

# The Democracy Policy Network

## *Movement policy for the states*

April 2020

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**Contact:** Pete Davis & Mike Draskovic | [Pete@DemocracyPolicy.network](mailto:Pete@DemocracyPolicy.network) | 347-453-3135

# 1. Overview

**The Democracy Policy Network (DPN) is a 501(c)3 interstate policy infrastructure for the growing movement of trailblazing politicians working to deepen democracy in statehouses across America.** By helping people to *gather, package, organize, and champion* bold state policies, we work to develop a supportive network for bold state leaders.

A new generation is rising up in statehouses across the country to challenge the shallow politics of the past decades. They are reviving an old American vision — a vision for deepening democracy... *more power to more people in more ways!*

From West Virginia's teacher strikes to California's public banks; from the campaign to restore the voting rights of formerly incarcerated people in Florida to the Homes for All effort in Maryland — bold ideas for deepening democracy are sprouting up all over. And this groundswell is just the beginning: in the coming years, we are going to be hearing a lot more about municipal energy and worker cooperatives, democracy vouchers and community land trusts, the four-day workweek and mass decarceration, and many more big, democratic reforms. There's a chance the 2020s could be remembered as the decade when — in the wake of devastating political, economic and health crises — Americans stepped up to build a new way of doing things.

But a state policy gap threatens to slow this wave down. We talked to dozens of the state lawmakers involved in this push to deepen democracy and they told us the bad news:

1. **Trailblazing policy is scattered** and **traditional policy isn't bold enough.**
2. There's **no synchronized, interstate offensive** to counter the anti-democracy assault on the states.
3. They feel **isolated and understaffed** — and need backup from an interstate community.

That's where DPN comes in. We aim to organize an interstate infrastructure for this groundswell in the states — a national organization designed to help these bold state lawmakers raise up big ideas for deepening democracy. In doing so, we hope to do our part in helping turn this short-term uprising into a long-term revival of the Movement for American Democracy. *How do we aim to do this?*

1. ...by organizing leaders around a **shared governing vision**: a framework for using their power to deepen democracy — *to strengthen citizens and communities to participate; to open up economic and state power to more people in more ways; to break down barriers of racial and gender injustice* — in their respective states.
2. ...by building a system that makes it easier for people to **gather, package, organize, and champion bold policies** for these leaders: *big democratic reforms, packaged into useful formats, organized on a beautiful platform, and tied to inspiring narratives that lawmakers can use to change the public conversation in their statehouses.*
3. ...fostering a **national policy community** around this vision and agenda: *a network of the Movement's thinkers, leaders, and ordinary citizens helping each other raise up ideas for deepening democracy.*

We tackle these tasks by organizing and coordinating three networks:

1. **The Movement Statehouse Network:** We organize a network of the policy-minded, democratically-spirited lawmakers and staffers working in statehouses across the country to champion ambitious policies for deepening democracy.
2. **The Movement Idea Network:** We organize a network of the policy-minded, democratically-spirited thinkers working in think tanks, magazines, advocacy groups and campuses around the country to develop ambitious policies for deepening democracy.
3. **The Movement Packager Network:** We organize a network of brainy citizens interested in helping connect Movement ideas to Movement leaders by gathering, packaging, organizing, and championing ambitious policies for deepening democracy.

Many past efforts to build interstate policy infrastructure like this have failed. That’s why we’re designing DPN to be different — to be more nimble, more participatory, and more Movement-based:

1. DPN is based in a **Movement, not a party**: *we organize around a shared governing vision (deepening democracy); we laser focus on serving Movement lawmakers; we prioritize long-term “North Star” policies that grow the Movement; and we tap into the Movement youth’s energy and time to package policies.*
2. DPN is organized through **networks, not bureaucracy**: *we coordinate work among our three networks rather than generating the work ourselves; we inspire our networks to cultivate and advance the interstate agenda together; and we work with the networks to synchronize policy efforts across states and issues.*
3. DPN is designed to be **nimble, not a money pit**: *we leverage an in-house skeleton team through both technology for scaling the policy packaging process and building leadership among our Movement networks.*

Here’s the big picture: We’re helping to build an agenda for this growing movement of trailblazing state lawmakers. And we’re building it in a new way: participatory, collaborative, transparent, co-created by the trailblazers on the front lines of each policy effort. By organizing Movement packagers to organize Movement ideas for organized Movement leaders working to deepen democracy, we help to build The Democracy Movement’s policy infrastructure at the state level.

The Democracy Movement has a shot at defining American political life for the coming century. Its fate, we believe, will be determined in part by how well we can realize our visionary ideals through concrete ideas. DPN aims to serve that effort.

## 2. The Movement for American Democracy

Throughout our history, democracy — *participation in power, respect for the productive capacity of ordinary people, having a say in directing the forces that govern their lives, everyone being invited to co-create our nation* — has been held up as America’s supreme ideal.

The great moments of American history are defined by this democratic spirit. The American Revolution was a popular revolt against absentee government — and, despite being too often

associated with its elite figureheads, blossomed into a symbol of bottom-up emancipatory movements around the world and across time. Our founding documents had an uncontrollable democratic energy that spilled out, almost immediately, beyond the original context their authors' intended. Within 20 years of Thomas Jefferson penning the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Banneker was quoting his words back to him to condemn his treatment of African Americans. Within 75 years, the feminists gathered at Seneca Falls were using the Declaration as a template for their calls for women's equality. Within a hundred years, abolitionists were citing the Founding's democratic ideals to point out the hypocrisy of slavery. And within a hundred and fifty years, radical labor leader Eugene V. Debs could be heard saying: "I like the Fourth of July... it breaths the spirit of revolution."

Less than a century after our democratic revolt from British tyranny, Americans revolted again against the tyranny of the slave aristocracy. This second American revolution, spurred by a democratic commitment to "free soil, free labor, and free men," emancipated millions of enslaved Americans and enshrined "equal protection of the laws" as an American ideal. Then, just a few decades later, in response to the rise of banking and railroad monopolies, Americans revolted again, forming the People's Party, the Knights of Labor, and various other Populist groups aimed at reshaping the American economy to empower farmers and workers. Their efforts would lead to the direct election of Senators, the progressive income tax, a wave of trust busting, and the establishment of cooperatives across the country. Their Populist spirit would eventually flow into a militant labor movement, which would earn American workers the weekend, the eight-hour workday, and, most importantly, the right to collectively bargain over the terms of their work.

Many of these labor radicals, like Dorothy Day and Rose Schneiderman, would help win Women's Suffrage in the early 1900s. Others, like A. Philip Randolph and Ella Baker, would help launch the Second Reconstruction, a two-decade wave of grassroots campaigns to break down the barriers that had blocked African-Americans from fully participating in America's democratic promise. Their efforts would help inspire various democratic revolts — from women's liberation to queer liberation to the empowerment of migrant workers — throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

Along the way, Horace Mann crusaded for public education, Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act to build what would become a world-renowned network of land-grant universities, and Circuit Chautauquas were established to spread new ideas to the masses. Jane Addams launched the Settlement House model to promote neighborhood democracy, F.W. Cathro founded the Bank of North Dakota to decentralize capital, and Reginald Heber Smith campaigned for civil lawyers for the poor. The free software movement helped build an open internet, the Farm Credit System kept small producers funded, and the referendum and initiative spread across the states to give ordinary citizens more avenues to change the law.

Our history can be told as the ebbs and flows of this Movement for American Democracy. Unfortunately, for the past decades, the American democratic spirit has been quieter than usual. As a result, our government has become distant and unresponsive, allowing corporate behemoths to dominate our economy. An out-of-touch political class feeds at the trough of deep-pocketed donors, granting an ever-smaller cabal free reign over elections and lawmaking, and leaving the American

people with little control over the fate of their economy, their communities and too often their own lives. This aristocratic politics has thoroughly failed — it has not narrowed our economic divide, tempered our climate crisis, nor supervised our global might.

Fortunately, in recent years, the American democratic spirit is slowly reawakening. A new generation of thinkers and leaders are rising up across America to challenge the aristocratic politics of the past decades and expand our institutional imagination. In response to our national crisis, they are reviving the old American tradition of fighting for a **deeper democracy**. Like their American forebears, they stand for:

- **Strong people** — *strengthening more citizens and communities to participate;*
- **Open country** — *opening up government and economic power to more people in more ways;*
- **One nation** — *breaking down the barriers that prevent our democratic promise from including every American.*

The first rumblings of this democratic revival are already underway. Teachers in West Virginia, LA, and Chicago are flexing their democratic muscles, often bucking their leadership to strike for control over their workplaces. Bold ideas to restructure the economy, from public banks to 21st century antitrust, are gaining steam. Florida’s hugely popular Amendment 4 campaign returned voting rights to formerly incarcerated people. And the Green New Deal’s momentum demonstrates a renewed appetite for democratic control over our shared natural resources.

And it’s not just activists and politicians that make up this groundswell — it’s a new generation of thinkers, too. In upstart think tanks, small campaigns, and tiny magazines across the country, ambitious, trailblazing policies — from decarbonization to decarceration, from civil *Gideon* to citizen assemblies, from platform cooperatives to community investment trusts — are being developed and expanded to show America what a deeper democracy could look like.

This generational moment can be squandered or seized — and the stakes are high. If this latest revival of the Movement for American Democracy succeeds, democracy can be deepened in the coming century, like it has been in fits and starts throughout our history. If it fails, anti-democratic forces may win the century, as Americans opt for bold tyranny over shallow politics. The Movement’s fate, we believe, will be determined, in part, by how well we can realize our visionary ideals through concrete ideas.

## 3. The Movement’s state policy gap

### 3.1 A beachhead in the states

Though we often hear about The Democracy Movement at the federal level, the heart of the Movement is in the states, where big democratic reforms are sprouting up all over. In Colorado, worker cooperatives are being mainstreamed. In Oregon, the voting age may be lowered to 16. In Maine, a state Green New Deal effort is linking economic and climate justice. In Maryland, social housing is being re-introduced. Indeed, the Movement has a beachhead in America’s statehouses,

where small but vibrant groups of lawmakers are putting issues and ideas on the table that have the potential to transform the public conversation.

### **3.2 Movement legislator survey results: *The state policy gap***

Though these trends are encouraging, the Movement — when it comes to state policy — remains severely underserved. *To discover what’s missing from Movement policy infrastructure at the state level, we interviewed 30 state lawmakers aligned with the Movement.* Though they each have various particular policy challenges, the interviews revealed five shared challenges:

#### ***1. Understaffing requires lawmakers to spend more time on defense than on offense.***

Movement politicians are often inspired to run for office because they have experience in a few issue areas. However, when considering whether to run or not, they are faced with the daunting task of populating a website policy page, filling out policy questionnaires, and answering interviews about *every issue*. Often, they are stuck googling around *Vox* and think tank websites alone, looking for quick answers. Policy remains a low campaign budget priority, so they desperately seek quick, inexpensive, and easy policy help.

Once in office, Movement lawmakers suffer from the notorious underfunding and understaffing of state legislator offices. Many are forced to share policy staff with other lawmakers, as well as rely on outside advocates for most of their policy information. As a result, well-funded, well-staffed corporate lobbyists step in to fill the informational vacuum.

When bandwidth is constrained like this, lawmakers are forced into a defensive posture, deploying their meager resources to simply stay on top of everything else happening in the statehouse. To go on offense — to really advance bold ideas that deepen democracy within their parties — requires more time and research staff than they often have. As one Movement state legislator put it when asked how they would champion a comprehensive Movement agenda: “I would need an army.”

#### ***2. There is a serious difference between establishment and Movement policy.***

There does exist an establishment policy infrastructure for state lawmakers: party leadership disseminate talking points; every state has at least one local think tank that runs numbers on various issues; and a few interstate policy infrastructures — like the State Innovation Exchange (SIX), the State Priorities Partnership (SPP), the Public Leadership Institute (PLI), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and Future Now, as well as national caucus networks, like the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) or the Women Legislators’ Lobby (WiLL) — have been established to provide “back office” policy support to state lawmakers.

However, though these infrastructures are succeeding at disseminating consensus party policies and training lawmakers in best practices, a state policy infrastructure for raising up bolder, envelope-pushing, structurally ambitious Movement policies — the types of policies that change the national conversation, that open up state issue environments to new possibilities, that attract new

constituencies into politics, that serve as flagships for dynamic election campaigns, and that provide a strong counterpunch to the relentless anti-democracy campaigns advanced by corporate-sponsored lawmakers — does not yet exist.

As a result, Movement state lawmakers are undersupported when they push the envelope with their policy agenda. When they want to advance, for example, moderate paid leave, gun safety, wage theft or renewable energy policies, they have policy help. But when they want to advance, for example, worker cooperatives, public banks, decarceration, a state-level Green New Deal, a homes guarantee, and democracy vouchers, they have to be more entrepreneurial than their establishment colleagues. As one Movement state lawmakers told us: “I was cobbling together solutions and had no idea where the best place to start was.”

This need for Movement infrastructure — independent of establishment infrastructure — is being addressed when it comes to fundraising (ex. Grassroots Analytics), campaigning (ex. Justice Democrats), organizing (ex. Sunrise Movement, Democratic Socialists of America), technical (ex. Progressive Coders Network), media (ex. *The Intercept*, *Current Affairs*, and *Jacobin*), polling (ex. Data for Progress) and federal policy (ex. New Consensus, People’s Policy Project) support. However, *state policy support* remains scarce.

### ***3. The Movement lawmakers need outside support to advance the Movement inside their statehouses.***

Movement state lawmakers tell us that one of their biggest obstacles to advancing the Movement in their respective statehouses is their own party’s leadership. Party caucuses often have rigid and hierarchical cultures that discourage newer lawmakers from raising up their own ideas. Party leaders often favor status quo policy frameworks and withhold policy resources from lawmakers who seek to work beyond the party consensus. The statehouse’s ‘institutional knowledge’ is often poorly captured and disseminated, leaving new lawmakers even more dependent on their leadership. And it doesn’t help that even ‘non-partisan’ resources internal to their statehouses — like allegedly-‘neutral’ research services — are stuck in outmoded economic frameworks. As one Movement state lawmaker told us: “The system is set up to keep us down.”

As a result, it is hard for Movement lawmakers to earn the respect, allies, and clout necessary to rise through the ranks of their statehouses without sacrificing their Movement agenda. To do so, they need outside resources to make up for what their internal party structure does not provide.

### ***4. Movement lawmakers are politically isolated.***

Movement state lawmakers feel politically lonely because few entities exist to connect them to fellow Movement leaders and thinkers across the country. State progressive caucuses are rare — and where they do exist, many are either nascent or have muddled missions. Unlike mainstream liberal and conservative state lawmakers — who are supported by their respective caucuses and a network of regional and national policy institutions — Movement state lawmakers have no interstate policy

community to support them and their Movement ideas. Some know a few of their fellow Movement lawmakers in other states, but these are one-off connections that are not systematically fostered.

As a result, despite the Movement surging across the country, individual Movement lawmakers in each statehouse still walk a lonely road, risking discouragement and stagnation.

### ***5. Movement lawmakers are not adequately synchronized across state lines.***

Without a coordinated push to deepen democracy at the federal, state, and local levels, Movement state lawmakers are not synchronized in their fight to deepen democracy. As a result, they are missing the opportunity to create powerful national narratives that maximize their policy impact in their respective states. If they could, for example, introduce similar legislation in multiple statehouses at once — with the backing of Movement experts, national leaders and the interest of national press — they would have more enthusiasm from their party’s mainstream members and more leverage with their party leadership.

In summary: when it comes to policy, state Movement politicians are not well-served — nor are they working together most efficiently to advance their shared vision for deepening democracy. If this state policy gap remains, we can expect unfortunate consequences: cutting edge policies will fail to spread beyond the states in which they originate; Movement lawmakers will waste time and energy reinventing the wheel in each state; states without well-resourced activist communities and big media markets will fall behind states like New York and California; and ambitious Movement lawmakers will flame out — or lower their sights — as they fail to translate their democratic ideals into actionable ideas.

## **3.3 Movement legislator survey results: *What a Movement policy network should look like***

*We asked the same 30 state lawmakers what they would want out of a Movement policy network.* Again, though they each have particular items on their wish lists, the interviews revealed five shared requests:

### ***1. Movement lawmakers want an interstate Movement network.***

Movement lawmakers desire an entity that brings together Movement thinkers and Movement leaders within their state and across the country to co-develop Movement ideas and coordinate interstate policy campaigns. Some concrete ideas that Movement lawmakers requested for coordinating the network included:

- a. An annual national conference with state and regional convenings
- b. Digital communities through facebook, slack and email listservs
- c. Databases of Movement lawmakers, their interests and work on Movement policies
- d. Databases of Movement experts, their interests and work on Movement policies

## ***2. Movement lawmakers want easy ways to learn about Movement policies and messaging.***

Movement lawmakers want help in cultivating expertise on Movement policy and messaging, so that they become more effective champions of Movement ideas. When asked what concrete support would be useful, Movement lawmakers requested:

- a. Research assistance that synthesizes Movement research and translates it into actionable, state-specific policy
- b. A policy organization system that is more structured than a database of random policies
- c. Experts on demand for Movement policy briefings
- d. Detailed bullet points on how a bill would be structured to pass along to statehouse drafting offices

## ***3. Movement lawmakers want policy advocacy tools.***

Movement lawmakers want full toolkits on hand to help them champion Movement policies. Concrete tools mentioned in interviews include:

- a. Quality, in-depth briefs and reports
- b. Lists of policy precedents — both historical and from other states
- c. Poll-tested talking points
- d. State poll results on Movement policies
- e. Video issue explainers for new audiences
- f. Op-ed and “Dear Colleague” letter writing assistance to help change the public conversation

## ***4. Movement lawmakers want synchronized, interstate policy campaigns.***

Movement lawmakers want more policy synchronicity across states — and across federal, state, and local efforts. They want Movement lawmakers pushing policies in multiple states at once — and national Movement leaders and media at the ready to amplify their interstate effort. Specifically, multiple Movement lawmakers requested:

- a. Interstate coordination around Movement issue priorities, like climate
- b. Open lines of communication between Movement thinkers, lawmakers, press, and activists
- c. A dedicated “hype machine” behind them, making it inspiring to join the Movement at the state level
- d. More press coverage of Movement policy gains
- e. A Movement policy tracker that aggregates the status of each Movement policy in each state

## ***5. Movement lawmakers want local issue advocates.***

The ideal interstate policy network, Movement lawmakers tell us, would help lawmakers tailor generic state policies to specific state contexts. Legislators appreciate the growing surge of national Movement thinkers, but they also want local issue advocates to help them champion Movement ideas locally. Specifically, they desired:

- a. Grassroots issue experts, especially people who are affected locally by the issue
- b. A state-wide network of local issue advocates
- c. Advocates that are not the “usual suspects” who meet with them often

In summary: Movement lawmakers want an interstate network dedicated specifically to Movement lawmakers. They want that network to make it simple and easy to learn about and champion Movement policies. And they want that network to help synchronize Movement policy pushes both (1) across state lines, by coordinating with Movement lawmakers in other states, national Movement leaders, and national press; and (2) inside each state, by coordinating with local issue advocates.

### **3.4 Movement thinker survey results: *What a Movement policy network should look like***

Fortunately, there exists a growing group of Movement thinkers — advocates, activists and policy wonks proposing and working out the details of big, structural reforms. Movement lawmakers have found ways to individually connect with them — some even by sending them direct messages on twitter. But these efforts remain ad hoc, for Movement thinkers’ ideas are *scattered* across a disparate world of think tanks, statehouses, magazines and academic journals — and are *disconnected* from a larger vision that helps people see how they fit together. Moreover, Movement thinkers are isolated *from one another* too — and when they do come together, it is usually around *federal policies*, with little translation done to translate ideas to state contexts.

In addition to surveying Movement leaders about what they would want out of a Movement policy network, we also surveyed *dozens of Movement thinkers from across the issue spectrum*. In their answers, six themes emerged:

#### ***1. Movement thinkers experience the Movement-establishment divide, too.***

Movement thinkers, like their legislator counterparts, are trying to push for bolder, envelope-pushing, long-term reforms in environments dominated by old guard figures and models. As a result, they too feel isolated within their institutions and desire a national Movement policy community. One Movement thinkers told us: “Progressives don’t support young people with ideas — they love young people when they’re doing on-the-ground Movement work, but not when they have policy ideas.”

#### ***2. Movement thinkers are excited about “North Star” policy packaging.***

In establishment venues, Movement thinkers are required to talk about their ideas in narrow “here’s a problem; here’s a solution” frameworks. However, they know from their research that real change is going to require bigger, structural reforms, packaged in inspiring packages that can change

the conversation (the Green New Deal being the prime example). They want more venues in which they are able to tell the truth about their bigger policy ambitions.

***3. Movement thinkers are here to help, but have limited bandwidth.***

Many thinkers we talked to said they are happy to take calls, give advice, testify, clarify, give quotes, share documents, orient, sign on to things, and answer questions — but they do not have the bandwidth to actually re-write/genericize their work for a whole new policy agenda. Whatever system we come up with to populate the agenda, they explained, would have to have a separate group of people do the work of packaging the policy thinkers' ideas.

***4. There is a distinction between policies as ends in themselves and policies as enablers of alternative structures.***

A distinction emerged in the Movement thinker survey between two types of policy efforts, both of which are important. In one type, policies are ends in themselves: lowering the voting age, legalizing marijuana, changing mandatory minimums. In another type, policies are means to help foster the growth of alternative structures: cooperatives, labor unions, tenant unions, community lands trusts, small businesses. In the latter group, the center of gravity is at the local level, but state policy can help provide funding, legal space, and publicity for local efforts.

***5. It's all about precedents.***

Multiple policy thinkers told us that the key to big policy change across the states was to generate precedents and then amplify them. “As soon as you have one state trying something new and it works,” one Movement thinker told us, “it’s like dominos after that.”

***6. Federal policies have state angles.***

We had expected many federally-oriented policy experts to have no use for an interstate policy network. However, many shared various examples of how state lawmakers can play a role in large-scale policies, including national antitrust pushes, global trade agreements and foreign policy.

In summary: Movement thinkers see the potential in an interstate policy effort specifically dedicated to Movement policy — policy that is more structurally ambitious than establishment policy; policy that can be used to change the conversation. They are open to working with a network to incorporate their ideas into an interstate agenda, but they do not have the bandwidth to re-package their work themselves. And they are excited about the potential to generate vanguard precedents, create space for institutional alternatives, and advance nationwide projects at the state level.

## 4. DPN: An interstate policy infrastructure for Movement leaders

To respond to these legislator needs, serve the Democracy Movement, and fill this state policy gap, we are organizing **The Democracy Policy Network (DPN): an interstate policy infrastructure for Movement leaders working to deepen democracy in statehouses across the country.** The network has three tasks:

1. DPN works to organize the Movement's statehouse leaders around a **shared governing vision**: a framework for using their power to deepen democracy — *to strengthen citizens and communities to participate; to open up economic and government power to more people in more ways; to break down the barriers of injustice that prevent our democratic promise from including every American* — in their respective states.
2. DPN builds a system that makes it easier for people to **gather, package, organize, and champion bold policies** for these leaders: *big democratic reforms, packed into useful formats, organized on a beautiful platform, and tied to inspiring narratives that lawmakers can use to change the public conversation in their statehouses.*
3. DPN works to foster a **national policy community** around this vision and agenda: *a network of the Movement's thinkers, leaders, and ordinary citizens helping each other raise up ideas for deepening democracy.*

These three tasks are embedded in our name, **Democracy Policy Network**:

- **Democracy**: We organize statehouse leaders around a vision of deepening democracy.
- **Policy**: We gather, package, organize, and champion state-level policies connected to this vision.
- **Network**: We foster a community of people devoted to developing and championing this vision and the policies that realize it.

These three tasks are achieved through three networks we are organizing:

- **A Movement Statehouse Network**: We organize a network of the policy-minded, democratically-spirited Movement lawmakers and staffers working in statehouses across the country to champion ambitious policies for deepening democracy.
- **A Movement Idea Network**: We organize a network of the policy-minded, democratically-spirited Movement thinkers working in think tanks, magazines, advocacy groups and campuses around the country to develop ambitious policies for deepening democracy.

- **The Movement Packager Network:** We organize a network of brainy citizens interested in helping connect Movement ideas to Movement leaders by gathering, packaging, organizing, and championing ambitious policies for deepening democracy.

In sum: We're helping to **build an agenda for the next generation of Movement state lawmakers**. And **we're building it in a new way** — *participatory, collaborative, transparent, co-created by the Movement*. By organizing **Movement packagers** to organize **Movement ideas** for organized **Movement leaders** working to **deepen democracy**, we help to build **The Democracy Movement's policy infrastructure** in the states.

## 5. Breaking the interstate policy network curse

### 5.1 Why interstate policy networks matter

Interstate policy networks play a specific role in the political ecosystem. They are distinct from federal policy networks, think tanks and grassroots organizations:

#### ***1. Interstate policy networks are about state, not national, policy.***

While there are many institutions helping craft Congressional and Presidential policy, state policy support is thinner. That's where interstate policy networks can help.

State policy is important, because, while Presidential candidates may appear to be setting our national agenda, many of their best ideas arise out of local and state politics. Today's Fight for \$15, for example, began as a campaign for cities and states to raise their minimum wage floors. Gay marriage began in Hawaii and Massachusetts. Legalizing recreational marijuana began in Washington and Colorado.

During the Progressive Era, activists developed what became known as the "Wisconsin Idea"— a coordinated effort by Wisconsin's academics, activists and state leaders to turn Wisconsin into a "laboratory for democracy" by modeling progressive state policy for other states to copy.

In the 1970s, Students for a Democratic Society leader Lee Webb helped launch [The Conference on Alternative Local & State Policies](#) to help activist office-holders learn about available policy alternatives. The idea emerged out of Webb's work as a Vermont activist, where he kept getting calls from around the country asking: "*Could you send me that bill on x? I heard you had some success tackling y, could you tell me how you did it?*" During its existence, CASLP published newsletters and books, convened thinkers, and held conferences with state leaders across the country, covering issues ranging from public utility commissions to real estate speculator taxes, state banks to neighborhood councils, consumer cooperatives to state sovereign wealth funds.

An interstate policy network can continue this tradition of using federalism to our advantage. This is why we focus on state leaders — as Congress stalls, we support The Democracy Movement by planting the seeds of its national vision in state houses across the country.

### ***2. Interstate policy networks are networks, not think tanks.***

Interstate policy networks are not like the Center for American Progress, Brookings, or Demos — they are networks, not think tanks. Interstate policy networks do not primarily generate original policy ideas. Rather they: (1) gather, package, and organize bold policy from think tanks, statehouses, and academic journals across the country; and (2) connect them with bold state politicians in their legislator network.

### ***3. Interstate policy networks organize the grasstops, not the grassroots.***

Unlike organizations like Indivisible, the Democratic Socialists of America, Our Revolution, or state unions, interstate policy networks organize the “grasstops,” not the grassroots. Instead of organizing or mobilizing on-the-ground communities for political change, they introduce bold policies to state politicians, civic leaders, journalists and the public at large, with the goal of inspiring existing grassroots communities to take up the policies.

In summary: interstate policy networks serve as state-based clearinghouses that organize thinkers and leaders for the purpose of connecting policy ideas with the politicians ready to champion them.

## **5.2 The history of progressive interstate policy networks**

The forces arrayed against democracy have been great at organizing interstate policy networks — most famously, The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which coordinates dozens of interstate policy campaigns each year. As one writer described the model: “You don’t get people singing from the same hymn sheet unless someone is writing the hymns, printing and distributing them, and building choirs everywhere.”

Various progressive interstate policy networks have been developed over the years to match ALEC: the Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies (1975-1985), the Center for Policy Alternatives (1990-2008), The Progressive States Network (2005-2014), The American Legislative and Issue Campaign Exchange, The Public Leadership Institute, the State Priorities Partnership, and, most recently, the State Innovation Exchange. In building DPN, we must work to both avoid past networks’ pitfalls and ensure we do not duplicate present networks’ work.

Some past networks suffered from three major problems.

First, many lacked ***stable funding sources*** — and therefore were unable to do the sustainable long-term work necessary to build a comprehensive state policy infrastructure.

Second, many lacked ***clarity of mission***. Some lacked clear ideology and therefore were caught working on disparate issues that never congealed into an inspiring, unified agenda. Others never nailed down who they were serving — the lawmakers themselves or the national issue organizations. There was also confusion over what activities should be prioritized: training lawmakers, passing legislation, or building a national narrative. As a result, those who focused on messaging were criticized for lacking

in-depth knowledge of the states or of policy, while those focused on targeted issue campaigns were criticized for being just another local issue advocacy group disconnected from the larger movement.

Finally, every past attempt to build a progressive state policy infrastructure has been constrained by the fact that *anti-democracy networks, like ALEC, are simply more well-funded* than other state policy networks. Their network development staff is larger, their policy-making infrastructure is broader, and their legislator conferences are more lavish. As one report put it, ALEC is not some magic bullet for the Anti-Democracy Movement — it is simply the connecting tissue for a well-oiled, well-funded state policy machine. An effective cockpit, one person put it, is no use without a plane to go with it.

The legacy of past state policy networks is not all doom and gloom — there is a lot to learn from their history. First, these networks found that policy-minded legislator-activists are present in state houses across the country. Second, they found that these lawmakers are deeply interested in becoming more effective at their job. Network leaders report that the more useful they were to lawmakers, the more engaged the lawmakers became. One network leader said their biggest regret was not having more of a service-minded relationship with lawmakers. Finally, these networks not only had success passing legislation — they also found state campaigns to be an effective way to change national debates.

## 5.2 Structuring DPN to avoid a similar fate

As a result of these problems, much of the history of progressive interstate policy networks has been grim. That’s why we are developing DPN in a way that learns from their successes and steers clear of their pitfalls so as to avoid a similar fate. Here’s how DPN will be different.

### *1. DPN is based in a Movement, not a party.*

Unlike many interstate policy infrastructures, we aim to have a strong, upfront governing vision — **deepening democracy**. We are not aiming to provide neutral, technocratic policy support to every state legislator on every issue. Rather, we will only advance policies aligned with our ideological goal of expanding more power to more people in more ways. We aim to be the state policy arm of the bold, new political generation and the Movement they champion.

In doing so, we aim to laser focus on serving and developing the handful of policy-minded, democratically-spirited **Movement lawmakers** ready to champion Movement ideas in their respective statehouses, rather than being a catchall for every legislator in a statehouse party caucus. Many prior interstate policy networks were confused about who they were serving. We know exactly who we are serving with DPN: a specific group of state lawmakers who form the burgeoning wave of activist lawmakers arising out of the Democracy Movement.

In turn, we also laser focus on raising up the envelope-pushing, Movement-driven, long-term oriented, **“North Star” policy ideas** produced by Movement thinkers, rather than being a catchall for all short-term, consensus policy ideas that have worked their way through establishment policy

shops. Many prior interstate policy networks became tangled up in short-term, insider politics. We avoid this fate by designing DPN to serve the long-term Movement rather than the short-term party consensus, freeing us up to shepherd bold ideas into the mainstream over longer time frames.

In designing DPN this way, we leave the goal of disseminating short-term, consensus policies and training all party lawmakers in best practices to more established policy networks. We see our work as upstream from other policy networks — we want to shepherd a Movement policy from being completely undiscussed in mainstream politics to being the policy consensus, while leaving establishment policy networks with the task of shepherding a policy from party consensus to passage.

When you base an organization in a Movement rather than a party coalition, you have the advantage of being able to tap into **the Movement’s energy and time**. We cannot overcome the funding advantage of the forces arrayed against democracy, but we can counter them with a *“they have money, but we have people”* strategy. However, this strategy can only be deployed if you arise out of a real Movement that inspires public participation. By basing ourselves in the popular Movement rather than a demobilized party system, we can, unlike prior policy networks, deploy this strategy.

## ***2. DPN is organized through networks, not bureaucracy.***

DPN is not designed like ordinary non-profits, which often scale by building top-down organizational bureaucracies. Rather, we are designed around organizing and coordinating three voluntary networks.

The first network is the network of **Movement state lawmakers** eager to champion Movement policies in their respective statehouses.

The second network is the network of **Movement thinkers** working to create and develop Movement policies within think tanks, campuses, magazines and advocacy groups across the country.

The third (and most important) network is the network of **Movement policy packagers**: policy-minded, democratically-spirited citizens eager to help shepherd state policy *from* Movement thinkers *to* Movement state leaders.

DPN works to organize and engage these three networks in the project of building and advancing **an interstate Movement agenda**. This agenda...

1. ...is housed on a public web platform with a clean, engaging front-end and a distributed back-end (similar to a web magazine CMS);
2. ...is populated piecemeal by the packagers who work with Movement experts and leaders to gather, package, organize and amplify the Movement’s North Star policies;
3. ...is designed to be a resource for an influential audience of state Movement leaders, who are directly engaged with the project through multiple channels (email lists, Zoom briefings, social media, video trainings, etc.); and
4. ...helps build up a national identity for the interstate Democracy Movement.

You can see the difference between network design and bureaucracy design in action: the agenda is not built by a private organization that speaks for the Movement; rather, it is built as a participatory project, co-created in the open, by the broad Movement.

### ***3. DPN is designed to be nimble, not a money pit.***

By leveraging Movement energy and a network structure, DPN can get a lot more done with a lot of fewer resources. This is very important, given that prior progressive interstate policy networks have had trouble finding stable funding.

To do this, DPN is designed to have an **in-house skeleton team** that works to cultivate Movement leader, Movement thinker, and Movement packager networks, rather than growing internally.

To help, DPN invests in backend support for serving and scaling the policy packaging process. This backend support — which could include, for example, design support, copyediting, databases of contacts, legal, grant writing, technology, etc. — is driven by a simple principle: *DPN should be constantly and relentlessly developing tools and processes to help packagers in their project of gathering, packaging, organizing, and championing Movement policy.*

In addition to building tools and processes *for* policy packagers, we also want to focus on building the leadership of the packagers themselves.

A great precedent for this is the work of the [Nader's Raiders in the 1960s and '70s](#). Through a flurry of Consumer Movement reports and campaigns created on shoestring budgets — *The Interstate Commerce Omission, Chemical Feast, Vanishing Air, Water Wasteland, Sowing the Wind, The Madness Establishment, Damming the West*, and more — they counterbalanced corporate lobbying by mastering the art of *gathering, packaging, organizing, and championing* bold policy ideas. In doing so, they mixed rigorous expertise, media panache, and legislative networking to turn what could have been boring, impotent reports into a powerful policy amplification machine. Most importantly, the whole operation served as a training academy for turning brainy idealists into super-citizens — and thus led to the flourishing of hundreds of new leaders and organizations in the public interest movement.

In summary: by harnessing Movement energy, by structuring the organization around networks, and by remaining nimble, we can avoid the pitfalls that crippled prior interstate policy networks.

## **5.4 Supplementing the State Innovation Exchange**

In addressing the differences between DPN and other progressive interstate policy networks, it is important to make specific note of the State Innovation Exchange, which has gone a long way to address the challenges and internalize the learnings of past interstate policy networks.

First, SIX has built up close relationships with party leaders and establishment progressive issue organizations so as to take advantage of existing progressive infrastructure, provide a stable funding

source for their network, and avoid energy-draining intra-coalition fights. Through these relationships, they have also developed a thorough agenda of consensus coalition policies.

Second, SIX has focused on helping lawmakers do their jobs better. They provide an annual orientation academy and help disseminate best practices regarding constituent relations, leadership development, legislative planning, and communications.

Third, SIX has been agile in connecting national news to state policy. For example, they have disseminated state policy regarding Presidential Tax Returns and Border Wall Divestment in response to Trump Administration actions.

With DPN, we do not aim to replace SIX — we aim to supplement it.

First, we want to leave consensus party policies to SIX and focus on raising up bold Movement policies that may not have consensus coalition support yet. To do this, we will focus less on organizing large, well-established progressive organizations and instead focus on organizing the next generation of Movement thinkers and leaders.

Second, we want to leave consensus, defensive policies (ex. Border Wall Divestment) to more established organizations and focus on promoting long-term, structurally ambitious, narrative-shifting policies that may not have an active news peg yet.

Finally, we want to leave general legislator professionalization to SIX and focus on specifically serving the small, but burgeoning, group of trailblazing Movement lawmakers in each state house.

In short, we aim to position ourselves *upstream* in the state policy process from SIX, raising up Movement ideas from “experimental, Movement seedling” to “coalition consensus.”

## 5.5 Why this strategy matters

Some might wonder: *yes, this organization makes sense, but why does it matter? Why invest time and energy in gathering, packaging, organizing, and championing Movement ideas when winning elections, advancing today’s issue campaigns, and organizing the grassroots are always pressing tasks?*

To answer this, we should look to the success of the Anti-Democracy Movement in the late 20th century. Their success was based, in major part, on this precise project of connecting bold ideas to bold idealists. Before they took power, they laid the groundwork of their rise by pairing ambitious national policy ideas with the state political leaders eager to champion them. Consider this Milton Friedman quote:

*“Only a crisis — actual or perceived — produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken **depend on the ideas that are lying around.** That, I believe, is our basic function: **to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.**”*

And the Anti-Democracy Movement followed Friedman’s advice, investing in a vast ecosystem of anti-democracy policy creation and dissemination through think tanks, legislative networks, targeted investments in academia, and student recruiting. The infamous anti-democracy network ALEC is clear about their strategy of supporting the Anti-Democracy Movement through “well-informed,

well-armed” lawmakers: *“ALEC’s goal is to ensure that these... state legislators are so well informed, so well armed, that they can set the terms of the public policy debate, that they can change the agenda, that they can lead.”*

The Democracy Movement should not just lament this — we should copy it. Policy support — like fundraising, organizing, campaign, technical, and media support — is an important pillar of any movement. It helps: Movement election campaigns back up lofty ideals with concrete ideas; Movement lawmakers gain power within their respective state houses; and keep the Movement in the headlines as hopeful solutions are pegged to the latest news stories. Indeed, when a policy network sees itself as part of a Movement (rather than as a neutral, passive resource), it not only helps pass one-off legislation— it also helps continuously build power.

## 6. The DPN platform

When most Movement candidates run for office — even when newly-elected Movement leaders assume office — they are well-versed in Movement *ideals*, but often still need help in articulating Movement *ideas*. Currently, they build their understanding of the Movement’s agenda in fits and starts — seeing a news story, hearing from an activist, learning about a precedent in another state. We want to help quicken the pace by creating a clearinghouse for Movement ideas at the state level.

To do so, we are organizing an **online, open source, interstate platform of state-level policies that deepen democracy**. By “open source,” we mean the platform’s policies, like open source software, will: (1) be made freely available for any state leader to use; (2) be designed to allow state leaders to transfer and modify policies for their own purposes; (3) be developed through public collaboration; (4) transparently show its elements’ original sources; and (5) be continuously updated.

In order to avoid the duplication of other state policy infrastructures, like the State Innovation Exchange, the State Priorities Partnership, and the Progressive Leadership Institute, the platform will focus solely on policies that are: (1) ideologically-aligned with the Movement’s project of deepening democracy; and (2) structurally ambitious, aiming to shift power and change the political conversation.

Many past attempts at building useful “policy libraries” have failed because they are not user friendly. Many have been experienced by lawmakers, staffers, and activists as a hodge-podge grabbag of random policies from random years. Without context, design, organization, or an overall framework that orients users to where each policy fits into the Movement, they can fail to turn information into action. We aim to avoid this same fate through: **structurally ambitious packages**, communicated through **engaging policy kits**, embedded in an **organized framework**.

### 6.1 ‘North Star’ packages

For each issue area, DPN bundles multiple small policies into structurally-ambitious, **‘North Star’ packages** — policy packages that can change the conversation, generate enthusiasm and orient action.

For example, instead of having multiple small policies regarding prison education, prison voting, and prison wages in the DPN platform, DPN would have one structurally ambitious North Star policy package called “*Prison Citizenship*” that bundles the various policies into one inspiring narrative. Instead of having a hodge-podge of union-friendly policies on separate pages, we will bundle them into a “*Labor Power*” bundle. This is the insight of the Green New Deal’s success — in Movement politics, bigger packages paired with strong narratives generate political energy.

## 6.2 The policy kit process

Both the process of forming and the method of displaying DPN policies will be standardized into engaging **DPN Policy Kits**. The goal for the kits is to be maximally useful to state leaders aiming to champion each policy. Each kit — which will be housed online, as well as downloadable as PDFs and available to be mailed as physical copies to lawmakers — will consist of the following 13 elements:

### *First Layer: Concept*

1. **Name:** DPN policies aim to be inspiring and structurally ambitious, so we put creative energy into the naming process. (If the Green New Deal was not named “The Green New Deal,” it would not be as inspiring nor as structurally ambitious.)
2. **Contributors & Co-Branding:** Since we are not generating policies ourselves, we take displaying credit very seriously. For policies that are packaged from multiple sources, we display upfront the contributors who gathered, organized, and packaged the policy. For policy kits that are wholesale imports from other policy organizations, we work with each organization to gain permission, partner and co-brand the policy kit.
3. **Introduction:** Every kit begins with a 1-2 paragraph introduction to the policy, which gives a broad overview of how it works, where it fits into the framework, and how it deepens democracy.
4. **Elements:** Policies are often made up of multiple elements — the discrete policies that are in the larger North Star policy bundle.

### *Second Layer: Starter Pack*

5. **Starter Pack:** For each policy kit, the first module we create is a *starter pack* — a curated packet of various articles, reports, and news stories that together can provide an introduction to the policy. Included in each starter pack is: a one-pager that can stand alone as a quick briefing on the policy, 100-200 pages of curated articles, short paragraph-long intros to each section of articles.
6. **Policy Bullpen:** Paired with each starter pack is a policy bullpen — a curated list of 5-10 scholars, advocates, lawmakers, practitioners and organizations that are experts on the policy and may be useful resources to contact to learn more.

7. **Precedents:** Paired with each starter pack is a list of precedents — a curated list of 5-10 examples around the country, world, and history that bolster the case for this policy.

### ***Third Layer: Policy Report***

8. **Policy Brief:** For each policy kit, the second layer we create is a *policy brief*: a 3-10 page explanation of and argument for the policy that can serve as a talking paper for kicking off a deeper conversation among policy experts and state leaders.
9. **Policy Report:** Once we have a *policy brief*, we use it to bring together a wider coalition — including policy experts, grassroots advocates, relevant organizations and interested lawmakers — to give feedback. Through that conversation, we develop a comprehensive 15-30 page report that fully articulates the policy. Reports should share: (1) The ideal outcome contrasted with the bad status quo; (2) a history of how this bad status quo came to be and has been addressed in the past; (3) Analysis of the policy challenge today; and (4) Our policy solution.
10. **Policy FAQ:** A list of frequently asked questions about the policy that addresses common concerns and unpacks execution details.

### ***Four Layer: Amplification***

11. **Policy Toolbox:** Finally, we develop a series of *tools* to aid in advancing the policy, such as: one pagers, fact sheets, talking points, polling, messaging memos, videos, charts, and model legislation.
12. **Policy Map & Measurement:** On the DPN platform website, we track progress on the status of each platform policy in each state, to educate leaders on where their state stands relative to other states, as well as direct leaders to useful precedents. In doing so, we also propose new forms of measurement for determining how to assess policy success.
13. **Amplification:** The end step of the process is to amplify the policy— to our own Movement thinker and statehouse network, but also through other methods, such as writing op-eds, connecting the policy to journalists, and directly contacting Movement leaders who are not yet in our network.

When you plug into DPN as a packager, you join a specific policy project and are guided through these steps. Along the way, you and your work are supported, encouraged, and amplified by the whole DPN community. As you walk through this process of gathering, packaging, organizing, and championing your policy, you not only shepherd your policy from a diffuse idea into a full-fledged policy kit — you also grow as an advocate, developing your own policy expertise and confidence.

## 6.3 Organized framework for deepening democracy

DPN policies are integrated into an **organized framework** that spans various Movement policy areas:

Vision:	Deep Democracy								
Pillars:	Strong People We should strengthen our citizens and communities so we can all fully participate in the American project.			Open Economy We should open up our government and economy to the participation of more people in more ways.			One Nation We should break down the historic barriers that prevent our democratic promise from including every American.		
Workshops:	Strong Bodies	Strong Minds	Strong Communities	Open Economy	Open Government	Open Commons	Deep Reconstruction	Deep Integration	Deep Mythology
Examples of Policy Areas:	- Income Security - Time Security - Food Security - Mental Health Security - Public Pharma - Social Housing	- Ad-Free Childhood - Education for Citizenship - Summer Camp for All - Student Power - Teacher Power - Teenage Voting - School Integration	- Community Land Trusts - Tenant Unions - Community Pace-Building - Civilian Oversight Boards - Fan-Owned Sports Teams - Social Infrastructure - Municipal Energy - Municipal Internet	- Public Banks - Platform Cooperatives - Worker Ownership - Labor Power - Anti-Monopoly Community Accelerators - Neighborhood Investment - Open Research	- Universal Voting - Democracy Vouchers - Citizen Advisory Boards - Legislature Transparency - Civil Lawyers for All - Journalism Vouchers - Sovereign Wealth Funds - Just Taxation	- Clean Air - Clean Water - Lead Abatement - State Blue New Deal - State Green New Deal - Regional Food Systems - Energy Democracy	- Government Reconstruction - Health Reconstruction - Economic Reconstruction - Educational Reconstruction - Indigenous Empowerment & Sovereignty - Inclusive Hiring - Inclusive Campaigns	- Mass Decarceration - Prison Citizenship - Municipal Citizenship - Restorative Justice - Migrant Empowerment & Integration - Disability Empowerment & Integration	- State Halls of Fame - State Holidays - Trust for Local Culture - Trust for Inclusive History - Reparations

- At the top is *a vision* for *deepening democracy* — a vision of a nation where freedom is seen as participation in power; where the creative capacity of ordinary citizens is respected; and where the aim of policy is to extend more power to more people in more ways.
- Below that vision are our *three pillars* of a deeper democracy:
  1. **Strong People:** strengthening citizens and communities so they can fully participate in the American project
  2. **Open Country:** opening up government and economic power to more people in more ways
  3. **One Nation:** breaking down the barriers of injustice that prevent our democratic promise from including every American
- Under each pillar are *policy workshops* that gather and package the various *policies* that concretely advance the vision:
  - Under **Strong People:**
    - **1. The Strong Bodies Workshop:** *To strengthen people to participate in our democracy, we must ensure that bodily needs — health, housing, food, safety, childcare, eldercare, leisure — are met.*
    - **2. The Strong Minds Workshop:** *To strengthen people to participate in our democracy, we must equip people’s creative potential by fostering opportunities for life-long learning.*
    - **3. The Strong Communities Workshop:** *To strengthen people to participate in our democracy, we must turn our cities and neighborhoods into inclusive venues for coming together around shared projects.*
  - Under **Open Country:**

- **4. The Open Government Workshop:** *To open up our country to the participation of the many, we must open up our government — our legislatures, elections, agencies, courts — to more people in more ways.*
- **5. The Open Economy Workshop:** *To open up our country to the participation of the many, we must open up our economy to more people in more ways by making it easier to start a business, form a union, and come together through a cooperative.*
- **6. The Open Commons Workshop:** *To open up our country to the participation of the many, we must protect our shared commons by decarbonizing our economy and conserving our environment.*
- Under **One Nation:**
  - **7. The Deep Reconstruction Workshop:** *To break down the barriers that prevent our democracy from including everyone, we must transform our structures of power that have historically excluded women and people of color from full participation.*
  - **8. The Deep Integration Workshop:** *To break down the barriers that prevent our democracy from including everyone, we must deconstruct the stigmas that segregate and isolate certain segments of our nation.*
  - **9. The Deep Mythology Workshop:** *To break down the barriers that prevent our democracy from including everyone, we must write our national story — our history, art, culture — in a way that lifts up the stories of everyone.*
- And then under each policy workshop are the various **policies** that fall under those workshops.

## 6.4 Building the platform together

The platform is a participatory project, co-created piecemeal by the Movement. Three groups help make this happen:

1. **Movement packagers:** Policy kits are compiled by Movement packagers, who are recruited, coordinated and supported by a skeleton staff. In many ways, we work like a magazine — people ask to “write” for us and we then regulate and support them through an editorial process that shepherds them from idea to ‘publication.’ Though most staff and packagers are not professional Movement thinkers or leaders yet, we hope our community cultivates Movement packagers into Movement thinkers and leaders.
2. **Movement thinkers:** To support this process, we recruit established Movement thinkers to our network to serve as a network of advisors on the Platform. Packagers work with Movement thinkers to package their policy ideas for the Platform.

3. **Movement statehouse leaders:** Statehouse leaders are not just passive recipients of the platform policies — there is a circulation process between the Platform and the state leader network advancing Movement policies. Therefore, in addition to amplifying Platform policies to statehouse leaders, core team members also work with statehouse leaders to package their policy ideas and efforts for the Platform.

We use a variety of tools and processes to manage policy kit building:

- **All Movement packagers actively working on DPN policy kits are added to:**
  - Our *Slack*
  - Our *Email listserv*
  - Our *Google Calendar*
  - Our *Notion workspace*
  - Our *Master Policy Kit Tracker* on our Notion workspace
- **Network-wide communication tools**
  - Monthly Zoom call: All packagers are invited to a *monthly all-network Zoom call* (listed on Google Calendar) to check in on progress and cross-pollinate ideas and feedback.
  - Slack: All packagers are invited to communicate informally on our Slack, which has channels for each active policy kit project.
  - Email listserv: All packagers are invited to email the network listserv with formal questions.
- **Onboarding process**
  - Onboarding documents: All new packagers read our onboarding documents — most importantly, (1) this white paper and (2) our policy kit-building explainer/template — before beginning with us. Onboarding documents are hosted on our *Notion workspace*.
  - Routine project calls: When Movement packagers start working on a policy kit, we agree on and schedule rough *deadlines* for creating each module, as well as the pace of *routine project calls* to check in on progress.
  - Master spreadsheet: We add new packagers to the *Master Policy Kit Spreadsheet* on our *Notion workspace*, which we use to track policy kit assignments and progress.
- **Policy kit preparation notes:**
  - Internal policy kit notes: Internal notes to each policy kit (both active and future kits) are kept on policy kit pages in our *Notion workspace*, so that everyone can easily see and use each other's findings.
  - Policy kit module drafts: In-depth policy kit module drafts are made in *Google Docs*, held in a *Google drive folder tree*, which is linked to on each *Notion workspace* and in the *Master Policy Kit Spreadsheet*.
- **Resource databases:**

- We will build up various helpful *resource databases* on our *Notion workspace*, including:
  - List of Movement lawmakers
  - List of Movement thinkers
  - List of press contacts

## 7. The DPN community

DPN is not just a policy platform — it is also a community of Movement thinkers, leaders and packagers built around engagement with the Platform.

### 7.1 The DPN idea network

The first task in building this community is to organize the next generation of political thinkers into **a network of Movement policy thinkers**. We are targeting thinkers who are both: (1) ideologically aligned with the Movement’s project of deepening democracy; and (2) interested in cultivating and amplifying structurally ambitious policies that push the envelope. We aim for this network to consist of both scholarly experts and policy-minded grassroots advocates.

The DPN idea network does *not* primarily serve as a think tank that generates original ideas. Rather it serves as DPN’s *connection* to the scattered Movement policyverse, helping DPN *gather*, *package* and *organize* policies from think tanks, state houses, magazines and journals from across the country. If DPN is a clearinghouse that connects bold policy to bold lawmakers, its idea network is our eyes and ears on the ground in the Movement policy world, scouting out bold new ideas.

### 7.2 The DPN statehouse network

DPN is a two-sided network: state policy on one side and state leaders on the other. Therefore, our second task is to organize the next generation of political leaders into **a network of Movement state leaders**. The network will be centered on current and aspiring state lawmakers who are, similarly to the DPN Cabinet, both: (1) ideologically aligned with the Movement’s project of deepening democracy; and (2) interested in championing structurally ambitious policies that push the envelope. Though centered on state lawmakers, the network is also open to state lawmakers’ staffers and allies.

Whereas other state legislator networks — like the State Innovation Exchange, the Public Leadership Institute and The National Conference of State Legislatures — cater to all lawmakers, we aim to serve a specific type of legislator: the Movement legislator who ran for office to help advance a bold agenda for deepening democracy. Every state legislature has a number of policy-minded, democratically-spirited members — and as the new political generation rises, this group of Movement lawmakers is set to grow in every state house across the country.

We aim to organize this network like a union, in the sense that: (1) we want the lawmakers we recruit to think of themselves as *members* — not just clients — of the network; (2) we aim for

members to see their fellow member lawmakers as partners in advancing a shared agenda; (3) we encourage members to take ownership over the network, participating in its development and recruitment efforts; and (4) we seek to raise each member’s consciousness about the important role they play in The Movement for American Democracy.

In reporting on CASLP in 1975, *The Nation* ran a piece with the headline “The Office-Holding Activists,” that described how CASLP was organizing “programmatic” politicians. There are hundreds of such activist-politicians across the country today, seeking office not only to advance themselves but also to advance a programmatic vision for deepening American democracy. These leaders do not just want to be reliable votes for consensus party priorities — they also want to push the envelope, introducing bold new ideas into the discourse and, eventually, into the mainstream of the party.

Unfortunately, though, when they are acting alone, their policy program often has to be pushed to the back-burner: in campaign season, they have to focus on fundraising and door-knocking; and during the legislative session, they are severely understaffed. However, if we can organize them and connect them to a supportive interstate infrastructure, they can better advance their shared vision while still attending to their ordinary political duties.

### **7.3 The DPN packager network**

The connective tissue between the idea and statehouse network is our network of packagers who work to develop and champion the DPN platform by gathering, packaging, organizing, and championing Movement policies.

When young people are interested in supporting the Democracy Movement, they are often asked to knock doors, donate money, vote, and engage in grassroots organizing. But there are hundreds of thousands of brainy young people who have the comparative advantage of being well-trained in research, analysis, and writing. They are a latent army of would-be Movement experts and issue advocates. They may not yet necessarily have the required skills to *generate* policies — they are not full-time policy experts — but they assuredly have the required skills to gather, package, organize and amplify policies.

Without outlets for meaningful Movement work that fits their skills, this latent army of brainy citizens are too often wasting available political energy scrolling twitter. We want to put their brains to work helping to gather, package, organize, and champion a Movement policy agenda for the states.

### **7.4 A vibrant community for Movement state policy**

DPN aims to be more than just the sum of its three separate networks — we aim to be a vibrant national community, with a strong identity, of which Movement thinkers, Movement leaders, and Movement packagers are excited, relieved and proud to be a part. Most of DPN’s community-building will be achieved through the direct work of building and advancing policy kits for DPN’s interstate policy platform. However, we also plan to implement ancillary projects to further cultivate the DPN community:

1. **The DPN Blog:** A written venue to cheerlead, report on, discuss, and editorialize about policies and leaders DPN is tracking.
2. **The DPN Podcast:** An audio venue to cheerlead, report on, discuss, and editorialize about policies and leaders DPN is tracking.
3. **DPN Social Media Channels:** Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Newsletter and Youtube feeds to cheerlead and report on Movement ideas and their advancement at the state level.
4. **DPN Digital Convenings:** Nimble, issue-based convenings — conducted over recorded Zoom video conferences with packagers, thinkers and leaders — to help in the development, coordination, and advancement of policy projects.
5. **DPN In-person Convenings:** Larger, in-person convenings to cultivate the shared vision, identity, and community of Movement packagers, thinkers, and leaders working with us to deepen democracy in the states.

If these projects are successful, we will not only successfully develop an interstate policy agenda, but also cultivate a national community of Movement thinkers, Movement leaders, and Movement packagers working to deepen democracy across the country.

## 7.5 The DPN flywheel

Success comes by building a self-reinforcing flywheel between DPN’s community and DPN’s useful, inspiring policy packages. We start by creating a base layer of policy content that politicians, journalists and the public at large find useful. The more our audience grows — and, specifically, the more our audience of insurgent, influential statehouse leaders grows — the easier it will be to attract people to create more useful policy content for us. And the more useful policy content we create, the more we can attract an insurgent, influential audience. That’s the self-reinforcing flywheel.

This is similar to Harvard’s Journalist’s Resource program, which curates and summarizes scholarship relevant to its audience of journalists. Here’s how they describe themselves:

*“Given the deluge of research output every day, we aim to be a useful curator. Our searchable database contains top academic and governmental research that we have selected and synthesized. We strive to translate complex statistics into clear data points and reformulate the terminology of academic specialists into more accessible language, without sacrificing rigor or nuance... we try to provide at least a point of entry and highlight key points — and we encourage media members to contact the authors of the research directly.”*

We too want to be a useful curator, making policy for deepening democracy accessible to an audience of influential leaders.

## 8. Two-year roadmap

We are aiming to achieve the following three objectives:

## 8.1 Objective 1: Launch the DPN platform website

The core of DPN is our *online, interstate platform* of state-level policies for deepening democracy. Therefore, our first task is to launch our initial website, which will be centered on hosting our interstate platform. This process will include:

- Working with a designer to make a brand book for our website and materials
- Launching an initial website to display our interstate platform, as well as information on our vision and network.
- Writing an initial “vision statement” that explains the DPN vision, mission and strategy to the public
- Launching social media accounts with a social media protocol and routine.

We aim to launch the DPN website by Spring 2020.

## 8.2 Objective 2: Launch the policy kit-building process

As we prepare to launch the online home for the platform, we will begin the work of *gathering*, *packaging*, and *organizing* the DPN platform through our policy kit process.

To demonstrate the breadth of our agenda, our core team will work to develop various policy **starter packs** — curated packets of various articles, reports, and news stories that together can provide an introduction to a policy..

At the same time, to begin demonstrating the depth of our platform kit process, we will also select 3-5 policies for which we will create full platform kits.

By our Spring 2020 launch, we hope to have a vibrant and well-functioning policy kit-building process that smoothly and continuously (1) produces policy kits for the platform internally; and (2) recruits partner thinkers and organizations to incorporate their policies into the platform.

## 8.3 Objective 3: Build out the Movement thinker & state leader networks

As we work to launch the platform, we also are working to launch the community surrounding the platform — the networks of Movement thinkers and state leaders. We have begun this process already by reaching out to 30 state-level Movement leaders and 30 Movement thinkers to hear what they would want out of a state policy infrastructure like this.

We aim to invite DPN thinkers and leaders to attend an inaugural DPN Summit in late 2020. The DPN Summit will be a formal opportunity for state-level Movement thinkers and leaders to connect and discuss the co-creation of a broad, structurally ambitious policy platform for state lawmakers across the country.

## 8.4 Objective 4: Build toward the 2021 session

If our model is successful, we aim to continue pushing at our two areas of work:

1. **Organizing the Platform:** broadening and deepening policy kits for the DPN platform, with the help of Movement packagers, thinkers, and statehouse leaders.
2. **Organizing the Community:** recruiting more state-level Movement thinkers, leaders, and packagers, while deepening their engagement with the platform and the DPN community.

Our first major waypoint of this effort will be the 2021 legislative session. Throughout the summer and fall of 2020, we will spend part of our effort targeting specific issues and state leaders in the hopes of advancing promising policies in the 2021 state legislative sessions.

## 8.5 Funding Strategies

By focusing on this narrow mission — organizing and connecting Movement thinkers and Movement state lawmakers through building an open, interstate agenda with a community surrounding it — we can operate with a **core skeleton team with a smaller budget** than previous, broad-based state policy networks.

And by focusing on gathering and organizing a wide-ranging policy platform, we can build our funding base **modularly** — raising money for each individual policy kit from funders interested in advancing that specific policy area. Similar to a media organization, our success will be determined by if we can convert a portion of that piecemeal, project-based support into providing robust back-end infrastructure — design, format, editing, website, distribution, audience engagement — that supports every front-end policy project.

We also will benefit — both in saving money and finding new streams of revenue — from fitting into The Democracy Movement’s wider infrastructure. One can easily imagine deep partnerships with organizations that have Movement resources — like national policy organizations and state electoral campaign organizations — but lack state policy support.

## 9. The DPN spirit

Our theory of change involves organizing and motivating thousands of people to build an interstate policy infrastructure that can counter and overcome the well-resourced, well-staffed forces arrayed against deepening democracy. To generate the necessary energy to do so, we need to be *deep, simple, and disciplined* in who we are and what we do. An overly-complex, shallow, and scattered operation is not going to cut it — and if we are everything to everyone, we will be nothing to no one. DPN is designed to be pluralistic — it involves various people organizing various ideas in various states

— but in our variety, we are committed to a shared spirit that guides how we interact with each other in this project, as well as how we, as a project, interact with the world.

Here are seven ideas that inform the DPN spirit:

### **1. DPN has a strong vision: deepening democracy.**

We believe that in America, there is a political fight between the forces of domination and the forces of democracy. The forces of domination aim to: weaken citizens and communities so they can't participate; close off government and economic power to the many; and divide our nation. We, on the other hand, aim: to strengthen citizens and communities to participate; open up our country's government and economic power to the many; and break down the barriers of injustice that prevent our democratic promise from reaching every American. The forces of domination want us to believe that most people are impotent, that a select few are the only competent managers of power, that the way most Americans should relate to the world is as consumers and employees, and that freedom is just liberty from outside intrusion. We believe the opposite: that the productive capacity of ordinary Americans should be respected, that everyone should have a say in directing the forces that govern their lives, that all Americans should be invited to co-create our shared world as producers and cooperators, and that freedom is, as Martin Luther King liked to say, participation in power.

### **2. DPN is a home for radical reformers.**

We reject both shallow reform on the one hand and pacifying cynicism on the other. In their place we substitute radical reform — the pairing of visionary *ideals* and adjacent possible *ideas*. We believe political change has been achieved when radical reformers have advanced revolutionary dreams with constructive reform efforts; when they used lofty visions to orient concrete action.

That is why our network's symbol is “**the star & pillar.**”

The star represents our vision for a deeper democracy — this is the North Star that orients our work. It is our commitment to *dreaming*, which, as Toni Morrison said, is the necessary “preamble to problem-solving” — the “pointed imagining” that should “precede our decision-making, our cause-mongering, our action.”

The pillar represents our concrete policies — the policies that together form the Democracy Movement's constructive program for deepening American democracy. It is our commitment to *building* — to taking responsibility for the difficult work of figuring out how ideas could become reality.

*We must dream and we must build* — and DPN exists to help serve that dual mandate.

And while we do, we aim to be a home for dreamer-builders: democratically-spirited, policy-minded radical reformers. We want to connect them with a meaningful channel for their constructive political energy — with a community and a project that makes better use of their imaginative and analytical skills than, for example, endlessly scrolling political twitter.



### **3. DPN's craft is raising up positive alternatives.**

There's an old protest chant — someone shouts, “*Show me what democracy looks like*” and everyone responds, “*This is what democracy looks like.*” In a way, this is what DPN's mission is all about — to show America, concretely, what a deeper democracy could look like.

Deepening democracy isn't just one, giant project — it's the raising up of a thousand positive alternatives. In 2020s America, a positive alternative is worth 1,000 denunciations. Many Americans have come around to seeing that various systems are dysfunctional — but most remain civically inert because they believe “there is no alternative.” However, when negative critiques have been paired with positive alternatives — such as has been the case in recent years with Medicare for All and The Green New Deal — people begin to hope and act. Neither element alone generates sufficient energy, but “critique and alternative” together work like vinegar and baking soda.

The craft we hone at DPN is raising up positive alternatives that deepen democracy. It's the work of gathering, packaging, organizing, and amplifying policy ideas — shepherding them from fringes to the center of the national conversation.

And we take our craftsmanship seriously. It's why we call the groupings into which our policies are organized “workshops.” It's why we consider teaching new packagers about the craft of developing policy kits to be a task of equal importance to the main task of developing policy kits. It's why, as we develop each policy kit, we are also constantly on the lookout for better methods for gathering, packaging, organizing and amplifying policy alternatives. And it's why we aim to earn a reputation of impeccable credibility among Movement lawmakers.

### **4. DPN serves a Movement bigger than itself: The Movement for American Democracy.**

DPN is not the star of the show — it serves a larger Movement for American Democracy. We help Movement lawmakers champion Movement policies; we help Movement thinkers amplify their ideas; and we help Movement packagers find and perform meaningful work advancing the Movement. And in doing so, we hope to help everyone — thinkers, leaders, packagers — deepen their relationship with the Movement. The throughline in all our work: *helping*. That's what we're about — not ego, but humility; not centering us, but centering the ideas; not commanding, but servant organizing.

Furthermore, we see this Movement of which we are a part as a *long-term* movement — and we do our best to take the long view in our work. First, we learn from and take pride in the rich history of the radical democratic tradition in America — a tradition that has been present in America since the beginning. Second, we see our work as foundation-building for the whole of the 21st century — and we do not let the length of time it's going to take to get to any given destination dissuade us from starting any journey.

Movements are not subcultures — their goal is to eventually have a majority of people see themselves *in* the Movement. In that spirit, DPN is committed to speaking and acting in a way that invites people *into* the Democracy Movement — in a way that is open to surprising collaborators and creative coalitions. In particular, DPN is committed using common, accessible language — to, as Tom Hayden once said, write in a way that “speaks American.”

**5. DPN trades top-down bureaucracy for empowered networks.**

We believe in democracy — and in structuring DPN, we practice what we preach, organizing our work in a way that trusts, believes in and empowers people. Our work is based in three networks — a Movement thinker network, a Movement lawmaker network, and a Movement packager network. They do the work of developing, gathering, packaging, organizing, amplifying, and championing Movement policies — and we, as the network organizers, serve them as a backend infrastructure that organizes, synchronizes, coordinates, connects, convenes, nudges, motivates, guides, publishes, credits and cheerleads. We see ourselves as organizers: thinkers, leaders, and packagers do not do things *for* DPN; they *are* DPN. Our message to everyone involved is the same one as the old labor organizing message: ‘there is no political salvation beyond our own power.’

**6. DPN has a job to do: organizing an interstate agenda.**

We are organized around a shared goal — building and advancing an interstate agenda that deepens democracy. We do our best to keep things about the work — to focus on this big task at hand. When people join with us, they join with us to advance this work. When we have disagreements, we resolve them by thinking about what best path forward serves this work. We celebrate people who do the work. We take pride in performing work that is relentlessly useful to The Movement for American Democracy.

**7. DPN’s true goal, however, is fellowship.**

Our stated goal is to organize an interstate agenda. But in the end, our deepest legacy will be the fellowship we cultivate between Movement leaders, thinkers and packagers. The policy kits we gather, package, organize and amplify will soon become irrelevant, but the Movement networks created and empowered by the process of developing and championing them will last much longer. Indeed, we are failing as a project if our daily work does not produce solidarity and joy.