



Documents reveal a powerful, secretive foundation's blueprint for spreading right-wing ideology, state by state

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The billionaire industrialists Charles and David Koch get a lot of press coverage about their vast, conservative political spending network that helps elect right-wing officials at the federal, state and local levels and advocates for policies that increase the profits of their fossil fuel and manufacturing conglomerate, Koch Industries. Earning far less publicity but perhaps equally powerful in driving rightward change in America is the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, a private foundation based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

New investigations by Daniel Bice of the [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) and Mary Bottari of the [Center for Media and Democracy](#) analyze hacked internal documents, which reveal that much like the Koch network, the Bradley Foundation has launched a national strategy to help conservatives control the branches of state governments and alter state policy to lower taxes, shrink government and attack labor unions.

The Bradley Foundation, which has historically supported taxpayer-funded “school choice” initiatives and work requirements for welfare recipients, is named after Lynde and Harry Bradley, two brothers who founded the profitable factory automation manufacturer Allen Bradley Co. After Lynde’s death in 1942, the Allen-Bradley Foundation was established. When Allen Bradley was sold to Rockwell International in 1985 for \$1.7 billion, the foundation’s assets ballooned and it became the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation as it added a focus on promoting the brothers’ conservative ideology on a national scale.

Thirty gigabytes of Bradley Foundation internal documents hacked by a group named Anonymous Poland reveal that after a \$200 million influx of cash in late 2012 from the trust of Caroline Bradley, Lynde’s wife, the Bradley Foundation geared up to fund networks of conservative think tanks, legal centers, candidate recruitment organizations, media outlets and advocacy groups in 13 states, based on the foundation’s successful efforts in Wisconsin. The foundation had already laid the groundwork for a welfare-to-work program and a private school voucher system and defended GOP Gov. Scott Walker in a campaign finance probe, helping him survive a recall election prompted by his dismantling of public-sector unions.

Now the foundation is focusing on five states it views as having a strong conservative infrastructure, thus making them ripe for rightward change. The foundation is working to expand conservative power in Colorado, North Carolina, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin by funding established networks of right-wing organizations that promote conservatism and help far-right candidates win elections. It’s a long-term strategy that “can take decades,” according to the longtime CEO of the foundation, Rick Graber, who recently stepped down from his post.

The trove of hacked documents shows that Bradley Foundation has recently given large grants to groups in these states, including a \$575,000 commitment to five organizations in Colorado, two of which aim to “defund teachers unions and achieve real education reform”; \$1.5 million to two groups founded and mostly funded by the Koch brothers’ biggest ally in North Carolina, Art Pope, to create a “disruptive communications framework” to amplify conservative news; and another \$1.5 million to a group in Washington and a field office in Oregon to “educate union workers themselves about their rights” and “defund Big Labor.”

The Bradley grantee, the Freedom Foundation, went to court to obtain the names of 34,000 union workers in order to urge them to ditch their union. Since the grant, 4,000 members of the Washington-based public sector union SEIU Local 925 have reportedly left the union. And adding to its already large investment in Wisconsin, the foundation gave \$1.2 million to an organization to found the Center for Competitive Federalism, tasked with stopping the federal government from requiring certain state actions in exchange for federal funding.

With \$845 million in assets at the end of 2015, the Bradley Foundation rivals the several Koch family foundations in size and in grants disbursed. That year, the Bradley Foundation gave out nearly \$49 million in gifts and grants, while four Koch foundations and the nonprofit Charles Koch Institute donated close to \$58 million. Both families give to many of the same national conservative organizations, including the corporate bill mill the American Legislative Exchange Council and right-wing think tanks the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute, as well as to several additional think tanks that the Kochs founded such as the libertarian Cato Institute and the George Mason University-based Mercatus Center. From 2011 to 2015, the Bradley Foundation has given \$550,000 to the Kochs’ Americans for Prosperity Foundation, the sister group of the brothers’ most well-known political nonprofit, Americans for Prosperity.

Both families also contribute huge amounts to higher education, often donating funds to support libertarian economics professors and academic centers devoted to free market economics. The Charles Koch Foundation is a profound donor to colleges and universities, having dished out hundreds of millions of dollars to higher ed programs that advance the Kochs’ laissez-faire economic ideology. Likewise, the Bradley Foundation has devoted well over \$100 million toward like-minded professors, programs and graduate fellowships at universities, including \$13.7 million to Marquette University and \$9.2 million to Harvard University from 1986 to 2013, according to ConservativeTransparency.org.

Between the Kochs, the Bradleys and their deep-pocketed allies, the conservative political movement was already quite robust by the time the Bradley Foundation took in \$200 million in late 2012. Now state-level politics are even more tilted toward the right, as Republicans hold 33 governorships and 69 state legislative chambers.

Some of the state-level goals of the Bradley Foundation are beginning to happen on a national scale. Right-wing media outlets such as Breitbart News and independent conspiracy theorists like Mike Cernovich are gaining steam. With Donald Trump in the White House, a union-crushing national “right-to-work” bill is possible. School choice champion Betsy DeVos now heads the Department of Education, and she and Trump want to spend \$20 billion on charter school expansion and taxpayer-funded private school vouchers. Congress, with Trump’s blessing, has already passed a gigantic tax cut for the super-rich in the form of a disastrous health care bill and will try to further enrich the wealthy with an upcoming tax bill.

Still, the surefire way to pass far-right legislation is in the states, and the Bradley Foundation is accelerating on that front. Keep up with the latest on the Bradley Foundation at the Center for Media and Democracy's [Bradley Files](#) page, which already includes several articles about the foundation.