Experts in the FIELD

RURAL AND REMOTE AMERICANS
WORKING TO ENSURE FEDERAL INVESTMENTS LEAD TO ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

LESSONS LEARNED - TOPLINES

SUMMARY

- **UTST's proven accelerator organizing model and the strategies and tactics it deploys can be replicated across a set of states with both existing institutions and new constituencies to meet the current moment.** Staying true to our vision of a Strategic Campaign Organizing Hub for the region, the "Experts in the Field Campaign" was our first coordinated multi-state effort that deployed our accelerated organizing model across a set of states. The result: the model—when rooted in aligned strategies and implemented by a high producing, nimble team and strong partners—produced policy wins, base-building metrics, and narrative change, while also deepening the potential for state-based power building across our mostly conservative regions. This proves that there is an untapped pool of people across rural and remote America who can be organized and their leadership developed. We firmly believe this model could be replicated in similar turf in other regions of the country, not as one large national entity, but as a distributed set of independent strategic campaign organizing hubs.

- **A key reason for this success was not just "training up" new organizers—though that certainly plays a part—but identifying people, both new to organizing and with years of experience, who were "fire in the belly" hungry to address the biggest challenges of the day. We found the right**

candidates and then built effective, supportive organizing structures that allowed them to realize their full potential. Simply put, the goal should not be a trained organizer, but one who can produce. UTST's team for this campaign included organizing first-timers as well as veterans, a former organizer who left the private sector to throw down for this effort, and electoral campaigners who are eager to build power and develop leaders. What connected everyone was their unflinching commitment to having impact at this moment. We must invest as much in identifying the right folks to do organizing, as we invest in training them how to organize and providing support.

- **In the turf where UTST organizes, it must be values before politics and relationships before asks.** Many efforts are framing their work around President Trump, however the people we organize rarely ever mention the President. Accordingly, we don't either. We never start with hyperbole about the political moment or politicians. We may start with an issue, like clean energy, Medicaid, democracy, or rural economic development, but we root it in a conversation about community, family, loved ones, hopes, and dreams. We don't position ourselves in opposition to anything at first, but rather as proactive agents for community-identified priorities. Only when we have built a relationship, even if only via digital channels, do we make an ask related to moving a campaign.

- **A majority of the people UTST engages do not differentiate between their general belief that governing systems are broken and the potential threats to democratic institutions that many progressives, Democrats, and moderate Republicans fear from the current administration**. If you do not have a stake in the system, you do not have a motive to save it. Messaging that focuses on an imminent crisis does not work for people whose lives have been in constant crisis since long before the current administration came to power and/or are far removed from places where threats to civil liberties are concrete, constant, and televised. Our conversations show that many people in our turf have different benchmarks for what an authoritarian moment looks like. We need to understand what those benchmarks are and what people will do if and when they're met.

- **Effective structures, rigor, and campaign culture matter.** The Experts in the Field campaign demanded a rigorous, urgent, high-performance culture rooted in robust expectations with ample support to meet and exceed them. We required organizers and leaders to be deeply accountable to metrics and deliverables, and then we supported them with successful growth and leadership development infrastructure like on-ramps, organizing meetings, research actions, prep sessions, and press events. We encouraged curiosity and an entrepreneurial approach to acquisitions. This kind of campaign-mode culture isn't for everyone, but we believe it's critical to meet the moment and essential to our model of accelerated organizing.

- **Build relationships with Republican and center right institutions.** Because our goal is to restore faith in governing systems—like democracy—by winning policies at the local, state, and federal level, we must develop and strengthen relationships with Republican, moderate, and independent institutions, policy shops, and funders. This is especially true when they are in power. This means building a relationship based on shared values and mutual interest, not a transactional relationship or hiring a Republican lobbying firm.

TOP-LINE NEXT STEPS

- **Pivot to accountability and set the stage for potential future campaigns.** Utilizing the hundreds of relationships we have built across our regions with key stakeholders, local elected officials (mostly Republican), and national and local media outlets, UTST will lift up the impacts of the recently passed reconciliation bill on states and localities, and when there is a relationship or it is requested, tribal communities. The "accountability phase" will focus on research actions with members of Congress (MOCs), including continued community-led roundtables and discussions, a strong push in the media, digital efforts, and a massive public education campaign to move people to action. We've already heard from Republican local elected officials that they want to partner with us to lift up how eliminating federal investments will impact their communities. **This is the base we will need in moments when we must advocate to protect or save governing systems, including democratic norms.**

- **Convene rural stakeholders, with a focus on base-building organizations, about the potential to work together on a strategic body of work focused on rural impacts from the OBBB**

- **Ensure that every dollar in the pipeline from BIL, IRA, CHIPS and other funding streams, continues to flow to communities, addresses their priorities, and creates good jobs, especially in the clean energy sector.** There is still funding available and UTST will work to ensure that it moves. We will respond to requests for support from local leaders when there are challenges, utilizing the relationships we have built with MOCs and their staff to find solutions.

- **Run a participatory research action project across the region.** Building off of UTST's successful Small Town Summit, Listening Sessions, and Rural Economic Messaging Project, we will replicate this arc of work—that began during the Biden Administration and has brought us to this moment of opportunity—at a larger scale. We will ramp up the scale and scope of our Listening Sessions, roundtable discussions, focus groups, potential bus tours, and digital strategies to better understand how people are thinking about the current moment, the administration, and what their hopes are for their lives, their communities, and the country. We also commit to holding another Small Town Summit when adequate resources are raised.
- **Strengthen and expand infrastructure and base-building organizing in a set of states.** Even though we move people to action quickly, we employ a parallel strategy focused on long-term power building. We believe that building state power is a critical strategy to deliver improvements to our communities. States will have to deal with the ramifications of the reconciliation bill, meaning opportunities to organize around the budget reconciliation are far from over (in fact we believe they will increase as the impacts of cuts and programs start to hit communities). UTST will work to ensure all communities, sectors, and constituencies across the political spectrum are invited into efforts to remedy the negative impacts the bill will have on rural health care, seniors, cuts to USDA, and more. Together, we will hold all elected officials accountable to their oaths to ensure government systems deliver on community needs.

EXPERTS IN THE FIELD: RURAL AND REMOTE AMERICANS

WORKING TO ENSURE FEDERAL INVESTMENTS LEAD TO ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

LESSONS LEARNED - FULL REPORT

BACKGROUND

United Today, Stronger Tomorrow's mission is to restore faith in governing systems that many people feel have abandoned them: democracy, mediating institutions, and civil society. We achieve this in two ways. First, by developing opportunities for people to activate their own agency within the very systems that have left them feeling disenchanted. And second, by building and executing campaigns where people with different opinions can come together, disagree, but still navigate their way to a plan of action. We develop these campaigns around community-identified priorities with a base of support that is organized around an issue, not an ideology. Employing a nimble yet scaled model of organizing that uses moments of crisis and opportunity to accelerate the organizing process, UTST is built to operate in moments of rapid change, instability, and potential, while remaining rooted in long term power building. *At this moment, when so many people feel like decision makers are not delivering for them, we move people from wanting to blow up governing systems, to demanding that they improve by becoming more transparent and accountable to the constituencies they're meant to serve.*

EXPERTS IN THE FIELD, AN OVERVIEW

Developed in November 2024, with strong partner support from across our states, UTST led a six-month campaign to protect federal investments that are critically important to the economic and overall wellbeing of the mostly conservative rural and remote communities in which we work. Clean energy, climate resilience, and conservation policies and programs; USDA funding; and Medicaid were all targeted for massive cuts and/or elimination entirely. Integrated into this defense work, UTST also used the campaign to gain a deeper understanding of how people felt about the administration's decision to claw back federal investments, its efforts to consolidate power in the Executive Branch, and the idea that its actions are motivated by a desire to topple civil society, mediating institutions, and democracy itself.

The campaign scored targeted policy victories including the reinstatement of approximately $55 million dollars of federal investments to projects across our states; and we defended clean energy credits from full repeal and supported longer runways for clean energy projects to leverage those credits in our turf. We helped counter bill language that would have eliminated prevailing wage or apprenticeship utilization incentives on credit supported projects and we maintained elective payment, which allows tax-exempt public entities and nonprofits to benefit from the credits. In addition, the campaign helped us build and/or strengthen relationships with more than 250 new local stakeholders, many of whom are self-described "unusual suspects," people who aren't typical handraisers or members of a constituency generally targeted by progressive organizations, like local Republican elected officials, business owners, and labor leaders. We also engaged 39 organizations in our Medicaid campaign and developed the leadership of people who hew to a much more conservative political view.

LESSONS LEARNED

In addition to our wins, we believe that the campaign has produced important learnings that can inform the strategies of a broad range of valuable efforts to meet the current moment. That is the goal of this document.

FEDERAL DEFENSE CAMPAIGN

- **UTST, our partners, and key moderate/conservative stakeholders were able to exert enough power during our campaign to**: **(1) Move targets** (Members of Congress in AK, UT, MT, IA, and SD) to unfreeze federal funding, make both public and private statements (written and verbal) supporting our demands, and to self-organize inside the Republican conference. **(2) Make clean energy a sticking point in final Senate budget negotiations.** We successfully influenced the narrative around clean energy, federal investments more generally and clean energy tax credits more specifically, from a story of wasted entitlements to a story of good jobs, building a strong economy, meeting growing energy demand, and the commercial health of the private sector (more on this below, but the fact that nearly every story we placed lifted up economic impacts, rather than political and personal fallout—a dramatic shift in the media's storytelling—proves this point).

- **Our <u>inability</u> to implement a mass based mobilization strategy** (phone calls, letters, and other tactics) **meant that we did not have enough power to neutralize President Trump's intervention in the budget process with MOCs from our states.** Without a broader commitment of resources, infrastructure, and rigorous at-scale engagement of community members into tactics that force MOCs to keep their commitments, a grasstops strategy alone—even a successful one—does not generate enough pressure to hold MOCs accountable to their own promises. In the face of political threats and arm twisting from the administration, even commitments made to constituents in face-to-face meetings were forgotten.

- **In hindsight, the campaign should have maintained an administration strategy and power-mapped the opposition.** Early on, we targeted and secured wins from USDA and other agencies. However, maintaining relationships with them became more difficult as their staff left, took buy-outs, and/or were laid off. We did not power map the administration and the President's key advisors on energy, so we had no strategy on how to neutralize opposition to clean energy within the White House, which ended up playing out in the last hours of the Senate's negotiations.

- **Strong leadership, a clear vision, a concrete goal, nimble campaign structures, additional staff capacity, the right staff, and targeted resources can yield results in the field, even with limited funding.** Reaffirming the learnings from our five years of organizing across our turf, the ability to respond quickly while still providing strong leadership and a clear plan can improve outcomes in terms of campaign wins, leadership development, and base-building. Member attrition is reduced when there is effective campaign infrastructure that identifies goals and then achieves them. While money is always helpful, UTST ran this campaign with no re-grants to the field. ***When you have good organizing and strong relationships, money, while necessary, isn't essential to move the field.***

- **Sending leaders to DC multiple times allows them to build, strengthen, and maintain relationships with MOCs and their staff, which is critical for ongoing work.** UTST leaders secured meetings with MOCs and senior staff on all of our fly-ins and built strategic relationships with Senators Murkowski (AK), Curtis (UT), Daines (MT), and Lummis (WY); three UT Representatives; and Rep. Bacon from NE. The fly-ins are where we **(1)** received commitments to unfreeze funds, **(2)** moved letters of support, **(3)** gathered important intelligence, **(4)** built reciprocal relationships where MOCs asked us to provide them with key information, data, and reports that they needed to support our case, and **(5)** provided a space where powerful rapport between local leaders from across the regions could develop. Multiple trips to DC should not be a sole strategy, as in-district work is key (though it's increasingly more difficult to secure meetings locally than it is in DC), but they are critical to building an ongoing relationship with MOCs, leadership development, and fostering a sense of collective support.

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

- **A sectoral media strategy energized local and national media outlets' interest in stories about the personal and professional impacts on a broad range of rural and remote communities and built trust between reporters and the campaign.** We started with few media relationships, but by offering reporters a steady stream of story opportunities—grounded in access to real people from varied sectors, like business owners, hospital administrators, and local elected officials—we built credibility as a trusted source. Even when reporters declined one story, many circled back weeks later for others. Now, outlets increasingly turn to us on rural energy and health care issues.

- **Centering economic impacts in our media strategy, gave outlets a new hook around which to tell a story.** A central strategy was to reframe these policy fights as economic issues—we centered job creation, rural investment, manufacturing, and economic stability, and independence. This framing provided the press with a new angle to cover these stories.

- **Leadership and speaker preparation and training requires significant resources and a commitment of both organizer and communications staff time.** Working with local communications professionals in South Dakota and Utah, as well as a dedicated OpEd writer, helped us scale our media work throughout June when debate over the bill went into overdrive. The additional capacity also allowed us to experiment with a variety of utilizing tactics, including media roundtables where deeper conversations could happen, statewide zoom press conferences, as well as site visits and tours.

- **Messaging, messengers, and facts that Republican MOCs responded to included:**

    - **Business leaders and investors** who communicated that policies that led to economic instability impacted local economic development in their states including job loss, lower tax revenues, and diminished community investment.

- **Local Republican elected officials, mayors, city managers, administrative staff, and State Representatives** who shared how policies would create a heavy burden on local governments and communities.
- **Law enforcement officials and staff** who communicated how policies would increase crime and recidivism and negatively impact local sheriff and police departments, communities, and businesses.
- **Rank and file Republican voters who supported President Trump** but were opposed to policy proposals and program cuts because of negative local impacts on themselves and in their communities.

BUILDING POWER AND RESTORING FAITH IN GOVERNING SYSTEMS

- **Most of the people we are in relationship with do not subscribe to the belief that we are in an authoritarian moment, but they do believe that governing systems are not working.** Across thousands of conversations in ongoing one-on-ones, town halls, and listening sessions, we have found that most independents, moderates, and Republicans do not think we are in an authoritarian moment. However, many people believe our governing systems—including democracy—are no longer working, especially the government's ability to address the issues they care most about (affordability, corporate power, safety and security, and clean air and water). This leads to people not participating civically, or worse, eager for "strong man" leadership to address their problems.

- **Messaging that attacks the Trump Administration and/or that assumes agreement around an authoritarian moment alienates a large base of people who we need if we are to restore faith in governing systems.** We need to promote a positive vision of what we want and bring people together to defend it, as opposed to mobilizing against authoritarianism, which many people do not believe is a real threat. Many of our members see the current administration as operating within the same executive power guard rails as prior presidents, both Democratic and Republican. What does work is a conversation that doesn't assume, but investigates how people are experiencing the current moment. To restore faith in governing institutions we need to better understand *everyone's* analysis, and then build messaging with that understanding in mind.

- **There is a large and powerful base of people and institutions hungry to *organize* at this moment, but they will not respond to traditional activation mobilization tactics like calls to mass mobilizations or petitions.** UTST has been extremely effective at engaging what we refer to as the disaffected middle, as well as more conservative people. Organizing these constituencies requires relationship building, probing, listening, and providing opportunities to engage that are culturally and politically relevant to them. Our organizers engaged new people using tactics as diverse as cold calling local Mayors about federal funding cuts to digital polls about how to improve Medicaid. Every engagement begins with a relational question, not a call to action.

- **People are eager for in-person, face-to-face meetings; deep strategy conversations; and to work with people who do not necessarily agree with them on all issues.** Despite the narrative of a highly partisan and divided nation, our experience—throughout five years of work and proven once again during the first six months of the Trump Administration—is that people want to engage in productive, collective, and collaborative work that focuses on common goals, not shared ideologies, and that fosters honest conversation without judgement. People are willing to invest their personal time into actions where they have agency and where their perspectives and interests are investigated, respected, and reflected. There are many more people who are in the disaffected middle than in either of the ideological extremes, but successfully engaging them requires a deep investment in relationship building.

- **Training up new organizers isn't enough to build the deep bench we need to meet the moment.** An ongoing, long term commitment to this work requires a robust and nimble organizing infrastructure across our turf that currently does not exist. We need more organizers, but we also need the right organizers, in the right infrastructure, who are working in a high-performance culture that emphasizes developing the leadership of new people all the time. This means engaging new organizer candidates from across a broad range of disciplines and interests who already understand what it means to be held accountable to scalable deliverables. Coupled with mentoring, coaching, and in-the-field opportunities to organize alongside experienced veterans, we can build an organizing infrastructure that can expand and contract to meet the capacity needs of the moment.

SELECTED DIGITAL LESSONS

MEDICAID CAMPAIGN. UTST's digital team focused on base-building around the issue of budget cuts to Medicaid. From mid-March to mid-May we ran acquisition ads on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok that generated 3,425 new contacts across six states at an average cost of $7.19 per contact.

- **The more narrow the targeting, the more expensive the acquisition.** Targeting an entire state produces acquisitions at a lower price compared to targeting a few counties within the same state. Targeting by political affiliation produces more costly acquisitions than an open targeting independent of political persuasion. Our narrow geographical targets within Montana, Iowa, and Alaska were consistently more expensive than our state-wide regions.

- **Ad fatigue, being shown an ad more than twice, forces new creatives (videos) every one to two weeks.** Most ads have a short window towards the beginning of their lifespan where results are favorable. It is these short windows that we can take advantage of to get the most results at a reasonable price.

- **Connecting with new acquisitions improves our acquisition abilities over time.** The more we connect with new acquisitions (over text, phone call, meeting) and get more details on their story, position, and political affiliation, the more we can apply this data to hone in and refine future ad targeting.

- **Without skilled digital campaigners, efforts on some social media platforms may fail.** Digital campaigns on social media platforms require expertise and experience that isn't readily available. For example, political advertising on TikTok is not allowed by the platform. But, with sophisticated—and complex—creative re-wording and reworking of visuals that bypass TikTok's filtering system, it is possible to run ads about important issues like Medicaid.

TWO-WEEK CLEAN ENERGY ACQUISITION CAMPAIGN. Over the course of two weeks, we ran an acquisition campaign that tested and optimized a range of creative formats across Meta, TikTok, and X to raise awareness and drive actions related to clean energy tax credits. Our dual focus was on public pressure (via letter sign-ons) and lead generation (via surveys), and general awareness, particularly among Republican-leaning and rural voters. While we saw strong signs of engagement across platforms, the clearest takeaways revolve around audience targeting, creative framing, and the critical need to improve the landing page experience on action-based campaigns.
This campaign was grounded in extensive research on GOP-aligned messaging, tone, and visual language. Every ad we deployed was informed by a deep dive into conservative digital communications—including how Republican campaigns frame issues like energy, freedom, and local control. *The goal wasn't to disguise our values or pretend to be a right-wing organization, but to meet people where they are and speak in a language that resonates.* By carefully aligning tone, visuals, and messaging with this research, we created content that could effectively break through partisan noise and begin a values-based conversation.

- **Survey-style creatives outperformed most creative variations.** The top-performing content used a survey format with patriotic visuals, rural imagery, and clear Yes/No choices—all tailored to a conservative audience. It drove 361 leads at a strong $2.89 cost per lead, down 15.9%, making it a top candidate for future campaigns. This format not only lowered friction but also made users feel included, as if they had a personal stake, driving strong engagement and the lowest cost per lead. Survey ads drove strong lead generation

overall, bringing in 763 leads at an average cost of $3.50 per lead, reinforcing their effectiveness as a high-performing, scalable tactic for reaching conservative and rural audiences. Messaging that focused on economic security, energy independence, and freedom of choice consistently outperformed content framed around climate or policy jargon.

- **This pilot test was our first major test of static visual creatives—and they delivered.** Until now, our paid campaigns had relied almost exclusively on video, but this pilot test marked the first time we invested in a broader mix of static image formats, especially those styled as "survey" or "question" graphics. The results were promising: not only did these visuals outperform many past benchmarks for engagement and cost per lead, but they also allowed us to simplify messaging, scale quickly and test narrative alignment. While the average cost per lead/acquisition across the survey campaign landed at $3.50, that number was skewed by keeping video variants live to validate results. Had we optimized mid-run and focused solely on the top-performing static ads, we would have sustained the lower $2.89 cost per lead—a major improvement over our historical $6.87- $7.19 average. This shift shows strong potential for scaling acquisition at a significantly lower cost.

- **Narrative testing went beyond visuals—language and framing made a measurable impact.** Throughout the campaign, we tested not just images and video formats but also how different narrative frames resonated with key audiences. The most effective messaging emphasized energy freedom, lower utility costs, and rural self-reliance—all without invoking climate jargon or government overreach. Supporting copy in both survey and awareness ads tested multiple values-driven angles, such as family savings, local job creation, and US energy independence. Creative that leaned into these themes, especially when paired with plainspoken, emotionally resonant headlines, consistently performed better, confirming that tone and narrative framing were just as critical as the visual itself. This pilot showed there are powerful ways to talk about clean energy and climate without relying on language that feels partisan or coopted—by focusing on shared values like savings, freedom, and local control.

- **The sign-on letter campaign had strong potential but lost users post-click.** While sign-on letter content still performed well in terms of cost per view (~$0.65—$0.84 per person), most users dropped off once they reached the landing page. The campaign received

a combined 3,830 views and 102 total signers, yielding an overall conversion rate of just 2.7%. This highlights a major opportunity: the message is resonating at a visual and messaging level, but the page experience is losing potential supporters.

- **X proved valuable for strategic pressure and conservative targeting.** It offers targeting capabilities that, on the surface, surpass what's possible on Meta—allowing us to reach conservatives and independents more precisely. This makes X a powerful tool for public accountability and narrative testing, especially in moments where direct pressure matters. While lead acquisition was limited due to the platform's lack of native lead forms, that shouldn't be seen as a blocker—with additional investment in creative optimization, audience research, and experimenting with third-party tools or landing flows, we could unlock a much more effective lead generation strategy. X has the potential to be a key platform not just for messaging and visibility, but also for converting attention into action if we build the right infrastructure around it.

- **X ad performance confirmed that static visuals with rural framing are the most cost-effective way to drive awareness**. The three top-performing posts on X were all static image creatives that used simple language and rural-specific messaging—averaging just $1.88 CPM, the lowest cost across the platform. This reinforces the idea that clear, values-forward visuals outperform more complex formats on this channel. While short-form video did achieve broader reach (one video topped 327K impressions), the cost per 1K impressions jumped to $2.14 - $2.19, particularly for talking-head formats. Messaging that emphasized rural pressure, job creation, and energy savings remained consistent in performance, showing up as the strongest narrative across both static and video. For future efforts on X, focusing on static creative with refined messaging—and away from spokesperson-heavy formats—will likely deliver more efficiency and alignment with audience expectations.

- **Audience response revealed a strong undercurrent of alignment—when messaging was reframed through values, not ideology.** What we saw across the highest-performing ads was not just engagement, but a deeper signal: rural and conservative-leaning audiences are open to conversations about clean energy and economic transition—but only when those conversations center *their* priorities. This suggests we don't

need to change the mission—we need to change how it's introduced. Rather than leading with political identity or "advocacy language," leading with shared concerns opened the door for meaningful connection and action. That's not just a media or ads strategy—it's an organizing opportunity.

NEXT STEPS

UTST, our partners, and leaders developed over the last six months and before, are eager to move forward and build off of the learnings outlined in this document. Over the next few months, we will do the following:

- **Evaluate the work over the last six months in order to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to build upon our collective work.** This evaluation will include one-on-ones, Zoom debriefs, and potentially an in-person gathering of key participants. Beyond deepening our understanding of what worked and what can be improved, this evaluation will strengthen relationships and provide opportunities to strategize collectively about how to build local power.

- **Conduct research action meetings with all of the MOCs we are in relationship with** to better understand why they voted for the recent budget and policy legislation and what it would have taken for them to have more influence in how the final bill was shaped. We will also identify a strategy to ensure that key issues—clean energy, healthcare, affordable housing, USDA funding, and the Farm Bill—are addressed over the course of the next two to four years.

- **Continue implementing an aggressive press strategy** designed to amplify the impact of the Big Beautiful Bill on communities, jobs, healthcare, and local economies, connect those impacts to the choices of relevant MOCs, and hold them accountable to those decisions.

- **Conduct a second rural listening participatory action research project** focused on how/if people's attitudes toward the current administration have shifted over its first nine months, identify the issues people care about, and probe how people view governing systems at this point in the new administration.

REGIONAL POWER BUILDING AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

- **Strengthen the base- and power-building in a set of states** where we have strong relationships on the ground. Currently we are exploring UT, AK, WY, MT and the Siouxland Region (IA, NE, SD) as key areas of investment for capacity building, direct base-building, and organizing that will lead to improvements in people's lives. We would like to strengthen and replicate the successful work in Utah.

- **Continue to fundraise for an Organizer Apprenticeship Program** that will provide collective on-the-ground and in-real-time experience working with a cohort of organizers modeled on the AFL-CIO's Organizer Institute and adapted for our region. These organizers will help to build UTST's core of base-building organizers and prepare a cadre of developed and tested organizers for our partners in the region.

- **Hold listening sessions with our stakeholders across the regions** to better understand how people are experiencing the current moment, what they think about the direction of the country, and how the recent budget and policy legislation will impact their communities. We will include key stakeholders like local elected officials, business owners, labor and faith leaders, and service providers.

- **Convene key partners, organizers and community leaders in late 2025 or early 2026** following the format of the successful Small Town Summit with a focus on the impact of policies on rural communities and how to engage with the new Administration and Congress in the lead-up to the 2026 midterm elections.

DIGITAL INNOVATION

- **Double down on vigorous innovation around acquisition and activation strategies.** The results reported above, came from a rapid turn-around campaign with creative development, testing, and deployment all happening within a few days. Even with limited time to iterate, the early performance signals were clear. With a longer runway, more creative variations, further investment in testing and deeper optimization, there's real potential to scale impact, further drive down costs, and build a high-performing acquisition pipeline that reaches our audience at scale.
- **Improve user experience from first view to landing page.** To convert effectively, we need to ask people to take action in a way that feels easy, low-bar, and aligned with the tone of the creative—not like a heavy lift. Acquiring supporters for under $1 would've been game-changing, and the content was doing its job to get people interested. But the visual and tone of the landing page didn't match the rural, values-forward language that brought them in. We should invest in testing simplified landing pages that reflect the message and tone of the ads—because this could become a high volume acquisition tool at scale.

For detailed report-outs about the Federal Defense Campaign, the Fly-Ins and Bus Tour, press links, and other collateral materials, please visit the federal defense page on our website.