



# POWER AND POSSIBILITIES:

*A Changing States Approach to* **ARIZONA**, **GEORGIA**, and **MINNESOTA**

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# Introduction

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For those who are committed to the hope of equity and justice, the 2016 presidential election and the dizzying turmoil since have made clear three lessons:

**The first is the importance of building state-based power.** In 2016, it became obvious that one could win the popular vote and still lose the game if the votes were not cast in the right locations. More significantly, it revealed that while progressives felt like they were making significant policy gains at the national level, including the long-cherished goal of expanding health care, they were steadily losing ground in the previous decade at the local level in terms of both elected officials and reactionary policy—with significant consequences for maintaining national momentum.

States with strong inside-outside and diverse coalitional power have not only been better equipped to implement federal policy victories but are now better positioned to defend against federal set-backs. On the inside, progressives seated in government posts—governorships, attorneys general, state legislatures, government agency heads, and judicial seats—have been key to policy wins, implementation, and protections. But equally so have been those social forces pushing from the outside to develop independent power and so influence decision-making processes and outcomes. Finally, there is yet another surprising source of power: Corporate leaders showing up on the same side of the fight as historically marginalized and targeted populations.

**The second lesson is the need to deploy grassroots organizing.** The outcome in 2016 had many explanations, but it was clear that the so-called “New American Electorate” and progressive forces, in general, were under-engaged. 2017-2018 has brought a dramatic change and new possibilities: The two Women’s Marches, the protests following the travel ban, the ability of Dreamers to get their issues on the agenda of Congress, and the remarkable mobilization of young people after the Parkland shooting speak to a new level of enthusiasm. So too does the emerging electoral

evidence, including the role of Black mobilization in the surprising defeat of a conservative candidate in the December 2017 senatorial contest in Alabama.

The kind of organizing that is needed is that which can breakthrough with a compelling and galvanizing narrative as the “99 percent” did—but with more follow-through than the Occupy movement managed to muster. Whether hashtags—#BlackLivesMatter, #TimesUp, #NeverAgain—can give power to marginalized voices and issues; center rather than skirt discussions of race, class, gender, and geography; and raise awareness of social and economic issues among a cynical and disaffected public is important. But the key factor in sustainable change is the institutional capacity—in terms of organizing, leadership development, policy ideas, and coalition building—to carry forward the groundswell of activism into concrete gains at the ballot box, in the halls of government, or in the corporate boardrooms.

**The third lesson is the need to leverage targeted investments.** The importance of states and the centrality of organizing may suggest a 50-state strategy that responds to a wide range of issues that impact people’s lives and could motivate the public to further engagement. The reality is not only that resources are scarce, but that even if they were abundant, it is important to sequence what comes first. For example, are there states where gains can have more or less influence on the dynamics of other states? Are there campaigns or arenas of work within states that offer the most potential to impact, domino-like, a broader terrain of other states? Are there key capacities that if further developed would contribute most to achieving progressive governance?

What is at stake in this immediate window of opportunity—between 2018 and 2021—is too consequential to lose. Decisions made during this period will shape the playing field of politics, policies, and progress for at least the next decade. Mid-term elections, 2020 census count, and redistricting

mark a clear pathway across all states. Hard-nosed assessments of institutional capacities, opportunities for a greater center of gravity to pull states and the nation in a progressive direction, and possibilities of transformative campaigns need to be coupled with co-created strategies between forces on the ground and their funders.

**This project tries to tackle these issues and provide some directions for choice-making.**

Using the *Changing States* analytical framework developed by the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE), we analyze three crucial states to offer insights into both state-specific investments as well as implications for a multi-state coordinated strategy. The intention is to ensure that change in a specific state does not stay in that state—rather that it can be leveraged to impact regional and national change.

We begin by reviewing the framework and explain why it is salient to the lessons above. We then turn to what the research tells us about three states, Arizona, Georgia, and Minnesota, and the opportunities that exist in those locales. We then discuss what the current states of play can tell us about the opportunities for a coordinated state-national strategy, in particular what alignment, investment, and the metrics of success that might be used for both choice-making and assessment as funders and advocates move forward. In terms of focus, **we stress the need to build strategic centers, encourage new narratives, push for new corporate strategies, and forge multicultural and cross-geographic alliances.** We close by talking about how this could all add up to help us reclaim our nation's values and reset the pillars of justice, democracy, and inclusion.

## LESSONS SINCE 2016

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1. The importance of building state-based power
2. The need to deploy grassroots organizing
3. The need to leverage targeted investments

# Changing States

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*Changing States: An Analytical Framework for Progressive Governance* (May 2016) is a research-based framework for assessing possibilities for, and pathways to, progressive governance in the U.S. states. In *Changing States*, researchers at the University of Southern California Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (USC PERE) proposed three main shifts in thinking among progressive philanthropy and movement leaders:

1. The need to cast our sights **beyond winning power to wielding power**, thereby emphasizing the idea of governance or governing power;
2. To need to challenge a dominant, transactional approach driven by short-term electoral strategies and instead consider **deeply engaging constituency bases, developing leadership, and building long-lasting organizations**; and
3. The need to **broaden the range of action** beyond elections and even legislative advocacy **to consider work in the judicial, administrative, cultural, and corporate arenas**.

All these shifts were recommended with an eye toward **building power at a state level**; the original framework was developed prior to the 2016 elections, but we had already concluded that progressive approaches often lacked a coherent strategy in terms of both focusing on key states that could influence national outcomes and having a sense of the geographic paths to power within states (for example, through metro areas or through particular arenas or work). This geographic imperative has, of course, become even more pressing given that the next electoral battlegrounds—which are also platforms for the presentation and discussion of progressive policy ideas—are at the local and state levels.

One innovation of the framework was the inclusion of multiple arenas in which progressive change is won, implemented, and protected. Progressives have rightly

tended to focus on securing new policies and laws in the electoral and legislative arenas. However, the role of the courts (a traditional focus of the right) in thwarting or promoting change has become increasingly clear. The impact of administrative implementation is also crucial; one wonders how the popularity of the Affordable Care Act would have fared had the website been fully functioning from day one. Communications and narrative are key (although often difficult to measure) in Texas, for example, where alternative policies often fail to gain traction if they conflict with the widely held low-tax, low-wage, low-regulation myth of the “Texas Miracle.”

## **Perhaps the most striking and challenging area of work introduced by the Changing State framework is in the corporate arena.**

For many progressives, corporate work means anti-corporate work, such as waging battles against large firms seeking undue government assistance and influence. Certainly some of that is necessary, particularly around issues like minimum wage, worker safety, and climate impacts. But there is a larger shift afoot and one that can be taken advantage of: the generalized tension between what political analyst [Ron Brownstein](#) has called a coalition of restoration (older and less diverse in both its demographics and its economic drivers) and a coalition of transformation (younger and far more diverse in terms of its demographics and its industry or sector mix).

Even before the corporate reactions of 2017—for example, the collapse of the business councils convened by the White House in the wake of racist comments by the executive or the perhaps surprising corporate support for the Dreamers—there were signs, such as business opposition to anti-transgender state bills, that a more nuanced approach could take advantage of possible allies in unusual circles. As Brownstein notes, it is also the case that left-leaning America tends to be where the new economy is generally the strongest. All this implies that progressives need both a new economic vision and a new set of relationships with business.

With support from the Ford Foundation and others, the staff at USC PERE, organizing allies Ginny Goldman and Kirk Noden (formerly of the Texas Organizing Project and the Ohio Organizing Collaborative), and national advisor Dr. Hahrie Han decided to repurpose the Changing States framework as a sort of “Power Audit of a state.” The three questions guiding this work were:

1. What are the demographic, economic, political, and geographic **conditions that create the context for social change efforts** in a state?
2. What is the **state of play in various arenas in which power is contested** (i.e., electoral, legislative, judicial, administrative, corporate, and communications)—and which are ripe for progressive intervention?
3. What are the barriers to progressive change—and **how could these barriers be overcome through key investments in the capacities needed to build governing power** (i.e., organizational breadth, networks and alliances, leadership ladders and lattices, and resource bases)?

For USC PERE, an additional question involved the research process itself. Our own staff was deeply immersed in the Changing States framework, but we developed it with an eye toward adoption by others. This was a real-world test of whether or not others, particularly practitioners, could use the framework to lay out nuanced strategies. We’ll let the reader assess the results, but we think this bodes well for further thinking, developing, and deploying the framework.

For the former organizers, it has also been important that this process deliver data, analysis, and tools for direct and immediate utility for in-state organizers. An ambitious effort was made to coordinate closely with state-based leaders, to contract with LILSis to conduct corporate power analyses, and to engage a data/analytics team to analyze electoral trends and opportunities. The products and analyses stemming from this project will return to key state players who are imagining a path to governing power—and more open and available versions of these resources will be housed at USC PERE for use by the broader field.

Finally, a note about our own priors before jumping into the state-by-state analysis. **Both USC PERE and the organizer researchers on this project are deeply committed to integrated voter engagement and social movement building which informs our analysis.** This means we believe that electoral plans should be embedded in power building and not the other way around; elections are a means and entry point to governing power which itself requires continual mobilization and grassroots engagement. It also means we are wary of short-term investments in swing constituencies; if you want to shift a state, you have to dig in for the long haul with communities that will show up over and over again.

This commitment means that while we challenge organizers to, for example, consider the role of corporate allies and political leaders, we also believe that funders and others should spend more time galvanizing the movements that will change the terrain on which corporate and political elites operate. It also means that our particular approach to narrative development or framing is not to move to the middle but rather to move the middle; this implies less time on focus groups, more time on wisdom “on the ground,” and a conscious effort to develop communications strategies that also inspire grassroots actors.

# Considering States

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So how does this play out in the states we analyzed? We had tested the framework by doing an analysis of five states in 2015 and 2016: Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Washington. For this effort, we conducted a series of deep dives or “power audits” of Arizona, Georgia, and Minnesota. Information from the full suite of case studies, particularly on the importance of narrative and corporate power and understanding local demographic change, informs our subsequent recommendations. This report is an attempt to summarize the detailed analysis.

For this analysis, the power audit methodology consisted of: (1) in-state interviews with a broad cross sector of stakeholders, including community organizers, labor leaders, funders, state table directors, policy and advocacy experts, electoral consultants, and government officials; (2) review of existing state planning and strategy documents; (3) independent analysis of electoral data focusing on voter registration gaps, turn out strategies, low propensity voters, and persuasion targets; (4) corporate power mapping conducting by LilSis in the form of a report and online tool for each state; (5) demographic and economic research, mostly based micro-data in the American Community Survey by PERE staff; and (5) follow-up interviews with state-based leaders to “ground-truth” the analyses.



# MINNESOTA

## CONTEXT AND DYNAMICS

Home to 5.5 million people, Minnesota is characterized by three big demographic trends: communities of color are growing quickly across the state, particularly in the major urban center of Minneapolis-St. Paul; **there is an increasing urban-rural divide**, with rural communities falling behind in almost every socioeconomic indicator; and the state has a rapidly aging and predominantly white population that looks warily at the demographic shifts.

**Minnesota is often seen as a progressive bastion**, partly because it has not experienced a Wisconsin-style conservative take-over of all its statewide political institutions. **But it is a more “purple” state than many realize**, with conservative forces having gotten traction based on concerns over demographic change and a resentment of what is seen as an outside influence of the more diverse and more liberal metro of Minneapolis-St. Paul.

Unlike other parts of the Midwest, the economy is relatively strong. Moreover, income inequality, as measured by a standard measure called the Gini coefficient, puts Minnesota in the middle of the inequality pack. However, inequality by race is profound: Of all the states (plus D.C.), Minnesota has the nation’s fifth largest racial gap in median household income and the [third largest racial gap in homeownership](#).

**Minnesota has a significant corporate presence with the third highest ratio of Fortune 500 companies per capita.** This creates important opportunities. For example, Target, the country’s second largest discount retailer, is headquartered in Minnesota. Under pressure that began with local organizing, including action by the Minneapolis City Council, it has pledged to raise its minimum wage to [\\$15 an hour nationally by 2020](#). This illustrates exactly how a state strategy, particularly when interacting with a corporate focus, can scale up and impact other states.

**The political situation is dynamic, and there have been significant tensions between progressive organizers and Democratic Party stalwarts and other traditional forces.** These were illustrated in a 2012 conflict around a ballot initiative supporting voter ID. Mainstream forces thought it was unwinnable and devoted resources elsewhere; grassroots groups took on the issue and swung public opinion 34 percentage points from initial negative polling to an eventual victory. The campaign showed that with good messaging—and deep organizing by unions and community-based allies to move thousands of volunteer leaders—Minnesotans can be tugged leftward but this requires developing outreach beyond the Twin Cities and into rural areas. The fact that the campaign was not as supported by mainstream forces but won anyway has fed into some tensions over what is the most effective model of organizing going forward.

As for narrative, Minnesota is ground zero for the class versus race (or “identity”) debate: Some worry that paying too much attention to race will scare away white working class and rural voters (whites are over 85 percent of the citizen voting age population) while others worry that paying too little attention will demobilize key constituencies of a potential new majority. Fortunately, message-testing is ongoing to see whether a complementary narrative can be developed and deployed. The trick is that the argument that race is used to “divide-and-conquer” tends to



diminish race as an independent variable in ways that can under-mobilize communities of color (since they are seen as the potential button to push to divide). Weaving this together will be a key challenge and offers lessons for other states.

## CAPACITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Minnesota has strong progressive ecosystem, partly a result of the Wellstone legacy. There is generally a culture of collaboration, partly driven by successes (including “ban-the-box” legislation, progressive tax changes, and cutting-edge foreclosure protections) that emerged from effective networks. Base-building capacity exists, but it is stretched thin. Finally, there is an admirable commitment from larger organizations to provide the resources and expertise to build up smaller organizations, particularly those representing communities of color.

So what is needed?

### **Minnesota progressives need more resources for a sophisticated, inside-outside corporate strategy.**

There is still a tendency to be reflexively anti-corporate and not as much an emphasis on which companies can come along for change. The right balance seems to have been struck in the Target campaign and expanding this may be useful. Funding training to do corporate power analysis and campaign development with an eye toward new allies and an inside-outside strategy could be a positive. Learnings from this should be captured and shared in other states.

**The narrative work is receiving new investment but could receive more.** As noted, one challenge will be to go beyond the notion that race is used to “divide and conquer” since that can disappear the real impacts of race which are evident in the data. Striking the balance is important for Minnesota and if a new narrative catches, it could extend beyond the state in important ways: If messaging that goes beyond the race-class silos can work here, it might be able to find its way to Michigan, Ohio, and elsewhere.

### **Investments in power building in Minnesota need to be hard headed but ambitious: The major metro areas are the base of strength, but there are risks from weakness in rural and suburban communities.**

Organizations in Minnesota get this and investment in those broadening the progressive map deserves consideration. The efforts should be coordinated. While the notion of a “strategic center” to take on such coordination came up in all our state analyses, one challenge in Minnesota is that there are already multiple state tables with different theories of change. At a minimum, thinking of a “strategic center” as a loose network that would produce better alignment (and support grassroots development) could be important. And timing is key: Efforts at getting on the same page should ramp up and mature in time for the 2020 electoral season and for the discussions of redistricting and representation that will follow.

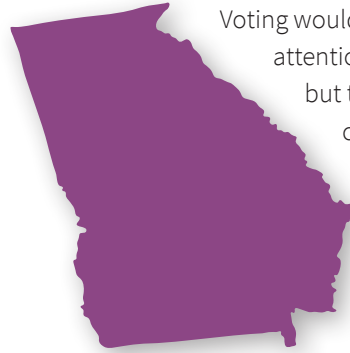
# GEORGIA

## CONTEXT AND DYNAMICS

Georgia's demographic change is running ahead of the nation's, with the state predicted to become majority people of color by 2025 (versus around 2045 for the country). **What is unique in Georgia is the sharp uptick in the number of African Americans**, part of a "New Great Migration" back to the South (but as we stress below, particularly to Georgia). Latino and Asian growth is also high—and immigrants and their children are an important base for change. But it is the Black increase that makes Georgia stand apart.

The geography of this changing demography is key. The Black migration has centered on the Atlanta metro area. Immigrants have been more likely to head to the suburbs and rural areas for jobs. The new Black base can keep Atlanta politics nominally liberal, a trend reinforced by the city's business-supported narrative of a New South city "too busy to hate." But **state political figures are overwhelmingly conservative and the geographic political divide is deep**. Disenfranchised populations in the rural areas have neither elected leaders nor narrative to protect them from right-leaning local policy.

While Georgia, like Minnesota, is plagued by sharp racial inequalities, it is not among the most unequal states in terms of the distribution of income. It seems, however, to be doing everything it can to raise its inequality ranking: It is tied with Wyoming for the lowest state minimum wage, and it is a leader in state-level preemption of local efforts to improve working conditions. Georgia also has the third lowest rate of all U.S. states in terms of union representation of the workforce.



Voting would be one way to bring attention to these economic issues, but the geographic concentration can work against moving state policy. **Eighty percent of voters of color are in the Atlanta media market, leaving many rural seats uncontested.**

To lock in the past, Georgia passed one of the country's first voter ID laws in 2005 and nearly 300,000 citizens have been stripped of their right to vote due to felony convictions.

The corporate sector is tricky. **Many corporate actors are proud of their role in promoting racial desegregation and acceptance of LGBTQ workers and communities—but main business actors and chambers of commerce are highly resistant to higher taxes, increased wages, and improved working conditions.** This cleavage between social and economic ideology is more pronounced than in California or Minnesota where business seems more open to, for example, progressive taxation. Looking in Georgia for allies in the business community is challenging, but there is a part of the business sector increasingly tired of the backward nature of state politics (to wit, the conflict between Delta and state politicians over Delta's decision to drop special discounts for NRA members).

Narrative is another challenge. **Conservative dominance makes it hard to have a coherent progressive frame.** Even messaging that would, in other settings, appeal to equity need to use the language of opportunity instead. Race is clearly important but often a taboo subject, particularly given the metro mythos of having "gotten past the past" in Atlanta.

## CAPACITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Georgia faces an interesting conundrum: It has a strong legacy, particularly in Atlanta, of civil rights, but this can sometimes get in the way of emergent configurations. In places like California, the relative weakness of such traditional groups has left the ground more open for new approaches and progressive alternatives. The emergent groups are more likely to challenge the status quo and to be networked. But they lack a strategic center and do not always share a coherent and compelling narrative, particularly to counter the pro-business tilt of the state.

So what is needed?

**There are significant opportunities in Georgia to invest in such a strategic center**—one that would differ from (or perhaps better put, expand on) traditional state tables such as ProGeorgia. That the focus would be less on voting and more on the development of long-lasting infrastructure for governing power. Such a center (either as a new entity or an established partnership) could provide unified training on organizing, leadership development, and c(3)/c(4) relationships, and work to better articulate the metro, suburban, and rural organizing. It should also work on generating an alternative narrative; this sort of narrative work is much less developed than in Minnesota, for instance.

**Black organizing presents some unique opportunities.** In the rest of the Deep South (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina), only around 15 percent of adult African Americans were born out of state. The figure for Georgia is nearly 40 percent, and Atlanta, in particular, has become a mecca. About half of Atlanta metro's African Americans have been born out-of-state. This suggests that that there may be persuadables not locked into old ways of thinking or old institutional or organizational engagements and arrangements.

**Part of that openness might be to new forms of combining Black and immigrant organizing—and lessons learned in Georgia would be critical for work in the rest of the South.** This would require infrastructure in the nascent immigrant community, which will be a serious task. Parts of the business community might come along on certain issues as they have grown reliant, particularly in rural areas, on immigrant labor, and are quietly concerned about nativist reactions.

Finally, **perhaps because traditional civil rights and liberal groups are accused of being too cozy with business, the emergent groups have not determined a corporate play.** The Georgia Budget and Policy Institute has developed a program for “People-powered Prosperity” which has positive elements, including realistic strategies to shore up finances and improve education funding. How this gets articulated so that it attracts some degree of business support is not clear. Investing in further corporate research and strategy, particularly to craft a narrative that could peel off some sectors of the business community, could be useful.

# ARIZONA



## CONTEXT AND DYNAMICS

**Arizona has a rapidly growing and diversifying population.** It boasts the ninth fastest population growth of all U.S. states between 2010-2017 (and the sixth fastest in 2016-2017). The particularly rapid

increases in the Latino population are pushing the state to majority people-of-color status around 2030. Because this is occurring with an older, whiter, legacy population in place—and because that population is propped by arriving retirees escaping cold weather in other locales—Arizona has the largest demographic divergence between its old and its young of any state in the U.S.

This “racial generation gap” has consequences: Aside from the state’s fractious politics about immigration and ethnic studies in the schools, it is also the state with the [largest cuts in K-12 state spending per student between 2008 and 2015](#). The sense of social distance that has fed into underinvestment in education has been exacerbated by two factors. The first is the retiring “snowbirds” who have a light attachment to place and the next generation of Arizonans. **Nearly 90 percent of those 65 years and older in Arizona were not born in the state**, the second highest level for all U.S. states of out-of-state births for the elderly (with number one being Nevada). The second factor is that Arizona experienced one of the sharpest upticks in undocumented residents in the last several decades, mostly because border security improved in California and Texas, a phenomenon which made “othering” new residents easier.

However, **there has been a push-back to the nativist politics, which is symbolized by the 2010 passage of SB 1070**. While it has taken time, both the changing demographics and ongoing organizing in reaction to SB

1070 has given rise to some new and promising trends. In 2016, the electorate passed a minimum wage ballot proposition, turned out against anti-immigrant icon Sheriff Joe Arpaio, and ensured that candidate Clinton lost by less than four percentage points in what was thought to be strongly Republican territory.

Racial splits are also geographic splits. Progressive are failing to make significant inroads beyond established urban areas. Fortunately, over 80 percent of the state’s populations is in three key counties. This suggests that **in Arizona, a decision will need to be made about how wide to go versus how deep to go in terms of both race and geography**.

The state’s economy has had challenges recovering from the Great Recession, partly because of its dependence on real estate development. In December 2017, the state was tied with several other states for the ninth highest unemployment rate in the U.S. Inequality exists but is not as extreme as elsewhere: In 2016, Arizona ranked 20 on a list of U.S. states in terms of a standard measure of inequality, the Gini coefficient. However, Arizona ranked third on a measure on inequality by race/ethnicity on the educational attainment, suggesting ways in which racial inequality is being baked into the economy.

The corporate sector is an important arena for study and work. **Business supports the usual conservative economic agenda but was moved to oppose more anti-immigrant state legislation after watching the negative national reaction to SB 1070**. Promise Arizona, a leading Latino empowerment and immigrant rights organization, returned the favor by supporting a city-wide sales tax increase in 2015 to extend light rail into South Phoenix, a priority of business leaders. Combining the outside game of forcing minimum wage increases through the ballot and the inside game of cultivating relationships with business groups around immigration and infrastructure is an area for development.

## CAPACITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Arizona has forged new capacities and relationships in the red-hot heat of the pitched immigration battles of recent years. Unlike Georgia, with its existing civil rights infrastructure, there has been more space for new formations to take center stage. For example, labor unions are relatively weak in the state. While this seems like a liability, it also presents an opportunity. They realize that they must collaborate with the other movement-based organizations to make progress. More significantly, there is no State Voices table, so One Arizona, the main c(3) table promoting voter engagement (and responsible for submitting over 150,000 voter registrations in 2016) is essentially home-grown, having emerged from progressive organizing against nativism.

So what is needed?

**Arizona already has a strategic center and building it up (rather than constructing it) is an opportunity for investment.** Indeed, there is both a sense of momentum in Arizona and a clear direction: While attention is being paid to engaging across the board, it is clear that the older generation and rural voters will be hard to bring along. So the real bet is on engaging and mobilizing communities of color and sympathetic allies to overwhelm the opposition. This would be helped by automatic voter registration which is a key policy issue for the Secretary of State election and perhaps for a ballot measure.

**There are likely opportunities in the corporate arena, but these will require new approaches and a wary eye.** Business remains deeply committed to free market principles but is also worried that the right-wing excesses of past years have hurt the economy. Finding points of common ground—as with the extension of light rail and the cooling of anti-immigrant rhetoric—can build up ties for the future. This will require movement by business but also by progressives who have come up in a broad resistance effort that may have built-in anti-corporate attitudes. Outside resources to facilitate a discussion of what sort of economy groups want could be useful.

**Narrative remains an important arena of work.**

It will be tricky to strike the right balance between economic populism and race-based struggles for justice in such a polarized state. **As with many other arenas of work, Arizona will have to both accept and resist national attention:** Now that it is seen as possibly tipping in terms of governance, there is more funder and other interest. But that inevitably brings a flurry of outsiders who will suggest more rural organizing, more attention to white voters, and other directions when in fact the success has been because of local progressive organizing based on a different approach. One possible set of collaborations for training is with California activists who have already been useful to Arizona activists, particularly around immigrant and youth organizing as well as integrated voter engagement.

# Making and Measuring Progress

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Funders, organizers, and other civic actors need to make choices: Where should resources be deployed? Which alliances are most crucial? Which arenas are most ripe for action? What sequence should strategies take to build on one another to attain governing power?

In this Executive Summary of the power audits, we offer a way to answer these questions based on our research and findings from three very different states. While we refer to key aspects of the three states we have analyzed, we direct the reader to the state power audits themselves—one version for 501(c)3 organizations and one for 501(c)4 organizations—for more in-depth, state-specific discussions. Our main intent with this summary is to support greater alignment between state and

national interests and between the field and funders. Toward that end, we offer a way to define a shared goal; measure the current state of affairs, calling on our three case study states as illustrations; suggest strategic directions to be tested; and provide the beginnings of metrics based on the Changing States framework (and its elaboration here) to measure progress and judge success.

# WHERE WE'RE HEADED

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A central premise of Changing States is **the need to set our sights beyond a progressive government to progressive governance**. Traditional strategies have been about getting a progressive government in place: winning posts and policies. But governance is also about how those policies get implemented (which is why both the administrative and judicial arenas are so important) and how we influence the social values and norms that govern behavior (which is why narrative and the corporate arenas are critical). It requires a multi-centric, sustainable ecosystem of organizations that can elevate the issues, keep government accountable, and put forth a narrative of inclusion and justice.

Today's challenges of structural inequality, eroding civic participation, and increasing social disconnect call for a new pathway forward. What we learn from states as distinct as Minnesota, Georgia, and Arizona is that while the pathways may be winding in some places, they should be guided by the same north star. Therefore, we call for **a new north star: Historically marginalized and vulnerable populations have voice, influence, and power to shape a progressive governing agenda at the local and state levels.**<sup>1</sup>

Certain populations have been structurally excluded from democratic processes and decision making—and others are at risk of being marginalized. The fight for social and economic justice should place their voices and their power at the center. In effect, **this pushes back on the centrist tendencies of traditional power brokers that narrow the parameters of public discourse—and recenters the debate on the issues, concerns, and policies of affected communities.**

Furthermore, the **campaigns for inclusion and justice should not only address the structural barriers to opportunity, health, and well-being, but campaigns themselves should be resourced and deployed in ways that build lasting capacities for change in those communities.** In other words, grassroots *participation and mobilization* in campaigns is not sufficient for the type of change that will build towards governing power; rather, campaigns need to be driven and sequenced in ways that build grassroots *power and decision-making influence*. In the state reports, we term this “leading from the front lines.”

**“WE CALL FOR A NEW NORTH STAR:  
Historically marginalized and vulnerable  
populations have voice, influence, and power  
to shape a progressive governing agenda at  
the local and state levels.”**

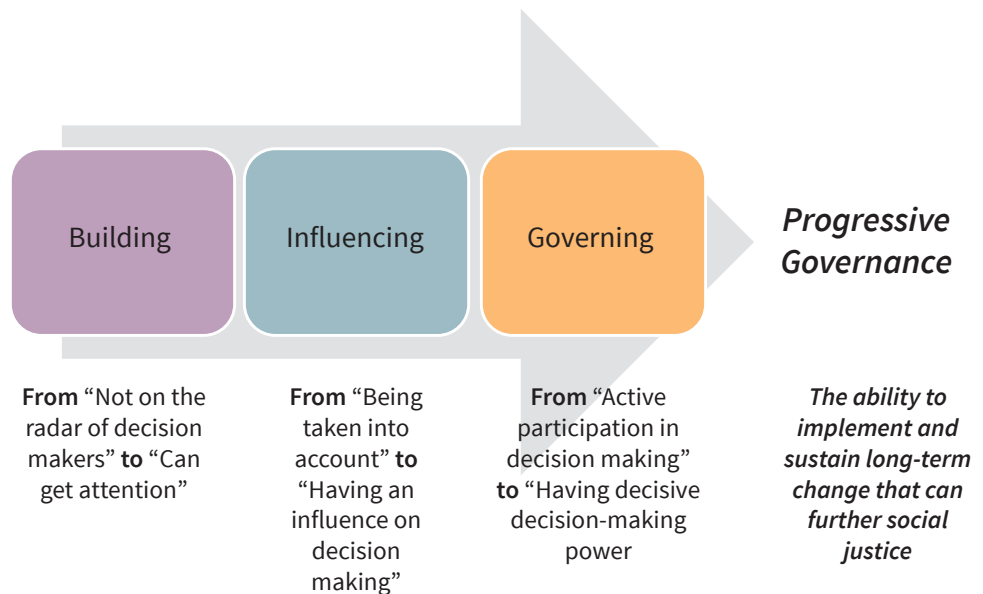
<sup>1</sup>. Adapted from the California Endowment's *Building Healthy Communities North Star Goals*.



# WHERE WE'RE AT

At its highest level of abstraction, determining the pathways toward progressive governance involves assessing the state terrain along three dimensions—geographies of change, capacities for change, and arenas in which power is contested and change takes place—and determining where groups and movements stand along a spectrum of power from **building**, **influencing**, to, ultimately, **governing**. What does the power look like along this spectrum? As the graphic below illustrates, a marker of having no or little power is

not being on the radar of decision makers. A step up in power, or “building,” is an ability to get attention—that might happen through mobilization at a key meeting that gets decision makers to take up an issue but that attention is not sustained. The next step up means moving from being considered by decision makers to “influencing” decision making. Finally, by “governing” power, we mean moving from having a seat at the table to having decisive decision-making power.<sup>2</sup>



NOTE: Terms in quotes are from the Power Analysis Tool developed by Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the Power Analysis Tool developed by Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education.

A caveat, of course: We realize that any such categorization of movement maturity is dynamic, fluid, and can depend on the issue and decision-making target. For example, while groups in Arizona have been able to get attention on immigrant rights issues, they may have less influence and power around a progressive economic agenda. And there are examples in several states where progressives have influence over local policymaking but are losing ground at the state level. But regardless of the risks of simplicity, such categories can be useful in understanding the current state of play, identifying the investment opportunities ahead, and determining what is a success. And so we apply this simplified categorization to the three states not as a comparison to say that one is a better investment than the other but rather to demonstrate how a shared framework can be applied to cases with different needs.

Using this framework, Minnesota might be considered the most advanced of the three states considered in terms of the geographic stretch, the work in multiple arenas, and the capacities built, including some degree of “inside-outside” strategies—which led, for instance, to Target increasing its minimum wage well above the state minimum. Georgia is perhaps the most challenged: It is building a power base among emerging communities, but the work is limited even on the electoral side; the strategy to build from metros out is nascent; and even getting decision maker attention—such as around the role of structural racism in determining people’s outcomes—is a big success. Arizona is in the middle; it is advancing rapidly (and unevenly), partly because of the volatile political situation, and so has jumped ahead in some areas—including electoral opportunities such as voting out anti-immigrant Sherriff Joe Arpaio—but lags in others.

A point of interest with regard to all three states:

**While these states are not as actively involved in cross-state collaborations for change as they might be. Each is a potential strong anchor for such**

**work.** Garnering governing power in Arizona would essentially lock up a progressive West, with Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado, and California completing the picture. Winning in Georgia could have important spillovers to the rest of the Deep South, and would also likely have an influence on corporate sympathies given the presence of significant businesses. Minnesota has partly held the dike against a right-wing drift in the Midwest. While it is a unique state in many ways, it could help with pushing back against more conservative or backward-leaning forces in Wisconsin and Michigan.

**This suggests an important consideration for national-level organizers and investors: Choose areas of work within states that could best facilitate that cross-state spillover and help to develop the**

**cross-state networks.** For example, investments in Black-immigrant organizing in Georgia could have ripple effects in the South; experiments in mobilizing young voters in Arizona could inform parallel efforts to improve turnout and civic participation in Texas; narrative that works to building multicultural alliances in Minnesota may be available for transplant into other states with modestly-sized but growing populations of color.

# HOW WE WIN

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Given the terrain in the different states, where should investments of time and money flow? We see four common areas with variations across states: the development of **strategic centers**, the development of **convincing narrative**, the initiation and development of **corporate/economic work**, and creation of **lasting multicultural and cross-geographic alliances**.

## DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC CENTERS

We should stress that the **development of strategic centers in these states** does not necessarily mean the creation of physical space or the anointment of one key group. Rather it **means facilitating a set of capabilities for leadership development, training, and voter engagement that are widely shared and networked among grassroots anchor organizations**—and deployed in ways that feed into a larger, unified power-building strategy.

In this sense, **a strategic center is an alignment of the progressive power players that serves as an anchor for a shared theory of change and the exercise of independent political power together**. In our view, they should be constructed authentically in states around organizations with active leaders and members (be they labor, civic, community, faith, students, etc.). A strategic center may, of course, require some central mechanism, but it should be state-based, state-rooted, and state-endorsed.

Minnesota already has State Voices and America Votes tables, both of which are complemented by another network in the form of Minnesotans for a Fair Economy, but the risk there is of state coordination focused mainly on traditional politics. Shoring up a “strategic center” (or set of networks) could support grassroots campaigns, develop the voices and leadership of communities of color, and expand geographic reach into rural areas. In Georgia, a strategic center should subtly work its way to be an alternative and complement to traditional civil rights and other groups.

In Arizona, a homegrown strategic center has emerged in the form of One Arizona, as well as a complementary presence of Arizona Wins. There is less tension between efforts than in other states. **One challenge in Arizona (and actually in all states) will be effectively absorbing outside resources as attention gets paid without losing local bearings, and that requires strengthening local infrastructure (likely with general support)**.

## DEVELOPMENT OF CONVINCING NARRATIVES

As for narrative, experiments are under way in Minnesota and Arizona and could be further supported with regard to the balance of economic and racial justice messaging. Georgia is a bit like Texas in that a strong conservative narrative smothers alternative perspectives. Framing progressive language in a terrain in which conservative economic thinking dominates and explicit talk of race is often considered taboo is difficult. Arizona progressives are slogging in the same mix but have the advantage of a younger and more militant generation who are themselves pushing language and are far more open to explicitly progressive messaging.

**Developing a new narrative** that fits each state will require the sort of local focus group work that is currently happening in Minnesota—and then making sure that reaches state organizations in a way that feels authentic and helps them get on the same narrative page. This **will require outside resources but the direction should be determined by the state groups, particularly in order to better fit the long-term political history and the shifting demographics**. Getting this right—and doing it early—is crucial.

## INITIATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CORPORATE/ECONOMIC WORK

The corporate work in each state could take two forms. **The first is the development of a convincing economic narrative and set of policies.** Such economic alternatives are often considered nationally, which makes sense given the importance of federal fiscal and taxation policy. But state economic development programs are important and they are often framed in ways that stress business subsidies and gloss over issues of inequality.

There is work in California to develop an alternative state economic strategy and this is becoming more prevalent in the Economic Analysis and Research Network (EARN). This should be encouraged in all three states, and there are hopeful signs in the recent work of the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Having such a narrative allows for a more effective counterpoint to business supporting business as usual.

**A second dimension of corporate work involves developing relationships with businesses.** We have seen in the fight for LGBTQ rights, comprehensive immigration reform, and gun control that it may be easier to move business than to move government. Helping groups develop better targeting (like the Target campaign in Minnesota) and more positive partnerships (as in the rail line work in Arizona) could be helpful. This is not necessarily organic work to the groups, so if deemed important, this would require more intervention as well as selectivity. Working through the EARN affiliates and other networks could be key.

## CREATION OF LASTING MULTICULTURAL AND CROSS-GEOGRAPHIC ALLIANCES

Finally, **while multicultural alliances are key, partly because of the way race is used to divide, the actual way to do so and the groups to prioritize differ by state since the demography differs.** For example, in Minnesota, communities of color should be engaged, but white communities will remain dominant in the political calculus. Figuring out a message based on addressing the state's extraordinary degree of racial inequality that motivates whites as well as people of color will be important.

**In Georgia,** there are significant opportunities with Black communities, in part because so many African Americans hail from out of state and may be shocked (and then energized) by the continuing degree of exclusion in the South. **Investing in Black organizing is thus crucial.** Immigrant communities complete that state's picture—and Black-immigrant alliances are key—but **state success will also require a suburban strategy** that will need to appeal to more educated whites.

Arizona is somewhat unique. In our view, the mobilization of the Latino vote is key—and the older and whiter electorate should receive relatively scant attention. The latter is a group with fewer ties to the state: Nearly 90 percent of those 65 years or older (and 85 percent of those who are 55 years or older) were born in different states, so their motivation to reinvest in the state for future generations is likely lower. **In Arizona, efforts may need to be focused on a longer-term struggle to change, rather than to convince, the electorate.**

Finally, **there is a geographic dimension, such as sharp gaps between urban and rural communities, in all three states.** We suggest not romanticizing the rural areas. In some cases, such as Arizona, there may be little to gain by developing a rural base whereas in Minnesota and Georgia, rural organizing could be important. **In all the states, putting resources into developing suburban organizing**—so that one secures activism as well as votes from the communities surrounding urban cores—**would be a worthwhile set of experiments.**

# HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS

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*Transactions, Transformations, Translations: Metrics That Matter for Building, Scaling, and Funding Social Movements* (Pastor, Ito, and Rosner 2011) offers a framework for determining the metrics of success for the range of strategies that effective organizing and movement-building organizations employ in the march toward social justice. While that report calls out the need for measures of movement effectiveness, it is, however, still largely focused on measures at the organizational level. A *Changing States*-based **metrics framework would pick up** from where *Transactions, Transformations, Translations* leaves off **by focusing on movement—or ecosystem—effectiveness and power.**

What we have learned from applying the *Changing States* framework to such different states as Minnesota, Arizona, and Georgia is that what may be an impressive success in Georgia is the norm in Minnesota. Time is another variant dimension: A victory in Arizona that takes five years may take longer or shorter in another state. **Any metrics framework needs to be flexible enough to take into account differing and dynamic conditions, capacities, and rules of the game (as they apply to the different decision-making arenas).** In short, assessment needs to be done “on a curve”—it depends on the preexisting scope and scale of influence and power that the progressive movement has in the state.

## A NEW APPROACH TO METRICS

Recall that for this project, we propose the following north star: that historically marginalized and vulnerable populations have voice, influence, and power to shape a progressive governing agenda at the local and state levels. This is rooted in an analysis that certain populations have been intentionally marginalized and excluded from democratic processes and decision-making—and that intentional strategies are needed to address that imbalance. So how do we measure progress toward this north star? We start by tying metrics to the investment recommendations: the development of strategic centers, the development of convincing narratives, the initiation and development of corporate/economic work, and the creation of lasting multicultural and cross-geographic alliances.

Benchmarking progress for each investment will differ by states. For example, because the demographics in any given state are different as are the racial histories, multicultural and cross-geographic alliances will look different between states. In Minnesota, a multicultural alliance would do well to involve progressive whites as they have been key to keeping the state from drifting rightward with its Midwestern neighbors. This is not the case in Arizona, where the racial generation gap means youth look different than the white boomers and retirees—who hail almost entirely from other states—and so are less invested in the state’s youth. Similarly, the nature of rural areas and suburban strategies differs by state.

**Yet the value of a *Changing States* metrics framework across states is to push the field of metrics and evaluation towards an ecosystem-based, values-centric, and multi-dimensional approach**—because that is what it is going to take to achieve progressive governance. While both the field and philanthropy have shifted towards an evidence-based approach—and there is certainly value of doing so) the common measures of success are focused at organizational effectiveness, issue- or campaign-focused, and on a single or limited set of strategies. Rather, as we propose above, these measures should focus on the strength and effectiveness of the movement ecosystem to influence, and ultimately attain, decision-making (or governing) power.

For comparison purposes, the following table illustrates the differences of defining success between the more common approach (what we’re naming “old” for shorthand purposes) and a *Changing States* approach (what we’re naming “new”) to the same set of strategic investments:

**Metrics for Defining Success, Old vs. New Approaches**

<i>Investment</i>	<i>Old Approach</i>	<i>New Approach</i>
<b>Strategic Centers</b>	Shared strategy to address one constituency, issue, or arena	Shared theory of change, progressive agenda, and long-term strategy
<b>Narrative</b>	Message to win majority support around a campaign, issue, or constituency	Values-based narratives that shift the public debate and motivate historically marginalized populations to get engaged
<b>Corporate/ Economic Work</b>	Short-term, defensive campaigns aimed at changing a single corporate practice or decision	Long-term, proactive campaigns aimed at winning over sectors of business around an economic agenda
<b>Alliances</b>	Token participation of marginalized populations to have a seat at the table	Historically marginalized populations aligned to influence the governing agenda

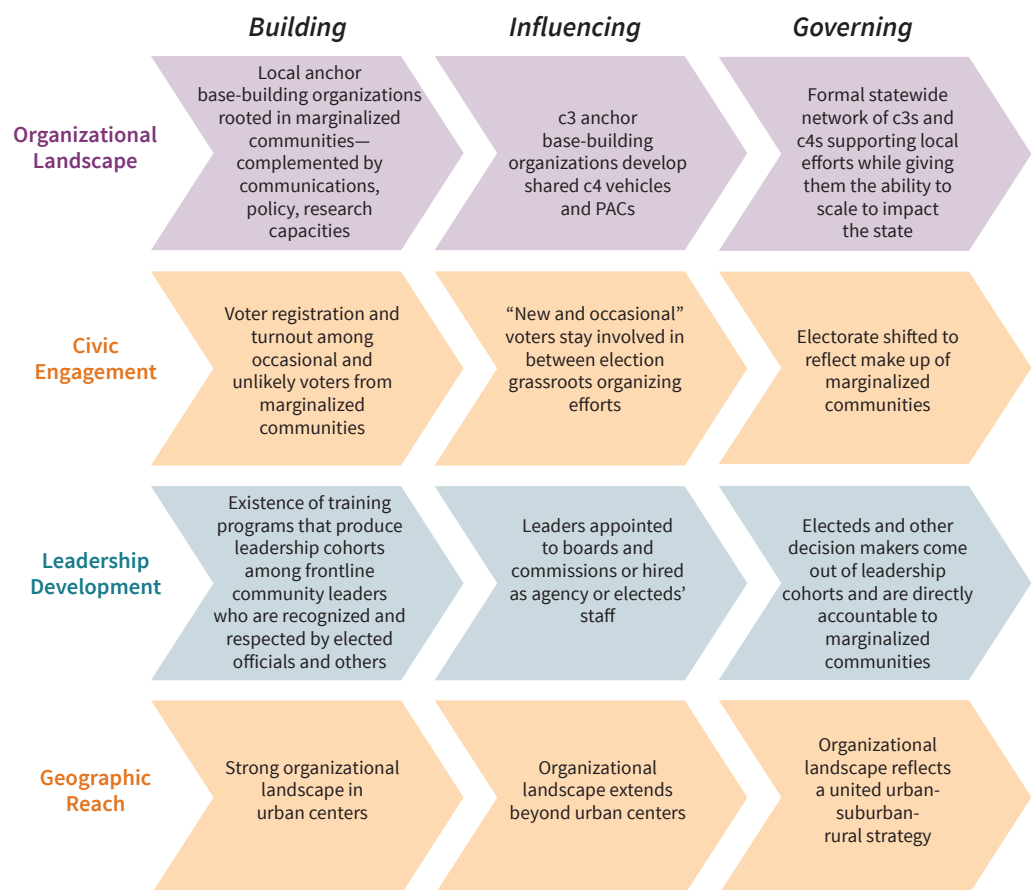
## METRICS TOWARD PROGRESSIVE GOVERNANCE

An assumption underpinning the north star is that strategies for inclusion and justice not only need to address structural barriers to opportunities in the arenas of change—but the **strategies themselves have to build capacities for change rooted in historically marginalized and vulnerable communities.** In other words, what we win is just as important as how we win it.

For example, investments in building and strengthening multicultural and cross-geographic alliances should define success as the ability of institutions rooted in historically marginalized

populations to be aligned to influence the governing agenda. To get there, it means building organizing capacity rooted in those communities so as to build grassroots power and leadership; it means building alignment among organizing groups around a strategic agenda; and it means building collective power (in key arenas and across multiple geographies) among those groups to be able to negotiate a governing agenda for the state with the traditional power-brokers.

The following chart provides examples of metrics to measure such capacities along the spectrum of power (i.e., building, influencing, and governing):



While this is far from comprehensive—there are certainly more capacities necessary to achieving the above strategies and more metrics within each thread—it illustrates what types of metrics could help determine where a state’s movement-building ecosystem is at on the pathway toward progressive governance.

In terms of the organizational landscape, we are talking about a robust set of organizations and players inside and outside of government structures. But it starts with base building, which affords the progressive movement a consistent constituency to show up and hold decision makers accountable for the long haul. Complementary capacities include research, policy analysis, and communications to design and push sustainable, viable strategies and policies. To influence decision making, (c)3 organizations form parallel (c)4 arms and Political Action Committees to directly lobby elected officials. And to move from influencing to governing, groups must have visions and capacities not only to organize but to “scale up” from the grassroots—as we suggest, through a network that provides resources and technical assistance to local groups to integrate state-level work into its existing local efforts.

As for civic engagement, “building” metrics include targeted voter registration and turnout among those new, occasional, and unlikely voters in historically marginalized communities whose interests are neglected and even harmed by the existing voter base. A state’s civic engagement structure moves to “influencing” when year-round organizing transforms a contact list into in a base that delivers consistently during and in between elections. And ultimately, governing means that civic engagement efforts create a tectonic shift in the electorate to reflect marginalized communities, which will build enough power to win in the electoral arena through both electing leaders connected to a grassroots base as well as pushing progressive ballot measures.

Closely intertwined with base building and civic engagement metrics are those of leadership development, which start with programs that form leadership cohorts among frontline community members who are: informed and can articulate their values and vision, prepared and empowered to speak up on issues and take action, and recognized and respected by elected officials and others. Power is elevated when these leaders are appointed to boards and commissions that influence decision makers, and governing power is attained when those leaders—who remain accountable to the bases from which they came—are elected to the decision-making chair.

Finally, geographic reach is perhaps the most straightforward but just as time-intensive and important as the others: building means locking down the urban cores, which concentrate much of America’s marginalized communities; influencing means extending the work outward to include suburban and rural communities; and governing means having an intentional and active strategy behind which cities, suburbs, and rural regions align.

Whatever specific metrics end up as part of a framework—which is the next piece of work stemming from this project—**the key here is to move from measuring power of individual organizations to measuring power of a state’s civic ecosystem to move the state toward progressive governance.**



# Summing Up

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America is at a crossroads. Tugging at its future are two sorts of political coalitions—one determined to restore the past economically, socially, and demographically and one determined to move forward along all these dimensions into the 21st century. This is one of those moments in which the progressive vision really is of progress—toward a future of prosperity, opportunity, and harmony.

Getting there will not be easy. The elections of 2016 revealed that the impulses pulling backward are strong and deeply rooted. The period before that—in which progressive changes at the federal level were being challenged by an increasing right-wing drift at state and local levels—convinced many that paying attention to states is key. But if that is so, then **one needs a blueprint for changing states—and then the nation.**

This Executive Summary has reviewed the *Changing States* framework and its emphasis on achieving progressive governance in multiple arenas. We deployed the analysis to look at Arizona, Georgia, and Minnesota. The research revealed different dynamics by state but common themes with regard to **the need to develop strategic centers, new narratives, new forms of corporate work, and nuanced approaches to multicultural and cross-geographic alliances.**

Those are broad directions and so we have offered initial thoughts on a framework for measuring progress toward these goals. We suggested that **the focus should be on gauging capacities and strategies, and eventually impacts.** We noted that one-size-does-not-fit-all: a strategy to build alliances in Minnesota is not going to play effectively in the more polarized and volatile Arizona. Still, the framework offered here provides some guidance for decision making and also for gauging success.

We understand that **hard choices must be made**—by funders, by organizers, and by civic actors. But these choices should be **guided by longer-term thinking that goes beyond immediate elections and considers building lasting strength and organizational infrastructure** to win and wield power.

After all, we did not get into our current predicament through one electoral cycle or one bad set of policy choices; rather, **there was a general neglect of base building, narrative development, and corporate/economic bridge-building on one side and laser-like focus on these activities by another.** To get to the more inclusive America so many envision, we will need to dig in deep, go state-by-state, and use an informed approach to make big bets on the future. We hope that this analysis helps with that task and look forward to future collaborations to move this agenda forward.



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