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.
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 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.

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.

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
Nebraska’s governor – urged on by corporate

Consider the work of OpenSky Policy Institute,

about. In state after state, these organizations

Reducing inequality and fighting poverty by

opportunity and prosperity for people or hold

Every day, state governments raise and spend

9 10

local foundations and other contributors

And across the country, hundreds of state and

Kellogg Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott

Casey Foundation, Ford Foundation, W.K.

support of the State Priorities Partnership: the

America.

debates and securing victories in state after

The relationships among Partnership members

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That’s why members of the Partnership are

organizations, and other allies.

• A forum for sharing best practices,

Coaching, training, and technical assistance

success in the face of well-funded challenges, it

• Partnership produce timely, compelling

analysis, what we learn

from each other makes us all better.”

— Alexandra Porter 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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Vice President for State Fiscal Policy,
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
johnson@cbpp.org
202-408-1080

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.
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.
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.