

**INDEPENDENT VOTERS' CORE VALUES & MISSION STATEMENT**

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## PREFACE

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An organization such as ours aspires to catalyze and shape a mass movement for political reform. Having clear statements about our mission, our values and our plans of action helps independents learn what we can do to transform the American political culture.

The polycentric development of and within IndependentVoting.org is a microcosm of good things happening in the world today. A growing number of social scientists, economists and activists believe that society benefits most by “spontaneous and uncoordinated actions of mostly small actors whose talents are allowed to flourish”<sup>1</sup>. This kind of activity creates new inputs into longstanding problems and new facts on the ground, politically speaking. IndependentVoting.org is somewhat difficult to characterize in traditional terms because this is what we do.

In addition, in my 30 years of experience working in independent politics, I have found that it is the shared *activity* of people building new and unorthodox things together that most shapes and sustains the character of an organization. We have gone up against serious odds to bridge racial, economic and social divides in creating this movement. We take great pride in that. We have been relentless on the question of the ideological divide, meaning we reject all of the ways that the categories of “left,” “right,” and “center” are used to manipulate and degrade the American people. We take great pride in that, too. Challenging the divisions that keep Americans apart from one another, and thereby powerless, are the bread and butter of our mission.

As this document makes plain, we are deeply committed to structural reforms that disrupt the partisan *status quo*. We do not seek “outcomes” such as moderation, or splitting the difference between the parties. We do not aspire to become an interest group or a nonprofit bureaucracy. The outcome we seek is a vigorous and nonpartisan democracy which allows the American people to “own the electoral process.”

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<sup>1</sup> Howard French, in a *New York Times* book review of *The Tyranny of Experts* by William Easterly.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This document sets forth basic principles to unite Independent voters as they work to reclaim the American electoral system and political process from political parties. It articulates key values and a mission to guide the work of Independent activists as they strengthen and expand the Independent Movement in America. It also provides examples of possible goals and courses of action to be considered, along with others, by state and regional organizations as they work to advance the Independent Movement.

The first section lists the core values that bind Independent voters together. The focus of the Independent Movement is fixing our nation's broken, dysfunctional political and electoral processes. It is essential that Independents recognize that differences on substantive policies should never be permitted to fracture their unity on reforming the political and electoral process—and their unifying struggle to reclaim the political process for the American people.

The second section identifies the mission of IndependentVoting.org and, more broadly, the Independent Movement. It provides a short statement of our key purpose and task. The “elaboration of the mission statement,” provides more details that help clarify our purpose.

Appendix 1 identifies examples of defined strategies aimed at fulfilling the mission. It is our hope that these examples may be useful to state and regional organizations as they consider the specific needs of their activists, the voters in their area, and the legal, electoral and political systems within which they operate. As the contemporary political environment changes over time, these strategies may need adjustment to adapt. We have decided not to create measures of effectiveness and performance at the national level, but regional and state organizations may choose to develop tools for assessing whether they are on track for achieving their specific goals and for analyzing whether new or revised goals are appropriate.

Appendix 2 sets forth examples of possible courses of action for accomplishing goals and performing designated tasks. As with Appendix 1, it is our hope that these examples may be useful to state and regional organizations as they consider the specific needs of their activists, the voters in their area, and the legal, electoral and political systems within which they operate. We suggest that in analyzing possible courses of action, state and regional organizations consider,

among other things, alternative courses of action; recommendations for the preferred courses of action based the likelihood of success, costs, risks and intended and unintended consequences; and branches and sequels that may be pursued, depending on the successes and challenges encountered in implementing the selected courses of action.

Along with the Handbook on *How to Mobilize and Engage Independents in Your Network*, this guide is a product of the National Election Reform Committee’s mission to “motivate and equip a growing network of Independents to lead electoral reform activity that addresses the crisis of democracy in America.” Internally, we hope that this guide assists growth of the IndependentVoting.org community into a polycentric network with more activity initiated and coordinated between members at the local, state, and regional levels. Externally, we hope that this guide provides the foundation for bridging differences among various independent voters groups and other organizations interested in political reform—and provides common ground for bringing together all Americans who are committed to fixing our broken political and electoral process.

Finally, please note that this Planning Guide is meant to be a working, living document that will be revised and expanded as needed. It is being developed in the midst of a dynamic political and social movement that is currently in process. It provides general guidance at a high level but State and regional Independents should adapt it to the particular challenges and conditions they face in their respective parts of the country. We look forward to receiving comments and suggestions from Independents throughout our nation for future revisions.

## **II. INDEPENDENT VOTERS' CORE VALUES**

- Our nation is self-governing: this means that elected officials and civil servants work for the American People through their oath of office to the Constitution. All decisions of our government at every level should reflect loyalty to our nation and to the American People— not to political parties, party bosses, campaign contributors or other special interests.
- The American People (“We the People”) should be the owners of America’s electoral process.
- Ideas should be judged based on the reason and evidence that support them, not on the party or politician who propose them.
- Independents are united on these core values and support one another in advancing them through structural political reform, even though they may respectfully disagree on substantive policies.

### **III. INDEPENDENT VOTERS' MISSION STATEMENT**

#### **Mission Statement**

Our mission is to further post-partisan reform of the American political process by bringing together Independents and other fair-minded Americans to support non-partisanship in our political decision-making processes.

#### **Elaboration of Mission Statement**

By developing a national strategy, communications, and organizing, we are working (1) to connect and empower the 42% of Americans who identify themselves as Independents and (2) to educate our fellow Americans who identify with parties about the flaws in the current electoral and political processes. We do not aspire to be another special interest group, but instead to eliminate the barriers to participation in the democratic process that have been erected and maintained by parties and partisanship.

## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX 1: EXAMPLES OF STRATEGIES FOR STATE & REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Here are some examples of strategies that state and regional organizations may wish to consider. This list is provided solely for illustrative purposes. State and regional organization may want to develop and implement different strategies. Further, the numbering of these strategies is solely for purposes of readability-- not to indicate priorities, let alone the need to adopt particular strategies:

1. Promote and continue to build support among our fellow Americans for the Core Values of Independents.
2. Recruit high profile members of entertainment/media industry who are committed to the Independent Movement to support the Independent Voters' Core Values. Continue the process of obtaining support of a variety of political candidates for the Core Values of Independents.
3. Continue to develop and build alliances and coalitions with other groups to support the Independent Movement.
4. "Surround" elected politicians by pointing out that Independents outnumber any political party in the U.S.; that without their vote politicians can't be elected; and that it is in the interests of politicians to support the concept of the American People "owning" the political process.
5. Develop, implement, monitor, adjust and refine a concerted program to utilize opportunities presented by technological innovations and social media for advancing these goals.

## APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION FOR STATE & REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The following list illustrates possible courses of action that state and regional organizations may desire to implement to advance their goals. As with the list of strategies, not every state and regional organization may want to develop and implement each of these courses of action, and numbering of these is solely for purposes of readability:

1. Participate in legal actions challenging the structures that maintain the parties' hegemonic status quo. For example, consider legal proceedings such as the New Jersey litigation recent filed in *Balsam et al v. Guadagno*, 2:2014cv01388 (D. N.J.) and other proceedings challenging the tax payer funded regional boards of elections that are exclusively Democrat and Republican.
2. Target electoral and political barriers to the participation of Independents in the electoral and political systems (such as laws preventing Independents from serving on local electoral boards; gerrymandering; partisan elections at the local level).
3. Build relationships with other organizations with whom we find some common ground and participate in joint actions.
4. Engage Independents on levels from local to state to national in campaigns that garner media attention and bring visibility to independent issues. Some examples: campaigns where local people write op-ed pieces and bring awareness of independent issues and organizing to their area, radio and television interviews, participation in panel discussions, organizing of local events, doing speaking engagements.
5. Participate in networks that bring together others who may share some common concerns (e.g., Ohio Fair Elections Network).
6. Foster community-building and organizations among Independents on local, state and national levels.

7. Get changes to state and local electoral structures on the ballot or into other such arenas where they may be deliberated upon (issues such as Non Partisan Primaries including, for example, Top Two Nonpartisan Primaries or Nonpartisan Redistricting), helping to bring these changes about and furthering public awareness of the issues in the current arrangement.
8. Inundate elected officials with information on and contact by Independent constituents. For example, seize opportunities to participate in political events, forums, peaceful demonstrations and other occasions to advance the messages of the Independent Movement, including our Core Values.
9. Pepper your elected officials with letters and media articles on issues affecting Independents.
10. Ask elected officials to publicly state their platform on positions and voting histories on issues affecting Independents.
11. Obtain letters from key elected officials endorsing non-partisanship & principles of the Independent Movement (e.g. letter from Maine Senator Angus King).
12. Sponsor educational & political discussions & seminars.
13. Make presentations to local and regional organizations willing to listen to the messages and core values of the Independent Movement, such as civic organizations (Rotary, Ruritan, Lions, others).
14. Help foster the development of independent organizations among students, especially at the college and university level.
15. Organize Independents on state and regional bases by developing contacts; scheduling conference calls; planning specific activities, such as meetings with officials and other independent organizations; and where possible, convening a larger group of Independents for discussion of issues and strategies (e.g., Western and Midwestern regional conferences in 2014).

16. Communicate to our fellow Americans, media and political leaders that (1) Independents are the largest group of voters in our nation; (2) we have the organizational infrastructure, means and intent to work together to achieve our goals.
17. Consider creating a Code of Ethics for defining the standards of a clean and honorable democracy and press all candidates, regardless of party or non-party affiliation, to adopt this Code of Ethics.
18. Create specific questions for candidates for political office to determine their commitment to the Core Values of the Independent Movement.