UNITED TODAY, STRONGER TOMORROW

MAY 2025

THE FIRST 100 DAYS

A REPORT OUT AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND FEDERAL INVESTMENTS IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

UNITED
TODAY
STRONGER
TOMORROW

United Today, Stronger Tomorrow is leading a regional campaign to defend federal funding and government institutions during the first 100 Days of the Trump Administration and beyond. This campaign has already brought together over 40 groups, partners and community leaders under the banner “Experts in the Field: Rural and Remote Americans Working to Ensure Federal Investments Lead to Economic Prosperity.” This report reflects many of our efforts to date as well as lessons learned. Our hope is that it can be helpful to others working to meet this critically important moment.

TOP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Despite the onslaught of attacks on federal funding, clean energy programs and federal agencies, UTST has successfully accomplished the following:

UNFREEZING $40 MILLION IN FEDERAL FUNDS

targeting rural communities and clean energy programs, and moving work to unfreeze an additional $20 million for additional states.

SECURING 27 MEDIA PIECES

in national, state, and local markets with key congressional targets including AK, UT, and SD. Collectively, this media reached an audience of over $21 million in both local and national outlets. In SD, press related to the Rural Bus Tour reached 241,398 people, over 25% of the entire population of the state. In addition, the reach is the equivalent of $173,000 in purchased publicity in small local media markets.

WORKING WITH SENATORS MURKOWSKI AND CURTIS AS KEY SIGNATORIES

to a Senate letter supporting Clean Energy Tax Credits.

TOP TAKEAWAYS

PEOPLE GRAVITATE TO AND WANT LEADERSHIP

Many Americans are eager for a clear plan that thwarts the rise of authoritarianism, ends attacks on people and institutions, and unambivalently centers long term community power building. An easily accessible on-ramp to activities that protect federal investments and the mediating institutions that control them, but that also builds local power that centers accountable, transparent, and efficient government, has resulted in a surge of members, developing leaders, and partners from across the political spectrum eager to join our work.

THIS MOMENT REQUIRES A COMMITMENT TO THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF RELATIONAL ORGANIZING

While digital tactics allow us to get to scale quickly, without effective follow-up, large lists don't matter. We must place a premium on in-person engagement, real time virtual conversations, deep leadership development that connects individual agency with support from organizers, creating collective spaces for dialogue and joint strategizing, strong power mapping and analysis, and strategic mobilization anchored in messaging and tactical execution that resonates with stakeholders and moves targets.

STRATEGIC POWER MAPPING, A LOCAL MEDIA STRATEGY, AND TARGETED MESSAGING MOVES TARGETS IN OUR TURF

We have found that equipping stakeholders with a clear demand and correct messaging connected to a culturally relevant a tactic, that while unfamiliar still feels comfortable, can move targets and even set the stage for later accountability actions. This is the result of putting the stakeholder into direct engagement with the right target–many of whom are already in relationship with each other. At each of our actions, we've won on the record responses from targets.

THE MOMENT

The goal of the Trump Administration is to increase power of the Executive Branch; and Congress, for multiple reasons, is not fulfilling its constitutional responsibility to thwart it. The Trump Administration's aggressive action in the first 100 days to pass Executive Orders targeting a wide range of communities and constituencies, challenge the judicial system, gut federal programs, and reduce the federal workforce–led by Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency in a role that has no checks and balances–has at best created a constitutional crisis, and at worst, laid the runway for the swift creation of an authoritarian regime.

OUR APPROACH

At a post-election retreat, UTST aligned around a plan to defend the federal investments that are important to people living in the rural and remote low-density states where we work, and in doing so, help our mostly Republican, Independent, and Moderate constituents, reconnect with their belief in the value of efficient government, mediating institutions, and democracy itself. Our plan doubled down on building a base of unusual suspects–people who haven't normally been asked to raise their hand–developing their leadership, and then organizing them to lift up the positive impacts of federal investments and demand that their elected representatives protect them. We believe this strategy will "divide the opposition" while also protecting and winning community-identified priorities, build long-term power across our turf, and swing the political imagination of our region away from MAGA and back towards the value of civil society.

THE FIRST 100 DAYS AND BEYOND PROGRAM

In the regions where we work–the Mid, Upper Mid-, and Mountain West and Alaska–we have a dual strategy of coalition building/working with state and local partners and base-building/activating grasstops leaders, including local elected officials, business owners, industry leaders, investors, farmers, conservationists, and community leaders. We are also doing new direct base-building with community members focused on leadership development and activation.

The work is rooted in three integrated strategies 1) grasstops base-building organizing and advocacy, 2) earned media and communications, 3) and grassroots mobilization. Work to date includes:

- Convening a weekly federal defense organizing call that has 36 organizations and individuals collectively strategizing and implementing an organizing plan.
- Building formal organizing committees in 3 states (UT, WY, and AK) that are actively moving state and local federal defense campaigns.
- Managing a regional federal defense campaign in Siouxland (the 200 mile region that includes NW Iowa, NE Nebraska, and SE South Dakota).
- Organizing a series of actions under the banner Experts in the Field with and/or targeting Members of Congress, including a successful educational DC Fly-In event where we our leaders met with 11 members of congress directly and over 20 congressional staff offices, a rural bus tour and roundtable in SD, and multiple statewide press conferences, community forums, and in-district events.
- Organizing local and statewide press and media events, and training local leaders in press and comms strategies.
- Building a base of people impacted by Medicaid cuts and building organizing committees in UT, MT, and Siouxland (NE, IA and SD), (with AK coming on line next).

This work has resulted in the following:

- Collaborating with Senator Murkowski's (AK) office to draft and circulate a Senate Letter about preserving Clean Energy Tax Credits and securing Senator Curtis's (UT) signature and support of the letter.

- Working with members of congress in Utah (Senator Curtis) and Alaska (Senator Murkowski) to unfreeze $40 million funds and counting, and are currently working to release another $20 million, targeting rural communities, USDA, and clean energy funding.
- Garnering 27 national, state, and local media hits (equivalent to $XX in paid advertising) in a diversity of local and regional outlets by leveraging the trusted relationships audiences have with local press in a consistent and engaging way that reinforces our work and laid the groundwork for hundreds of thousands of people new to our organizing.
- New base-building, which resulted in 1600 new acquisitions with phone numbers at an average CPA of $7.50. The breakdown by political party is approximately 35% Democrat, 30% Independent, 15% Republican, 20%.
- Building relationships and developing more than 100 new leaders across our turf, half of whom are Republican and most of whom have never been engaged in this work before.

LESSONS LEARNED

These learnings are based on our current work, our and our leaders' experiences on the ground, and how various sectors are responding to the current moment.

RELATIONAL ORGANIZING IS EFFECTIVE AND NECESSARY WHEN WORKING TO MOVE REPUBLICANS AND MODERATES

Doubling down on organizing and base-building has had a huge return in developing new leaders and organizing committees moving significant bodies of work, including press conferences, round tables, and other in-district events to which targets are paying attention. We need strong organizers who can manage relationships, provide concrete strategic advice and support, and help local leaders build relationships. The more skilled organizers who can scale up the number of relational meetings and conversations, the more of these people we can move to action.

PEOPLE ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM ARE ACTING TO PROTECT THE FEDERAL FUNDING AND CRITICAL PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT THEIR COMMUNITIES.

In the first 100 days, UTST has activated over 200 local grass-tops leaders to advocate for and publicly defend federal investments that support rural communities, small towns, and the people who live in them.

People are hungry for an opportunity to express their support for programs that work and their frustration at how they've been targeted.

A MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE IN THE UTST UNIVERSE WILL NOT TAKE THEIR FIRST ACTION TO DEFEND DEMOCRACY BUT WILL SHARE THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY ONCE TRUST IS ESTABLISHED AROUND A CONCRETE ISSUE THEY CARE ABOUT.

The most effective entry-point for our constituents to discuss government and democracy is through meeting them on direct concrete issues such as federal funding, Medicaid cuts, rising costs and affordability; building trust; and then moving them to action. This means that building a base of anti-authoritarian moderates and conservatives will take time and an investment in the issues that directly impact them.

INVESTING RESOURCES IN OFF-LINE COLLECTIVE STRATEGY AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING SPACES IS CRITICAL.

Every time UTST has convened people since the Small Town Summit in 2023, the payoff in on-going relationships that produce results has been consistently robust. Our Experts in the Field educational DC fly-in event brought more than 20 new mostly Republican and Independent leaders to meet with representatives and participate in three days of strategy sessions. The fly-in has led to stronger local field organizing in five of our states, three of which currently do not have local UTST organizers.

FLY-INS, REGIONAL STRATEGY CALLS AND ACTIONS, AND CONNECTING PEOPLE ACROSS TURF, IS AN IMPORTANT AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGY, ESPECIALLY WHEN IN PERSON.

Direct contact with members of congress coupled with a chance to build relationships and strategize with other leaders working in similar situations, allows a leader to understand how moving a single target in their district is part of a larger strategy. This is especially important for organizations and leaders where federal advocacy is not a primary focus.

STATE AND LOCAL MEDIA ARE EAGER TO PUBLISH STORIES THAT FEATURE LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS, AND THEY HAVE A PROVEN IMPACT ON TARGETS.

UTST has garnered 27 media pieces about our work in the first 100 days. This coverage has lifted up the stories of a variety of stakeholders, many Republican, which has resulted in concrete responses from members of congress, both on and off the record. However, despite this opportunity, many leaders and organizations on the ground need support, additional capacity, training, and message development, to optimize the value of press coverage.

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BECAUSE FEARS OF RETALIATION ARE REAL, EVEN AMONG CONSERVATIVE GRASSTOPS AND INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS, WE MUST CREATE WAYS FOR PEOPLE TO STAND TOGETHER.

Across our turf, there are as many local leaders who have told their story as there are leaders who have refused for fear of funding cuts, political blow back, and even violence. To mitigate these fears, we need to build trusted cohorts of people who will have each other's backs, and utilize tactics that are collective rather than individualized.

MESSAGING THAT TIES POLICY INSTABILITY AND CHAOS TO ECONOMIC IMPACTS, FRAMES FEDERAL FUNDING CUTS AS IMPACTING SMALL TOWNS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES, ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF JOBS, SERVICES, AND UNDERMINING ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, WORKS.

Talking about how investors, businesses, and companies cannot plan due to funding freezes, tariffs, or other unstable policies allows Republican MOC's to align with our priorities. Talking generally about "the administration" versus publicly calling out Trump also yields better results from targets and constituents. Here are the talking points from the fly-in: Talking Points: Experts in the Field.

BUILDING "BEYOND THE CHOIR" WILL REQUIRE UNDERSTANDING THAT THIS NEW BASE IS NOT A HOMOGENOUS MONOLITH.

As we build a base "beyond the choir" we will need to employ strategies and tactics and create spaces that acknowledge the different self interests of, for example, a business owner who is concerned about their federal loan and preserving governmental functions and the MAGA mom of a disabled child about to lose Medicaid who has less investment in preserving the current political system.

GRASSROOTS LOBBYING IS A KEY STRATEGY THAT REQUIRES SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES TO PRODUCE RESULTS.

Ongoing grassroots lobbying efforts, like calling targets, is an important strategy that can reinforce media and grassroots advocacy efforts. However they require a significant investment of time, human capacity, and financial resources to build lists and systems to mobilize calls and to stave off diminishing returns once an issue goes stale.