



# Building Power Beyond the *Ballot Box*



Executive Summary prepared by A Good Question  
for Ballot Initiative Strategy Center

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# executive *summary*

The Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (BISC) launched the \$2.5M for BISC's 25th Anniversary Project (2.5 Project) to engage funders in a demonstration project to address several key challenges in the ballot measure campaign ecosystem. The demonstration project provided early and less restricted funding to two economic justice ballot initiative campaigns:

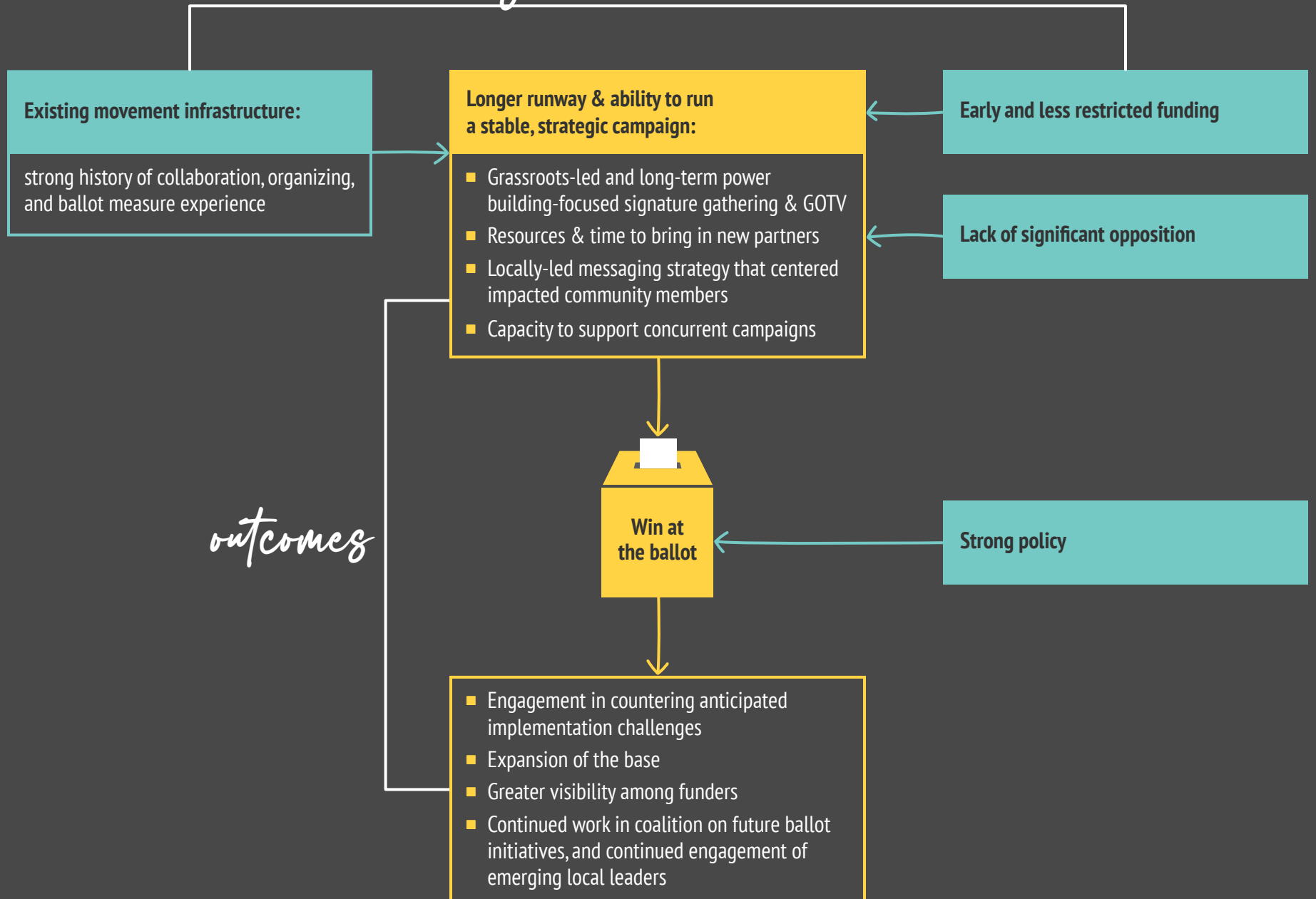
- Paid Sick Leave for Nebraskans (PSL; on the 2024 ballot as Initiative 436), which requires employers to provide paid sick leave, and passed with 74.6% of the vote
- Missourians for Healthy Families and Fair Wages (HFFW; on the 2024 ballot as Proposition A), which raises Missouri's minimum wage and requires employers to provide paid sick leave, and passed with 57.6% of the vote

BISC partnered with A Good Question to carry out an in-depth evaluation of the 2.5 Project. We co-designed the evaluation approach with the HFFW and PSL coalitions to ensure that we assessed the outcomes that they were trying to achieve, including and beyond winning at the ballot box. We looked at 13 other campaigns as part of an effort to contextualize our findings within the wider universe of ballot initiatives, and consulted the literature. **In total, we learned from 216 individuals across 43 organizations** over the course of two waves of data collection. In summary, this is what we found.

Strong in-state movement infrastructure combined with early and less restricted funding enabled HFFW and PSL to run long, stable, and strategic campaigns that won in a way that built power for the long term. Existing relationships among partner organizations, ballot initiative know-how, and in-kind support from their coalition anchor organizations allowed HFFW and PSL to begin early and invest in key campaign positions. Early and less restricted funding supported their abilities to resource coalition expansion, base activation, grassroots signature collection, voter engagement and get out the vote (GOTV) field operations, locally-led communications, and local leadership development. Minimal organized opposition and the ability to strategically stave off the emergence of opposition allowed them to focus on running grassroots-led and power building-focused campaigns.

After winning at the ballot box, the coalition partners felt ready to defend their wins against implementation challenges, counting on continued support from the people they engaged throughout the campaigns. They also looked forward to continuing to move together in future election cycles, further amplifying the equitable and sustainable power they developed. They have been in this work for a long time and are here to stay; they clearly see the difference between winning the vote and winning while intentionally building for the future.

# enabling conditions of success



## The Road to Power Building



**Securing funding.** The HFFW and PSL partners' proven track records with ballot measure work, a demonstrable path to victory, and the leaders' preexisting relationships with funders supported early and sustained fundraising.

After having started early and won decisively at the ballot amid a landscape of losses for progressive candidates, coalition partners have gained visibility among national funders.



**Activating the base.** Both campaigns emphasized grassroots-led signature gathering and voter engagement efforts, and involved their worker bases in field operations.

They hired signature gathering vendors to supplement grassroots capacity. PSL engaged 225 grassroots signature collectors and HFFW engaged 846; 99% of survey respondents who collected signatures indicated that they are likely or very likely to participate in similar campaigns in the future (n=133).

Both campaigns successfully centered the stories of people affected by the ballot measures as a way to engage voters and influence the media narrative around paid sick leave and minimum wage.

Beyond dollars, the time that early funding afforded the campaigns allowed for community engagement that felt more meaningful and equitable, and less transactional.

PSL and HFFW experienced challenges with a lack of interest in the policy among people who already have labor protections and among people who care more about other political issues. Other challenges to engaging voters included operating in an intense, presidential election cycle and engaging previously under-reached communities.



**Investing in partnerships.** HFFW and PSL partnered with a variety of entities, including rural organizations, organized labor, faith-based organizations, social services organizations, and community-based organizations.

Some of these groups were new and unexpected allies. Intentionally practicing inclusive governance and regranting funds helped grow the coalitions, build relationships among partners, and develop ballot initiative knowledge and processes within new organizations.

Nonetheless, depth of participation and mutual accountability was challenging to maintain over the course of the lengthy campaigns. Burnout of staff, volunteers, and organizations also posed a challenge.



**Developing local capacity.** PSL and HFFW coalition partners hired and developed local staff, grew their volunteer bases, and practiced new ways of sharing work among organizations. They named specific individuals

who have grown as leaders and are poised to continue to play significant roles in future ballot measure campaigns.



**Sustaining the momentum.** As they look to the future, coalition partners are considering what it will take to continue to create a space for political belonging through organizing that allows community members to have a

say in policies that directly impact their lives. Access to direct democracy through the ballot measure process is fundamental to sustaining and expanding this type of grassroots involvement.