

THE STATE POLICY NETWORK

Organizational Profile & Threat Assessment

We Are the Resistance — Corporate Collaborators Series

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This document is part of the Corporate Collaborators research series. All claims are based on verifiable public records, IRS filings, and credible investigative reporting. For civic education and lawful accountability purposes only.

I. Organization Overview

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| Full Name | State Policy Network (SPN) |
| Type | 501(c)(3) nonprofit — national network of state-level think tanks |
| Founded | 1992 in Arlington, Virginia — founded by Thomas Roe, a board member of The Heritage Foundation, after President Reagan told him every state should have its own version of Heritage |
| President (2025-26) | Chris Dauer (appointed August 2025), formerly Chief Operating Officer of the Hoover Institution; succeeded Tracie Sharp who served 25 years |
| Headquarters | Arlington, Virginia |
| Network Size | 64 state affiliate think tanks (at least one in every state); 90 national associate members |
| Combined Revenue | Approximately \$120 million annually across the full SPN network (2019 CMD analysis); SPN itself had \$27.1 million revenue in 2023 |
| ALEC Relationship | SPN is a member of ALEC; ALEC is an associate member of SPN; their agendas are tightly coordinated — SPN provides academic legitimacy to ALEC model bills in every state |

The State Policy Network is Heritage Foundation and ALEC replicated in every state — simultaneously. Its 64 affiliated think tanks produce state-specific 'research,' testify before state legislatures, run media operations, and provide the local credibility that makes nationally-coordinated corporate policy appear to be a homegrown state initiative.

SPN's former president Tracie Sharp told a donor meeting in 2013: 'the donors have a very specific idea of what they want to happen' and 'the grants are driven by donor intent.' SPN told the Wall Street Journal after Trump's 2016 victory: 'We feel like for such a time as this, we've built up this network. We need to really run.'

II. How SPN Works

The Franchise Model

SPN was designed from the beginning as a franchise operation. A 2008 spokesperson for People for the American Way described it: SPN trained its member organizations to run like business franchises. A national agenda is developed, funded, and distributed. State think tanks customize and execute it locally while claiming to represent homegrown state interests.

SPN provides its member think tanks with:

- Start-up funding — SPN granted \$60,000 to the Foundation for Government Accountability in 2011 to establish operations in Florida
- Fundraising training and donor introductions — connecting state think tanks to the national conservative donor network
- Model 'research' and policy frameworks — providing cookie-cutter studies that state tanks publish as independent local analysis
- Media operation guidance — training staff to run news sites and communications operations
- Annual conferences — where member organizations share strategy, coordinate messaging, and receive training
- Legal infrastructure — SPN has associated litigation centers that challenge state laws and regulations

The Academic Legitimacy Laundry

This is SPN's core function in the network: it provides the veneer of independent, state-based academic credibility to legislation that was written by corporate lobbyists at ALEC meetings.

The mechanism works as follows:

- ALEC drafts model legislation with corporate members at closed-door meetings
- State legislators introduce that legislation as their own, without disclosing its ALEC origin
- SPN-affiliated state think tanks publish 'independent studies' supporting the legislation
- Those studies are cited in legislative testimony as evidence of local expert consensus
- The legislation passes, appearing to have both democratic legitimacy and academic support

In reality, the legislation, the research supporting it, and the testimony endorsing it all originate from the same national corporate-funded network — and none of that coordination is disclosed to the public or to legislators' constituents.

The Tax Status Problem

SPN and its affiliates are classified as 501(c)(3) charitable organizations — the same tax status as hospitals, universities, and food banks. This means:

- They pay no federal income tax
- Donations to them are tax-deductible for donors
- They are subject to strict IRS restrictions on lobbying activity

Investigative reporting by The Guardian and the Center for Media and Democracy found that SPN member think tanks have orchestrated extensive lobbying and political operations in violation of IRS restrictions for 501(c)(3) organizations — while reporting little or no lobbying on their tax forms. Several member organizations have been accused of running what amount to political operations disguised as educational nonprofits.

III. What SPN Has Pushed Into Law

All 64 of SPN's member state think tanks have pushed components of the ALEC agenda in their states. Documented areas of coordinated activity include:

Anti-Union Legislation

SPN think tanks have been central to the spread of right-to-work laws, restrictions on public sector collective bargaining, and anti-union messaging across the country. In Wisconsin, SPN-affiliated groups including the Maclver Institute and Americans for Prosperity coordinated support for Governor Scott Walker's 2011 legislation severely restricting public employee collective bargaining — a model subsequently pursued in other states.

The Bradley Foundation alone gave more than \$37 million in one year to support right-to-work, collective bargaining restrictions, and other anti-union initiatives through SPN and related networks.

School Privatization

SPN think tanks are the primary state-level advocates for school voucher programs, charter school expansion, and the defunding of public education. The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 goal of eliminating the Department of Education is implemented at the state level through SPN's school choice and education reform campaigns.

The Bradley Foundation's leaked 2016 strategic plan explicitly prioritized 'defund[ing] teachers unions and achiev[ing] real education reform' through SPN-affiliated state groups.

Climate and Energy Disinformation

SPN serves as the central hub of a coordinated 50-state disinformation campaign against renewable energy and climate policy. In 2015, SPN coordinated with ALEC to repeal or weaken clean energy laws across multiple states. In 2024, SPN announced it would focus on working with state lawmakers to prevent states from adopting wind and solar power.

At least 15 'grid reliability' and 'grid stability' bills based on ALEC model policies were introduced in statehouses across the country in 2025 alone — all backed by SPN-affiliated think tanks providing local academic legitimacy.

Voter Suppression

SPN think tanks have promoted voter ID laws, restrictions on early voting, and other election restrictions that civil rights organizations document as disproportionately suppressing minority, elderly, and low-income voter turnout. These campaigns are coordinated with ALEC model legislation and presented as locally-generated election integrity initiatives.

Tax Policy

In the 2025 legislative sessions, Republican state legislators backed by SPN-affiliated groups made significant strides toward flattening or eliminating progressive state income taxes. This agenda — which primarily benefits high-income earners and corporations — is presented by SPN think tanks as pro-growth economic reform.

IV. Funding and Corporate Connections

SPN does not fully disclose its donors. What is known from IRS filings, leaked documents, and investigative reporting:

- Koch network — Charles Koch's Stand Together Trust contributed \$5 million in 2022 to SPN-affiliated think tanks, plus millions more to SPN associates like ALEC and Cato; DonorsTrust (the Koch network's dark money vehicle) is a major funder
- Bradley Foundation — \$1.6 million directly to SPN plus an additional \$6.5 million to SPN members; partnered with SPN to create the Bradley Freedom Grants Program
- Corporate funders — AT&T, Verizon, Comcast, Microsoft, Facebook, Kraft Foods, Reynolds tobacco, fossil fuel interests
- DeVos family — education privatization agenda aligned with SPN's school choice campaigns
- Walton Family Foundation — Walmart heirs funding school privatization through SPN network
- Coors family — Adolph Coors Foundation is a documented SPN funder

The same donors who fund Heritage and ALEC at the national level fund SPN and its state affiliates at the state level. The money flows through the same dark money channels — DonorsTrust and Donors Capital Fund — which allow donors to give anonymously while receiving a tax deduction.

V. What Can Be Done

Identify Your State's SPN Affiliate

Every state has at least one SPN-affiliated think tank. Find yours and monitor its activities:

- Search 'State Policy Network members' or visit spn.org to identify the affiliated organization in your state
- Monitor local news for citations of your state's SPN affiliate — their studies frequently appear in news coverage and legislative testimony without disclosure of their funding sources
- When your state legislators cite research from a think tank, search SourceWatch and ExposedbyCMD to determine if it is an SPN affiliate

Demand Disclosure

- Contact your state legislators demanding that they disclose when legislation originates from ALEC model bills or is supported by SPN-affiliated research
- Support state legislation requiring disclosure of model bill sources and think tank funding in legislative testimony
- File public records requests with state agencies to document coordination between SPN affiliates and state officials

Support Counter-Organizations

- Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) / SourceWatch — the primary investigative resource on SPN and its affiliates; their ALEC Exposed and SPN Exposed projects are essential references
- ExposedbyCMD (exposedbycmd.org) — real-time tracking of SPN and ALEC legislative activity
- Energy and Policy Institute (energyandpolicy.org) — tracks SPN's climate and energy disinformation campaigns
- People for the American Way — monitors SPN's judicial and education agendas

VI. Sources

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| Overview / Structure | Wikipedia, State Policy Network (updated 2026) Ballotpedia (July 2025) InfluenceWatch SourceWatch |
| Franchise Model | People for the American Way (2008) The New Yorker, Jane Mayer (2013) CMD / SourceWatch investigation |
| Sharp Quote / 2016 | ExposedbyCMD Wall Street Journal reporting |
| Tax Status Issues | The Guardian, 2013 CMD investigation SourceWatch Portal: SPN |
| Anti-Union | Wisconsin Democracy Campaign CMD reporting on Bradley grants |
| Climate / Energy | Energy and Policy Institute ExposedbyCMD, November 2025 (grid bills) |
| Funding | InfluenceWatch (Bradley grants) SourceWatch SPN Funding CMD analysis |
| Combined Revenue | CMD analysis of IRS Form 990 filings (2019, updated) |

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Peaceful · Lawful · Persistent · Collective

All materials are for peaceful, lawful, and ethical civic engagement only. Not affiliated with any political party.

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