

Crafting a Long-Term Agenda for Change: A Case History of National People's Action



Grassroots Policy Project and
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NATIONAL PEOPLE'S ACTION

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Executive Summary

Since 2008, National People's Action (NPA) has been on a journey to become a more strategic and powerful organizing network as well as a movement leader. We've been developing a collective narrative about what is happening in our country. We've been honing our vision for a new economy and our longer-term goals for transforming our society. Along the way, we've gotten clearer about a lot of things, including the primacy of ideas, the need to build power in new and innovative ways, how addressing racial justice requires ending structural racism, how to work in alliances, and the need for strategic electoral engagement.

NPA has devoted time and resources toward developing a long-term agenda to guide our work by projecting out to where we'd like our country to be 40 years from now. Forty years is a long time. As organizers, we tend to work in the here and now—often in reaction to what is happening around us. Crafting a long-term agenda helps us to connect the here and now with our picture of the new economy and to understand how we can orient our current work toward achieving fundamental change in our political system and economy.

The full case history tells the story of our journey and how, along the way, we've learned some valuable lessons and made shifts in our work. Here is a summary of the key lessons:

- 1. Creating a long-term agenda has radical implications for the present** – how we run campaigns, choose and sequence issues, make landscape and narrative shifts, and build power.
- 2. Dismantling structural racism is integral to breaking the stranglehold that corporate power and concentrated wealth have on our democracy and economy.** Structural racism and corporate power are tools of concentrated wealth, and cannot be addresses separately.
- 3. Engaging thousands of people from our affiliate membership in the process of creating our long-term agenda gives us the momentum we need to move forward.** People want to realize the vision of a new economy and just democracy they created, and this energy and urgency propels our long-term agenda.
- 4. Building a long-term agenda requires a commitment to function over form, recognizing that tactics, alliances, issues, and ideas evolve over time.** There is no linear path toward a long-term agenda, in fact we should embrace a winding path that gives us the freedom to act in the political and economic moment without locking ourselves into structures that don't serve the moment that follows.
- 5. Letting go of certain self-limiting orthodoxies of professional organizing frees us to embrace the project of building people power at the scale needed to win a long-term agenda.** This includes engaging in the battle of ideas, developing a strategic approach to electoral engagement, and working in partnership with our allies to build a movement that is oriented toward the compass of a long-term agenda.

Transforming a Community Organizing Network into a Movement

This is the story of how we developed our long-term agenda and what it means for our work going forward. Our story begins in 2008 when the seeds of our long-term agenda were planted and continues through the phases that led us to last year's launch of our Strategic Inquiry process.

On the road toward crafting a long-term agenda, we moved through four overlapping phases:

1. The Battle of the Big Ideas
2. Shaping Our Narrative
3. Developing Principles for a New Economy
4. Strategic Inquiry

Our first phase began back in 2008, when, despite years of solid organizing and powerful campaign victories, we were struggling to get out ahead of events. The gains we had won--expanding access to affordable housing and investments for low-to-moderate-income communities--had always been contested, but now they were being dismantled at high speed. Alarming, the people and institutions making things worse were getting bigger and more powerful. It was clear that we were not building power on the scale needed to affect the issues we most cared about.

Other organizing networks, faith-based groups, labor unions, environmental groups, and advocates for progressive public policies were asking similar questions. We were all working hard, but things were deteriorating. It was time to re-examine questions about building power: across sectors and within our networks, to have our agenda and our people govern. We began a process of separating the elements of organizing that are key to our future from the orthodoxies and self-imposed limitations of the past.

Enter the Battle of Big Ideas.

Phase 1: The Battle of Big Ideas

On April 12, 2008, over 500 people from community organizations around the country descended on Washington, D.C. for the annual National People's Action (NPA) conference. Organizers and leaders connected to the National Training and Information Center (NTIC) had been coming together the past 35 years under the banner "National People's Action." NPA conferences always featured inspiring stories from the field, rousing speeches, creative workshops and hard-hitting direct actions. These actions, targeting key decision-makers in Washington, were designed to get the target to the negotiating table so we could win agreements that would improve the lives of people across the country.

The network was recovering from some internal setbacks at the time, and our base was already reeling from a growing sub-prime mortgage and securitization crisis. We also were gearing up for the Presidential elections. In his opening remarks, the network's new Executive Director, George Goehl, set the tone for the conference by laying out the key political challenge of the moment: Whether we know it or not, we are in a historic battle of big ideas. Goehl pointed out that conservatives had out-organized us by naming and fighting for their big ideas about how government and society should work. They had pushed forward their beliefs about free market fundamentalism, rugged individualism, limited government, and The United States as a post-racial society. They used these beliefs and ideas in support of an agenda that brought us historic racial disparities, radical deregulation, privatization of public goods, and economic policies that reward greed and corruption at the expense of our families and communities. They used organized ideas, along with organized people and organized money, to shape a hostile political terrain. We needed to take on this fight, Goehl urged. We needed our own big ideas.

NPA leaders attending the conference enthusiastically embraced Goehl's call to action. We were hungry for the chance to grapple with big ideas, and in small groups and large plenaries, that's what we did, breaking down the corporate-conservative ideas and naming alternative ideas based in our deeply-held beliefs about human rights and dignity, community self-determination, government by, of and for the people and people above profits. We'd seen the impact of the corporate-conservative worldview, and we knew that our ideas were better, more hopeful, more inclusive, and more democratic than theirs. We emerged with a stronger sense of the power of ideas.

Taking on "The Battle of Big Ideas" was a turning point. It gave us a way to think bigger, to become more strategic. It allowed us to see a way forward and to realize that our day-to-day campaigns had to fit into a bigger picture. It also opened up possibilities for new ways of working, including forming new alliances and using elections as key battlegrounds for big ideas.

As we made shifts in our work, we integrated our new thinking about advancing big ideas as a form of power and shaping public narratives as a form of strategy into our events and trainings. Beginning in 2008, we built a strategic partnership with the Grassroots Policy Project (GPP), a partnership that has been integral to our network's progression toward crafting a long-term agenda. As we worked with allies on events like the Showdowns --- multi-day collaborative actions that brought the fight for financial reform the doorsteps of banks that caused and benefited from the financial crisis --- questions about leadership and movement-building became sharper. As we revised our thinking about electoral power, we began exploring new electoral engagement strategies. As large-scale eruptions occurred--on the right (Tea Party) and on the left (Occupy Wall Street)--we sharpened our analysis

and refined our strategy further.

Focusing on big ideas allowed us to see our way through and beyond the vital defensive work of stemming the tide of foreclosures and the immediate effects of predatory lending. Because of our decades of work in these areas, we knew something was terribly wrong in the housing and financial sectors. After the repeal of Glass-Steagall in 1999, NPA and our allies sounded the alarm, but the regulators and Congress were not listening because the bank and investors were making so much money that they were covering up for structural problems in the U.S. economy, especially in the financial sector.

We also could see where the right's narrative was going: blaming poor people of color, homeowners, and government programs for the consequences of Wall Street's reckless behavior and greed. What we couldn't quite imagine in the Spring of 2008 was that we were headed toward a near-collapse of the entire global financial sector, followed by massive, no-strings-attached bailouts. We could not have predicted the degree to which the U.S. Treasury Department and Federal Reserve would collude to save the banks that caused the financial crisis at the expense of everyone else. As a result, the biggest banks on Wall Street were positioned to use the bailout and the assistance of the Federal Reserve and U.S. Treasury to grow their power exponentially. That such a thing could happen is a testament to the power of corporate-conservative ideas--the public seemed to agree that there was no alternative.

Viewing the situation from a long-term perspective, we knew we wanted to move beyond fighting for immediate relief for the communities that were devastated by the financial crisis. We wanted to get out ahead of the crisis, with new ideas and a strategy for restructuring our economy and society. The "Battle of Big Ideas" gave us a sense that we could move beyond merely playing defense.

Our 2008 National Leadership Conference took place two days after the election. We were buoyed by the electoral results, especially the election of the first African American President. Because of the financial crisis, people were asking fundamental questions about our economy. People were angry about the Wall Street bailout. We realized that we could direct that anger toward popular demands to rein in Wall Street, break up the big banks, and address a host of social needs --- jobs, healthcare, infrastructure, the environment, and more. We refined our beliefs and big ideas and began to think about a long-term agenda to bring our big ideas to the fore, linking our campaign areas together: housing, banking, workers rights, immigrants' rights, health, and education. Here, and every step along the way to our long-term agenda, we engaged the grassroots members of our affiliates to develop our ideas.

It was during these 2010 discussions that we also began to focus on the role of race. Digging into our beliefs and big ideas compelled us to name, and bring into all aspects of our work, the effects of structural racism and persistent race-based inequities in our society. Race plays a central role in reinforcing many of the economic and political conditions affecting our communities including the persistence of discrimination in housing and homeownership, the disproportionate impact of subprime and predatory lending in communities of color, the difficulties of rebuilding inner-city and inner-ring suburban communities, and our society's retreat from addressing poverty. While NPA and NTIC have addressed racialized impacts on a host of issues since the early 1970s, this deeper analysis of structural racism is changing how we choose issues, run and sequence campaigns, build organizations and

power, train grassroots leaders and organizers, and evaluate our work.

Our internal work on naming our big ideas and beliefs also helped us figure out how to respond to the financial crisis and to the historic elections. Like most of our counterparts in community organizing, labor, faith-based, environmental and other movements, we were not sure what to do about the unprecedented bailouts that had started in the fall of 2008. We stepped back, did more thinking and analysis, talked with potential allies, consulted with thought leaders, and tried out a number of things.

If we were going to have a response that was anywhere near adequate to the challenges posed by the financial crisis, we needed a more coordinated approach to alliances. We needed an inside/outside strategy: outside on the street and inside with Washington advocates working legislators and the executive branch. NPA's approach to working on the inside while bringing grassroots pressure to bear from the outside has been honed over several decades. A great example of how effective this inside/outside approach can be is the way we've brought grassroots leaders and organizers together with key decision-makers like the Federal Reserve Board Chairman. When decision-makers don't accept our meeting requests or take us seriously, we put the pressure on through direct action. Our relationship with Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke started out the hard way, but once he agreed to meet in 2008, we held three meetings with him that led to a stronger relationship between the Federal Reserve Banks across the country and our affiliates.

Beliefs

Our beliefs represent what we feel to be right and true about how people and the earth should be treated. They are:

- Every person has innate dignity, beauty, and worth, and thus is entitled to basic human rights;
- All people, regardless of race, class, gender, and national origin must be ensured a high quality of life;
- Society should be organized on the basis of mutual responsibility, cooperation, and community self-determination achieved through political and economic democracy.

Big Ideas

Our big ideas reflect how things should be. We use these ideas to describe how the economy and society should be organized so that our beliefs can be realized. They are:

- Take back our power to use the government as our tool to promote the common good, correct the injustices of the past, and redistribute resources equitably and sustainably.
- Democratize the market to put people above profits.
- Enforce fundamental human rights standards that prevent exploitation of people and the environment.
- Take action to ensure racial, gender, economic, and immigrant justice in all social and economic systems.

A Turning Point: The Showdown in Chicago

Throughout the summer of 2009 we held regional meetings with Federal Reserve officials on foreclosure prevention and our proposals for updating the Community Reinvestment Act. These meetings brought out a broad section of people whose concerns went way beyond foreclosure prevention, including members and leaders from allied groups. We sensed an opportunity to tap grassroots anger at the big banks and direct that anger toward support for major regulatory reforms. We also sensed that, absent grassroots pressure, momentum for financial regulatory reforms would falter.

In early September 2009, we saw an opportunity to ratchet up the tension in the campaign for financial reform. The American Bankers Association Convention was coming to Chicago on October 25th -27th. The plan was to take the fight directly to the big banks and force policy-makers and officials to choose sides, through a series of street actions and by crashing the bankers' party. In the process, we could provide a focal point for grassroots frustration over the no-strings-attached bailouts that led to a quick recovery for Wall Street and an ongoing recession for the rest of us. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) quickly signed on and many others followed, including the PICO National Network and Right to the City Alliance. While NPA made the call and provided broad principles, by the time of the Showdown a wide array of groups felt ownership over an action that cut across many sectors: community, labor, and more.

The Showdown represented all kinds of people fighting back against corporate and Wall Street power, demanding accountability from both Wall Street and Washington around the stewardship of the economy, demanding real financial reforms, and talking about ways to democratize the financial sector (starting with breaking up "too big to fail" banks).

After Chicago, an ever-widening circle of leaders organized actions around the country-- in the Midwest, on the West Coast, and in the South. In late April 2010, the AFL-CIO threw its weight behind a Showdown on Wall Street that took the fight directly to the banker's front door. On April 29, over 10,000 took to the streets in lower Manhattan. A few weeks later, just before the Senate vote on financial reforms, our alliance turned up the heat with a Showdown that targeted Wall Street's lobbyists, taking the fight to K Street in Washington, D.C.

While the Showdowns were led by organizers from community, labor, and faith-based groups who brought pressure from the outside, the organizers also worked very effectively with financial reform advocates who implemented an "inside-the-beltway" strategy. The direct actions put the heat on both political parties and criticized the Administration as needed, without turning their grievances into anti-government diatribes. The inside-the-beltway tactics helped line up support from reform-friendly officials and lawmakers, as well as from liberal and progressive allies who were less comfortable participating in direct action.

Working on the Showdowns, we began to reconsider our strategy for building alliances. We made a conscious decision to work hard to share the credit, share the podium, share the leadership. Without using the term, NPA was thinking and acting in terms of movement-building. It was the start of a shift away from the old dictum: "no permanent friends, no permanent enemies." We would start to explore deeper relationships based on shared beliefs and strategic concerns.

The legacy of these mobilizations continues in the form of ongoing relationships and joint work

around campaign efforts such as Make Wall Street Pay, started in early 2011, which aims to increase revenues and repair the damage that Wall Street has done by continuing to put pressure on lawmakers and agencies to implement financial reforms.

The power of our collaborations continued to grow. The Banking on a New Economy Summit, which took place in the midst of the Showdowns, moved the alliance-building to a new level and gave birth to the New Bottom Line. With the help of our close allies at the PICO National Network, Alliance for a Just Society, and Right to the City Alliance, NPA embarked on this national campaign to restructure Wall Street in order to help families and communities build wealth, close the country's growing income inequality gap, and advance a vision for a new economy.

Running joint national conferences, as NPA did with the National Domestic Workers Alliance in 2012 (and will do so again in April 2014) is yet another example of how deeply we've built relationships with allies. Inviting another group into an NPA gathering would have been heresy before 2008.

This is new terrain for us. We are taking risks, and learning as we go. We are fully committed to movement-building. We do so with a sense of humility: We want and need to learn, share, and take risks with our counterparts in other networks and sectors.

Phase 2: Shaping Our Narrative

As the Showdowns were taking place, we continued to strengthen our network. At the leadership level, we engaged in conversations about what we believe in and what we are building power for, not just what we are against. We started shaping our big ideas into an overarching narrative. We also transitioned from calling ourselves the NTIC, which conveyed the more technical aspects of who we were, and took on a new, yet familiar name — the banner under which we had been gathering for over three decades — National People’s Action.

Incorporating our big ideas into our work led us to develop a narrative – something that would have seemed inconceivably “abstract” a few years earlier because it challenged another old organizing orthodoxy about “checking your ideology at the door.” Our approach to developing a narrative wasn’t about abstractions, it was about how people in communities around the country feel and think about what is going on and what they want. We worked with teams of leaders who represented the breadth and depth of our network, with help from our strategic partners at GPP, to clarify and sum-up what we were hearing and learning from our base. Our work on narrative led us to write our story down in early 2010. We refine it periodically as we deepen our collective understanding of what is wrong, how it got this way, and how to fix it.

The narrative contextualizes our work on housing, banking and finance, education, racial justice, immigrant rights, and labor rights. It also reaches back in time and lays claim to the democratic, egalitarian tradition that is part of our nation’s history. From the earliest colonial days, there has been a battle of big ideas, as the ongoing project to build a democratic society has competed with a more plutocratic tradition. The plutocrats have scored many victories over the past 235+ years: constraints in the Constitution, advances in corporate prerogatives throughout the 19th century, gilded ages, bailouts, as well as constraints on what government can do on behalf of those who are marginalized in our capitalist-based political economy. Over the last 40 years, we’ve witnessed a veritable plutocratic boom.

In the democratic tradition, groups have fought to enlarge and extend democratic ideals and experiences to all people--those who were enslaved, Native Americans who had been dispossessed, workers who were organizing under brutal conditions in the factories, mines and mills, various waves of immigrant groups, women, African Americans who were demanding civil rights, urban and rural poor, religious minorities, dissenters of all kinds--while also recognizing the corrosive effects of concentrated wealth and power, whether it be by government or by corporate forces. Our narrative makes it clear that NPA stands in the democratic tradition.

Our work on narrative has also reinforced the need to bring the struggles for racial justice into the heart of our work. Working on racial justice means supporting groups and individuals as they struggle to change laws, policies, practices and ideas that reinforce and perpetuate racial disparities, while applying a racial justice lens to our own work. Whether the campaign is about affordable housing, predatory lending, banking reform, immigrant justice, health care, racial profiling, or criminal justice reform, a racial justice lens sharpens our focus while also deepening our analysis and broadening our sense of what we are aiming for.

Working on narrative is about more than writing a document. The narrative must be incorporated into our practice. It influences our long-term approach to all of our communications, provides the glue that connects all of our campaigns, reminds us that we can use elections as opportunities to

shift worldviews, and locates our struggles within historic movements. Using narrative can help as we provide leadership to ongoing and newly emerging movement formations and alliances.

We do this work with a modest understanding that we don't have it all figured out and that we will need to bring together a broad set of allies to develop and implement a plan to shift dominant narratives on the economy.

Phase 3: Principles for a New Economy

Coming out of the Showdowns, the time was ripe to challenge the underlying assumptions of our economy, to move beyond demanding reforms in banking and housing toward pushing for major economic restructuring. In early 2010, we could see how galvanizing the anti-Wall Street mobilizations were. With more and more people asking hard questions about the economy, we had a rare and precious opportunity to provide new answers. We also were witnessing the rise of extreme right-wing forces that were channeling populist ire at the bailouts into more authoritarian, anti-government, and disturbingly racist forms. This was clear in Tea Party activists' use of racist images and language, as well as red-baiting, in their fight against health care reform. We were in danger of being out-mobilized. This was no time for tinkering. It was time to advance big ideas and lay the groundwork for a series of campaigns that could move us closer to creating a new economy.

Ideas about the kind of economy we want and how we can start to build toward transforming our broken economy grew organically out of our campaigns and mobilizations. The work was close to the ground and informed by big ideas and narrative. At national meetings members started sharing their vision of an economy that works for all of us, an economy that we control, not the 1%.

Forty-three small groups and 700 people participated in sessions on our vision for a new economy. From these conversations, a set of principles emerged. They are:

- Democratic control of capital.
- Racial justice.
- Reducing corporate power; restoring public purpose.
- Renewing democracy.
- Ecological sustainability.

These principles guide our work, including our engagement with allies. Moving these principles into the center of politics is a movement-wide struggle. We cannot do this alone.

Rise of the 99%

We entered 2011 with a good deal of uncertainty about the near-term prospects for reining in corporate power, taking back our government, and building shared prosperity. The mid-term elections were a huge set-back for the progressive momentum that had pushed forward health care and financial reform. These set-backs occasioned soul-searching across progressive sectors.

But then, something incredible happened. It began with news of massive demonstrations in Tunisia. By mid-February, we were buoyed by the spirit of the protesters in Tahrir Square. Next came Madison, WI, where tens of thousands of public sector workers, students, and farmers marched for several weeks and occupied the state capitol. People were fighting back against corporatocracy and austerity on the streets of Madrid, London, and Athens. Closer to home, we and our allies continued to carry out creative actions against big banks. By the Fall, Occupy Wall Street emerged.

Around the world, masses of people were in the streets, fighting for big ideas. The new energy coming out of the parks, the streets, and the camps put forward ideas and proposals for a new, morally-grounded, sustainable economy, curbing corporate power and making government institutions more

accountable. They drew attention to new thinking about economy, government, civil society. People were inspired by democratic and egalitarian alternatives to the agenda imposed on the world by Wall Street and big corporations. There was an intoxicating sense that, yes, another world is possible!

As the Occupy movement demonstrated, it takes big ideas to shake things up. Responses to Occupy validated our three years of work clarifying our big ideas and core beliefs and pulling them together into our narrative.

Many of the questions we had been grappling with took on more urgency. For example, we moved closer to developing an electoral strategy. Our inside-outside strategy builds toward governing power even if it's many years away. This calls for increased focus on building new 501c4 and 527 organizations with significant and independent sources of financing.

In the spring of 2012, NPA and a number of allies launched two related projects -- 99% Power and 99% Spring -- in an unprecedented effort to hold big corporations accountable, 99% Power coordinated actions with more than 12,500 people at 34 shareholder meetings. These actions brought environmental, labor, community, and faith groups together under a common banner to push shareholder resolutions, advance corporate accountability campaigns, and foster cross movement dialogue and relationships.

99% Spring was a related effort to train more than 50,000 people in person and online on the narrative and analysis of the growing populist 99% movement.

This brings us to the 2012 elections. In 2012, the Republican presidential candidates lowered the bar for political discourse by advocating for more tax cuts, for increases in deportations, for measures that would suppress voter turn-out, and for corporate personhood. The party's standard-bearer, Mitt Romney, was caught dismissing 47% of the electorate as "takers." Meanwhile, the Democrats were too cozy with Wall Street and big corporations to fully claim the populist mantle. Our affiliates were on the frontlines, calling out the role of corporate power in the campaigns. It was activists associated with Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement that cornered candidate Romney into blurting out

Goals for 99% Power

1. Publicly define the 1% as large unaccountable corporations and the executives behind them and reveal how they have violated basic democratic principles of fairness and decency. Put this into a coherent story to use in shareholder meetings.
2. Publicly define the bold ideas that define the 99% on revenue, democracy, dignity, and the new economy.
3. Help polarize a "Which Side Are You On?" choice in the public debate and political environment between the 1% and the 99%.
4. Build the coalition of the 99%, deepening alignment, coordination, and racial justice analysis in the progressive movement.
5. Raise tension on unaccountable corporations to encourage them to make immediate changes in their policies, and
6. Transfer the energy from the shareholder season into a movement of the 99% in the election season.

“Corporations are people, my friends” in response to the suggestion that corporations should pay their fair share of taxes to preserve Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Many of our other affiliates were also in the trenches, using the elections to put forward an alternative narrative and our vision for a new economy. In Maine, Maine People’s Alliance helped their allies shift the balance of power in their state legislature. TakeAction MN and their allies won a huge victory against reactionary forces in their state on Election Day as they successfully defeated a voter disenfranchisement ballot initiative. In the midst of this election season, our leaders made the collective decision to invest in building a c4 infrastructure. This was yet another major shift for our network.

Now we had to figure out how to bring all of these shifts in our work together as part of a longer-term strategy for power. We needed a long-term agenda: a set of major structural, game-changing goals.

Phase 4: Strategic Inquiry and our Long-Term Agenda

In June 2012, GPP joined us at the Affiliate Directors retreat for an initial conversation about a long-term agenda. We discussed reforms and pathways for moving toward long-term goals for the new economy. Directors were energized by the discussion and endorsed a plan for leadership sessions with every affiliate on strategic reforms and a long-term agenda for economic and political transformation. These sessions would take place between September 2012 and March 2013, with results to be endorsed at the 2013 annual gathering. We called it the Strategic Inquiry process. We include materials from these sessions as attachments at the end of this report so that readers can get a visual sense of the story we are telling about the long-term agenda of the 1% and our long-term agenda. Curriculum designs for both rounds of the strategic inquiry process are available upon request.

The Strategic Inquiry took on a set of larger questions for the network: How should we think about growing our affiliates, growing our membership, and expanding our network and our relationships so that our work adds up to bigger victories? What are the kinds of structural reforms that NPA wants to be part of? What kind of national organization do we need to become in order to advance our long-term agenda? Where does electoral work fit in all of this?

Round One took place in the Fall of 2012. Affiliates participated in local sessions that engaged over 500 members and leaders in the Strategic Inquiry. In these sessions, members worked through a framework and came up with hundreds of ideas for reforms that could be used to build power and advance toward long term goals.

The process worked backward from the long-term goals we are trying to achieve to get a sense of the pathways along which we can move toward those goals, and from there, the reforms that can be used as stepping stones along the way.

The framework we used was as follows:

- **Name our big goals.** These represent our vision for a more democratic and moral economy and society. We'd already laid the groundwork for this in setting out of principles for a new economy (see the description in Phase 3).
- **Identify structural reforms.** Structural reforms give power to people and take power away from the opposition, whether corporate CEOs, their lobbyists, corporatist and/or racist politicians, and others. Thinking in this way was another breakthrough for us -- we want to take on and win campaigns that not only improve people's lives and build our organizations, but also change the power dynamic for the next set of fights. For example, if we win the right to vote for people returning from prison, we are in a stronger position going into the next fight because we've increased the number of people that can exercise the power of the vote. And we want to build elements of that next fight into the work for ex-felon re-enfranchisement, to make it part of a series of reforms along a strategic pathway.
- **Define strategic pathways.** These are the pathways along which we can sequence our campaigns, coordinate with allies, and accrue people power. As we stepped back from the lists of reforms that came out of the first round of sessions, we saw some pathways emerging. The pathways suggested ways to advance structural reforms that shift economic and political power from corporate elites to communities and workers. We were able to further refine these at national-level meetings such as the Organizers Conference and the National Leadership Conference.

• **Identify stepping-stones.** Campaigns and reforms serve as stepping stones along the pathways, moving us towards our big goals for a new economy. As we move along the path, we need milestones in the shape of reforms that will chip away at the economic and political structures that concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the 1%. The specific stepping stones will shift based on political opportunities – moving us between local, state, and national – different issue priorities, and different points of intervention, whether corporate, regulatory, legal, or legislative. The agenda suggests a set of tools for choosing and sequencing campaigns.

Note that we are using the term “agenda” in a somewhat unconventional way. We don’t mean a laundry list of issues or a platform. We are talking more about a compass or a map that lays out pathways to achieving a new economy and a more democratic and inclusive society.

Details of Round One

We started with our principles for a new economy. This was the basis for defining our long-term goals. We then looked at what the last 40 years have been like. Corporate-conservatives developed a long-term agenda that has guided them over the past 40 years. They have been advancing their agenda in a systematic way. They have sought to win on issues and expand profits, but the heart of their agenda has been about power: more power to run our society and less power for the rest of us. What can we learn from the ways they built their political and economic power?

The most frequently mentioned blueprint for this work has become known as the “Powell Memo,” referring to a memorandum crafted by Lewis F. Powell, dated August 23, 1971. The Powell Memo stressed that corporations had to take power as seriously as they took profits. Getting control of the government, taking control of public functions, and freeing themselves from rules that limit their ability to create larger and less restrained corporations has allowed for the consolidation of power in the marketplace as well as in the political life for corporate conservatives. They pursued their goals along multiple pathways that advanced de-regulation, privatization, and redistribution of wealth through regressive tax policy. Their efforts also included attacks on institutions that had the potential to build people power.

One of the key strategies for advancing this agenda was the explicit and implicit use of race as a means of dividing people, undermining the role of government, and weakening the power of unions, community organizations, and voters of color.

Once this direction was set, they methodically proposed and won structural reforms that advanced one or more of these pathways and shifted power in decision-making in our society.

To drive this point home, we used a picture of the kinds of reforms that different parts of the corporate conservative infrastructure had used as stepping-stones along their pathways.

After looking forward 40 years to envision a new economy and just democracy, and back 40 years to understand how the 1% and the right created an imbalanced economy and rigged our government to work for them, participants got to work on generating a variety of reform ideas during the Round 1 sessions. This gave us the raw materials for defining pathways and reforms that can serve as stepping-stones.

At December’s Organizers Conference, directors and lead organizers reviewed the output from

Round One and brought it together into a more coherent picture. In early Spring of 2013, we were able to refine the picture further during our Leadership Conference in D.C. and during another round of sessions with affiliates.

Components of Round Two

In Round Two affiliates worked with the emerging picture of strategic pathways and structural reforms. We evaluated reform ideas in terms of potential to shift power away from corporations and toward people's organizations. How could we build the power to advance our long-term agenda using campaigns and reforms as stepping stones?

We began to work through one of the strategic pathways. We looked at how we can advance Democratic Control of Government, using stepping stones along the way. [see attached picture of Pathway and stepping stones]. This involved taking affiliates' current issue campaigns and "structuralizing" them. We asked people to imagine that they've won their current issue campaigns, and then challenged them to come up issue campaigns that could act as stepping stones toward structural reform. For many people, this process was liberating.

By the time of the 2013 NPA national gathering, our members were able to see the results of our Strategic Inquiry. We had principles and long-term goals, structural reforms, strategic pathways, and an idea of what it might look like to sequence our reforms as stepping stones.

2013 marked NPA's 40th national conference. We used the occasion to reflect on and carry forward the best of what we've been able to do, while also scrutinizing recent shifts in our work: new strategic alliances, creative tactics, big ideas, and narrative that move us beyond tinkering with a broken economy to pushing forward an agenda for a new, morally-grounded, and community-centered economy.

Participation and enthusiasm has been high throughout the process, which means the level of buy-in has been high. Throughout the network, affiliates are committed to sticking with the process and making adjustments in our work, so that our actual practice becomes more strategic. This is essential; without it, this would just be another set of pictures and words.

From Strategic Inquiry to Strategic Practice

Now we have arrived at the Strategic Practice phase: how this affects the way we work and the way we shape, access, and evaluate what we do. Strategic Practice is about how long-term goals show up in an organization's day-to-day work, or how long-term strategy actually affects what an organization does, so that we are aligning short-term efforts with longer-term transformational goals.

Reorienting our work toward the long-term agenda has radical implications. By naming where we want to end up, we are able to think beyond the next campaign, and have an eye toward a series of changes we need to win to create an economy and democracy that serves our values.

By having a long-term agenda with a focus on structural reforms, we have new things to consider as we decide which campaigns to run. So, when we look at the current political openings and the possible campaigns we could run in those moments, we can ask: Does this move us toward our long-term agenda? Does this campaign include a structural reform that means we fight the next fight on

stronger footing? How does this move our narrative and ideas? How much power do we need to win, and what do we need to do differently to build it?

Our fights are not a series of distinct campaigns, but instead a set of linked efforts within a larger strategy which will ultimately lead to the people on our side having more power and the opposition becoming weaker. We are raising our game in terms of strategic thinking and practice.

Bringing new thinking into daily practice is an ongoing challenge. We sometimes get caught up in the imperatives of a campaign, or a set of actions, before circling back to analysis, reflection, and planning. We are still learning how to navigate the tensions between short-term and long-term, to move forward with the daily work without sidelining the Strategic Inquiry and Practice.

In the next several months, we will be engaging with our allies around shared visions for a new economy and just democracy. We would like to see broad alignment around a long-term agenda. In the fall and winter of 2013, NPA will conduct a third round of Strategic Inquiry sessions with members. We are getting concrete about the next several years and the sequencing of campaigns that will lead us toward structural reform. Winning progressive revenue and fighting against austerity has emerged as the most unifying campaign focus, and our next round of Strategic Inquiry sessions will sharpen this issue and connect it with local and state-based campaigns.

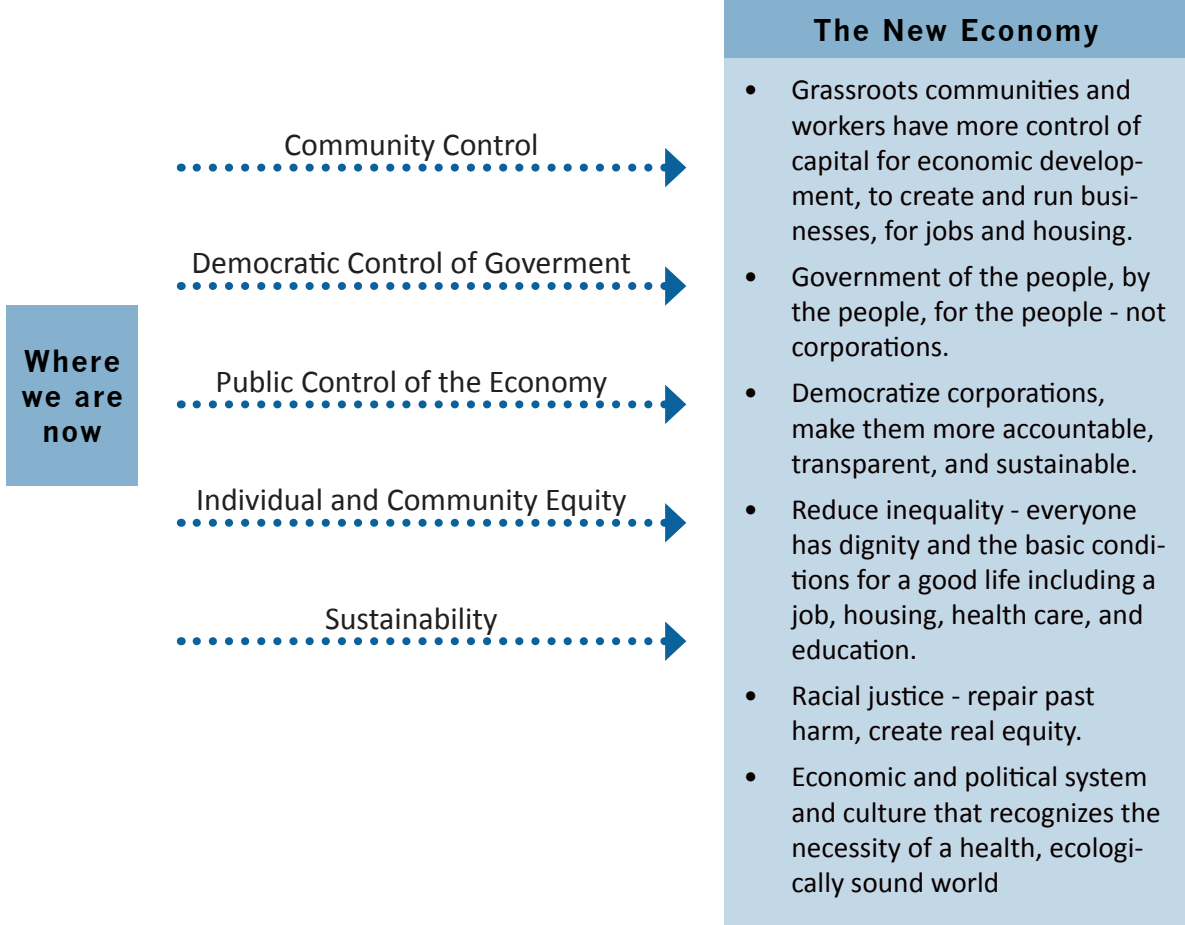
Our Strategic Practice work also extends to NPA's support for affiliate power building and organizing at the national, state, and municipal level. NPA is working with affiliates to create their own agendas and stepping stones. We are supporting groups in making the essential breakthroughs that will build the power: alliances, narrative, campaigns, and electoral engagement.

Summary

This case study explores the ways in which our network is trying to build upon a strong, powerful tradition of grassroots organizing and leadership development, while acting on a commitment to being part of building a more powerful movement that can wrest power away from corporations, dismantle structural racism, and make advances toward a new economy and real, inclusive democracy.

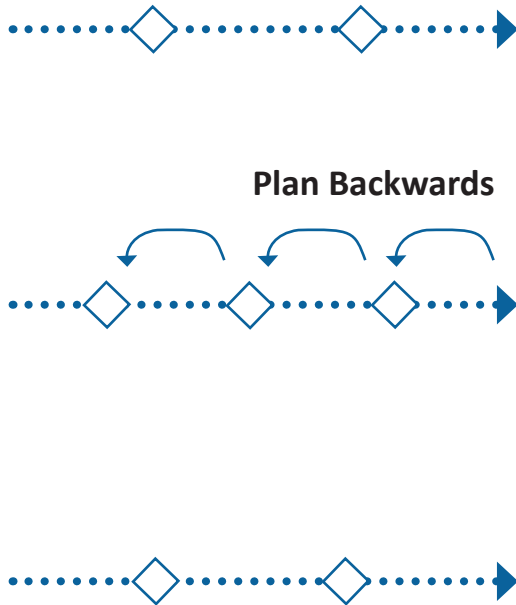
Our work on the battle of big ideas, our use of old and new tactics to confront corporate power, our emerging approaches to civic engagement, and our experiences working with allies in new kinds of formations all fed into, and created an imperative for us to work on a long-term agenda. This is all new ground for us. And we realize we cannot do this alone. We want and need to learn with and from others who are struggling to build people power, to transform our economy and society. We hope our experiences with strategic inquiry and long term agenda can be another point of departure, for discussing, learning and sharing around big picture movement strategy.

NPA's Long-Term Agenda for a New Economy



Finding Our Way to the New Economy

**Where
we are
now**

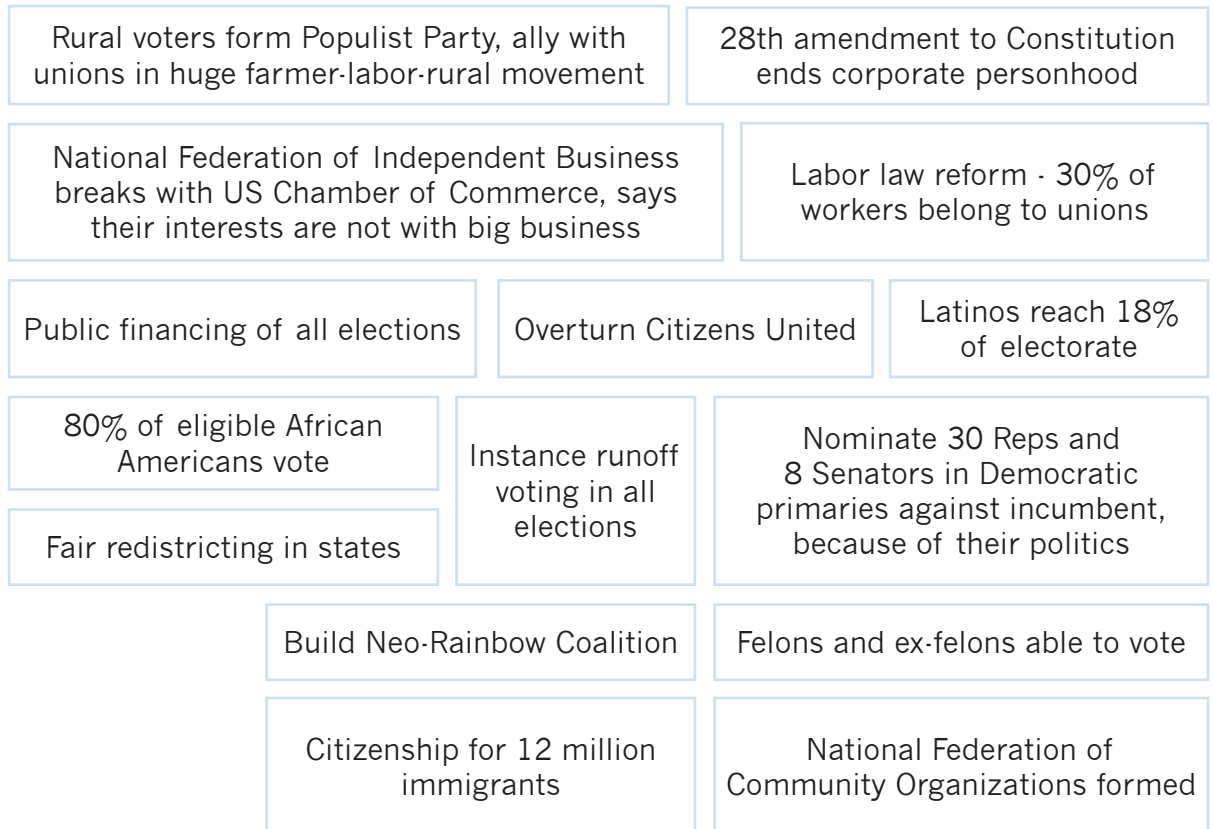


The New Economy

- Grassroots communities and workers have more control of capital for economic development, to create and run businesses, for jobs and housing.
- Government of the people, by the people, for the people - not corporations.
- Democratize corporations, make them more accountable, transparent, and sustainable.
- Reduce inequality - everyone has dignity and the basic conditions for a good life including a job, housing, health care, and education.
- Racial justice - repair past harm, create real equity.
- Economic and political system and culture that recognizes the necessity of a health, ecologically sound world

Democratic Control of Government

These are examples of possible structural reforms



The 1%'s Long-Term Agenda to Get to the 1% Economy

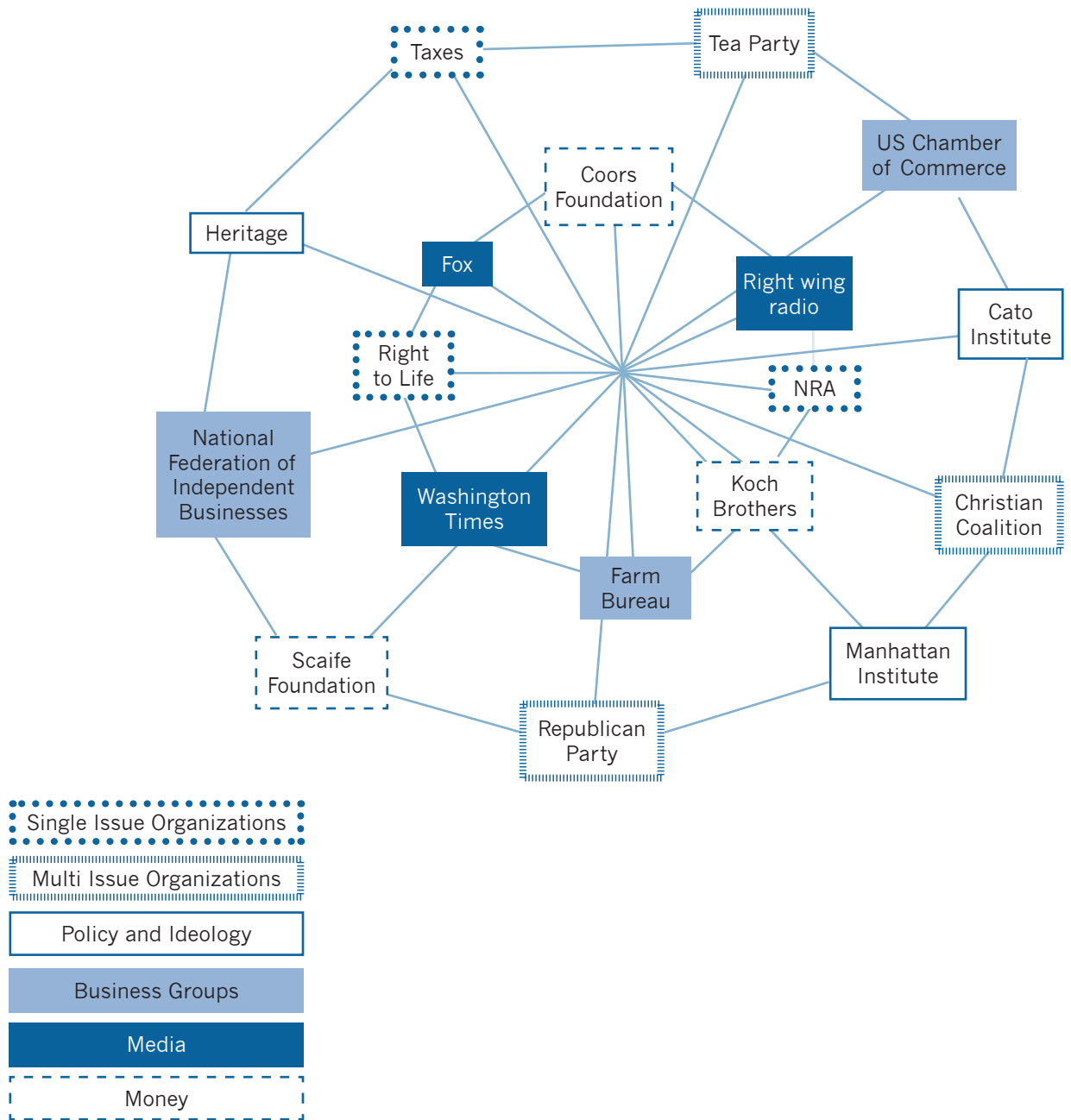


The 1% Economy


- Big corporations and the 1% control government.
- Unions and community groups don't have any power to oppose the big corporations.
- Inequality is good.
- Minimize taxes on the 1%; don't spend tax money on social programs.
- We live in a post-racial society. Get over it.

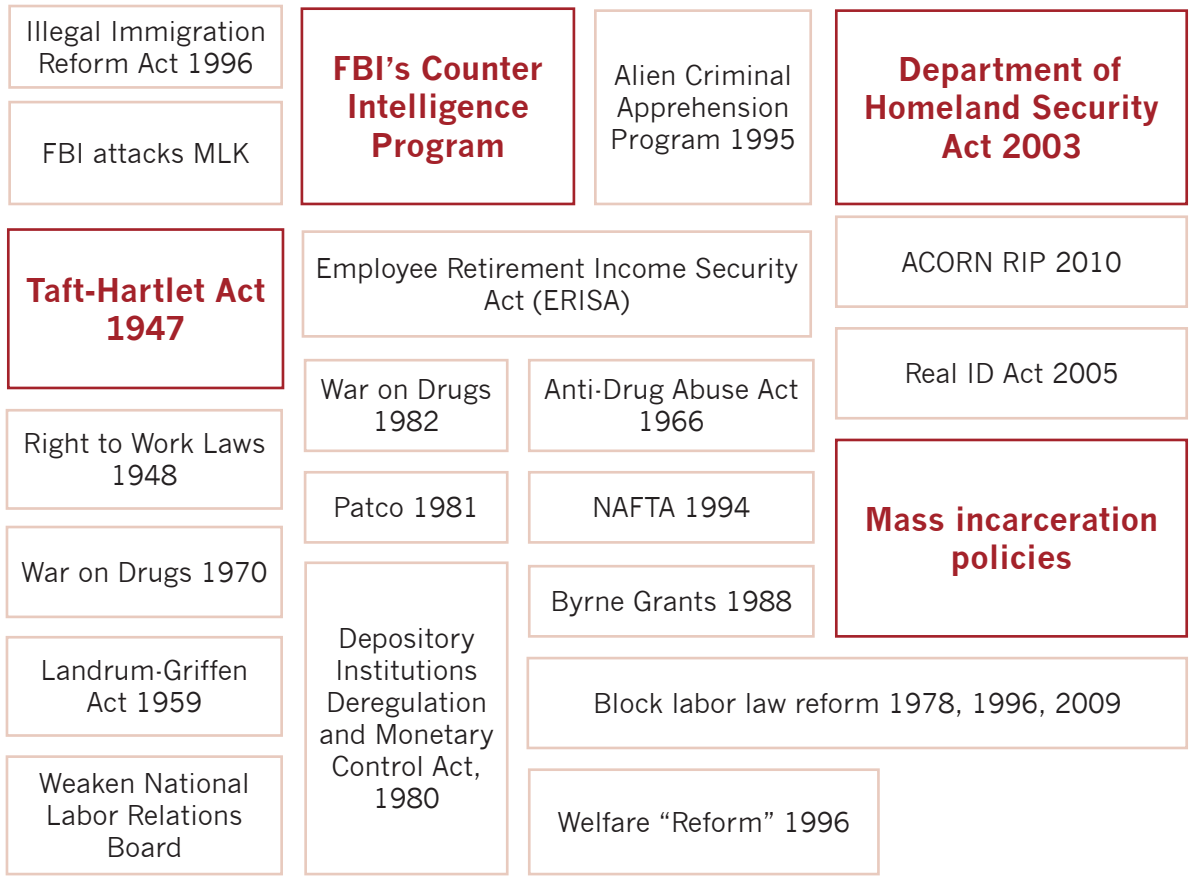
Conservative Infrastructure

The web that holds this infrastructure together are their big ideas: limited government, market fundamentalism, and post-racialism.




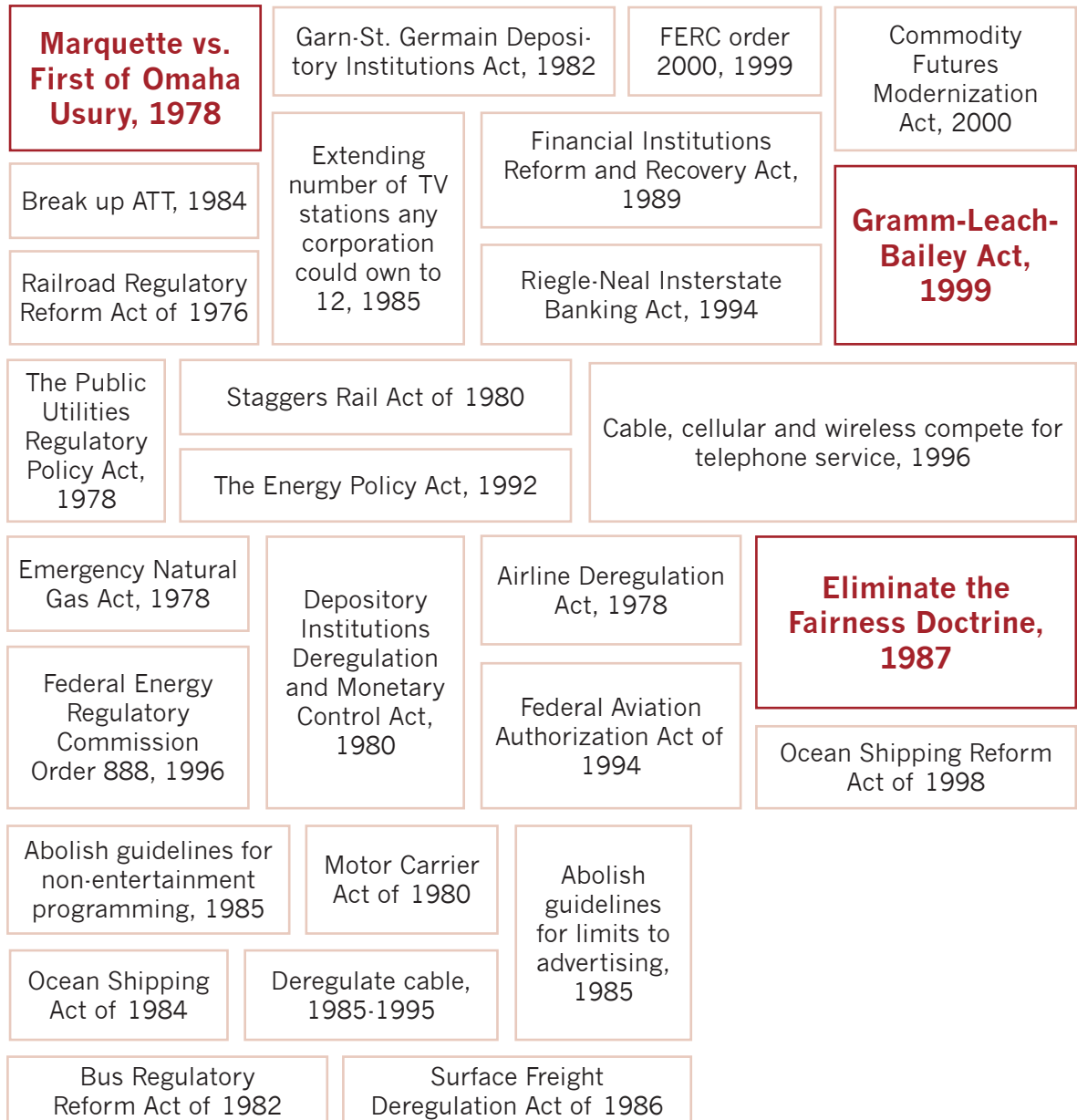
Attacks on Us - A Structural Transformation

To the 1% Economy 

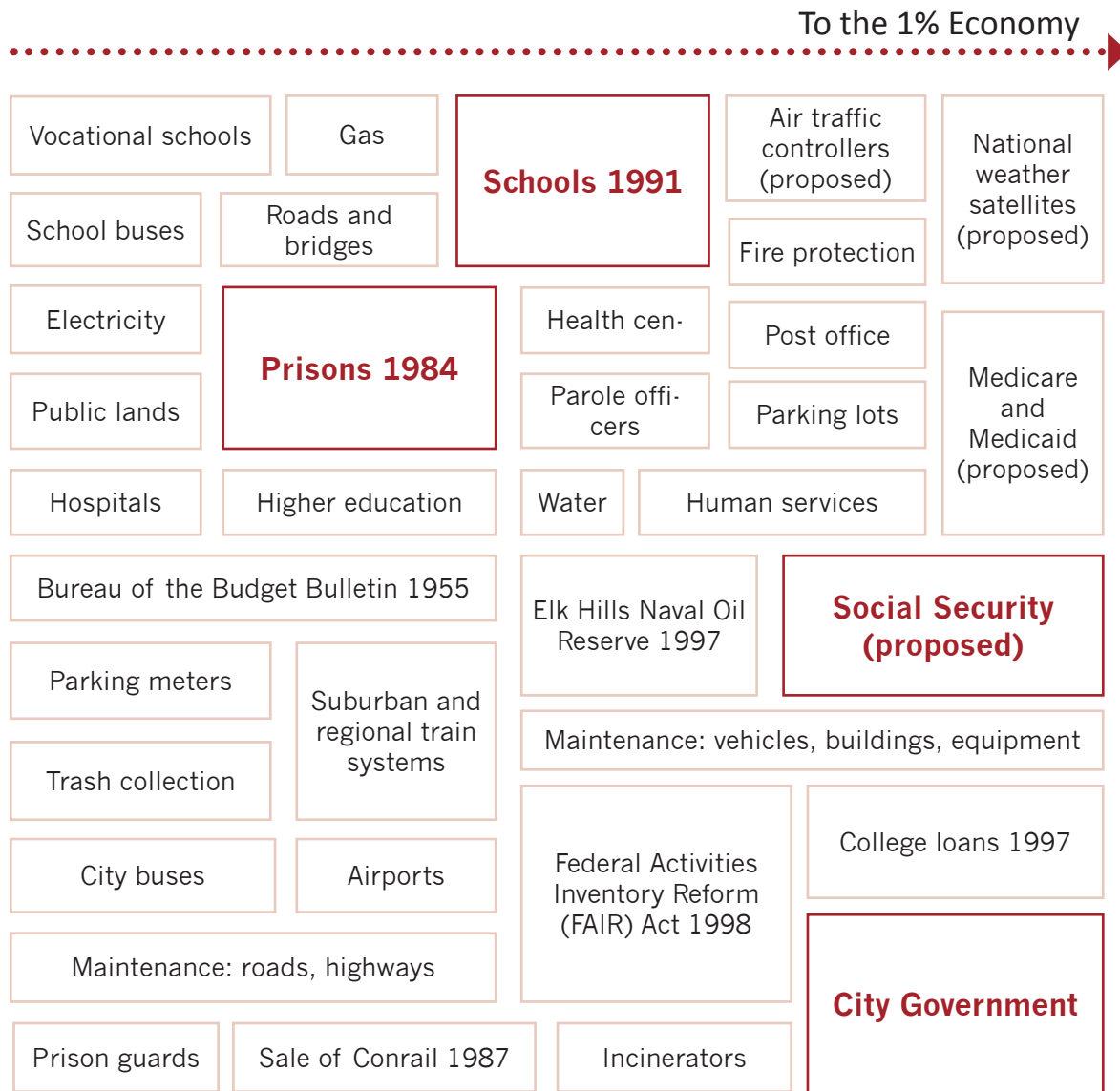


Deregulation - A Structural Transformation

To the 1% Economy 



Privatization - A Structural Transformation



The Principles of NPA's Agenda for a New Economy

As we seek to rebuild our economy, we are at a crossroads. Three paths have emerged that we can take.

The first is to simply fight to keep what we have. This means drawing a line in the sand to save our jobs, our homes, and trying to protect the best social programs and policies we have. And while we must defend our communities, defense alone is a path toward defeat. If we want to win, we have to go on the offense.

A second route is working to get back to the old economy - whether that be the "Clinton economy", or the way things were before the financial crisis. While for some of us these periods were much more hopeful than where we are now, they were marred by incredible racial and gender disparities and then as now, the poorest among us paid a terrific cost for the success of the rest. Going backwards will not take us forward.

A third and more powerful path would be to completely re-imagine what's possible. To not let the challenge of the present prevent us from fully rethinking how our democracy and economy work. Because if we lower our expectations of what's possible, then we've already lost. But, if we craft a vision for an America in which the health and well-being of families, communities, and the planet are prioritized in our national bottom line, we could inspire millions of people to join us.

During the fall and winter of 2012, hundreds of community leaders from the NPA family gathered in cities and towns across the country to begin reimagining what's possible. These guiding principles emerged from those conversations.

Democratic Control of Capital

We will shift trillions of dollars of capital toward true democratic control. We'll instate laws that favor community held economic structures that keeps wealth in our communities. These rules will favor cooperative and community controlled structures for housing, worker-ownership, food production, bank, as well as locally run small businesses, and democratically-managed public institutions such as a federal infrastructure bank and state banks.

Racial Justice

The new economy will finally address persistent structural barriers to racial equity and opportunity. As part of building toward a new economy, we will advance countless policy reforms that include improvements for all people, but that also ensure that significant additional resources are targeted to communities of color as a means of addressing longstanding racial disparities. A racially just economy will include an end to the mass incarceration of people of color and open the promise of prosperity to millions of immigrants who have been excluded from the benefits of the wealth they produce.

Reduce the Power of Corporations

We will create a new bottom line in America, one that accounts for the health, well-being, and

happiness of the entire population. To do so we need to dramatically restructure corporations and our relationship with them. To exist, corporations will need to demonstrate a public purpose and be smaller, more accountable to, and governed by the general public. We will change our relationship with corporations in ways that are hard to imagine right now.

Renew Democracy

We will advance a “people-in, money-out” agenda that dramatically expands citizenship, voting rights, and voting ease and accessibility. We will dismantle the current money-driven political process by reversing Citizens United and creating a public financing system for elections. We will restore a broad set of rights to people that have been excluded from our democracy through mass incarceration. We will expand the ways we engage in our democracy, including participatory budgeting, exercising control over local institutions, and encouraging our own people to seek elected office.

Ecological Sustainability

The reality of climate change has made the issue of protecting our environment not only an ecological issue, but a social justice issue as well. Transforming our economy gives us an opportunity to rethink growth and redirect investments into green alternatives. It also means we need to prepare for the effects of climate change (such as more dramatic storms, rising sea levels, more drought conditions, etc.) so that we face them in ways that are just and equitable.