

Indivisible

What Donors Need to Know

Indivisible was founded in 2016 to help progressives stop the Trump/Republican agenda by using some of the tactics successfully deployed against Democrats by the Tea Party in the 2010s. By creating the online [Indivisible Guide](#), founders Leah Greenberg and Ezra Levin provided easy-to-follow steps that could be used even by political novices to make their voices heard. The Guide went live in December 2016, a critical moment when tens of thousands of people were mobilizing to take part in the January 2017 “Women’s Marches” across the country. Indivisible quickly became a key organization of the “resistance.”

In 2022, as a result of its high-velocity growth—in membership, media visibility, and funding—Indivisible now includes a c3, a c4, and a PAC; a professionally-staffed headquarters in Washington, D.C.; and a number of paid field organizers. It boasts both national members (affiliated directly with the national office) and hundreds of autonomous Indivisible groups at the state and local level founded by grassroots organizers.

Indivisible’s mission is to promote progressive policies by prioritizing federal advocacy and electing progressive candidates. Despite early successes, we find Indivisible’s actual track record on both issue advocacy and elections to be mixed. We also find its lack of support for and cultivation of local Indivisible groups to be self-defeating and a missed opportunity. For these reasons, we advise donors to only **consider** giving to Indivisible and see this group as a **low priority** for small to medium donors. At the same time, we encourage donors to give directly to successful local Indivisible groups and to keep an eye on the national organization as it continues to evolve.

Our analysis is based on an in-depth review of information provided by Indivisible; conversations with academics, progressive political professionals, a local group co-leader, and former employees; and on available media coverage. ([Explore our methodology](#)).

Is it a top leader in its space—or have the potential to be?

Indivisible is one of many organizations—including MoveOn, Swing Left, and Our Revolution—using similar tactics to oppose the Republican agenda and hold Democrats accountable to their stated goals. As one of the most visible and well-funded such national groups, Indivisible has a lot of room to grow to be a true leading force in the progressive movement.

Does it have a persuasive theory of change and a realistic strategy?

At the national level, Indivisible works to hold elected officials (primarily Democrats, but also Republicans) accountable to their promises and to elect progressive Democrats to nationally-focused offices.

The key to the organization's initial rapid growth is that it demystified political action, activating thousands of citizens throughout the country. The [original Indivisible Guide](#) provides step-by-step guidance on everything from making calls from home to organizing small groups, to hosting town halls with members of Congress, and holding demonstrations. The 2020 [iteration of the Guide](#) uses the same accessible language to guide supporters on what to look for from members of Congress depending on their party affiliation; where they stand on the political spectrum; what kind of opposition to President Joe Biden's agenda is expected; and what tactics to use to push for change.

Using the guide, local Indivisibles have held candidate forums, organized phone banking, canvassed, engaged in GOTV, and otherwise worked to elect officials to local, state, and national office. Ostensibly, local Indivisibles should be a fierce ground force for achieving Invisible's stated goals. But we have not found evidence of a clearly coordinated strategy between the group's broader goals and the thousands of people they originally spurred to action.

Is there strong evidence of its impact?

Indivisible was one among many organizations that helped create the electoral "blue wave" of 2018. In 2020, its "WINdivisible" project drove nearly 40 million voter contacts helping people navigate voting during the pandemic. However, in that year Indivisible had only marginal success with its slate of endorsed candidates. [Four out of five endorsed primary challengers](#) lost to more conventional Democratic incumbents, and only three out of 19 Indivisible-endorsed candidates won their Congressional races. At the same time, election wins in 2018 and losses in 2020 can hardly be laid at Indivisible's door given that both cycles were shaped by events largely beyond the control of Indivisible *and* all other organizations trying to elect progressive candidates.

Analyzing Indivisible's legislative success is similarly challenging. In 2017, the national office activated local Indivisibles throughout the country to protect the Affordable Care Act. Local chapters drove more than 100,000 calls to Congress and organized more than 100 events, making Indivisible a key player in saving Obamacare. They also took on the ultimately unsuccessful effort

to defeat the “Tax Cut and Jobs Act,” the 2017 Republican tax giveaway to corporations and the wealthy.

Since Biden’s inauguration, Indivisible’s legislative priorities have been eliminating the filibuster, passing the For The People Act, and passing Biden’s “Build Back Better” legislation, in large part by driving constituents to pressure their representatives and by lobbying the House and Senate. The reality of a closely divided Senate, however, has made it hard for the progressive movement to achieve its goals, making it impossible to parse whether a change in strategies and tactics by Indivisible alone might have led to greater impact.

Indivisible has indeed been highly active in pushing the Congressional Progressive Caucus to be bolder and to negotiate harder. The national office has urged the CPC to become a “[Freedom Caucus of the Left](#),” efforts it claims have inspired CPC’s negotiating strategies and positions. Indivisible has aligned itself closely with the CPC, [including facilitating the caucuses’ 2018 new member orientation](#). Unfortunately, we can’t assess Indivisible’s own claims of its impact: there is little publicly available evidence to support Indivisible’s claims of changing the positions of individual members of Congress on the filibuster, for example.

Meanwhile, local Indivisibles have taken on fights ranging from the hyper-local to the state and national level. These groups have used phone banking, town halls, and protests to lobby elected officials of both parties. A media search by Blue Tent found nearly 160 separate stories and letters to the editor about grassroots Indivisible groups published in local outlets between January 1 and November 16, 2021. The two national issues that sparked local involvement were support for the For The People Act and this fall’s SCOTUS decision to let Texas’ abortion ban stand. Our analysis of local media coverage showed more than 30 protests or other actions by local groups in support of eliminating the filibuster and passing HR 1 (the For The People Act) in locations from Addison County, Vermont and Tampa Bay, Florida to Sherman Oaks, CA.

In 2018, one of the most active groups, [Empire State Indivisible](#), endorsed candidates and worked on local Assembly elections. In 2020, Empire Indivisible was part of a coalition that unseated the majority of that state Senate’s former Independent Democratic Caucus, a group of Democratic senators more closely affiliated with state Senate Republicans than with their own Democratic constituencies.

Though they are very active, many local Indivisibles don't feel supported by the national office. According to Shannon Stagman, a co-lead organizer for Empire State Indivisible, Indivisible's greatest success was in giving "liberal people who care about politics, who care about the future of this country... focus and direction in a really positive way," particularly during the Trump administration. But, Stagman said, once you've activated and trained these people and they become more sophisticated about their own strategies, they want and need more support from that national level. Indivisible, according to Stagman and others interviewed off the record, hasn't been proactive or visionary about supporting local groups for the long run, especially as those groups become more sophisticated and motivated in their work.

Changing federal policy requires forceful and sustained grassroots advocacy, and by failing to vigorously support and cultivate the strength of local- and state-level Indivisible groups, the national office may be undercutting its own agenda.

Does it have a plan to achieve future impact?

In late 2021, Indivisible launched a new effort, the "Give No Ground" campaign, which will provide heavy support to seven Democratic Congressional incumbents and one Democratic Senator, Georgia's Rev. Raphael Warnock, all of whom support Biden's agenda but face difficult races. [According to CNN](#), Indivisible's "Give No Ground" candidates "will receive an initial donation to be followed by bespoke investments, potentially including help with voter mobilization, rapid response messaging and outreach in multiple languages." And, true to form, the organization has provided local groups with a [step-by-step guide](#) on endorsing candidates and nominating locally-endorsed candidates for national office support.

But this circles back to the question of ground troops. Indivisible "members" are those that are affiliated with the national office. Local Indivisible groups may or may not be made up of "members." This suggests an important gap in strategy and in the potential to build power. Indeed, a survey by University of Maryland sociologist Dana Fisher suggests that Indivisible needs to do a better job of connecting motivated individuals to join local groups, given that everything from candidate endorsements to campaign activities are best coordinated by groups at the local level. The survey of 12,000 national Indivisible members conducted in April and May of 2021 found that only 25 percent were involved with a local group. The national office does seem to be working to highlight local groups as an option, but it's not clear what that means for supporting them more fully going forward into 2022 and beyond.

In response to these critiques, Indivisible’s communications director Emily Phelps replied that Indivisible “has always prioritized federal advocacy—we were formed by former congressional staffers who were trying to demystify federal legislative advocacy, and we continue to have that focus because of the huge opportunities for transformative change that exist during a Democratic trifecta.” The challenge remains on how to harness the grassroots power they’ve built to spur that “transformative change,” especially at a time it’s clear that Democrats, too, must be held accountable.

Does it have strong leadership and governance?

Sixty percent of Indivisible’s staff is based in D.C., including a three-member executive team and nine department heads. The national office also employs 17 organizers divided among four regions, each living in the communities in which they organize. We are unable to assess whether this team exhibits effective leadership or the quality of its governance.

Indivisible’s co-founders, Leah Greenberg and Ezra Levin, are both former Congressional staffers who’ve held a number of political jobs including work on various campaigns, prestigious fellowships, and roles in the Obama administration. It’s too early to say whether as leaders they are able to pivot in changing circumstances, command enough power to challenge entrenched interests, or successfully run a national organization with a large grassroots base for the long term.

Is it diverse and culturally competent?

As of the end of 2020, 36 percent of Indivisible’s staff identified as persons of color, more than a third as LGBTQ, seven percent as gender-nonconforming, 64 percent as cisgender female, and 26 percent as cisgender male. Indivisible hired a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director in 2020, and told Blue Tent that the national team prioritizes DEI training in its support of local leaders. According to the national office, in 2020 more than 7,400 Indivisibles participated in DEI training.

Indivisible’s staff may be diverse, but its membership is not. According to Dr. Fisher’s census results, 87 percent of respondents are white, 72 percent are women, and more than 75 percent are 61 years old and above. Nonetheless, Indivisible’s grassroots members have proven open to learning about and acting on racial justice issues. On May 25, Dr. Fisher wrote in her blog that 60 percent of her 2021 census respondents said that “Police Brutality/BLM” motivated them to

participate in politics. That's up from 32 percent in 2020. Likewise, the importance of "Racial Justice" as a priority issue leaped from 48 to 61 percent of the membership in one year.

Is its financial house in order?

Two of Indivisible's three arms—Indivisible Civic and Indivisible Project—show evidence of strong donor support with revenue growth year over year. Its third arm, Indivisible's PAC, raised \$2.2 million in 2020. We have found no indications of excessive debt, wasteful spending, or other financial mismanagement within Indivisible.

Indivisible provides a negligible amount of funding to local groups. Between April 2020 and early summer 2021, Indivisible granted all local groups a combined total of just over \$66,000 combined. Given the organization's overall budget and the vital importance of local organizing, it's reasonable to wonder why so little of that rain has reached local groups.

Does it collaborate well with other organizations and have strong partnerships?

Indivisible told Blue Tent it works with a "whole ecosystem" of other organizations, and that it forms partnerships with different organizations during specific campaigns. As examples, in September 2020 Indivisible joined forces with more than 160 other groups including Common Cause, SEIU, and Win Black / Palante for a "[Protect the Results](#)" campaign that led to nationwide protests in November. In June, Indivisible worked with more than 70 other organizations including Stand Up America, End Citizens United Action Fund, Common Cause, Fix Our Senate, and Just Democracy on nationwide "[Deadline for Democracy](#)" actions that took place in several locations nationwide during the July Congressional recess.

Does it have the support of key funders?

Indivisible has received support from a range of funders, but declined to provide current totals for each. It did disclose that in 2021 its C4 received money from NEO Action Fund and Open Society Policy Center. Its c3 received grants from Wallace Global Fund, the Compton, Bauman, Tides, Sandler, and Marin Community Foundations. Indivisible Project has received money from a variety of funders including the Open Society Policy Center, Ploughshares Fund, and Tides Advocacy.

Conclusion

Indivisible has several strengths on which to build and was a key factor in energizing voters to oppose the Trump/Republican agenda. Indivisible has mobilized a potential key demographic, provides materials that take the fear factor out of both confronting and working with higher-level elected officials, and has demonstrated the ability to both quickly provide new resources to voters and to assist would-be activists from across the spectrum. But it is not clear how it will organize what it has built into a more forceful national presence.

Given a mixed track record, lack of concrete demonstrated impact, and substantial funding from large donors, small and mid-size donors who want to maximize the impact of their investments should instead move their money to under-resourced groups, including under-resourced local Indivisibles. For these reasons, Blue Tent rates Indivisible as a **low priority** and advises donors to only **consider** the group for donations.

You may also want to check out:

- [The Fairness Project: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [Emily's List/Women Vote!: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [Swing Left: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [Sister District Project: What Donors Need to Know](#)