

Conservative Philanthropy

By Niki Jagpal

Justice Rising

March 2012

What drives change at the federal policy level?

Over a decade of research by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) demonstrates that conservative philanthropy has succeeded at building a right-wing policy agenda by providing sustained support to conservative think tanks and building the base of a conservative grassroots-powered movement.

Richard Fink, founder of the Koch-funded conservative think tank, the Mercatus Center, stated succinctly the conservative perspective on philanthropy's purpose: funders should use political action committees and think tanks to turn intellectual positions into policy "products." The Mercatus Center has demonstrated success in moving such products — 14 of the 23 regulations on George W. Bush's so-called "hit list" were suggested by this think tank.

The rise of the "Tea Party" movement, funded in large part by oil-industry billionaires Charles and David Koch, and the outcomes of the 2010 midterm elections demonstrate the efficacy of such funding. As Charles Koch states, he sees grassroots organizing as a key political strategy: "To bring about social change" requires "a strategy" that is "vertically and horizontally integrated," spanning "from idea creation to policy development to education to grassroots organizations to lobbying to litigation to political action."

By coupling top-down approaches with bottom-up mobilization supported by the use of effective funding strategies, the conservatives are succeeding at moving their policy agenda. These strategies include:

-

Providing long-term multiyear grants and significant amounts of unrestricted core support, which allow grantees to respond to the ever-changing political landscape.

-

Giving more and bigger grants to a targeted group of grantees they knew would advance their agenda.

[Read the full piece](#) .