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# Environmental Success Through Democracy Reform: **A Grantmakers' Win-Win Toolkit**

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ENVIRONMENTAL GRANTMAKERS ASSOCIATION



FUNDERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FCCP's Money in Politics Working Group would like to express our gratitude and appreciation for the funders who contributed their work and ideas to this paper.

We would also like to thank and appreciate the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA) and the Health and Environmental Funders Network (HEFN). EGA was one of the earliest affinity groups to recognize the connections between our environment and the problem of money in politics and has played a seminal role in launching this work. Both EGA and HEFN are valued leaders in philanthropy and trusted thought partners in this work. For the past few years, each have created time and space at conferences and retreats and on phone briefings to explore the convergence of environmental reform and democracy reform. Members have learned and strategized together, challenged each other and inspired the creation of the [Case for Collaboration report](#) and now this toolkit. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and to continuing to work together in the weeks and years to come.

## INTRODUCTION

Our environment and our democracy are under siege. In early September, the world learned that greenhouse gases reached a [troubling new milestone](#). Just one week later, two grassroots groups [released a startling report](#) uncovering the amount that major corporations have bankrolled to members of Congress to deny climate change: \$641 million in campaign contributions since 2008.

Wow. If there ever were a powerful example of how money in politics is harming our planet, this is it. It's clear the two go hand-in-hand: big dollars are buying votes to block progress on environmental issues—from climate change to fracking to chemicals in our household products. We can wring our hands in frustration.

Or we can act.

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Some in the funding community began to act when they wondered how to raise up the voices of those who want a healthy environment for themselves, their children and their grandchildren. They went to the source of the pollution: a broken democracy where everyday people are drowned out by the toxic effect of money's stranglehold on decision makers.

Over the last few years, both environmental and democracy funders have teamed up on programming to educate fellow grantmakers on the connectivity between environmental issues and money in politics. From briefings to breakfasts to convening sessions and last year's report [A Win for Democracy and a Win for the Environment: The Case for Collaboration](#), a growing number of grantmakers are seizing the opportunity to advance both causes as a strategy for supporting change. And this is not just happening in philanthropy. As environmental groups infuse their work with democracy reform, democracy reform groups are better understanding the need to collaborate and stand with issue-based organizations that are working for the public good.

The intersection between these two causes gives funders a powerful opportunity. An opportunity to say: The days when corporations steer votes on climate change are over. **The Win-Win Toolkit** offers a step in that direction.

If you're a funder looking for information that demonstrates the cause-and-effect connection between money in politics and environmental degradation, then this toolkit is for you. If you're wondering how other foundations made the case to their boards for investing in money-in-politics work and want to know what they accomplished when their board said "Yes!" then keep reading.

We hope that through this toolkit we can further a dialogue about the need for deeper investments in repairing our democracy so that we may ultimately repair our environment, too. The situation we face is perilous. Our planet and our democracy are on the brink. Will you join us?

## THE WIN-WIN TOOLKIT

This toolkit has been designed to help environmental funders learn more about how money in politics influences their work. It is not making a specific case for investment or prioritizing one organization over another; nor is it an exhaustive, inclusive compilation of all the excellent work happening across the country. In fact, creating this toolkit is somewhat of an experiment. We heard from many of you that compiling a sampling of learning resources with grant making materials may inspire us to break down the silos between money in politics and the environment. It's a start. [And we hope to hear from you](#) about what additional information would be helpful.

### The toolkit includes:

- ✓ Strategic board memos
- ✓ Sample requests for proposals (RFPs)
- ✓ Examples from the field
- ✓ Online research tools
- ✓ Resources, including funder blogs

## SO, HOW DID WE GET HERE?

In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court's [\*Citizens United\*<sup>\\*</sup> v. Federal Elections Commission](#) ruling allowed for unregulated election spending by corporations, effectively giving corporations the same rights as people. This ruling, and [several others by the Roberts Court](#), made money in politics a more pressing and urgent issue. If the problem of unchecked corporate political spending was bad before *Citizens United*, it is now out of control.

The rulings are a culmination of nearly 30 years of legal strategy to advance the political power of elite special interests in America. Together, and with the aid of lobbyists, front groups and politicians, the rulings have effectively overturned 100 years of law that restrained the role of money in the political system. Post *Citizens United*, corporations are now free to cherry pick the candidates who will protect their interests and oppose policies for the greater good.

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### Consider these startling figures:

- Since 2008, the oil and gas industry alone has spent more than \$1 billion in lobbying and campaign contributions at the federal level.
- In 2012, just 32 Super PAC donors, giving an average of \$9.9 million each, matched the \$313 million that President Obama and Mitt Romney raised from all of their small donors combined.
- The 2014 midterm elections are on track to receive **15 times more** outside political donations than in 2006 before *Citizens United* was decided.

To make matters worse, in 2014, Princeton [released a study](#) analyzing 1,800 different policy initiatives over a 20-year period and concluded that the U.S. has become an oligarchy in which “economic elites and organized groups representing business interests” wield the most power.

Where does this leave us today? Currently money in politics is more entrenched, and the movement to safeguard the environment is struggling on many fronts—particularly in areas where money and power shape environmental policies. Just as money is influencing our elections, it's also impacting the future of our planet.

How so? Consider this: [the chemical industry is blocking common sense toxics regulation](#) and public health standards. In fact, a [Common Cause report](#) confirms corporations that make harmful chemicals and pollute the environment spend millions on lobbying to protect their profits. Members of Congress who are [climate deniers, receive large sums](#) of money from dirty energy interests like oil and gas, coal mining and electric utilities. And, [this report](#) by [Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington](#) exposes the hydraulic fracturing industry contributions to congressional candidates from fracking districts. The list goes on and on.

Recently, just as the Senate undertook a historic debate on money in politics and a constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision, both the Sierra Club and Common Cause came out with reports detailing the impact of political money on environmental reform. [Common Cause's paper](#) shows how fossil fuel campaign spending has silenced debate on climate change. [The Sierra Club outlines](#) the extensive overlap between corporate polluters and some of the largest political contributors.

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<sup>\*</sup>**Citizens United** refers to the 2010 Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. FEC* where the court ruled that political spending by corporations is a form of protected speech under the First Amendment. The ruling allowed corporations and unions to spend money in support or opposition of candidates. While the decision does not allow corporations or unions to give money directly to campaigns, they can seek to influence voters through ads and other forms of outreach and campaigns.

## MONEY IN POLITICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDER INNOVATIONS

Over the past few years, the environmental movement has recognized the need to infuse democracy reform into its own efforts. Leaders have long understood that if they want to ensure that meaningful environmental protections are passed they must also incorporate civic engagement and democracy reform. Increasingly, environmental funders have begun exploring the nexus of money in politics and the environment. And a few foundations, some of which are highlighted below, have expanded their own grantmaking to either address money in politics directly or fund at the intersection of money in politics and the environment.

3 The [Overbrook Foundation](#), a grantmaker working to safeguard the environment and human rights, saw that unregulated power and big moneyed interests were blocking any major environmental policy advancements. In response, they launched a deliberate and strategic internal research process around money in politics and are now funding money-in-politics organizations. Here you will find Overbrook's [strategic memo](#) that implores their board to make investments in this area.

In 2012, the [Arkay Foundation](#) launched an initiative that funds environmental organizations to engage and mobilize their constituencies around democracy reform issues. Arkay has funded groups that include 350.org, Oil Change International, Union of Concerned Scientists, and the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club created and staffed a democracy director position and is running its own democracy-specific campaign and collaborating with other issue-based groups working on democracy reform, called the [Democracy Initiative](#).

In 2010, the [Piper Fund](#) began to address the challenges many organizations face in weaving money in politics into existing work. The group launched a grant making initiative to broaden the



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movement by offering planning grants to economic justice organizations that would incorporate a money-in-politics analysis into their work. This summer, the Piper Fund released a [Request for Proposals](#) for organizations working in food systems and sustainable agriculture. Piper recognizes the corrosive influence the corporate agribusiness has on food systems policy and is funding a series of planning grants to help organizations work at the intersection of those issues.

Some foundations have also created their own philanthropic initiatives. For example, through its partnership in the [Divest-Invest](#) initiative, the [Wallace Global Fund](#) works to engage foundations and individuals of wealth to shift assets out of polluting industries and into the clean energy technologies that will offer solutions to the climate challenge. The [John Merck Fund](#) is creating [a concerted effort](#) to expose the influence of the Koch brothers on public policy in the New England region. And the [Solidago Foundation](#) launched [Powering Change](#), a collaboration of funders and organizations. Powering Change works to win on climate by collaborating at the state level with social justice and civic engagement organizations, and by using multi-state alliances, strategic communications and shared evaluation tools.

## GOING FORWARD

Funders have an exciting opportunity to make a serious impact on money in politics and the environment. It's clear that a pro-environment agenda is hamstrung as long as corporations and special interests can influence elections and policy making. This toolkit offers a partial overview of how these movements are evolving together, and how funders can transition with them.

We want to continue to explore this evolution and learn from funders. We are aware of the challenges, including advancing core grant making priorities while weaving in money in politics, as well as finding ways to support smaller and regional organizations. It is our hope that compiling these resources furthers our conversation and future thinking about what we can do together and how FCCP, EGA and HEFN can help make the work happen.

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**“Climate activists have come to the conclusion that when our governments are bought and sold, policy shifts must begin in the streets. Compromised politicians will not willingly act to save the ecological balance of the planet.”**

—Ben Ptashnik and Victoria Collier

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## GETTING STARTED: HOW IT WORKS

Stepping into the money in politics and environmental movements doesn't need to happen in a vacuum. Funders can lean on colleagues who are already working in this space.

Below are materials from allied funder colleagues: strategic board memos, sample requests for proposals and a few funding examples. These funders have graciously shared these materials and offered to be available for follow-up conversations. Please note that while these funders are happy to share these internal documents with colleagues, they are not for broad distribution or to be published on the Internet.

### Strategic Board Memos

The Arkay Foundation and the Overbrook Foundation's internal memos make the case to their boards for expanding their current grantmaking portfolio into the money in politics arena.

The Piper Fund shares an analysis of their decision to fund national and regional organizations who will fold money-in-politics connections into their own economic fairness work.

The Thornburg Foundation is exploring investments in money in politics and commissioned an introductory memo on public financing\*.

### Sample Requests for Proposals

- ✓ Arkay Foundation
- ✓ Piper Fund

### Funder-led initiatives

- ✓ John Merck Fund's Koch-Out Campaign
- ✓ Wallace Global Fund's [Divest-Invest initiative](#)
- ✓ Solidago Foundation's Powering Change

*Note: The funder materials listed above can be found in their full form at the end of this document. The rest of the already available and public resources will also be listed on FCCP's website.*

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\*Public Financing is when public funds are used in election campaigns. Twenty-five states have some sort of public financing programs.



## RESOURCES

This section includes resources for environmental funders looking to engage in the money-in-politics space. Below are explanations of recent Supreme Court decisions, sample blogs from funders making the case for this work, and research tools to help track the money in your state or issue area. These materials will be available online at [FCCP's website](#).

### The 101 of the Current Campaign Finance System

First, the rules of the game:

FCCP has created an indispensable guide on how to support non-partisan civic engagement work. [This booklet](#) helps demystify the IRS rules for funding voter registration, education and ballot campaigns and addresses funders most commonly asked questions.

Second, the basics on money in politics:

Open Secrets' [ten-point list](#) details the key things to know about democracy reform. Public Citizen's Democracy is for People offers valuable [background materials](#). Public Campaign created an interactive [power point](#) presentation chock full of the latest polling and research, updates on campaign spending and common sense policy solutions. Finally, the [glossary](#) at the end of this document defines commonly used money-in-politics words, phrases and Supreme Court cases.

[Jill Lepor's](#) September 2014 New Yorker article, [The Crooked and the Dead: Does the Constitution protect corruption?](#), lays out a timely and fascinating history of campaign finance reform, that while wonky, is an interesting to read.

## Supreme Court Decisions

There are three key Supreme Court decisions that formed the basis of our current campaign finance laws, and are the reason that campaign finance reform has become a more pressing issue since 2010.

- ✓ [Demos](#) breaks down the *McCutcheon\* v. FEC\** Supreme Court [decision](#).
- ✓ The [Brennan Center](#) demystifies the *Citizens United v. FEC* [decision](#) and the [Story of Stuff](#) creates an interesting and [fun video](#) about it.
- ✓ The [FEC](#) shows where the dismantling of our campaign finance laws began in earnest with the 1976 [Buckley v. Vallee\\*](#) decision.

### A Few Examples From the Field: Intersection of Money and Politics

The following links highlight a small sample of field collaborations that successfully bring together money- in-politics and environmental reform campaigns:

- ✓ The [Sierra Club](#) is committed to the idea that "to protect our environment, we must protect our democracy" and created the [Sierra Club Democracy Program](#) to do precisely that.
- ✓ [Greenpeace](#) is working at this intersection and just released a new report the [Kinpins of Carbon and their War on Democracy](#).
- ✓ The [League of Conservation Voters](#) works to hold members of Congress accountable when they vote against the environment and in favor of big oil and dirty coal.

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**\*McCutcheon** refers to the 2014 Supreme Court case *McCutcheon v. FEC* where the court struck down the aggregate limit on the total amount that an individual donor is allowed to contribute in a two-year period to all federal candidates, parties, and political action committees combined. **\*FEC** is the Federal Election Commission, a six-member, independent regulatory agency that administers and enforces the Federal Election Campaign Act, the statute that governs the financing of federal elections. **\*Buckley v. Valeo** was a 1976 Supreme Court regarding the constitutionality of the Federal Election Campaign Act. This case introduced the concept that money in elections is a form of free speech.

- ✓ Launched in 2013, the [Democracy Initiative](#) is building a movement to halt the corrupting influence of corporate money in politics and restoring the core principle of political equality. The Initiative is a collaboration of environmental, labor, civil rights, good government and other like-minded organizations with broad memberships.
- ✓ [The Climate Justice Alliance](#) is a collaborative working to transition communities away from unsustainable energy and addressing the root causes of climate change. The alliance is comprised of over 35 community and movement-based organizations that are rooted in indigenous communities and communities of color.
- ✓ The turnout of hundreds of thousands of individuals and activists from across the country for the [People's Climate March](#) shows just how mainstream this issue has become. An [article in Truthout](#) reports that "climate activists have come to the conclusion that when our governments are bought and sold, policy shifts must begin in the streets. Compromised politicians will not willingly act to save the ecological balance of the planet."

## Funder & Affinity Group Writings on the Case for Collaboration

Many funders are expressing their support for collaboration between the democracy reform and environmental movements. Several key blog posts include:

- ✓ [Why One Environmental Health Funder Joined a Donor Collaborative on Money in Politics](#): Carolyn Fine Friedman, chair of the Fine Fund, writes about her work as a toxic health funder supporting initiatives to curb the influence of money in our political system.
- ✓ [Money in Politics and the Environment: The Case for Collaboration](#): Alexandra Russell, director of FCCP's Money in Politics Working Group, highlights a report that captures the

innovations that funders are doing to build portfolios funding at the nexus of money in politics and the environment.

- ✓ [Complicated Times: Speech and Advocacy in a Changing Environment](#): Truman Anderson, executive director of the Stuart Mott Family Foundation, defends why his conservative foundation supports campaign finance reform.
- ✓ [Civic Engagement: Restoring America's Political Voice](#): Philanthropic Advisor Scott Nielson writes an overview about what we mean by civic engagement and infrastructure.

## Money-in-Politics Online Research Tools

### Federal

[OpenSecrets](#), a project of the Center for Responsive Politics, tracks federal campaign contributions and lobbying data, provides analysis and advocates for a transparent government.

[MapLight](#) researches and compiles data around federal, state and local ballot campaigns, connects the data to shows patterns of influence and supports issue-based coalitions.

[Sunlight Foundation](#), which advocates for an open and accountable government, and its sister project [InfluenceExplorer](#), share how a special interest group spreads its influence across federal and state elections.

[Voter's Edge](#), a free online voter guide, helps citizens decide their votes on ballot measures by providing funding information, articles, campaign ads, plus daily updates reflecting breaking developments.

[Environmental Grantmakers Association's Tracking the Field](#) project is a resource that provides key information about trends in environmental grantmaking at the intersection of public policy and advocacy. The Tracking the Field Report [Executive Summary](#) is available to all foundations. EGA members have access to the searchable



grants database and interactive tool to explore almost 40,000 grants including many at the intersection of environment and democracy.

[Foundation Funding for U.S. Democracy](#) works with the Foundation Center to track current democracy field grants and in the next year will offer even more detailed information on money-in-politics grants and strategy.

### State and Local

The National Institute on Money in State Politics created [FollowTheMoney](#), which compiles data from all 50 states.

For the most timely and up-to-date information, your state's Secretary of State or Ethics Commission will have current data. Find city-level data at a Board of Elections, Ethics Commission or Department of Records.

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## STAYING INFORMED

Join FCCP's Money in Politics Working Group list by emailing: [arussell@funderscommittee.org](mailto:arussell@funderscommittee.org). Monthly emails include resources, updates and information about the latest funder briefings and panels related to money in politics.

Public Campaign releases a [daily email](#) with the top federal and local money-in-politics and democracy news from around the country. You can also [track federal money](#) in politics legislation.

Piper Fund Communications Collaborative Weekly Echo Chamber sends out a weekly email with the latest news, polling and events. Check out a [past email](#) to get a flavor for it and email [tyler@rethinkmedia.org](mailto:tyler@rethinkmedia.org) to sign up.

Common Cause compiles a [monthly Democracy Download](#) that tracks all of the federal legislation and upcoming reform events.

## CONNECT WITH COLLEAGUES FUNDING THESE ISSUES

Below is contact information for colleagues working in these fields who are available to connect with you. Please note this is a partial list and not meant to be inclusive of all the funders working in this space.

**Jay Beckner**, President, [Mertz Gilmore Foundation](#): [JBeckner@mertzgilmore.org](mailto:JBeckner@mertzgilmore.org)

**Jennifer Berman**, Powering Change Coordinator, [Solidago Foundation](#): [jenniferb@solidago.org](mailto:jenniferb@solidago.org)

**Carolyn Fine Friedman**, Chair, [Fine Fund](#): [cffriedman@aol.com](mailto:cffriedman@aol.com)

**Steve Foster**, President and CEO, [Overbrook Foundation](#): [sfoster@overbrook.org](mailto:sfoster@overbrook.org)

**Benita Kline**, Foundation Manager, [Arkay Foundation](#): [benita@lkmi.com](mailto:benita@lkmi.com)

**Jenna Nicholas**, Director, [Divest-Invest](#): [jensta27@gmail.com](mailto:jensta27@gmail.com)

**Jen Sokolove**, Program Director, [Compton Foundation](#): [jsokolove@comptonfoundation.org](mailto:jsokolove@comptonfoundation.org)

**Melissa Spatz**, Program Director, [Piper Fund](#): [mspatz@proteusfund.org](mailto:mspatz@proteusfund.org)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS WORK

**Alexandra Russell**, Director, [FCCP's Money in Politics Working Group](#): [arussell@funderscommittee.org](mailto:arussell@funderscommittee.org)

FCCP promotes civic participation\* as a key to making our democracy work by providing grantmakers with a stage for showcasing innovative ideas, a forum for strategic dialogue, and a resource for civic participation research, tools, and news.

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\*Civic participation is the active engagement of people in the decision-making processes that shape their communities and their lives.

**Rachel Leon**, Executive Director, [Environmental Grantmakers Association](http://EnvironmentalGrantmakersAssociation.org): rleon@ega.org

EGA works with members and partners to promote effective environmental philanthropy by sharing knowledge, fostering debate, cultivating leadership, facilitating collaboration and catalyzing action.

**Ramtin Arablouei**, Program Manager, [Health and Environmental Funders Network](http://HealthandEnvironmentalFundersNetwork.org): rarablouei@hefn.org

HEFN works to maximize philanthropy's impact on environmental health and environmental justice by providing its members with information, learning and networking opportunities, and by providing support for funder collaboration.

## TEN HELPFUL MONEY IN POLITICS TERMS

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**FEC** is the Federal Election Commission, a six-member, independent regulatory agency that administers and enforces the Federal Election Campaign Act, the statute that governs the financing of federal elections.

**PAC** stands for political action committee, an organization that exists to give money to candidates and raises money from individuals. PACs tend to represent a particular interest and can donate directly to a candidate or party and spend unlimited amounts in independent expenditures. Contributions to traditional PACs are capped at \$5,000.

**Super PACs** can raise unlimited amounts of money from any source and the source of the funds is disclosed. Unlike a regular PAC, super PACs cannot donate money directly to a political candidate or party and are not subject to contribution limits. Super PACs can spend as much money as they desire for the support or defeat of a specific candidate or issue through various forms of communication and outreach. Super PACs came into being in 2010 as a result of two Supreme Court rulings.

**Citizens United** refers to the 2010 Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. FEC* where the court ruled that political spending by corporations is a form of protected speech under the First Amendment. The ruling allowed corporations and unions to spend money in support or opposition of candidates. While the decision does not allow corporations or unions to give money directly to campaigns, they can seek to influence voters through ads and other forms of outreach and campaigns.

**McCutcheon** refers to the 2014 Supreme Court case *McCutcheon v. FEC* where the court struck down the aggregate limit on the total amount that an individual donor is allowed to contribute in a two-year period to all federal candidates, parties, and political action committees combined.

**Buckley v. Valeo** was a 1976 Supreme Court decision regarding the constitutionality of the Federal Election Campaign Act. This case introduced the concept that money in elections is a form of free speech. It struck down campaign spending limits and suggested that fighting corruption is the only legitimate reason for limiting campaign money.

**Dark money** refers to funds used for political campaigns where the donor list is not disclosed.

**Outside Spending** refers to campaign expenses paid for someone other than the candidate's campaign committee or political party. This can refer to money from super PACs and dark money.

**Public Financing** is when public funds are used in election campaigns. Twenty-five states have some sort of public financing programs.

**Civic participation** is the active engagement of people in the decision-making processes that shape their communities and their lives.