

Michigan Student Power Alliance

runner

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Michigan Student Power Alliance is a hub for radical youth activism, existing within a broader statewide ecosystem of grassroots, progressive student organizers who are working to connect student struggles across higher education campuses and build a powerful youth movement that will enact change. Runner Magazine invited us to share some information about our organization to spread the word and let people know how they can get involved. In the following paragraphs, we present a summary of our work followed by contact information and links to upcoming events.

The History of Michigan Student Movements

Since our inception in 2014, when MSPA functioned as an informal network of student organizers called Michigan Student Power Network, we have undergone several structural transformations. Regardless, we continue to be the only statewide organization led by youth (including both staff and Board) that is dedicated to providing comprehensive training, mentorship, and paid relational-organizing opportunities for students both, on campuses and in communities across Michigan. Rooted in principles of co-liberatory socialism, we have stayed connected with progressive organizers and youth activists across the state through various levers in order to maintain our presence as a youth-led incubator for radical ideas, learning, resources, and relationships.

Our work today is inspired in part by our Reclaim Higher Education campaign from 2018, which was established to increase state funding for higher education, combat gendered and sexual violence, and confront/combat White Supremacy. Our approach to organizing is multifaceted. Since then, we have hosted student summits, organized direct actions, created voter guides during election seasons, funded short programs, facilitated guerilla gardening as well as statewide collaborative campaigns between students, youth and outside progressive groups.

Our organization has also served as a support system for students who faced tremendous siloing and hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to these challenges, we launched a campaign called Not MI Campus, which advocated and facilitated remote methods for radical organization and education. Now, Michigan Student Power Alliance (MSPA) is blooming into the next phase! After a year of transformation and transitions, we have developed a strategy to invigorate and sustain the next generation of youth organizers. As we move deeper into the work of creating a rich ecology of student activism, we are proud to have a longstanding history of creating space to cultivate education, document and archive for future reference, and self/community care in Michigan.

What is the Purpose of Michigan Student Power Alliance?

The most effective elements of MSPA includes:

- A comprehensive training curriculum created by and for our organizing fellows, which is also offered to students/ youth groups across Michigan on demand.
- An exchange of knowledge that has been gained through participation in radical grassroots networks who are actively taking on social justice issues within local contexts.
- A growing network of relationships with established social justice coalition organizations in order to build a pipeline from student to progressive leadership for our youth.

Our 501(c)(3) amplifies local commitments to create a wave of change amongst college campuses across the state and into the broader ecosystem of activist and radical organizing. To ensure that we are developing a robust alliance of change-makers who will blossom into community leaders, we understand that it is imperative that opportunities remain available for our organizers beyond their student life. For example, MSPA alumni have gone off to be incredible organizers, leading change as staff in other Michigan-based organizations, graduate student union organizers in partnership with local unions across the US, advocates and policy influencers in foreign policy spaces, and founders of local (Detroit, Grand Rapids, etc. based) co-ops and collectives.

MSPA exists to create spaces and build specific skills for youth organizers to sustain anti-oppressive issue campaigns. The training, mentorship, and resources that MSPA provides empowers youth to find their frontline, activate into movement spaces and create strategic issue campaigns that seek transformational change for Michigan communities. By giving youth the tools they need to create movements rooted in solidarity, liberation, and strategy, MSPA is creating a ripple effect of youth leadership and change in the Midwest.

How Does MSPA Work with Youth Organizers?

MSPA's is most proud of our first-year fellowship program for student organizers on college and university campuses. This fellowship grew out of a need to address two major struggles that campus organizing faces: ongoing leadership changes, and financial needs. Campus organizing cycles through leaders rapidly. A lot of times our strongest local leaders will graduate, change organizations, or remove themselves from the work for one reason or another. Oftentimes when this occurs we are left scrambling to gather crucial things like account passwords, access to documents, and understandings of how to strategize, do outreach, and attract people to our spaces. Organizers are often unable to form strategic and intentional long-term movements due to these constant changes and because of this, they struggle to build institutional knowledge around strategy, outreach, and base-building. Students often find it difficult to sustain a dedication to the justice work they are passionate about alongside school and employment. By paying fellows a stipend, MSPA seeks to mimic the world we are building by paying folks for their labor and opening the door for them to prioritize the work they are deeply rooted in.

MSPA actively recruits and supports young people from Black, brown, queer, and trans communities. Our fellows received 40 hours of training to hone their organizing skills, social justice history, and movement theory. At the local level, fellows are expected to organize on their campuses in ways that align to one or more of MSPA's identified pillars, as listed above. On a statewide level, our fellows are split into workgroups to complete a project that will have a direct impact on youth organizing in MI. Additionally, fellows are encouraged to participate in public statewide calls that serve as a space to build relationships with students and young adult organizers across the state. While our fellowship commonly hosts fellows at University of Michigan and Michigan State University, its efforts have impacted students of various backgrounds on campuses across the state through direct mentorship, which supports our fellows to confidently organize campaigns that are rooted in revolutionary ideologies such as anti-racism, anti-capitalism, and anti-patriarchy.

Our fellowship is instrumental in sustaining a robust program of social justice caucuses including the *People of Color Caucus (POCC)* and the *Accomplice Caucus (AC)*. We host the Michigan Youth Reproductive Justice Coalition in collaboration with Michigan Voices, and hold listening sessions to discuss and envision radical initiatives in Michigan.

The *People of Color Caucus* is a radical Black and brown collective of students and young people in Michigan functions as an anti-imperial and queer/trans-affirming gathering space organized by and for BIPOC. As organizers of this caucus, MSPA is committed to naming and examining interlocking systems of oppression, building collective knowledge and communal resilience, and solidifying points of unity among people of color. The caucus facilitates bimonthly meetings throughout the academic year that center discussion, reflection, healing, radical self-care, and growth as tools to develop a collective liberatory consciousness. In recognition of the disproportionate labor placed on people of color in issue-based organizing, our programming prioritizes creating a restorative and life-affirming environment that aims to combat burnout and emotional drain. The *People of Color Caucus* provides three major outcomes to participants in the space:

- Rest and recuperation
- Connecting liberatory racial justice issues across campuses and communities statewide
- Non-hierarchical knowledge building

The caucus aims to be a space where youth BIPOC organizers can take refuge from predominantly white institutions, providing moments of relief from systemic harm. Like MSPA overall, caucus organizers connect across regions to build lasting relationships anchored in shared experiences, kinship, and cultural relevance. As needs are addressed and issues are named, the communal understanding around racial justice-oriented issues fosters a growing ability to strategize, build, and push forward movements that can win. We acknowledge that this program has historically enabled Michigan Student Power Alliance (MSPA) to foster lasting relationships with young BIPOC so they can self-identify ways that support, uplift and empower.

Michigan Student Power Alliance's *Accomplice Caucus* is a learning cohort that equips youth organizers in Michigan with the knowledge and skills to lead diverse organizing spaces centered on solidarity, intersectionality, and community care. We define *accompliceship* as the sustained practice of identifying your personal stake in social justice movements that extend beyond the individual. Being an accomplice means ensuring that your efforts in issue-based organizing focus on the needs of those most directly impacted—this includes, but is not limited to, building relationships with those people and asking them how you can show up in the most supportive way.

The *Accomplice Caucus* develops organizers' skills in speaking about progressive causes while holding privileged identities in their Michigan communities and social justice groups. Caucus members will leave this space with a foundational knowledge of anti-oppressive organizing practices and a working understanding of past and present multiracial, intergenerational, class-diverse, and LGBTQIA+ movements in Michigan. The *Accomplice Caucus* welcomes youth (18+) who are interested in social justice movements, community organizing, and what it means to stand in solidarity with historically marginalized and oppressed groups. These members will participate in monthly meetings over the course of four months and attend a retreat at the conclusion of a cohort cycle.

The *Michigan Youth Reproductive Justice Coalition* (MYRJ) is a youth-led collaborative initiative by Michigan Student Power Alliance (MSPA) and MI Voices. MYRJ is a statewide network of youth organizers building power to win material and transformational change for reproductive justice issues in communities both on and off college campuses. The coalition is a monthly meeting space where youth ages 15-25 can unite across the state to learn, build relationships, and organize around the intersectional nature of reproductive justice organizing. This collective has been a work in progress since Fall of 2022, when MSPA and MI Voices came together to facilitate this space specifically for college students. The collective has since merged with the youth committee that consisted of high school organizers, and has also opened its doors to non-student youth to foster collaboration between all youth backgrounds. This coalition regularly collaborate with partnered and youth-led advocacy groups/councils/organizations that center around reproductive justice, access, and sex education to ensure these movements do not repeat the same work, are not siloed, and build capacity to create change together.

If you're interested in learning more about these programs and registering for an upcoming event, visit www.mistudentpower.org/programming or our instagram @mistudentpower.

If you have questions or want to talk more with an MSPA staff member about joining our network of youth change-makers, reach out to team@mistudentpower.org.

The logo for 'runner' is written in a lowercase, italicized, sans-serif font. The letters are black and have a slight shadow or depth, giving it a three-dimensional appearance. The 'r' is particularly stylized with a long, thin tail.