

# A New Path to a Thriving Democracy



**INNOVATING FOR  
THE PUBLIC GOOD**  
R & D FOR DEMOCRACY

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**THE STAKES**

**As Americans, we have operated under the assumption that democracy is durable. That it bends, but does not break. That it will endure.**

**That assumption is wrong.** Our democracy is not a given. It is an ongoing experiment, and it is under enormous strain. After years of concerted effort to undermine representative democracy is at a crisis point. The question is, can it survive.

There are a number of forces that have created this moment. Some are structural, caused by shifts in our country's demographics and advances in technology, like AI which reshapes how people understand truth, power, and participation. But the crisis point is intentional, fueled by actors who benefit from weakening democratic systems and increased wealth inequality.

The causes vary. The outcome doesn't: a fundamentally weakened democracy that is less trusted, less functional and less stable. And it's not clear that it will prevail.

**A weakened democracy has profound human costs:** an ever-increasing concentration of power, the erosion of basic rights, and the reshaping of systems to serve fewer and fewer people. **At risk is the baseline dignity that gives each person a sense that their voice matters** and their future is theirs to shape. And with that, the **very foundation on which democracy rests.**

We are already experiencing the loss of the ability to dissent safely, the narrowing of who gets to belong and thrive, the distortion of what people can know and trust, the quiet hollowing out of institutions meant to serve the public, the ideological skewing of the judiciary, the possibility that elections continue but cease to matter.

2016 was a wake-up call.

2024 demonstrated the fragility of our democratic institutions and guardrails.

**Democracy is under attack. And with it, the very idea of America.**

**Our response has not matched the duration or the scale of the threat.**

THE CHALLENGE

## Our failure has left a void being readily filled by coordinated forces working to weaken democracy

While we are still operating on the blind assumption that the core systems of our constitutional democracy will hold, well-funded movements have been working across multiple levers of power to weaken democratic institutions and reshape them to serve narrow interests: an alliance of concentrated wealth, political power, and exclusionary and racist ideology.

The Heritage Foundation was founded in 1973, the Federalist Society in 1982. Since then they've built the think tanks, legal pipelines, media infrastructure, and donor networks designed to shape American life across generations..

- \$120 million+ into the Project 2025 since 2020 by six billionaire family networks
- \$22 million by Heritage staffing the next administration before the 2024 election was held
- 100+ organizations coordinated in lockstep through Project 2025

**Democracy philanthropy has focused on election cycles, not building systems to sustain democracy.**

It is reactive, fragmented, risk-averse and focused on efficiencies. Investments in voter registration, GOTV, and crises of the moment are important. But none of it building the foundation underneath.

THE IMBALANCE

# More than \$15B

invested in electoral wins in 2020 and 2024

*Less than 1% of American philanthropy goes to making those elections matter.*

\*OpenSecrets analysis of FEC filings, 2024 & Democracy Fund, 2024

To meet this moment, we must have a different approach.

**We have been winning elections, but losing power. And that has to change.**

**OUR SOLUTION****Safeguarding democracy requires ambitious action now**

We must influence the most impactful levers across the interconnected system that enables our rights and freedoms. We require long-term strategies that produce generational change, focused on rebuilding the institutions of democracy, and realigning our country's democratic governance to meet the needs of the majority. And we must do this by delivering wins that build power not only today but also for the future.

**This is the gap that has held us back:**

*Focusing on short term electoral wins, and compromising on the underlying conditions that determine whether democracy is strong, trusted & resilient.*

**IFPG is built to deliver immediate impact in the current cycle, while building the infrastructure to protect rights & freedoms for generations.**

We work where democratic systems are breaking down. We convene, design, and catalyze solutions that strengthen democratic resilience in the near term, while building lasting capacity for the future.

**This is the work the field has been missing:**

*A systems approach to shifting strategic levers to deliver electoral gains today, while strengthening the foundations of democracy for every cycle after.*

We rapidly prototype solutions grounded in real-world constraints, then scale adoption for what works across the broader ecosystem. We do this by mapping the system, engaging across sectors to ideate new solutions focused on key levers, then connecting the best outcomes to aligned investment and execution support.

**This requires:**

- Understanding root causes that are weakening democracy, not just symptoms
- Bringing together perspectives that rarely build together, to ideate powerful solutions
- Rapid prototyping grounded in deep research and focused on impact
- Resourcing and scaling what works so it can spread

## We aren't alone in believing that this work matters.

Americans agree we have a problem

# 69% of Americans

say America **used to be a good example** of democracy, but is **not anymore**

*including a majority in both parties*

\*Pew Research Center, Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 23-29, 2026.

*“Elections are one of the greatest investments societies make in democracy. But winning an election and strengthening democracy are not automatically the same goal.”*

Danielle Allen, Harvard University

*“There are moments in American history of backsliding. But there has never been members of the administration seeking to enrich themselves using American policy on this scale, ever”*

Anne Applebaum, Pulitzer Prize Winning Historian

*“Protecting our democracy requires more than fright and outrage.”*

Steven Levitsky, co-author of How Democracies Die

THE SYSTEM MAP

## IFPG works across 5 pillars of democracy as a system

Democracy is not a single thing. It is an interconnected system of five pillars, each dependent on the others. When any one erodes, the whole weakens. This principle guides our work.

01

### Narrative / Shared Belief and Belonging

*A widely held belief that democracy matters, and works for people like me. **When this weakens, cynicism grows, division deepens, and authoritarians exploit the fracture.** IFPG works to win the hegemonic fight for hearts and minds, so that a majority sees democracy as the system that protects their interests and identity.*

02

### Free & Meaningful Elections

*Free, open, and honest elections where people can use their vote to choose who leads. **When this weakens, power stops being accountable, and elections happen but don't matter.** IFPG defeats the strategies that insulate elected officials from the people they serve.*

03

### Trust in Information and Institutions

*The ability to know what is real, encounter diverse perspectives, and find the truth. **When this weakens, misinformation spreads, trust collapses, and people can no longer tell truth from manipulation.** IFPG fights to restore a shared reality.*

04

### Policy that Protects People and Principles

*Laws and rules that safeguard democratic participation. **When this weakens, rights erode, power concentrates, and the system is reshaped for partisan gain over public good.** IFPG builds the case for laws that protect democracy, and against the ones that erode it.*

05

### Institutions that Deliver for People

*A public sector that works effectively and earns trust through performance. **When this weakens, services fail, trust declines, and people lose faith in government and in each other.** IFPG diagnoses where the public sector is breaking and designs solutions to fix it.*

HOW WE WORK

## From research to adoption at scale, focused on the most impactful levers in each pillar

We have conducted an extensive landscape analysis to understand the gaps in how democracy is being strengthened, and prototyped a model designed to close them. This work has shaped an approach that turns diagnosis into scalable action widely adopted across the full system of democracy.

**We work through a four-step model that turns diagnosis into adoption at scale.**

**1**

### Diagnose the levers for change

Within each pillar of democracy, we map where the system is most susceptible to change, identifying the specific levers where targeted work can produce outsized impact.

**2**

### Deep research

We commission and conduct primary and secondary research on each lever, grounding every project in evidence rather than assumption.

**3**

### Convene, ideate, prototype

We bring together practitioners from across sectors: technologists, academics, organizers, policy experts. Together they ideate and prototype solutions in rapid sprints. No single sector can produce the scale of solutions democracy needs in a silo, but together powerful interventions take shape. Participants carry ideas back to their organizations, seeding work across the ecosystem, and the best prototypes move to Step 4.

**4**

### Adoption at scale

We back the solutions that prove themselves, funding continued development and connecting teams to the partners and resources needed to carry the work into the world. In parallel we support adoption with systematic training and distribution, so we work on all levels to ensure small, medium, and large organizations can actually utilize our findings.

WHO WE ARE

## The network that makes it happen

IFPG is intentionally organized differently, with a small nimble core team, supported by a network of senior practitioners who consult, advise and are engaged project to project, spanning the five pillars. In this way, we keep overhead remarkably low, while ensuring we draw from the diverse expertise needed to effect change across the entire system.



**Page S. Gardner** founded and led the Voter Participation Center and the Center for Voter Information, building them into two of the biggest and most innovative voter engagement organizations in the country. She pioneered new methods for reaching voters. Her work earned the 2020 American Political Science Association Award for evidence-based policy advancing voter registration and turnout. Having studied the demise of our democracy for almost a decade, Gardner is now taking a systems approach with a focus on long term innovations to address the rapid backsliding of democratic governance.

**Core to IFPG’s impact is convening cross-sectoral teams** to develop new solutions that can only emerge through shared understanding and diverse expertise. This engagement means we bring the highest impact people into the room, who also carry the work back to their organizations supporting adoption.



WHERE THE WORK HAPPENS

## IFPG's 2026–28 Strategic Pillars

*The pillars describe the territory. Our strategic work applies the four-step method across it, because the people whose lives depend on a functioning democracy cannot afford another cycle of tactical fixes. In each pillar we have diagnosed the levers that, when moved, transform democracy at its foundation. The work is underway. Scale requires investment.*

## PILLAR 1

# 1 Narrative Innovation

The right dominates the narrative environment, and it isn't accidental. IFPG conducts causal research into how narratives are manufactured and sustained, and builds the frames and distribution channels that counter them across the ecosystem. IFPG's goal is to change the operating environment in which elections are held and public policies debated. Hearts and minds must change first.

## Levers we've identified

- Othering as the mechanism by which political differences become existential threats
- Local information environments and the collapse of community journalism
- The gap between message formulation and how people process information
- Channels of communication that reach and influence key segments

## Current projects

- **Othering Research.** We've conducted causal research in partnership with Hart Research on how Other Narratives work, and what effectively counters them at scale. Three of four phases complete; the next stage is field testing.
- **News Deserts.** Research on the effect of local newspapers moving into news deserts on attitudinal change, civic knowledge and political outcomes. Initial work has suggestive data that a local newspaper approach that contains civic and electoral information that does not seem partisan is effective. The next step is a scaled effort over many cycles with ongoing tracking to measure impact and iterate quickly to change viewpoints.
- **Emotions-First Messaging.** Socializing a neuroscience- and psychology-grounded framework for message development with partners, donors, electeds, and consultants. Literature review, practitioner toolkit, training, and field experiment scoped.

## PILLAR 2

# 2 Electoral Innovation

The American electorate is changing rapidly. The changes are widespread and include demographics, geographic location, employment, education, religious affiliation, marital status, childbearing, and information technologies. The tools we use to understand voters in this rapidly changing environment need updating. IFPG builds the models, targeting tools and investment frameworks to develop new approaches that will reach voters and rebuild their power.

## Levers we've identified

- The 17–23% of American voters who hold negative views of both parties and decide modern elections. These are the “double haters” or “double negatives” that continue to grow in terms of a percent of the electorate.
- How campaigns measure efficiency and decide resource allocation in a presidential setting, using an electoral vote strategy
- Changes in technology and audiences require the creation of new testing methodologies and new measurements of efficacy
- The identification of new strategies, tactics, and standards of success that require risk-taking and a multi-cycle time frame

## Current projects

- **Double Haters / Double Negatives Model.** The first targeting model built for the double-negative cohort, developed in 2024 in partnership with TargetSmart. Being re-upped and expanded for the 2026 cycle. This model should be updated every cycle.
- **Cost Per Electoral Vote / Investment Elasticity Model.** A framework for measuring the real return on electoral spending in presidential elections, and identifying where additional investment moves votes versus where it doesn't. Being refined with partners for the 2028 cycle.
- **2032 Investment Strategy:** A change in the political and communications operating environments that produce key attitudinal changes is needed to overcome the structural disadvantages resulting from the 2030 census. We are not going to out-organize, out-register, or redraw enough Congressional districts to secure an America in which the will of the majority is secured.

## PILLAR 3

# 3 Innovation to Restore Trust

Trust collapses when people can't tell what's real. IFPG works on the biggest lever in that collapse, the information environment itself, building tools, research, and interventions to restore people's capacity to know what is true.

## Levers we've identified

- Ideological skewing in how large language models are trained and deployed
- Tools for monitoring and counterbalancing AI bias as it shapes public understanding
- Transparency and traceability in AI-generated content

## Current projects: Building an AI Center

- **AI & Ideological Skewing of LLM Models.** Original research (with Dewey Digital) documenting the asymmetric accessibility of conservative vs. progressive content to AI training pipelines and the downstream consequences for public knowledge. Initial report complete.
- **AI Bias Monitoring and Counterbalancing Tools.** Follow-on work developing a diagnostic platform, content pipeline, and bias monitoring service for organizations whose work is shaped by commercial AI. In scoping.
- **AI Transparency and Traceability.** The inability to know what is real and what is not is directly correlated to the distrust in media and the misinformation vacuum that is damaging democracy. The potential for a Black Swan tipping-point event stemming from this is real. Identified as a lever; project scope in development.
- **AI Research and Landscape Assessment.** A strategic map of the current AI ecosystem's impact on electoral processes and democratic institutions, The work engages across the system to empower progressive organizations with an understanding of the risk associated with adopting AI in their work, and the strategies they can use to effectively mitigate that risk.

## PILLAR 4

# 4 Policy Innovation for Civil Service That Works

Policy fails when the institutions can't see they're being failed. IFPG diagnoses where the public sector is breaking down, reframes that breakdown as a failure of the system (not of the individual), and designs policy, and the narrative that carries it, to make the government actually deliver.

## Levers we've identified

- The causal relationship between people's difficulty accessing public services and the collapse of public trust in democratic institutions
- Income inequality and the institutional levers that enable the growing wealth disparity

## Current projects

- **Barriers to Service and Public Trust.** Research establishing the causal link between public-sector accessibility and declining trust in democracy, paired with the "Make the Public Sector Work" policy playbook that any Democratic governor or legislature can run at the state level. Barriers report complete; causal survey pending funding; playbook development underway.
- **Addressing Income Inequality.** Massive distortions in income or wealth have led to increasing authoritarianism and nationalist movements. There are many groups in this field whose work is excellent. We are missing an overall story, a compelling narrative and a multi-phased strategy that moves people to action in a way that incentivizes elected officials to enact needed reforms.

INVESTMENT

## IFPG Funding

**We are raising an investment of \$5M for IFPG.**

To date, efforts have been funded sporadically, project by project. The ecosystem has validated both the need for a systems-level solution and the value it would add.

Scale requires an initial tranche of funding to enable consistent, coordinated work that adds up to more than the sum of its parts.

**USE OF FUNDS**

**90% direct to programmatic work**

10% to operational overhead (legal, core staff)

**BUDGET BY STRATEGIC PILLAR**

NARRATIVE	ELECTORAL	TRUST	POLICY
\$1.25M	\$1.25M	\$1.75M	\$750K

*Specific program and project budgets available on request.*

**THE 2026 MIDTERMS WINDOW**

**To maximize impact in the 2026 midterms, we need \$1M committed by Sept 2026.**

## OUR 501(C)(3)

## Innovating for U.S.

Democracy is under systemic strain. Not only from bad actors or external pressures, but from a fragmented response ecosystem that is too siloed, too slow, and too reactive to meet the scale of the challenge.

Innovating for U.S. is our 501(c)(3) research and innovation vehicle designed to develop, test, and scale new approaches to strengthening American democracy. It is where new ideas are generated, tested, and refined before they are scaled through broader system-level work.

Its purpose is to bring 21st and 22nd century thinking, tools, and methods into the renewal of democratic systems in the United States.

**Our model is simple:**

***Diagnose where the system is breaking, conduct deep research, convene cross-sector experts to design and prototype solutions, and fund and test the most promising approaches so they can be refined, validated, and prepared for scale and adoption.***

Innovating for U.S. functions as a democratic R&D engine. Like basic and applied research in the private sector, it supports experimentation, iteration, and learning, investing in ideas early, embracing risk, and refining what works through evidence and practice.

This is pre-scale work: building, testing, and validating solutions that can later be scaled through ecosystem partners and through IFPG's system-level implementation work.

**We focus on foundational challenges that cut across democracy's core functions, including:**

- How people understand and trust information
- How narratives shape civic identity and participation
- How institutions rebuild legitimacy and public confidence
- How communication systems evolve in a fragmented media environment
- How policy ideas can be tested, refined, and translated into practice

## THE WORK

## Prizes for Democratic Innovation

A key mechanism for this work is our Prizes for Democratic Innovation. These are competitive awards designed to expand who participates in democracy innovation, bringing in interdisciplinary teams of different subject matter experts, some of whom work in the field currently and some of whom do not. Awards support multi-year experimentation, from ideation and research through design, testing, and refinement, with the goal of producing solutions ready to scale if successful.

Innovating for U.S. is intentionally structured for experimentation and iteration. It is designed to surface new approaches, test them in real-world conditions, and generate evidence about what works.

### How the Prizes work

Innovating for U.S. plans to award competitive prizes not only to boost innovation but also to expand the pool of people who participate in the development of pro-democracy efforts that address foundational challenges.

**Grants of no less than \$1.5M over three years will be awarded to teams of people with a variety of professional expertise.**

These grants are designed to break down professional silos and seek ideas from a broad range of people who would not normally be involved in democracy work. IFUS seeks proposals that address core problems and go from ideation and research to programmatic design and testing. The programs, after testing and iteration, must be able to go to scale if successful.

## THE SUMMITS

# Summits

The summits are where the convene-ideate-prototype step of our methodology comes alive. They are working interventions, not conferences. Each one is engineered to do two things at once: sharpen the foundational problem we're solving, and seed the cross-sector teams who will compete to solve it.

Problem definition in the democracy field has been fragmented and siloed for decades. Every organization defines the problem in terms that fit its own tools. The summits break that pattern. They put technologists, behavioral scientists, artists, organizers, policymakers, funders, and frontline practitioners in the same room to define foundational challenges with precision and to prototype the pathways to solve them.

### How the Summits work

Each summit is a 2.5-day curated convening designed for combustion: unlikely collisions of expertise that surface solutions no single field could produce alone. **Each summit produces three outputs: sharpened problem statements that frame Innovation Prize pathways, prototype concepts and the creative councils that will steward them, and a defined picture of what success looks like for the multi-year work that follows.**

One national summit per year anchors the foundational challenge IFUS is preparing to put into the field. Two topic-specific regional summits per year focus on state-based needs and policy solutions, partnering with local organizations and universities to ground the work in the places where democracy is being most acutely tested.

### In partnership with HATCH

We are partnering with HATCH, a network accelerator that has spent two decades curating cross-sector convenings designed to generate breakthrough collaboration. HATCH's community spans CEOs, filmmakers, scientists, technologists, artists, policymakers, and systems designers from organizations including IDEO, NASA, Google, Stanford, and the United Nations. Their craft is the design of the room itself: who is in it, how the conversation is structured, and how unexpected ideas get caught and carried forward.

The first summit, **Foundational Futures**, is in development now. It will identify the two to three core problem statements that anchor the inaugural Innovation Prize cycle, develop the creative councils that will steward each one, and define the multi-year pathway from prize to prototype to scale.

INVESTMENT

## IFUS Funding

**We are raising an initial investment of \$1.5M for IFUS.**

IFUS is the research and innovation engine that feeds the broader IFPG strategy. It is where new ideas are generated, tested, and prepared for scale.

\$1.5M is the initial tranche needed to launch the inaugural Foundational Futures Summit, seed the first Innovation Prize cycle, and stand up the operational infrastructure to carry both forward.

The full \$4M plan funds three years of programming, allowing prize teams to ideate, prototype, and validate before handing successful work off to IFPG for scale.

INITIAL \$1.5M ALLOCATION

FOUNDATIONAL FUTURES SUMMIT

**\$600K**

FIRST PRIZE COHORT

**\$750K**

CORE OPERATIONS

**\$150K**

*Three-year program budget and detailed line items available on request.*

THE ASK

## Democracy will not save itself.

The infrastructure that has weakened it was built deliberately, over decades, by people who knew exactly what they were doing. The infrastructure that defends it has to be built the same way.

**IFPG is doing that work. The next decade will determine whether it is enough.**

### We'd love your support.

Join us to help make this happen.

The next conversation is a 30-minute call to walk through any pillar in depth, share specific budgets, and talk about where your investment could have the most leverage.

CONTACT

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