

Progressive Strategy

Handbook 2011

A crowd funded
and open source
roadmap to a

Progressive Vision for



America's Future

The 2011 Progressive Strategy Guide

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This book is dedicated to those who strive to make the future a place worthy of our children, everywhere in the world.

A special thanks to the crowd for funding this book and showing us a new model for empowering progressive causes.

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Cognitive Policy Works is a consulting firm that analyzes the workings of the political mind for non-profits, government agencies, and social businesses. We're a team of experts in political behavior and social change with a powerful combination of skills ranging from psychology and linguistics to media studies and strategic planning.

We empower non-profit leaders and grassroots activists alike, through innovative engagement models inspired by the open source software movement. Our services include frame analysis, policy briefings, strategic advising, and training workshops.

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Welcome

So you want to be part of a real progressive movement? You've come to the right place.

We're tired of sitting idly by hoping that our elected officials will set a bold and visionary agenda for progressive change. We know that our political system is fundamentally broken and that swapping out one corporate-sponsored politician for another is only going to preserve, if not strengthen, the status quo.

And we're tired of waiting for wealthy progressives to get the message that they need to fund a movement, not just another election cycle. Since they have shown an inability to put money into progressive infrastructure for the long haul, we're going to have to do it ourselves. And with the power of social media tools, we believe it is now possible for us to come together and do this.

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Let's start with a few questions we hear a lot:

- Why have the Democrats ignored George Lakoff's advice & employ progressive frames to shift public debate?
- When are we going to see major investments in progressive infrastructure?
- Why are progressives still so divided by issue silos?
- When will there be a concerted response to the conservative propaganda machine?

After years of asking these questions ourselves, we've grown tired of waiting for someone else to provide an answer. So we're doing something radical: We're bypassing the elites, going straight to the crowd, and getting down to work.

The following pages lay out a vision for building the progressive movement based on a new paradigm for digital organizing in the internet age. The core idea behind this endeavor is this:

*The lifeblood of 21st Century democracy will be **Empowered Interactivity!***

What we need now is an engagement model that is participatory and transparent. We need a movement that empowers everyday citizens to mobilize and pull our country forward in the new millennium. And we need the tools and ideas, plus the will and the funding, to enable everyday citizens to engage in empowered interactivity.

That is the strategy for a 21st Century progressive movement.

The First Crowd-based Strategy Project

In the spirit of engagement, we are approaching this strategy handbook in a new way. From its inception, this has been a ground-breaking endeavor. It was not funded by the usual suspects—those wealthy donors who pool their resources for elite control of political parties and philanthropic institutions. This handbook is the first of its kind because it was paid for by the crowd as a crowd-funded project.¹ We have reached across the for-profit/non-profit divide and contracted with our community to serve a social mission.

Our goal is to unleash the wisdom of crowds using social media tools and a web of interactive procedures that take what we've written here as a starting point for refinement and expansion. We encourage you to think of this handbook

¹ For more information on crowdfunding see the Wikipedia description at www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crowd_funding/. This project was collaboratively funded through the website www.rockethub.com.

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as a work in progress that comes with an open invitation to help us improve it. By participating in this process, you are both helping to build a progressive infrastructure and becoming part of a progressive movement.

We believe that the burgeoning phenomenon of crowdsourcing is now mature and robust enough to serve as a model for a new kind of collective engagement. And our aim is to demonstrate that this platform is now strong enough to build a new kind of progressive infrastructure that gets around the institutional bottlenecks that plagued the movement in the past.

According to Jeff Howe, the writer for Wired Magazine who coined the term, crowdsourcing can be defined in two ways:

The White Paper Version: Crowdsourcing is the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call.

The Soundbyte Version: The application of Open Source principles to fields outside of software.

This handbook combines both definitions.

How to Use This Handbook

Ownership of the handbook is distributed to you and to all users. Since The Progressive Strategy Handbook was paid for by the crowd, the crowd owns it. We have released it under a creative commons license that distributes ownership across all users. The particulars of this legal arrangement provide clues to how it can be used.

You are free to share it with your friends without being charged (right to distribute);

- You are free to revise and improve it (right to remix), so long as you give credit to those whose work you are building upon (the attribution clause);
- You have the right to release a new version so long as you preserve this license in the new version (the viral propagation clause).

These legal criteria are designed to encourage sharing and improvement of the handbook, while also ensuring that the ability to share and improve gets passed along to later versions. So if you contribute to this project, you will be given credit for your work and you will be free to access and use the materials generated by the crowd into the future.

In the spirit of collaboration, our team at Cognitive Policy Works will help foster dialogue around how to improve the handbook. We'll provide online forums for open discussion and debate on our website.² And we will help attract various experts to the effort as the need arises. In

² The online forums can be found at CognitivePolicyWorks.com/handbook

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concrete terms, this means we will provide a space on our blog for targeted discussions about strategy development and action as new topics arise. And we will offer our expertise as part of the mix to help clarify and extend what is already written here.

We have also been inspired by a powerful approach to product development called rapid prototyping, also known as “release early, release often” in the software world. If this project is successful, we envision extended versions of the handbook coming out on a regular basis that incorporate the best contributions from online discussions – along with new supplemental materials on specific strategy areas that warrant special attention.

So you can use this handbook at its current state of development (and share it with your friends). And you can also become part of the creative process and add your expertise to help build better strategies and tools for the progressive movement.

A New Moment for Progressives

Here we are in the early days of 2011, feeling the significance of this moment. We find ourselves standing at a crossroad in American history, a junction with two paths before us.

One road winds onward toward an empire controlled by powerful elites whose riches pile high behind the security gates of their walled-off communities. In that land of scorched earth and darkened sky, the working people find themselves in a state of perpetual debt,¹ indentured servants to the machines of industry that callously horde wealth and preserve a privileged status quo through their consolidated media system. We already have glimpses of this future in

¹ In January 2011, approximately 1 in 4 U.S. home mortgages are underwater. For an on-going description of how the loss of home values affects individual families, see the series Learning to Walk: www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/03/learning-to-walk-underwater-mortgages_n_818315.html

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the tattered safety net and crippling infrastructure of our society.²

The other road leads toward a participatory democracy where people come together and celebrate the bonds of humanity, a land of tolerance and diversity that promotes individual fulfillment through supportive social institutions. In this land of possibility, wealth is defined as anything that promotes widespread health and prosperity, and expands people's opportunities and choices. We explore new economic models that seek balance with natural systems in the spirit of social innovation and civic entrepreneurship. We have already seen hints of this different world in the emerging community-based markets that merge capitalism's powerful ability to identify and meet people's needs and wants with the shared values of civic spirit, social responsibility, and community stewardship.³

Wouldn't it be great to live in an America where government programs, including our legal system, are stable, unbiased and effective; where we can trust our government officials to have our best interests at heart; and where we are in solidarity with fellow citizens about developing shared prosperity for all? In other words, can't we have an America where we are safe and secure in our

²This article details how U.S. inequality is even greater than that of Egypt: thinkprogress.org/2011/01/31/income-inequality-egypt/

³ An inspiring overview can be found in *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption* by Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers (2010).

homes, health, jobs, and community so we can work and debate without resorting to violence?

We are faced with a choice between continuing to live in a broken economy that serves the few at the expense of the many, or rolling up our sleeves and working together to build a better economy that serves everyone together.

This is our moment. This is our choice. We can bury our heads in the sand, or we can get organized and strategic about driving social change.

A Snapshot of the Movement Today

Want a slogan that captures the gist of progressive political strategies in America today? Too little, too late sums it up nicely. While conservatives invest hundreds of millions each year in a vast network of think tanks, media outlets, and talent recruitment centers all focused on spreading their vision of America, progressives remain divided against ourselves in a hundred issue silos and mired in reactionary tactics that constantly keep us on the defensive. Conservatives dominate the media landscape and set the bounds of our political discourse. And we tend to feel powerless to stop them because we lack the capacity to build an effective response.¹

Add to this the fact that corporate money has a stranglehold on both political parties. While conservatives align with powerful political institutions through the Republican

¹ For an overview on conservative and progressive infrastructure go to: www.commonwealinstitute.org/progressive-infrastructure-information-page/

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Party, we find ourselves in the inconvenient position of having to struggle against corporate Democrats who benefit from the elite power structures standing in the way of progress.² So we must contend with conservative media and a larger political system that is structurally aligned with preserving a conservative status quo.

This has to change.

We need a new approach to political strategy that gets us out of this rut. Not only do we need better strategies (more on this in a moment), we also need better methods and models for cultivating and implementing them. It just isn't enough to take the tools of yesterday and apply them to the challenges of tomorrow. We have to be innovative. We have to constantly learn and grow, evolving to meet the changing needs of our movement.

And America needs the progressive movement to be strong!

Consider this. Research on political psychology has shown that people who align with conservatism tend to have high anxiety about change, and embrace authoritarian structures as a way to preserve external stability and control. In today's turbulent times, this means conservatives are having a hard time coping. They hunker down and cling to ideas that

² See for example Obama's appointment of Jeff Immelt, CEO of General Electric, to simultaneously sit as the head of the White House's outside panel of economic advisors: openleft.com/diary/21566/businessweek-investors-tout-immelt-as-vehicle-for-corporations-to-sculpt-obamas-economic-policy

applied to a different era, or lash out against changes that they aren't equipped to handle.³

Conversely, the psychology of liberals aligns more with tolerance of ambiguity and a greater ability to consider alternative perspectives. This is why we are better equipped to see the suffering of marginalized groups and push the envelope on cultural issues, even when we don't know what society will look like after we make a change. Add that we're also better at envisioning what possible futures will look like if we do attempt change, and it's easy to understand why America has always turned to progressives whenever a large-scale reorganization of society has become necessary.

So it makes sense that we call ourselves progressives. We have a natural predilection toward progress, and the necessary skills and attitudes that make us change agents and social entrepreneurs. It is time to take pride in what we do to advance civilization—and to put our unique talents

³ For an accessible overview of the psychological differences between liberals and conservatives read this article: www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200612/the-ideological-animal

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to work to re-make and re-define the structures that tie our country to an outdated status quo.

The Big Picture

The progressive movement needs a brand identity—a Big Picture that sets out the values, principles and ideas that guide our thinking, communication, and policies.⁴

We need to spell out what things like climate action have to do with gay rights and why ending the genocide in Darfur sits beside corporate governance as a concern we all share.

We won't be truly effective until we can describe the Big Picture that all our various causes fit into—the ethical basis that drives every decision we make and every action we choose. The pieces hang together in the “mushy” (that is: intangible, non-quantifiable, and often highly emotional) space of shared values and social norms, the moral worldview that constitutes our progressive ideology.⁵ Without that strong collective vision, we can't galvanize our movement into a coherent community capable of collective action—let alone offer the rest of the country an inspiring vision of the future we'd like to lead them to.

⁴ See Jonathan Smucker's description of the importance of grassroots organizational branding: beyondthechoir.org/uncategorized/organizational-branding-grassroots-communications-tips-pt-4/

⁵ Learn about the progressive worldview here: CognitivePolicyWorks.com/learning-center/resources/thinking-points/chapter-4-part-1-progressive-morality/

This handbook builds on the foundational insight that social movements hang together around three things:

- A shared identity comprising the core values, worldview, and character of the movement;
- A vividly detailed, richly compelling vision of the better world that the movement seeks to create; and
- An oppositional threat that the movement pushes against in order to right a fundamental wrong in society.

Of course, a movement also needs the resources—people, ideas, materials, money, and connections etc.—to get this out. This is the necessary matrix that ties any movement together; the common soil out of which a thousand flowers can bloom, eventually evolving into a complex, self-reinforcing, and highly adaptive ecosystem.

The progressive movement in America today has all of these necessary elements. We just haven't formally articulated them and put them forward at the center of our agenda. This handbook, with its unique approach to collaborative engagement, will begin the process of remedying this situation.

How We Will Build Progressive Strategies

The rest of this handbook provides a framework for cultivating new capacities for the progressive movement, which can be broken down into four elements:

- Know the Landscape
- Set the Agenda
- Prepare to Engage
- Be an Innovator

Simply put, we want to take actions that increase our ability to influence the trajectory of America over time. But action is meaningless without knowing the landscape that sets our context, enables us to see what is possible now, and gives us clues as to how things will change in the future. We provide an overview of global trends that place the United States in an emerging context in the section titled “America Is At An Inflection Point”.

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In order to be strategic, we need our actions to set an agenda that moves us toward our progressive vision. The section “Setting The Agenda For America’s Future” introduces frame analysis as a method for strategic agenda-setting that will help us reframe the public discourse around our vision of the United States while countering conservative propaganda.

Creating a powerful Progressive Majority will require that we become more organized, more cohesive, and more broadly appealing to the masses. Our agenda will not unfold unless we are prepared to engage our fellow citizens in a deeper and more compelling dialogue than what they currently experience. This is covered in the section “Paving The Way to Engagement”.

And finally, we have to be willing to question foundational assumptions about what it means to be a progressive. Every one of us must be an innovator who can participate in the creation of new business models, disruptive technologies, and organizing principles for our movement to succeed in the great transition that lays before us. We close things out with “Change How Politics Is Done”.

America at an Inflection Point

America has already begun a fundamental transition. Many vested interests cling to the status quo without realizing that the world has changed under their feet. But progressives already know the truth: It has changed, and there's no turning back. This fundamental truth will define the future of America and shape the progressive response throughout the global community, both at home and abroad.

The changes we're facing in this century are so different that we can't rely on tactics we used on the last century's battlefields. New strategies are needed that reflect our updated knowledge that:

- America is already in transition and cannot go back to the way things were;

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- A confluence of global patterns has created a threat unprecedented in human history;
- Intergenerational shifts have changed who we are and how we interact with one another;
- We have entered an epic Age of Consequences and must ensure that the United States becomes an exemplar of progressive leadership in the world.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

The Inevitable Transition

The United States has transitioned from a burgeoning experiment in capitalistic democracy to the position of unparalleled world super power. And now it has become a place of widespread inequality, crippling personal and national debt, and corroding infrastructure, where opportunities are unevenly distributed and future prospects for the majority of our citizens are uncertain.

The United States has fallen out of sync with the times. The institutional models that brought it greatness in past centuries are ill-equipped for the challenges of tomorrow. We can take advantage of this situation by recognizing that we are breaking free from the outdated models that created our current predicament. We are now entering a new era, full of opportunities for new kinds of entrepreneurship and innovation. We are privileged to be the pioneers of a new America that is now taking shape.

As we develop strategies for the progressive movement, we must be mindful that the future will not be like the past. We cannot simply assume that our companies will be the most innovative, nor that our currency will remain the standard for global commodities like oil and grain. And we cannot perpetuate the frames of national development that place us above other countries as the global leader in technology, clean energy, urban design, agriculture, and other vital economic sectors. These frames conceal and obfuscate the realities of our second tier status in health care, manufacturing, human security, education, sustainability, and economic prosperity.

We are a country that has lost its way. This should be a rallying call to progressives everywhere. Those who want to keep us in this quagmire have no vision for the future. It is up to us to create one that captivates the imagination of the American people and the world.

To understand the way forward, we must first understand why our country has fallen into decline. There are many contributing factors. The four that we believe are most critical to address are:

- The unprecedented concentration of wealth in the hands of a few powerful groups;
- A consolidated corporate media system that promotes the conservative worldview and marginalizes progressive voices through an array of propaganda techniques;

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- A broken national political system that is structurally incapable of producing democratic outcomes; and
- The conservative philosophy of governance that has destroyed our heritage of democratic ideals.

The Need for Global Context

While this handbook focuses on the progressive movement in the United States, it is essential that we also remain aware of the larger global context we're working in. The next generation of progressive leaders must contend with the depletion of natural resources, a destabilizing planetary climate system, and rapid urbanization across the globe that threatens to exacerbate these seemingly intractable problems. Hundreds of new cities will be built to accommodate the massive populations of India and China, driving economic pressure for extraction of an ever-scarcer pool of resources.

A global green economy is already starting to take shape, though the United States is not among the countries taking the lead in this transformation. As many of our elected officials deny basic science about the seriousness of environmental degradation, we see bold leadership in many other places that are already reaping the rewards of entrepreneurship and innovation. Germany is rapidly renovating its residential energy systems toward renewable sources. Places like Amsterdam, Melbourne, and Copenhagen exemplify 21st Century walkable cities

while U.S. cities are enmeshed in outdated urban planning paradigms that created car-centric suburban sprawl. And China owns the manufacturing capacity for solar panels and wind turbines—including some technologies that first originated in the U.S.

Competing in this rapidly changing global economy will require that the U.S. invest in innovation and entrepreneurship like it did throughout the middle of the 20th Century—and ensure that the benefits of this innovation are used to increase our overall prosperity at home, rather than re-directed to financiers and shareholders who will divert the proceeds overseas.

The monumental shifts in the global economy have risen on a growing worldwide digital communications infrastructure—a vast network of satellites, internet server hubs, and widespread access to computing in the form of desktop computers, laptops, and mobile phones. Out of this web of technologies has emerged a vibrant information ecosystem that is producing disruptive innovations in every sector of the economy, while also transforming communications and organizing in the realm of politics.

These converging trends are culminating in a new paradigm for the 21st Century global economy based on ecological insights and social media tools. The progressive movement will find its greatest strengths by leveraging the tremendous opportunities that come with this monumental transition. At the same time, a threat exists that is unprecedented in

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human history. Never before has a civilization reached the planetary scale, where resource depletion threatens the viability of not just one culture but of the entire human race.

So the progressive movement must span beyond our borders and collaborate with our international allies in order to participate in the global transition that is taking place.

Intergenerational Change in the United States

While the larger global community is changing, there are also major demographic shifts underway within the United States. The progressive movement of the next few decades will look and feel different than it did in the late 20th Century. We'll draw attention to just two aspects of this shift that will affect progressive strategy-making—the ascent of a multi-racial majority in America, and the rising Millennial Generation.

Non-Europeans are no longer a minority in much of America, and will become the national majority sometime around 2040. Ethnic groups hailing from Latin America, Africa, and East Asia represent the new multi-tonal majority in the United States. The implications of this changeover are nuanced and difficult to predict, but the early information we have suggests that this majority is ours to lose. Latinos, African-Americans, and Asian

immigrants all vote very solidly progressive at present. However, this advantage is weakened by two factors.

The first is a rising wave of young conservatives who are rejecting their elders' racism. The Republican Party has used race as a wedge issue for over 80 years; but it's possible that in another 20 years, we could be faced with a conservative party that no longer deals in racial politics, and may thus be more attractive to immigrants and people of color. Hispanic and African-American Evangelicals, who already agree with some social conservative positions, may be particularly responsive to these appeals.

The second potential pitfall is that historically, voters from all groups tend to become more politically conservative as they move from the working class into the middle class. So, ironically, progressives open up the doors to social mobility; but those who pass through them fall farther away from progressive positions as they rise. Middle-class African-Americans have been the group hardest hit by the recent economic downturns, which mitigates some of this loss for the short term. But as their prosperity increases in the future, we may expect to lose them again.

The second way that demographics are changing is that a supermajority of Americans now lives in large metropolitan areas, and this trend will continue into the foreseeable future. So urban politics will become increasingly important and the major focus for economic development will be at the

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regional scale of metropolitan areas.¹ This is an exciting prospect for progressives because the density and diversity of urban communities promotes heightened tolerance and open-mindedness in the spirit of progressivism.

However, this increasing urbanization is also being accompanied by a long-term trend in which white Americans over 40 are rapidly exiting into all-white enclaves that re-create the segregated suburbs of the 1950s. Some scholars are concerned that by 2025, these “whitopias,” which range from working-class exurbs to affluent resort cities that cater to the wealthy, will polarize the country along new lines. On one hand, we’ll have urban areas which are younger, multi-racial, and poorer; and on the other, there will be enclaves that are the last bastions of old, concentrated white power. The two camps could end up in deep political conflict over which one represents the True America.

In the end, however, it will be the Millennial Generation that redefines our political and economic realities over the next 40 years.² Born between 1980 and 2000 (roughly), they are the first native internet generation—and the most socially adept and technologically skilled users of information ever to walk this earth. They grew up immersed in networked environments that promote systems thinking and egalitarian group structures. They define authority differently than

1 Excellent demographic analysis of metropolitan development can be found here: www.brookings.edu/metro/StateOfMetroAmerica.aspx

2 Learn more about this inspiring young generation at www.gen-we.com/

past generations did, and expect the powerful to use their power for the good of everyone in the group. Raised in a time of extreme financial turbulence, they value security, and believe in the power of the collective—the government or the community—to provide it. They are also the most ethnically diverse generation in American history: 44% self-identify as non-white or multiracial, and they speak more languages and have more friends abroad than any generation before them.

Millenials are also pro-sumers and makers of “user-generated content” who expect to be able to hack into production systems and modify them for their purposes. As such, they are highly interactive and entrepreneurial in their approaches to problem-solving. And they collaborate instinctively through the pervasively social environments that surround them. The future of the progressive movement depends almost entirely on how well we can harness the creativity and organizing power of this young generation as they begin to assert their political and economic power.

Entering the Age of Consequences

This brief survey is just a sample of the vast web of changes that are altering the landscape that progressives will be working in. Simply seeking to elect more Democrats or fund policy initiatives will not be enough. We must fundamentally reconsider what it means to be an American

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Progressive in the face of profound and fundamental change.

Put in a global context, we are talking about the evolution of the United States in the midst of global ecological disturbances. We have entered an Age of Consequences where the steps we take now may determine the fate of us all.

It's a serious situation, and we need to get serious about developing better strategies and methods for implementing them. Partisan wrangling within a broken political system won't get us where we need to be. We can't keep trying to operate on the basis of reason and facts in the face of massive propaganda systems that crush our ideas in the public realm. And we can't merely count on wealthy progressives to fund an elite system of think tanks and media centers when the stakes are so high. We need an All Hands On Deck approach to mobilizing that engages and empowers everyday citizens to participate in the next stage of the American experiments in democracy and capitalism.

So let's not squander another moment. Turn the page, and let's start creating the strategies that will enable us to create large-scale social change at home and around the world.

Setting the Agenda for America's Future

By now you're probably wondering where the strategy guidance comes in. We don't presume to know everything that will be needed. We'll provide many insights and ideas, as well as some process structure, but we're also counting on the crowd to contribute in these areas (and others) as well. Our contribution comes from years working as cognitive scientists, social scientists, and political strategists. So we'll get the conversation started by explaining how progressives can frame the debate and set the course for America in the next several decades.

You may be familiar with the work of George Lakoff, whose writings have brought frame analysis into the political mainstream.¹ Several members of our team worked closely with Lakoff as Fellows of the former Rockridge Institute, [1 linguistics.berkeley.edu/people/person_detail.php?person=21](http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/people/person_detail.php?person=21)

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analyzing political discourse and revealing value-laden frames that promote progressive and conservative ideology.

If you aren't familiar with frame analysis, don't worry. It is simply a set of research methods for revealing the mental models that constitute how people think about and understand the world. Frame theory arose in several different fields around the same time in the mid-1970's to explain the inner logic of human thought—spanning the disciplines of psychology, robotics, linguistics, sociology, and media studies.

What is a Frame?

George Lakoff describes them as:

“Frames are the mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality—and sometimes to create what we take to be reality. [T]hey structure our ideas and concepts, they shape how we reason, and they even impact how we perceive and how we act. For the most part, our use of frames is unconscious and automatic—we use them without realizing it.”²

Stephen Reece, in the field of media studies, gives this working definition:

² See chapter 3 of *Thinking Points: Communicating Our American Values and Vision* for a discussion of political frames. Download it here: CognitivePolicyWorks.com/resource-center/thinking-points/

“Frames are the organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.”³

Frames are everywhere around us. They are the conceptual models in our minds that allow us to make sense of the world. We cannot have a coherent thought without them. There is no such thing as “choosing” to use frames, only a matter of being more conscious about selecting frames rather than blindly using them without knowing it.

What Do We DO With Them?

So how do we use frames to make America’s course a progressive path into the future? It helps to think of framing as agenda-setting, a common usage in the policy-making world. We want to set the context for action that places our ideals, our most pressing concerns, and our core values at the forefront of public discourse.

As an example, consider the Industrial Education Frame⁴ that is setting the scope of education policy in America today. This frame places emphasis on a core set of ideas about schools as places that can be run like factories, where knowledgeable students are products to be produced like widgits and built on the assembly line (thus the emphasis on

3 Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Understanding of the Social World, edited by Reese et al. (2003).

4 A very explicit, tongue-in-cheek description of schools as factory-like businesses can be found at educationontheplate.wordpress.com/2010/02/01/run-schools-like-businesses-absolutely

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developing technology-based “teacher proof” standardized lessons), and responsibility is understood through the lens of top-down authoritarianism (e.g., quality control is molding all students to pass the same state or national standards, which are measured with standardized tests, and teachers with students who make low scores are punished). The conservative agenda for public education is understood through this web of concepts that collectively represents a conceptual model for education reform.

As a progressive you probably recoil at the thought of schools set up as factories. Your values beckon a different understanding of education based on an intuitive sense that children are individuals who blossom, not machines that are can be built to order. You probably prefer to think of schools as a place to cultivate young minds, where teachers nurture the learning process and all children grow smarter and more engaged in civic affairs.

This understanding stems from the Garden School Frame that allows us to think about children as living beings who need proper nourishment and guidance to grow into healthy adults. It also provides a context for seeing teachers as valued professionals with a responsibility to both the children they teach and the larger communities those children will join as they become adults. Teachers are seen as both gardeners sharing the fruits of knowledge and stewards of the education landscape.⁵

⁵ For more on educational framing, see EricHaas’ The Framing of No Child Left Behind: CognitivePolicyWorks.com/resource-center/education-policy-and-

It is easy to understand why framing matters so much for politics. If the wrong conceptual model is used to understand political issues, it will be very unlikely that effective solutions get implemented. As long as education is thought of as a 19th Century industrial process we won't get the 21st Century public education system we need and deserve. And these deeper assumptions do more than set the context for problem-solving, they also establish the right-and-wrong sentiments for what society should do and how people should be treated.

Throughout the last several decades, conservative frames have put up boundaries around our public discourse, and haven't been seriously challenged by progressives. Because of this, conservatives dominate the agenda for policy-making in every arena from environment to economy, from national security to international trade, and from taxation and governance to the act of voting at the heart of our representative democracy.

Using Frames to Set Our Agenda

If we are to set a progressive agenda for the United States, we'll have to learn how the debate has already been framed—and directly challenge the toxic mental models with frames of our own.

Luckily, the foundational work on this has already been done. The Rockridge Institute brought together thinkers
practice/the-framing-of-no-child-left-behind

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and strategists who identified many of the central frames in political discourse. An archive of papers has been created on the Cognitive Policy Works website to preserve this legacy.⁶ And many frame analysts emerged on the scene (ourselves included) as beneficiaries of the unique training that this work provided. We are now engaging in the more difficult work of introducing frame analysis into the daily operations of progressive organizations.

You can participate in this vital endeavor by learning about frame analysis as a set of tools for:

- Deconstructing cultural narratives that establish our commonsense;
- Revealing the underlying modes of political thought that drive human behavior;
- Challenging the conservative agenda by calling out the harms of its logical conclusions; and
- Promoting a progressive agenda by framing the issues in a manner that reflects the character, core values, and collective identity of our movement.

To help get you started, consider these pairings of antagonistic frames that should be part of our agenda-setting discussion:⁷

⁶ GeorgeLakoff.com

⁷ It may be helpful to think about electing a primary frame as more a matter of deciding on emphasis than making an absolute either/or judgment.

CONSERVATIVE	PROGRESSIVE
Are we a nation of rugged individuals, where each of us does everything on our own?	Are we comprised of strong families and communities, where we enable each other to succeed?
Is the essence of human nature that we are rational actors who make individual choices?	Is the essence of human nature that we are ecological beings embedded in a web of physical, cultural, and biological relationships that shape how we act in the world?
Is the primary role of government to be a strong authority figure that punishes wrong-doing?	Should government empower and protect us to promote human flourishing?
Are people inherently bad such that they must be disciplined to learn right from wrong?	Are people inherently social and learn right from wrong through role models in their community?

Each pairing of frames reveals a deep tension in how we might understand the world around us. As we consider what the American Story should be, we'll chose which of these and other frames often does, as well as should be, primarily guiding our thinking in order to understand what it means to live in a good society.

Change How Politics Is Done

Now is the time for bold change. Two years ago, we rallied around a campaign with this theme. It was exciting. People were engaged. And then... the same old game played on because we didn't change the system. We still have the same congressional rules, the same corporate-sponsored elections, and the same dominant media institutions setting the agenda for American politics. It really shouldn't come as a surprise that we haven't seen bold change come out of Washington. Replacing an outdated and broken political/economic system is serious work, much more difficult than electing a candidate to the White House. It takes time to dig in and replace the fundamentals of a complex web of institutions built over a span of decades and, in some cases, centuries.

There may be a time for finger pointing and assignment of blame, but this isn't it. Huge challenges stand before

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us and we've got a choice to make about the future of our country. Now is the time to do the heavy lifting and create change we can really believe in.

We've already seen where the conservative movement wants to take America. They've made their choice clear: they want a corporate-controlled empire that channels immense wealth to the super rich by destroying America's middle class—which Plato knew was the bulwark of any democracy—and consigns the lower 98% of us to the ranks of the working poor. They care more about preserving old institutions that no longer fit the world we live in and refuse to engage with the titanic changes that are already defining our new reality. They've also shown that they'd be perfectly content to let America's legendary democracy collapse into neo-feudalism, if that's what it takes to preserve their antiquated systems of authoritarian power.

We can't let this happen. Our choice is also clear. We must become true progressives and carry our faltering country through a process of rebirth so that it can enter the new economic paradigm that our predicament requires. This is our moment to really shine by taking pride in our role as the social innovators and change agents who create the new and better world.

So what is our central strategy? It is to unleash our entrepreneurial creativity and cultivate the institutions of tomorrow. We will create the new models for civic engagement using the tools presented in this handbook,

along with those that emerge in our unfolding dialogue in the crowd.

The work has already begun. As we write these words onto the page, there are civic entrepreneurs out there in all walks of life creating disruptive technologies, launching social businesses, and living stories of life in a progressive world. We see them launching micro-finance projects like Kiva and Grameen Bank. They are running car-sharing companies like Zipcar and developing social media tools for mobile phones like One Bus Away.²⁴ They are represented in Europe by the 200 businesses of the Mondragon Cooperative; and in the U.S. by the co-op movement, which includes hundreds of businesses that have been owned by their customers or their employees for many decades now. The world is sprouting with new business models that decentralize economic power, create wealth in ways that are sustainable and fair, and enrich their communities as well as their shareholders.

What does it mean to be a civic innovator? It means we all become social designers who hack into poorly designed systems and make them work better. We look at how the systems of society work today (or how they don't) and we create elegant solutions to chronic problems. In electoral politics, this may be about removing private money from campaigns or starting conversations about the limitations of our two-party system. In international affairs, it is about reining in multinational corporations by creating new legal

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structures that both regulate them on the global stage and re-design them to serve the public good (as the Benefit Corporation²⁵ and L3C charters²⁶ attempt to do).

We can't make big changes happen overnight. But we can make them happen if we collaborate effectively.

There are plenty more strategies to be developed. Others we've already mentioned include:

- Brand the progressive movement;
- Set our agenda by framing the debate;
- Use crowdsourcing to build our capacity;
- Leverage social media to build a response to the conservative propaganda machine;
- Learn how the political mind works so that we know how to engage effectively.

There are plenty more that we haven't included, many of which will come from others in the community—perhaps even from you. We have the advantage of our strength of numbers. And we have the right disposition for facing an uncertain future with confidence, curiosity, and excitement.

Let's show the world what it really means to be a progressive.

Launch Strategic Actions

Are you fired up and ready to take action? The name of the game is empowered interactivity and the wisdom resides in the crowd, so we're going to need a way to work together. And we need to come up with projects that have a strategic impact. In the words of George Lakoff:

“The most powerful form of thinking is strategic. It is not just a matter of thinking ahead. It is a matter of changing the landscape of thought and action. It is a matter of setting many things in motion by setting one thing in motion. It is a matter of reconfiguring the future by doing one thing in the present.”

This is how he introduced the concept of strategic initiatives in the book *Thinking Points*.¹ We need to create strategic initiatives that leverage impacts in two ways:

¹ Download *Thinking Points* at CognitivePolicyWorks.com/resource-center/thinking-points/

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- Multifaceted initiatives where a targeted policy change has far-reaching effects across many areas, advancing a range of goals through one change; and
- Domino initiatives where a first step is taken toward a broader goal that makes the next steps easier or inevitable.

He then went on to suggest four initiatives that could be game changers: clean elections, healthy food, ethical business, and transit-for-all.

- Clean elections would change the fundamentals of power in our politics.
- Healthy food would drive a cascade of economic and social changes through our communities.
- Ethical business would create new incentive structures that change social behavior at all levels of society.
- And reliable transit-for-all would give the majority of Americans a daily reminder of the shared benefits that an effective government can provide, while also breaking of us of our insular car culture.

With each example it is clear that a targeted agenda can lead to sweeping changes if its objectives are achieved. It is through this kind of high-level thinking that we can coordinate our efforts across issue silos, focus on the kind of world we want to create, and advocate for a progressive vision of America.

We can create and carry out strategic initiatives together through the discussion forums for this handbook (see link below). Pooling our collective knowledge will allow us to

harvest the best of our ideas and mobilize our resources for driving targeted efforts that advance the movement toward its larger goals. This is something our institutions have lost sight of too frequently in recent years. And it is something that self-organizing crowds are particularly well suited to accomplish.²

Because this document began with crowdsourcing, we think that the first strategic initiatives that come out of it should further leverage the power of this idea. Let's harness the power of mobile phones and the internet to organize powerless people into a collective force capable of overwhelming existing power structures. This is starting to happen all over the world, and it can happen in the U.S. as well.

A critical starting place is to rethink the financial structure of the progressive movement. The limits of elite funding are clear: begging for money from wealthy individuals or institutions is not a sustainable strategy for any change movement. While we appreciate the generosity of the movement's donors, we've been badly hurt by their blind spot where the issue of progressive branding, framing, and narrative are concerned.

We have learned that we cannot count on donors to make long-range strategic investments in the movement's future.

² For an overview of unique strengths of crowd-based mobilization, read Clay Shirky's *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (2008).

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And fortunately, we have also learned that we may not have to. So we begin with a call for the micro-financing of the progressive movement. Let's use the same crowdfunding power that brought this handbook to life to channel our diffuse resources into the pressure points that leverage systemic change.

Let's Get to Work!

Join us for a discussion of this initiative at the link below and help hone and clarify the other strategic initiatives that will become the backbone of the emerging Progressive Majority. Collaborate with us as we envision the future of politics in the United States and around the world.

We need everyone to be part of the solution and there is a lot of work to do. The first step toward bold and transformational change is to join the conversation. The second step follows from what we say to one another when we start talking. And then all of the subsequent steps become possible when we launch strategic initiatives.

Help us make America a beacon of progress in the world once again: *CognitivePolicyWorks.com/handbook*

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