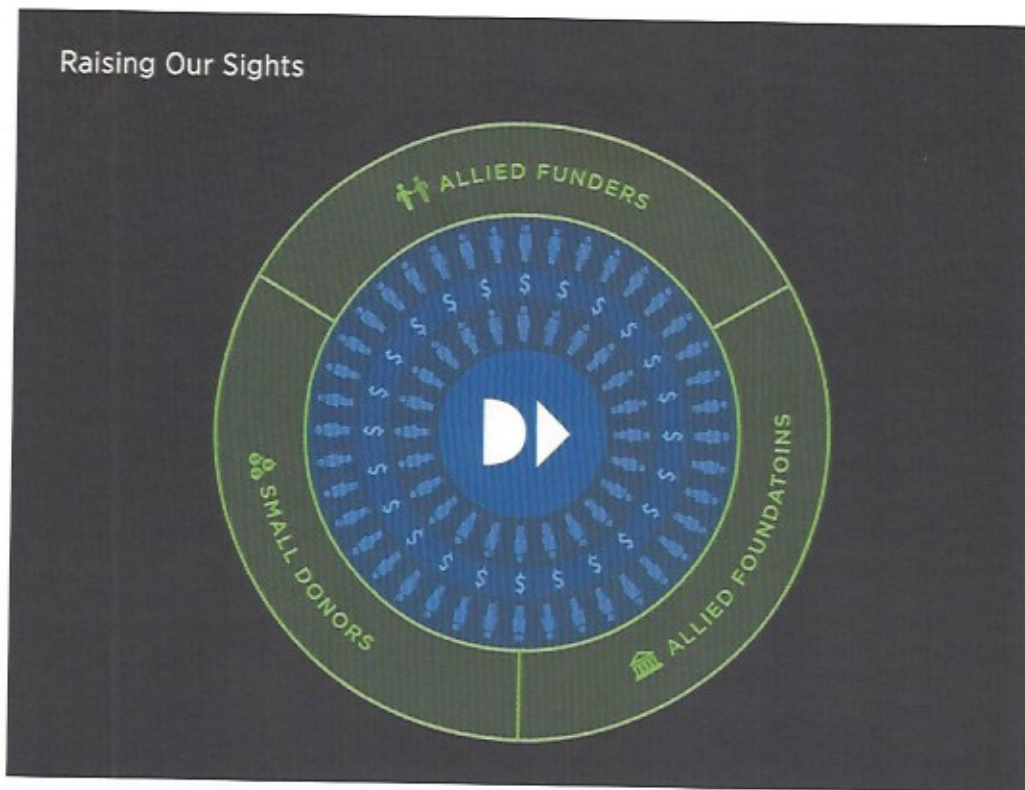
By the time the partners meet in the fall, the board will have taken all this into consideration and we will have a plan to take the DA to 2020 that we'll review and discuss in this kind of forum when we meet in Washington.

This doesn't cover every thing the DA should do – for instance, making better use of partners as advocates, as many you did with Voices for Progress on the filibuster use last fall, or enhancing the DA's convening capacity or its work to help the organizations in our movement diversify their funding base. But it is meant to get at the central issues of why we are here.

And as we discuss our investment strategies for the coming years, we need to assure that we don't stray from our commitment to providing core support for the "public utilities" of the progressive movement and that the DA will always be a place where donors who are passionate and committed to strategic funding on issues such as climate change, gun violence and immigration reform can network, learn from one another, and collaborate on funding.

A final word about the critical issue of money. If the DA did not raise a penny, there would still be great value and power in the community that I talked about at the start. But the progressive movement, and I would argue the country, relies upon us to marshal the financial resources necessary to make enduring progressive change.

Raising Our Sights



We've made an enormous contribution to that, but we can do so much more. In widening our frame, I think we also need to lift our sights from the \$25-30 million we raise for the aligned network, past the \$50-60 million we raise for the larger progressive infrastructure map, to the hundreds of millions of dollars that will be necessary to make a serious effort to repair our democratic infrastructure, build broad and deep capacity in the states, and mobilize the voting constituencies that are the backbone of our political strength and of our ability to hold leaders accountable for progressive government.

That starts with the partnership, with the people in this room, and I hope we can build a vision that is compelling enough to encourage those of you who can give more to do so. That partnership needs to expand, and our early success this year encourages me to think we can grow significantly, if every partner resolves to work with the board, the staff and the membership committee to recruit others.

But to raise the funds we need to raise, we also need to think differently about how we go about it. We need to build on a larger, even more committed partnership to approach other progressive donors who, for whatever reason of capacity or focus may not join the DA. We need to work more closely with progressive foundations and other institutions. And we need to leverage the contributions of small donors who may find our investment recommendations compelling and who may be attracted to give by the prospect of having their gifts matched by some of the savviest, most generous donors in America.

In my months of talks with progressives around the country, I came away with a strong sense that many are looking to have the progressive vision articulated and eager for a road map for get us there. I think DA can play a very important role in this, as it has over nine years, as it had under the leadership of Rob Stein, Rob McKay, Kelly Craighead and many in this room.

My first few months here have given me a sense that this is not only possible, but that it is imperative. I hope you agree, and that we can work together to make our 2020 Vision a reality.