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ORGANIZETEXAS.ORG



State: Texas

Core Constituency/Target Audience: Black and Latino Texans; people of color who have been left out of the electorate

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Texas Organizing Project (TOP) is a grassroots organization that has helped lead direct-action organizing, grassroots lobbying, and electoral organizing in Dallas, Harris, and Bexar counties since its founding in 2009. Their goal is to transform Texas into a state where working people of color have the power and representation they deserve. TOP “fights with two fists.” They organize around issue-based campaigns, and they mobilize their members and supporters around electoral campaigns.

STATE LEGISLATIVE WORK

TOP, along with TOP PAC, has been organizing as part of a ten-year effort to increase the electorate, win targeted elections, and ultimately flip the state. TOP and TOP PAC have worked to ensure that there are quality candidates running for state legislative seats in areas with high numbers of disengaged voters, which hasn’t always been the case in Texas.

TOP and TOP PAC have worked election cycle after election cycle in targeted state house races in their target areas of Dallas, Harris/Fort Bend, and Bexar counties. They engage in an extensive member-led endorsement process for each race. Once a candidate is endorsed, they run robust, data-informed door-to-door canvass and voter contact programs for targeted races.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

TOP and TOP PAC conduct major GOTV efforts for every election at every level of government through door-to-door canvassing, phone banking, texting, and digital organizing. In 2020 alone, they reached 1.9 million unique voters. Of the voters they targeted, 842,303 voted -- 447,964 of which did not vote in 2016.

TOP and TOP PAC have successfully worked to elect new District Attorneys in all of their target counties. In Harris County, their efforts led to major policy changes, including drug diversion and cite and release, cash bail reform, and a \$2 million Immigrant Legal Defense Fund for immigrants facing deportation.

TOP also engages in issues advocacy across all of their target counties. They were an instrumental partner in the push for local Paid Sick coalition ordinances in Bexar and Dallas Counties.

TOP has led various housing initiatives in Texas. In Harris County, they secured a historic agreement with the City of Houston to invest \$60 million in low-income neighborhoods devastated by Hurricane Ike. They also worked with a coalition of allies to found Houston Organizations Mobilizing for Equity (HOME), which works to ensure equitable disaster recovery for TX communities.

In an effort to create a more reflective democracy TOP developed and successfully finished four cycles of their Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI). This intensive leadership development program supports issue organizing efforts and brings about a more representative democracy by intentionally using a leadership development model to grow a cadre of women of color (particularly low-income women) who are equipped to serve in elected or appointed positions.

GOALS IN 2021-2022 CYCLE

TOP's primary goal for 2021-2022 is to continue engaging Black and Latino Texans through their issue organizing and electoral work while continuing to build the narrative around failed conservative leadership, which was even more elucidated by the recent weather event that resulted in complete infrastructure failure for millions of Texas.

They will conduct large turnout programs for municipal elections in Dallas and San Antonio in 2021, while gearing up for the statewide midterm elections in 2022. TOP will continue to power build in their community by training 500 new grassroots leaders on policy proposals and organizing skills, and developing 90 leaders as grassroots policy experts who can educate elected officials on the economic problems, offer policy solutions, and serve as spokespeople with the press.

Through strategic partnerships and their issue campaigns TOP aims to win at least one local policy in each of their target counties and continue developing statewide structure in coordination with allied progressive organizations.

ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO TOP

Voting Rights

In 2010, Texas ranked 50th in the nation for turnout of eligible voters, and moved up to 48th in 2012. There are approximately 3 million low-propensity voters of color in Texas, of which more than 900,000 are concentrated in the three counties where TOP organizes. TOP's overall strategy is to raise the voices and participation of Black and Latino families in the decision making and electoral process.

Through TOP's work, they aim to shift the state so that the priorities advanced by decision makers in both the public and private arena reflect the actual needs and best interests of the majority of Texans.

Ending Mass Incarceration

The United States incarcerates its citizens more than any other country. Mass incarceration disproportionately impacts the poor and people of color, and does not make anyone safer. Right now, more than 70 percent of the people who are in Texas county jails have not been convicted of any crime. They're there simply because they can't afford to pay bail. TOP is fighting to end mass incarceration by demanding bail reform and the implementation of cite and release policies.

Housing

The TOP Housing Justice campaign aims to strengthen resident power to change systems and policy outcomes. Most recently, they organized to more equitably distribute billions of dollars in Hurricane Harvey recovery funding that would otherwise be largely diverted from low-income communities. Their campaign leaders are tenants and homeowners who believe that housing is a fundamental human right.

Healthcare

For years, Texas has ranked first in the nation in the percentage of residents without health insurance, and this isn't by accident. The state's Republican leaders continue to play politics with the lives of Texans by refusing to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, a measure that would expand affordable health coverage to more than 1 million Texans.

From pushing for Medicaid expansion to advocating for Medicare For All at the national level, TOP recognizes that the current, profit-driven healthcare industry in the United States is shortchanging Black and Latino communities and must be drastically transformed.

Climate Justice

Climate change most impacts Black and Latino communities, who are the least responsible for the degradation of the environment. TOP's Climate and Environmental Justice Campaign is building a people of color-led movement in the fight against climate change by confronting the systemic issues contributing to the destruction of the planet while also ensuring that the transition toward clean energy centers workers and leads to a more just economy.

ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP



Michelle Tremillo, Executive Director

Michelle is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of TOP. She is a 4th generation Tejana, born and raised in a low-income neighborhood in San Antonio. After attending Stanford University, Michelle dedicated herself to fighting for racial and economic justice and returned to her native San Antonio where she worked for ACORN, serving in various capacities including: San Antonio Head Organizer, Texas Legislative Director, and Texas Deputy Director. Michelle has nearly two decades of community organizing experience. She is responsible for raising a multi-million

dollar budget and developing TOP's overall strategy to create and win on our economic and racial justice policy agenda in Texas' 3 largest metro areas, including our recent statewide response to push back against racial profiling state law SB4 and passage of a Paid Sick Leave ordinance in San Antonio. She was also the founding Director of Public Allies San Antonio, an AmeriCorps funded program that provides leadership training for young adults who want to pursue careers as non-profit leaders.



Brianna Brown, Deputy Director

Brianna Brown is a 4th generation Texan and the Deputy Director of the Texas Organizing Project, the largest grassroots, community-based organization in Texas. As the Deputy Director, she's focused on building a bomb staff and membership that centralizes the experiences of Black folks and Latinos. In her role, she works internally to operationalize TOP's mission with purpose and performance, and externally corralling resources and telling the story about the victories realized through a decade of TOP organizing and the Texas-sized possibilities that are ahead.

With more than a decade of experience working in the social justice movement--on issues ranging from ex-offender re-enfranchisement to immigration reform, Brianna was the Center for Public Policy Priorities, Future of Texas Award Honoree in 2016, was recognized in Texas Monthly's 2018 Power Issue along with TOP's, ED, Michelle Tremillo as one of 31 Texans taking charge and is a frequently quoted expert in local, state and national news media. Brianna is a founding board member of the African American Center on Global Politics and Human Rights. She is proud to be a product of Texas public schools and graduated Phi Sigma Alpha from Brown University where she earned degrees in Africana Studies and Political Science. Personally, she's over-the-moon to be a new mom, loves mushrooms, basketball and is desperate for the return of Emerge and YSB magazines!

IN THE NEWS

- [This is why Texas is the next Georgia](#)
- [Democrats are 'clearly poised' for a Georgia like victory in Texas](#)
- [Texas Organizing Project activists say they will bail people out of jail to protect from coronavirus](#)
- [The Power Issue: Michelle Tremillo and Brianna Brown are waking the 'Sleeping Giant' of Texas Politics](#)

TEXAS FAST FACTS

- **Current Control:** Republican Trifecta (since 2003)
- **Gubernatorial Election:** 2022
- **Length of State Senate & House term:** 2 years
- **Redistricting:** Congressional and state legislative lines drawn by state legislature; Governor has veto power over maps
- **Sister District Target:** Blue Inroads