



Advancing Equity  
and Prosperity

# Advancing Equity and Prosperity



The fight for a just and equitable America is under way in the states.

Just a few years ago, severe cuts to schools, health care, and other state services that people depend on every day were overwhelming the country as tax revenue dropped.

For most Americans, it hit close to home. Public school teachers in Georgia saw their class sizes surge due to budget cuts, making it impossible to give kids who were already struggling the attention they needed. In Maine, poor families were losing cash assistance that helped them pay rent and put food on the table. Ohioans suffering from serious mental illnesses were cut off from the care they desperately needed. And the heavy burden of rising tuition got dramatically worse for students struggling to get an education at California's state universities.

The harm to individuals, communities, and local economies didn't go unnoticed. Some of the nation's most effective state-based organizations responded by quickly analyzing the toll on people's lives, mobilizing their partners, and persuading lawmakers to take a more balanced and equitable approach that would maintain essential public services.

The result was dramatic: States that had been poised to make damaging, short-sighted cuts raised tens of billions of dollars in new revenues to pay for services people needed, like unemployment insurance and affordable child care.

The organizations that led the way – helping millions of people by advancing responsible state policies – are members of the State Priorities Partnership, a network of more than 40 independent, nonprofit research and policy organizations coordinated by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

The Partnership, launched over two decades ago as the State Fiscal Analysis Initiative (SFAI), uses evidence and analysis to advance policies that give more people the opportunity to prosper. State Priorities partners equip lawmakers, journalists, advocacy organizations, nonprofit service providers, and the public with unassailable information that helps children get a quality education, families get medical care, and working people get the assistance they need to build a better life.

# States Need Sound Fiscal Policy to Invest in People



Every day, state governments raise and spend tax revenue in ways that profoundly affect families and communities. Choices states make about investing in schools, health care, child care, and other services can either help create opportunity and prosperity for people or hold them back.

Reducing inequality and fighting poverty by making sure states have the resources they need through an accountable budget process is what the State Priorities Partnership is all about. In state after state, these organizations are making a difference.

Consider the work of OpenSky Policy Institute, the State Priorities partner in Nebraska. There, as in most states, the wealthiest residents pay a smaller portion of their income in state and local taxes than the less well-off. In 2014, Nebraska's governor – urged on by corporate interests and national anti-tax groups – wanted

to cut taxes in a way that would have further favored the rich. If the cuts became law, millions of dollars would be taken from schools, health care, and other areas that open up opportunity and foster economic security for Nebraskans.

OpenSky activated a coalition to speak up as the debate unfolded in the state Capitol, in the media, and in communities across Nebraska. Its team of four policy and communications experts produced analysis that showed how damaging the tax-cut proposals would be for Nebraska. OpenSky put that information in the hands of lawmakers, journalists, community leaders, and grassroots organizations. The work paid off; they stopped the harmful tax cuts.

OpenSky's work mirrors the Partnership's approach across the nation to win policy debates and advance the public good.

“State investments in children have an enormous impact on their future. For more than 20 years, supporting the Partnership has been among the Foundation's most effective strategies for putting kids on a path to success.”

— Patrick McCarthy, President and Chief Executive Officer, Annie E. Casey Foundation

“Our grantees and the communities they serve have a huge stake in the state budget. They rely on the State Priorities Partnership to keep our policymakers focused on Ohio's most pressing needs and our most vulnerable families.”

— David T. Abbott, Executive Director, The George Gund Foundation

# Two Decades of Success

You don't often see stories about a state's budget leading the local nightly news. Yet the State Priorities Partnership continually shines a spotlight on the consequences of these decisions, to ensure millions of children and families in America thrive.

Through analysis, strategic communications, coalitions, and collaborations, the Partnership's members are reshaping the way policymakers, journalists, community leaders, and the public approach many of the important policy questions of our day.

Here are just a few ways the State Priorities Partnership has used trusted budget analysis and strong relationships to make a difference over the past two decades.

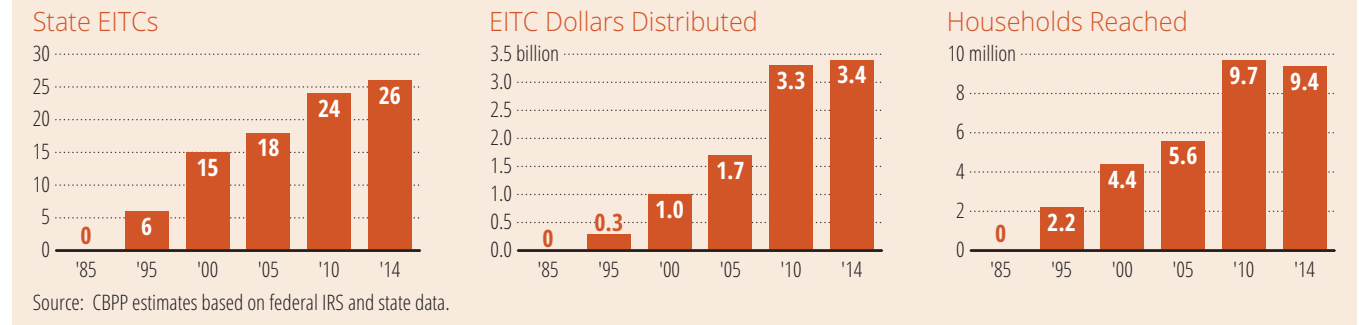
## Getting a Leg Up

The federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is the nation's most effective tool for reducing child poverty, and it is especially powerful when combined with a state EITC. Prior to the work of the State Priorities Partnership, few states had their own tax credits for low-income working people. Today, Earned Income Tax Credits in 26 states from Louisiana to Illinois and from Maine to Oregon provide more than \$3.3 billion per year to help more than 9.3 million working households make ends meet. These credits make tax systems fairer and help low-wage workers pay for basics like child care and car repairs.

## Raising New Revenue With a Fairer Tax Code

State Priorities partners have made taxes in their states more equitable. As a result, the tax bills of low-income and middle-class taxpayers are more in line with their income while more revenue is raised to invest in people and communities. In 2013, the Minnesota Budget Project led a coalition of faith groups, social service advocates, unions, and community organizations in a successful campaign that raised \$1.1 billion in new revenue by increasing taxes on the wealthiest households and

## Number of State Earned Income Tax Credits Has Grown Over 30 Years



reducing property taxes paid by low- and moderate-income people. The new revenue meant long-overdue investments in schools, colleges, and child well-being could finally become a reality.

## Getting Health Care to Low-Income People

When the U.S. Supreme Court left it up to states to decide whether to implement the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion, access to health care for low-income people was in jeopardy. The State Priorities Partnership played a key role in persuading reluctant lawmakers in states like Arkansas, Michigan, and New Hampshire to expand Medicaid – securing medical coverage for 6.3 million low-income people in states that have implemented the expansion so far.

## Stopping Damaging Tax Cuts

After the 2010 and 2012 elections, many new governors and legislators advanced tax cuts for the wealthy and profitable corporations that

would have severely reduced investments in education, health care, and other key services. In the years since, organizations in the Partnership have stopped or delayed at least \$6.1 billion in tax cuts in Georgia, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. The debate continues in these states and in others across the country.

## Beating Back Destructive Policies

Organizations in the State Priorities Partnership helped lead a successful nationwide effort to defeat arbitrary limits on tax revenue, which would have severely restrained states' abilities to meet public needs and promote economic growth. They have shown how these restrictions hurt people – especially low-income people – and argued successfully that important budget decisions must be made by the citizens and their representatives, not left to rigid formulas.

# How We Do It



Funders, advocates, and others committed to fostering economic security for America's families know that when it comes to state budgets, every dollar counts. The State Priorities Partnership is the only network dedicated to producing sound, fact-based state tax and budget analysis to strengthen families and communities.

But these organizations don't stop at data. State Priorities partners use innovative outreach strategies to deliver new information and effective messaging into the hands of diverse state partners, grassroots organizations, and other allies.

That's why members of the Partnership are sought-after sources on fiscal issues. Directors of State Priorities partners are highly visible, influential thought leaders. They are skilled strategists and valued resources for policymakers and journalists. They leverage

the power of fiscal analysis to advance some of today's most important issues, from racial equity to environmental protection.

The relationships among Partnership members and the Washington, DC-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities enable greater effectiveness through:

- **Coaching, training, and technical assistance** as the state partners create strategic plans, develop expertise in new issue areas, connect with new partners in their states, and amplify their communications to a broad audience of lawmakers, advocates, media, and the public.
- **A forum for sharing best practices**, allowing the state partners to tap the wisdom and experience of their peers in other states as they respond to rapidly emerging opportunities and challenges.

## Issues We Work On

The State Priorities Partnership works to improve state policy in a variety of areas:

- Taxes
- Budgets
- Education
- Health Care
- Poverty & Inequality
- Economic Development
- Workforce & Wages
- Immigration
- Racial & Gender Equity
- Children & Families
- Civic Engagement
- Government Accountability
- Criminal Justice
- Environmental Protection

## The Partnership at Work

With strong links to partners across the country and to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, members tackle tough problems aided by the wisdom of their peers in other states and the support of national experts. As a result, winning strategies are spreading across the country, amplifying State Priorities partners' impact.

The Georgia Budget and Policy Institute's defense of the income tax in 2013 is a good example of how invaluable the Partnership is. From the experiences of colleagues around the nation, the Institute recognized early warning signs of a looming campaign for tax cuts. Institute leaders knew who to call to hear how others had faced similar challenges and won. They had ready access to a team of policy experts and strategists at the Center. These connections not only saved GBPI time and money; they also resulted in a more effective strategy. GBPI anticipated which arguments their opponents would use in this debate and what analysis and messaging could successfully counter it.

With this support, the Institute launched a pre-emptive campaign against the proposal and blocked it.

# Join Us



The State Priorities Partnership is shaping debates and securing victories in state after state, and new opportunities for real progress keep emerging.

Since 1993, this Partnership has succeeded thanks to visionary national and local funders. We invite you to join this growing effort as we continue to work toward a more just, equitable America.

Today, eight foundations participate in a collaborative that coordinates resources in support of the State Priorities Partnership: the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ford Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Sandler Foundation, and Stoneman Family Foundation. And across the country, hundreds of state and local foundations and other contributors support members of the Partnership.

## Three Keys to the Partnership's Success

Three characteristics of the State Priorities Partnership are key to its success:

- Partners produce timely, compelling analysis and bold policy solutions and communicate them effectively.
- Partners bring unique knowledge of their state's needs and circumstances and work strategically with allies.
- Through participation in a vibrant network, they share ideas and strategies across the nation.

You can support the work of the State Priorities Partnership in three key ways:

- **Invest in individual organizations** by providing direct grants to members of the State Priorities Partnership.
- **Invest in the Strategic Action Fund**, pooling resources with other funders to enable State Priorities partners to address emerging issues and to increase capacity in the states. The fund is managed by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and every dollar is disbursed to the states.
- **Invest in the Partnership as a whole** by funding the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities to provide strategic guidance, coaching, and trainings in a number of areas, including policy analysis, communications, building alliances, organizational development, and sustainability. The Center also sponsors an annual conference and other convenings where partners gather from around the country to share challenges and solutions.

To build on the Partnership's track record of success in the face of well-funded challenges, it is essential to increase the Partnership's capacity for communications, collaborations, and in-depth policy work around the country.

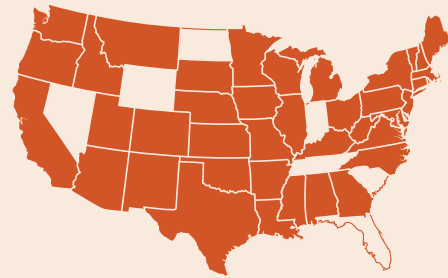
"Being part of this network helped us make big gains for North Carolinians. From strategy decisions to nuts-and-bolts policy analysis, what we learn from each other makes us all better."

— Alexandra Forter Sirota, Director,  
Budget and Tax Center at the  
North Carolina Justice Center

To learn more about the State Priorities Partnership, contact:

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# State Priorities Partnership Organizations



## **Alabama**

Arise Citizens' Policy Project

## **Arizona**

Children's Action Alliance

## **Arkansas**

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

## **California**

California Budget Project

## **Colorado**

Colorado Fiscal Institute

## **Connecticut**

Fiscal Policy Center at Connecticut Voices for Children

## **District of Columbia**

DC Fiscal Policy Institute

## **Georgia**

Georgia Budget and Policy Institute

## **Idaho**

Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy

## **Illinois**

The Fiscal Policy Center at Voices for Illinois Children

## **Iowa**

Iowa Fiscal Partnership

## **Kansas**

Kansas Center for Economic Growth

## **Kentucky**

Kentucky Center for Economic Policy

## **Louisiana**

Louisiana Budget Project

## **Maine**

Maine Center for Economic Policy

## **Maryland**

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

## **Massachusetts**

Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center

## **Michigan**

Michigan League for Public Policy



**Minnesota**

Minnesota Budget Project

**Mississippi**

Mississippi Economic Policy Center

**Missouri**

Missouri Budget Project

**Montana**

Montana Budget and Policy Center

**Nebraska**

OpenSky Policy Institute

**New Hampshire**

New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute

**New Jersey**

New Jersey Policy Perspective

**New Mexico**

Fiscal Policy Project at New Mexico Voices for Children

**New York**

Fiscal Policy Institute

**North Carolina**

Budget and Tax Center at the North Carolina Justice Center

**Ohio**

Policy Matters Ohio

**Oklahoma**

Oklahoma Policy Institute

**Oregon**

Oregon Center for Public Policy

**Pennsylvania**

Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center

**Rhode Island**

The Economic Progress Institute

**South Dakota**

South Dakota Budget and Policy Institute

**Texas**

Center for Public Policy Priorities

**Utah**

Voices for Utah Children

**Vermont**

Public Assets Institute

**Virginia**

The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis

**Washington**

Washington State Budget and Policy Center

**West Virginia**

West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy

**Wisconsin**

Wisconsin Budget Project

For contact information,  
please visit [statepriorities.org](http://statepriorities.org).





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