

# The American Independent Foundation Due Diligence Document

## Executive Summary:

The American Independent Foundation (TAI) is a 501(c3) nonprofit publication that creates news content specifically designed to advance progressive ideas and values. TAI was founded in 2016 to address a growing problem: the right's dominance of owned media. Through our [website](#) and [social media platforms](#), TAI has built one of the largest organic followings of any progressive news outlet nationwide. In addition to digital reach, we currently deliver [more print newspapers](#) to readers than any newspaper in the United States. We have the audience, proven experience, and clout to move voters on progressive issues with factual, hard-hitting coverage in communities across America.

## Theory of Change:

Since the 1980s, right-wing interests have used national media sources to push right-wing propaganda and rile up an increasingly misinformed and cloistered base. The American Independent fulfills an essential role by creating and delivering news content designed to advance progressive ideas and values straight to battleground states.

## Unique Strategy/Special Sauce:

Unlike right-wing media, our content is designed not only to be compelling and engaging, but to break factual news. The American Independent is one of the few publications breaking key stories on local and statewide issues from a progressive lens. Especially for print, No one matches our reach -- we currently deliver [more print newspapers](#) to readers than any newspaper in the United States.

## Fundraising:

To complete funding for the overall project and have the resources to send papers through Election Day in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, The American Independent needs to raise \$3.8 million. To complete our raise in the three priority districts in Ohio (1,9, and 13), sending to a universe of 139,772 households, would cost just over \$300,000, This is entirely 501c3 funding and there is a 1:2 match on the table for another week, so any \$1 contributed would net the organization \$1.50.

## Timing Constraints:

We would need funding by October 10 to be able to send these final papers. We would not need the funds to be in by that date but would need a commitment to allow us to move forward.

## Primary Influence Tactic:

This cycle and beyond, The American Independent will promote, inform, and defend democracy itself. We will reach voters in key states using print newspapers and targeted digital content to deliver informative and engaging content. These papers have proven effective at persuading swing voters, leading to a 6 point boost in an RCT run by the Analyst Institute in Virginia in the fall of 2021.

## Other Influence Tactics:

Digitally, to break through social media algorithms, we've built relationships with brands that share our values while implementing creative solutions to move content in front of online audiences. For our print materials, we've tested the effectiveness of including more/less local, national, and non-political stories. We'll continue to employ innovative tactics to reach voters.

## Current Activity:

The American Independent has begun to deliver newspapers to over 3 million households in four key battleground states: Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Ohio. We're also supplementing papers with state-specific digital programming, reaching targeted voters directly on various digital platforms.

- These papers are locally branded and have a mix of political and non-political content, as well as national and local content.
- The papers are sent to households containing moderate to progressive women, focused more outside of the major media markets in their states. These women often receive less political communication and are more-likely to read and trust print news.
- While universes will vary widely from state to state, we expect to send these newspapers to about 250,000 to 1,000,000 households per state.

## Future Goals:

Moving forward, we'd like to continue to scale and grow the program going into the 2024 cycle and beyond. There are key races in 2023 in several of our current core states that will have a major impact on the future of our democracy, including a state supreme court race in Wisconsin in April and key local races in Pennsylvania in November. We also plan to expand into new constituencies, including Spanish-language editions in Arizona, which we will plan and run along with allies who specialize in communications to Latino voters in the Southwest.

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) Statement:

Not included

## Leadership Team Roles + Board Members:

**Matt Fuehrmeyer – President**

Matt is the former DCCC Director of Research and Strategic Communications. Prior to his roles with The American Independent and the DCCC, he was the Research Director for Senator Al Franken and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.

**Jessica McCreight - Vice President and Executive Editor**

Jessica is a political communications and media expert with over 15 years of experience. She served in the Obama Administration and has worked for progressive campaigns, causes, and candidates all over the country. Most recently she worked for Courier Newsroom, a network of local online news outlets.

**Danny Kazin - Senior Adviser**

Danny is currently the Vice President of campaigns for American Bridge 21<sup>st</sup> Century and formerly ran the DCCC's independent expenditures for the 2020 cycle.

**Dhanya Addanki – Managing Editor**

Dhanya is a journalist, editor, and oral historian. Her work has primarily focused on religion, politics, and human rights in community-based newsrooms. She was born in South India and raised in South Texas and has called D.C. home for almost a decade.

**Jessie Standafer - Digital Director**

Jessie is a Digital strategist and content producer. Formerly working with Cabán for Queens and the Maine Democratic Party. She is the creator of #PeoplePowered, a global hub for participatory democracy used by progressive campaigns nationwide.

**Alice Visocchi - Director of Outreach and Partnerships**

Alice is former campaign manager and researcher with over 5 years of experience in electoral politics. Most notably, she managed both Derrik Gay and Tess Judge's campaigns for Congress. Prior to this work, she was the South Regional Research Director for the DCCC during the 2018 cycle.

**Josh Israel - Senior Reporter**

Josh Israel is a former senior investigative reporter at ThinkProgress and former head of money-in-politics reporting at the Center for Public Integrity.

**Emily Singer - Senior Reporter**

Emily Singer is a political reporter based in New York. She's covered campaigns and elections for years, including at Roll Call, Mashable and Mic.

**Oliver Willis - Senior Reporter**

Oliver Willis has been reporting for the American Independent since 2017. Before that he was part of the team that helped to launch Media Matters for America in 2004 and served as a Research Fellow there. Willis has been personally blogging about politics since 2000.

## Organizations Structure & Overhead:

The American Independent Foundation is a 501c3. Its budget for 2022 is \$25.4M. Its 2021 budget was \$3.6M.

## Impact Reporting:

We continue to test all of our papers, not just to verify our stellar results from 2021 but also to improve the effectiveness of our content and distribution going forward. We're testing everything from timing to content to digital reinforcement. And we're measuring whether our readers are reading our papers, remembering the content, and being persuaded to vote for Democrats up and down the ballot.

If The American Independent receives funding from 1.5°Climate Strategies Group, we will provide test results, including how readers are engaging with our content and the impact our program has on educating voters.

## Barriers/Risks:

Challenges in pursuing these tasks may include an explosive event that demands far greater attention and resources (e.g., further cataclysmic Supreme Court rulings; pandemic events; seismic developments from the January 6 investigation; an escalated crisis of electoral integrity) or other major events that could shift The American Independent's most urgent immediate priorities. We will meet any such obstacles in a way that most productively utilizes our critical resources and maximizes our impact, and we will accurately explain any such challenges in our grant report.

## Landscape/Collaborators/Competitors:

We're working with a number of groups to collaborate on content for our media, including groups like Forward Majority, the States Project, and the Heartland Signal. The American Independent also has a close working relationship with its partners American Bridge and Media Matters.