

Building Power Through Change:

Hoosier Action's Journey Across Three Organizing Eras



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BACKGROUND

Indiana's grassroots organizing landscape has undergone significant transformation since 2019, marked by an unprecedented shift from established in-person organizing methods to rapid digital adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic. With support from the Voices for Health Justice project, [Hoosier Action](#) leveraged multi-year, flexible funding to meet the moment and strengthen its health justice advocacy.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOOSIER ACTION

Founded in 2017, Hoosier Action quickly established itself as a formidable grassroots force in rural Indiana. By early 2020, they had conducted over one million conversations through door-knocking, phone outreach, and community events.

Their organizing model focuses on listening first, building relationships, and then developing leadership to mobilize collective advocacy and action. In 2020, Hoosier Action built a robust infrastructure with strong geographic presence, proven mobilization capabilities, effective advocacy strategies, established partnerships, and diverse engagement tactics. This foundation would prove essential when facing the unexpected challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In just 48 hours of their Pregnancy Accommodation Bill campaign, Hoosier Action contacted 7,000 people, generated over 150 constituent calls across 14 Senate districts, mobilized faith communities in seven counties, coordinated 100+ emails, and organized an emergency day of action.

Their coalition-building also includes partnerships with organizations like the Indiana Recovery Alliance and specialized initiatives such as the Hoosier Moms program which deepen community connections through targeted listening sessions.

THE CHALLENGE

The onset of COVID-19 catalyzed a dramatic pivot to digital organizing strategies, forcing rapid adaptation of traditional organizing methods to virtual spaces. This transition, while challenging, ultimately enabled Hoosier Action to substantially expand their reach and impact, particularly in their Medicaid advocacy campaigns during the 2021 and 2023 legislative sessions.

The Evolution of Community Power: *How Hoosier Action Adapted and Transformed Through Crisis*

When Governor Holcomb issued the March 2020 shutdown order, Hoosier Action rapidly pivoted their organizing model while addressing intensified community needs.

Hoosier Action's transition from in-person to digital organizing during COVID-19 represents a remarkable story of adaptation and growth. Rather than seeing the pandemic as a limitation, they leveraged digital tools to dramatically expand their reach, deepen their impact, and build statewide power. This pivot enabled them to reach more Hoosiers than ever before while maintaining their commitment to addressing urgent community needs. The crisis accelerated their development into a sophisticated statewide advocacy organization with increased capacity to influence policy and mobilize communities across Indiana.

2020: DIGITAL MOBILIZATION



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOOSIER ACTION

Hoosier Action's digital transformation:

- Reached 35,000+ Hoosiers via phone/text
- Mobilized around eviction defense, winning \$40 million in rent relief (30,000+ recipients)
- Held virtual press conference on housing, healthcare, and police accountability (1,600+ viewers)
- Mobilized 120+ volunteers for get-out-the-vote deep canvassing
- Expanded to become "officially a statewide organization of rural and small-town Hoosiers"

Hoosier Action's digital organizing yielded significant legislative impact:

- Built "largest ever state legislative advocacy program" with over 50+ leaders
- Organized 200+ person Statehouse vigil on pandemic's one-year anniversary
- [Released report documenting COVID impacts and legislative failures](#)
- Successfully prevented cuts to Medicaid and substance use treatment programs
- Secured expanded funding for vital safety net programs
- Celebrated Pregnant Workers Fairness Act approval (19-2 vote) and leveraged state-level attempts to protect pregnant workers to move federal lawmakers on this bill
- Opened additional Hoosier Action offices in Southern Indiana



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOOSIER ACTION

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Between 2021-2023, Hoosier Action dramatically expanded their organizing capacity.

Hoosier Action reached:

- 8,000 Hoosiers through direct one-to-one contact
- 20,000 people via email and newsletters
- 65,000 people through text messaging
- 250,000 people through social media platforms

Hoosier Action also expanded their digital capacity in this period adding over 23,000 new contacts to their database, fundamentally transforming their capacity to mobilize across the state.



Bridging Digital and Physical Spaces: 2022-2023

As pandemic restrictions eased, Hoosier Action faced a new challenge: in-person and digital engagement attendance began to plateau at under 100 participants from mid-2022 to early 2023. Rather than seeing this as a limitation, the organization focused on slowly rebuilding in-person capacity in both pre-existing chapters and new chapters to accommodate the shifting landscape.

COALITION BUILDING AND LEGISLATIVE WINS



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOOSIER ACTION

Digital organizing capabilities matured into sophisticated advocacy:

- Convened representatives from 28 organizations for a statewide “All Hands On Deck” Medicaid coordination
- Organized first-ever Tenants Day of Action at the Statehouse
- Passed multiple bills including eviction expungement (HB 1214), removing shackles from pregnant incarcerated individuals (HB 1294), and destigmatizing substance use disorders (HB 1169)

Get Out the Vote efforts in 2022 demonstrated this hybrid model's effectiveness, with digital outreach driving awareness while targeted in-person canvassing deepened engagement. Local chapters applied this dual approach to specific issues:

Overdose Prevention (*Ohio River Valley*):

- Conducted door-knocking while maintaining digital storytelling
- Trained 20+ small businesses and churches to carry Narcan
- Partnered with *Project Recovery So. In.* for resource distribution

Housing Advocacy (*Bartholomew County*):

- Combined Columbus door-knocking with digital mobilization
- Participated in Housing Day of Action at the Statehouse
- Quickly pivoted to digital response when [SB 202](#) was defeated



Hoosier Action's most significant hybrid model victory came in 2023: securing \$100 million for mental health crisis response. This campaign succeeded through:

- In-person Town Halls in five legislative districts
- A 150-person Town Hall with Senate President Pro Tempore
- Digital outreach to 30,000+ Hoosiers

This balancing act—maintaining digital momentum while rebuilding in-person participation—continues to evolve as Hoosier Action works toward "a kinder and more caring Indiana for all Hoosiers."

CONCLUSION

Power Building Through Change: *Key Strategic Insights for the Next Chapter*

Hoosier Action's journey from 2019 to 2024 demonstrates how with targeted support, organizations can catalyze organizational transformation and power building. Their evolution across three distinct organizing eras offers valuable insights for community organizations navigating changing landscapes.

Recent data from Hoosier Action's 2024 Town Hall indicates a gradual resurgence in in-person participation, while simultaneously highlighting the enduring value of digital platforms developed during the pandemic. The November 2024 town hall boasted 200 in-person attendees and over 1000 online participants—exemplified the culmination of Hoosier Action's evolution.

Thanks to the organization's successful integration of traditional and digital organizing approaches, gubernatorial candidates and state officials heard directly from everyday Hoosiers.

Since 2024, Hoosier Action has become increasingly rooted in place, purchasing two buildings in New Albany to renovate into a community and organizing hubs. Digital tools continue to serve a key role in mobilization and initial outreach, but they are also innovating with new ways to build community in-person, a crucial need expressed by their base.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOOSIER ACTION

Key Strategic Insights:

1 Digital tools expand reach without sacrificing depth.

By incorporating digital organizing while maintaining community relationships, Hoosier Action expanded from regional to statewide impact. Their database grew by 23,000+ contacts while maintaining the personal connections that drive commitment.

2 Crisis reveals organizational adaptability.

The rapid pivot to digital organizing in March 2020 revealed latent organizational agility. Rather than retreating, Hoosier Action accelerated their growth, reaching 35,000+ Hoosiers via phone/text within weeks of shutdown.

3 Coalition-building transcends organizing models.

Whether organizing the 200-person Statehouse vigil or building the "All Hands on Deck" Medicaid coalition with 28 organizations, Hoosier Action demonstrated that power-building fundamentals remain consistent across in-person and digital spheres.

4 Hybrid approaches maximize impact.

The \$100 million mental health funding victory in 2023 proves that combining targeted in-person events with broad digital mobilization creates a multiplier effect on advocacy power.

5 Digital organization enhances traditional accountability.

By reaching 250,000 Hoosiers through social media and maintaining detailed engagement metrics, Hoosier Action created new mechanisms for holding elected officials accountable to everyday people.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOOSIER ACTION

Hoosier Action's experience reveals that the future of community organizing isn't choosing between digital and in-person approaches, but strategically integrating both to build power for everyday people. As they continue advancing health care justice in Indiana, this integrated approach positions Hoosier Action to maintain deep community connections while leveraging expanded digital reach—ensuring that the voices of everyday Hoosiers remain at the center of policy decisions.

