POGO Strategic Plan: A Vision for the Future
Exposing Corruption and Abuse of Power, Demanding Accountability
June 10, 2021
The goal of this strategic plan is to articulate how POGO will adapt over the next five years to achieve its vision of how our government should function. It lays out a roadmap to navigate the challenges the organization faces today. The uncertainty resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its economic effects, as well as the long-term threats facing our system of government due to the metastasizing of lies about voter fraud in the 2020 election, and a full-on assault on access to voting across the country, underscore the urgent need to build the preeminent nonpartisan democracy watchdog and advocate for the public. Below are just a few brief highlights from the plan.

- While the plan has a lot of strategic initiatives across all the teams, there are three major ones for POGO.
  1. Become an organization that embraces and actively works to support a racially just and equitable society.
  2. Grow POGO’s civic engagement program and become active across all 50 states.
  3. Form a robust research and FOIA team, and combine it with investigations.
- The growth in staff relies on the organization reaching its fundraising goals. Therefore, future years of the plan will need constant review and revision.
- The organization chart referenced in the document is a vision of what the organization would look like at the end of 2025 if the plan were executed as envisioned. It does not consider any changes to the plan that could be made as we execute it.

A Vision for the Future

The Problem
We believe our system of government is eroded by corruption and abuse of power by those who are meant to serve the public interest.

Government agencies with the mission to protect the wellbeing and safety of the public have been captured by corporate influence. Other government entities and officials who have been given vast powers are abusing them by ignoring constitutional safeguards and by prioritizing the interests of the politically powerful. Barriers to equity, which are connected to government corruption and abuse of power, further undermine communities systemically marginalized from power, including and not limited to, Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Indigenous, disabled, migrant, low-income individuals, and other marginalized identities. Sadly, much of this is legal—existing laws and rules, or the lack thereof, have created the conditions and obstacles to stopping this systemic abuse. POGO recognizes how oppression is manifested between and within social identities and will work with new and existing partners committed to equity to dismantle barriers to access and oppressive systems in our government and society.

Government corruption and abuse of power are not new problems. From our country’s founding, our democracy has been a work in progress, often struggling to realize its fullest potential. At times, we’ve moved miles forward and at other times miles back; throughout the struggle, people and groups have fought for a just and fair government that works for everyone. But it appears we may be at a tipping point in our progress as a country given the growing authoritarian movement in this country.

Our Vision
Corruption and abuse of power go hand-in-hand in the United States, each contributing to the people’s diminishing belief that the government can and should serve their best interests. POGO fights to build a
government that works for everyone—not just those who have the money and political power to shape public policy for their own personal or private gain at the expense of the public interest.

**Our Role**

For four decades, POGO has been one of those groups pushing back on the forces manipulating our democracy and corrupting our government. **Our model—nonpartisan public policy advocacy informed by our investigative reporting and research—is what makes us unique among our peers and competitors. It is also what has made us effective in enacting meaningful change that benefits the daily lives of everyday people.** This model is what established POGO’s credibility to be fair, accurate, and effective, and it has served us well over the past four decades of pushing for reforms no matter who is in the White House or controlling Congress.

POGO and its subprojects have achieved extraordinary wins.

- We pushed passage of landmark whistleblower protection laws and enhancement of inspectors general laws.
- We successfully advocated for improvements to the security of nuclear energy and weapons facilities, and the cancellation of many overpriced and unneeded programs.
- We helped expose the US government’s use of torture, leading to the publication of the Senate report, and were leaders in passing the law prohibiting such abuse in the future.
- We helped lead to the reversal of several unjust death sentences through our amicus briefing before state and federal courts urging the courts to address serious violations of their constitutional rights.
- We saved taxpayer money by exposing billions of dollars of fraud and reforming the federal oil and gas royalty program.
- We played a pivotal role in the creation of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board in the wake of revelations of warrantless surveillance.
- We blocked the confirmation of unqualified political nominees and caused the removal of appointees who were not acting in the public’s interest.
- We exposed the Department of Homeland Security’s deliberate decision to separate families at the border and inhuman conditions in detention centers.
- We highlighted issues surrounding the secretive offices at the Department of Justice that facilitate an unconstitutional justice system.

**The Future of POGO**

It has become clear that all of POGO’s wins have not fundamentally changed our broken system of government. While corruption and abuse of power are seen by much of the public as among the most important challenges of our time, many are at a loss as to how to fight it, as public confidence in government erodes. Having principally relied on an inside-the-Beltway approach, bad actors have too often found new ways to accomplish their illicit goals.

In today’s political climate, evidence-based advocacy efforts by civil society to press policymakers to strengthen the core elements of public accountability, transparency, and oversight are beginning to hit an impact wall. Political polarization, a growing anti-democratic trend in our society, a segregated news media landscape, and the rise of disinformation on social media platforms limit the extent to which D.C.-based “expose, inform, and propose” advocacy strategies reach people who are affected by this system of government.
Polling shows that there is a growing concern among the public and across the political ideologies about the level of corruption in Washington, growing from 58% of respondents listing it as their number one fear in 2015 to 77% listing it in 2019. In many ways the 2016 and 2018 elections demonstrated this growing recognition of the need to “drain the swamp” and “unrig the system.” While many believed their political candidate of choice would fix these problems, the number of individuals identifying as an independent hit the 50% mark in January 2021, signaling a growing lack of confidence in the two major parties to address the corruption and abuse of power in the government.

This challenge is why POGO will invest in adding a citizen-centric advocacy approach by launching and growing a civic engagement team. POGO’s genuine independence and demonstrated commitment to tackling these issues give us the credibility to effectively communicate with and empower that audience. Research shows that members of Congress who are undecided on an issue are more likely to be influenced by “in-person issue visits from constituents.” We want those in the public who are outraged by the level of corruption and abuse of power in government to feel empowered to work with POGO to fight for a government that works for all people.

For POGO to further build support among elected officials for the systemic change needed to fight corruption and abuse of power in the United States, it needs to break through political and media polarization to advance a meaningful reform agenda. A civic engagement program operating in 50 states is what is needed to make POGO more effective in the future.

POGO will continue to strengthen its inside-the-Beltway strategy by building on its historic model of uncovering corruption and abuse of power through investigations and research but will organize the work so that it is more supportive of POGO’s organizational objectives.

Over the past few years, nonprofit investigative journalism has moved to cover state and local issues as more and more small town and regional media companies have closed. But there is still a great need for investigative reporting and research on how the federal government works, and this reporting can help bolster our policy and citizen advocacy strategies. POGO will modify its approach to conducting investigations and research projects by including an equity focused lens and ensure they more closely center on sectors that are organizational priorities because they are most vulnerable to public policy being skewed for personal and private gain. POGO will also need to build support for the team, which includes increased research capacity, editorial capacity, and communications capacity.

Given POGO’s unique experience, our credibility with policymakers across the political spectrum, and our growing national reach of supporters, POGO is situated to lead civil society’s efforts to rebuild our government. POGO has the blueprint to address the problems facing our system of democratic governance so clearly illuminated over the past four years and to help to build a government that works for everyone—not just those who have the money and political power to shape public policy for their own personal or private gain at the expense of the public interest. In order to meet POGO’s mandate, it is necessary to expand certain organizational capacities.

Commitment to Racial Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
The events of 2020, including the murder of George Floyd and many other Black people by law enforcement, was a wake-up call for POGO, which has not, until now, carefully considered the ways in which corruption and abuse of power collides with systemic racism to have very specific and harmful effects on Black lives.
Throughout the history of the United States, white supremacy has explicitly served corrupt networks, by repressing certain sub-groups within the population, effectively preventing potential cross-cutting coalitions from forming to keep kleptocratic networks in check. The overwhelming evidence of the role systemic racism plays in blocking opportunities for real democracy reforms means POGO needs to play a more active role in combating systemic racism that affects all minority populations, including and not limited to Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Muslim and Arab, Latino/a, and Indigenous people, in order to achieve our mission. POGO will also work to explore and understand how intersectionality and systemic oppression impacts gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc.

While POGO is just beginning to work through a deeper understanding of this fact and its implications for our work, it is clear that we must do a much better job at understanding how corruption and abuse of power affects communities that are systemically marginalized from power, and work with representatives of those communities to find meaningful and lasting solutions.

If we are ever truly going to see a government free of corruption and abuse of power, we need to see significant advancement of racial justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion reforms. Only in tandem with those efforts will we truly have a government that works for everyone.

**Over the next five years, POGO will:**
- grow its civic engagement program so that it is active across the country;
- form a robust research and FOIA team, and combine it with investigations;
- become an anti-racist organization that embraces and actively works toward a racially just and equitable society;
- develop a DEI strategic plan to further support the overall strategic plan;
- strengthen its brand awareness beyond the Beltway;
- increase its email subscribers to 500,000 active email addresses;
- grow to a staff of 74 employees and a $11.3 million budget;
- increase the diversity of our staff, leadership, and our board; and
- create an organizational structure that enhances effectiveness and impact to meet the challenges of today and beyond.

**POGO by Numbers – Then, Now, and Soon**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2025</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$2.8M budget</td>
<td>$6.7M budget</td>
<td>$11.3M budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 employees</td>
<td>46 employees</td>
<td>74 employees</td>
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<td>53,527 supporters</td>
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<td>500,000 supporters</td>
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<td>2,607 unique donors / 1 at $100k&gt;</td>
<td>2,716 unique donors / 2 at $100k&gt;</td>
<td>7,944 unique donors / 5 at $100k&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 foundations / 0 at $500k&gt;</td>
<td>32 foundations / 5 at $500k&gt;</td>
<td>50 foundations / 10 at $500k&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launched Congressional Oversight Initiative</td>
<td>Launched Civic Engagement Pilot Program</td>
<td>Have a Robust Investigation, Research, and FOIA Team</td>
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Launched Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Internal/External Evaluation Effort

Civil Engagement Program Active Across the Country
Racial Justice and Equity Lens Fully Integrated into Our Work
Achieved Initial DEI Goals from Evaluation

**Key outcomes (impact oriented)**
This section is the list of outcomes from our work that would demonstrate that our vision of a fair and just government for everyone has become a reality.

- Constitutional checks and balances are restored and strengthened, with Congress and the courts serving as an effective check on executive power.
- Freedom of the press is celebrated, not undermined, by the executive branch and Congress.
- Government agencies are no longer captured by the industries they regulate.
- The federal government’s budget, particularly in the national security sector, accurately reflects the public’s policy priorities without wasting taxpayer dollars.
- Robust ethics rules exist and are fairly and consistently enforced.
- National security and domestic policing powers are curtailed to respect constitutional rights and principles while protecting public safety.
- Barriers to equity connected to government corruption and abuse of power that undermine communities systemically marginalized from power—including Black, Indigenous, disabled, migrant, and poor, and other marginalized identities—have been removed.
- Federal whistleblower protections are strong enough to encourage truth tellers, deter acts of retaliation, and hold those accountable who retaliate against whistleblowers.
- Individuals and communities are empowered to act to address corruption and abuse of power issues in their local, state, and federal governments.

**Key Impact Indicators**
This section lays out how POGO will measure our work toward achieving the above outcomes. They should show some sort of change (increase/decrease) in something. There are three areas in which POGO will measure its impact toward achieving a fair and just government.

- **Policy and Institutional Change** (Government Institutions, Political Parties, Businesses)
  - Increase in the number of reform proposals introduced in legislation that reflect POGO’s values and recommendations.
  - Increase in executive actions that reflect POGO values and recommendations.
  - Increase in the number of ethics loopholes closed by legislation.
  - Increase in the number of reforms passed into laws that strengthen whistleblower protections.
  - Increase in the number of instances that courts reject overbroad claims of executive branch authority and secrecy.
  - Increase in public engagement from members across the political spectrum on POGO issues.
  - Increase in times members of Congress support and defend congressional powers.
  - Increase in times public officials are held accountable for wrongdoing.
  - Increase the number of enforcement actions by government agencies to address wrongdoing by powerful interests.
• **Behavior Change** (People, Communities, Civil Society Organizations)
  ➢ Increase the number of whistleblowers coming to POGO, as opposed to other outlets.
  ➢ Increase in the number of civil society organizations incorporating corruption and abuse of power issues in their messaging.
  ➢ Increase in percentage of advocacy actions taken by POGO supporters.
  ➢ Increase in the number of elected officials connecting the role of corruption and abuse of power to the further marginalization of communities systemically marginalized from power.
  ➢ Increase in the number of elected officials reaching out to POGO for guidance, advice, or support for their reforms or oversight.

• **Outreach and Awareness**
  ➢ Increase in engagement with communities systemically marginalized from power on how corruption and abuse of power affects their lives, and in opportunities to work with those communities to ensure policy solutions will advance their lives/goals/issues.
  ➢ Increase in the number of news outlets covering POGO findings and policy solutions.
  ➢ Increase in percentage of active POGO supporters.
  ➢ Increase in the number of civil rights and liberties advocates requesting POGO amicus support in the courts.
  ➢ Increase in the number of third-party influencers uplifting POGO findings, messages, and policy solutions on the national and local levels.
  ➢ Increase in the number of contacts POGO supporters make with district offices on our issues.
  ➢ Increase in the number of congressional staff trained by POGO.
  ➢ Increase in the number of times POGO testifies on the Hill.

**Overview of Challenges, Opportunities, and Risks**

**Key Challenges**
The organization is facing an array of external and internal challenges to its strategy.

• An ongoing pandemic and the economic consequences it will have in the future.
• A massive movement of state and local legislators to enact strict voter suppression laws.
• A rise in tribalism politics within our government that makes it difficult to pass laws.
• Asymmetry among our two major political parties, where large factions of Republicans have drifted toward authoritarianism and anti-democratic rhetoric and policies.
• A decrease of interest by both Democrat and Republican elected officials in pursuing an ethical, effective, and accountable government or in conducting oversight while they are in power.
• A growing distrust by the public over the past 20 years in the concept of a pluralistic democracy and a turn towards authoritarianism.
• A populace that believes “they are all corrupt” about all politicians and the media.
• A federal workforce under attack in ways that chill free speech and strongly discourage individuals from coming forward.
• The rise of disinformation, where there is no longer agreement on facts or whether they matter.

**Key Opportunities**
The organization also sees opportunities over the next five years that it must take advantage of:

- A growing understanding by the public that our democracy is more fragile than we believed and that we must work to safeguard its institutions and our constitutional rights.
- A growing dissatisfaction by voters with both major political parties, many of whom make up a growing group of persuadable voters.
- A growing awareness by large swaths of the public of the need to combat institutional and systemic racism in the country.
- A growing interest in an anti-corruption agenda by the public that transcends the political spectrum.\(^1\)
- A growing number of political leaders talking about our issues on the campaign trail.
- A number of potential new foundations are entering the democracy-building space.
- A move by nonprofit journalism organizations away from D.C.-focused work, toward state and local work.
- A further evolution of the media landscape that breaks down the divide between “news” and advocacy organizations that gives POGO more opportunities to partner with media outlets.

**Risks to Strategy**

- An uncertain funding climate driven by decisions at foundations, an aging donor/supporter pool, and the risk of an economic recession, especially with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.
- A competitively rich environment of investigative journalism and pro-democracy NGOs that will compete for resources.
- A faction of the Republican Party, including the former president, publicly undermining the legitimacy of democratic institutions.
- Public burnout from a former president, and senior policymakers, who constantly attacked the pillars of our democracy with zero accountability.

**Lessons from the Past Four Years**

After the results of the 2016 presidential election, we knew that then-President Trump’s financial interests and lack of experience holding public office would create an environment in which rules and norms would be tested. We also knew early on that Trump would not be willing to separate himself from the business empire he created while he was in office. And we knew that a Congress controlled by the same political party as the president would struggle to conduct the appropriate oversight of the executive branch that our Constitution demands.

POGO’s 2017 “Moving Forward” document laid out four key priorities that created a roadmap for how the organization would approach meeting the unprecedented challenges the Trump administration presented to the integrity of our democratic institutions, as well as the opportunities that would be created by that. The four priorities were:

- doubling POGO’s capacity to investigate unethical government decisions;
- protecting and supporting whistleblowers;
- forcing the formal oversight bodies to do their job; and

• building a broader base of support for good government.

The plan was designed not only to address the immediate crisis but also to build the organization so that it could sustain this expanded leadership role over the long-term.

Over the past four years, POGO has grown from a **staff of 18 to a staff of over 45** employees. We went from a **$2.9 million budget to a $6.7 million budget**. We also surpassed the $1 million mark of donations received from individual donors. This growth was a result of implementing the plan put forward in 2017 and POGO’s merger with The Constitution Project.

**External Challenges**

*Aftermath of the 2020 Election*

Every election taking place at the federal level has some impact on POGO’s work and strategy. A few, like the 2016 presidential election, have seismic effects that cause the organization to grow, and evolve. However, the record turnout in the 2020 election for both President-elect Biden and President Trump reconfirms for us that there are larger issues at play across the country beyond just these two individuals and this election.

Political tribalism, outward attacks on our pillars of democracy, and increased support by voters for authoritarian methods and ideas will continue to play out in the governing of our country and make it even more difficult for POGO to maintain its nonpartisan brand.

The way the 2020 election played out, especially the attack on its legitimacy and the insurrection at the Capitol, has made the window of opportunity for reforms in the first year of the new administration more difficult. The second impeachment of Trump was another unsuccessful attempt by the First Branch of government to hold him accountable, but it also —spent lots of political capital and shortened the timeline for bipartisan cooperation on any reform agenda.

If the 2020 election had been like previous elections, Trump’s loss might have meant that the infusion of funding we had received over the past four years to defend democratic institutions would have disappeared. But as Trump supporters maintain control of the Republican Party, POGO and the democracy reform (and preservation) movement face a loud megaphone shouting back against every effort, which in turn could inspire funders to support POGO at higher levels.

The Biden administration also poses a challenge to our investigative work. While there are few foundations that directly support this work, investigations still demonstrate the systemic problems plaguing our government, such as industry capture of federal agencies, the impact of the revolving door, conflicts of interest on policy decisions, and abuse of power. However, these foundations (which are typically progressive) wane during Democratic administrations. That is why POGO will continue to pursue general support from foundations and look for additional independent and conservative-leaning foundations that would support our work of government accountability. This is also a reason to continue to diversify our revenue by growing our base of individual donors.

*Hostile Climate for Whistleblowers*

Competition over access to inside sources has made it even more difficult for POGO’s investigators to compete for the stories that are making national news. POGO’s last strategic plan predicted that government insiders would be blowing the whistle with increased frequency. The organization launched a whistleblower resources portal on its website, which included an update to our federal work survival...
guide, an interactive “Know Your Rights” quiz, and an e-course delivered over email that broke down the survival guide into more digestible chunks. We were wrong.

Building off the behavior of most administrations before them, efforts by the Trump administration to crack down on leaks or to publicly “out” the identity of whistleblowers (like the Ukraine whistleblower) continued to create a dangerous environment for whistleblowers. What we saw take place over the past three years is a decline in whistleblowers coming forward, and many of those who did come forward worked with reporters at major newspapers rather than with POGO. POGO has also worked extensively over the past 15 years training and working with members of Congress and their staff to be more effective at working with whistleblowers that come to them. Despite this hostile climate for whistleblowers, POGO’s efforts to reform laws and increase awareness about the need for whistleblower protections helps POGO maintain its position as a premiere whistleblower organization.

**Economy**

An additional external threat that POGO needs to be prepared for is a possible economic downturn.

Ahead of the coronavirus pandemic, the United States was in the longest economic expansion in its history. And despite a record recovery on Wall Street from the 2020 shutdown of the U.S. economy, the economic prognosis for much of the country is still grim. The first unemployment numbers of January 2021 still have us at an estimated 10 million unemployed with signs that the jobs crisis is broader than just those service sectors or small businesses seen to be most affected by the COVID-19 guidance and shutdowns.²

Foundations typically reduce their outlays when the markets are down.³ That makes our unrestricted grants even more valuable in allowing the organization to spend resources in the areas most critical to the operation and impact of the organization.

The data shows that recessions don’t necessarily impact individual giving, with most giving either staying the same or slightly increasing (the exception being the Great Recession). Still, it is a situation of unease and unknowns. The unknown short- and mid-term results of the ongoing pandemic could mean that individual giving, especially among lower tier donors, might take a dip in 2021 and 2022—especially if the economic struggle is combined with a less-than-urgent actor and administration outwardly threatening our democracy.

The uncertainty in the market means that POGO will need to continue to make it a top priority to diversify its funding sources between foundations, individual donors, and donor-advised funds. A recent study found that donor-advised funds tend to weather economic downturns and are a must have source of revenue for nonprofits.⁴ From 2018-2019, POGO saw a 163% increase in revenue from donor-advised funds.

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Grow POGO Civic Engagement Program

Launching POGO’s civic engagement program is necessary for the organization to continue to grow its ability to create meaningful change in who our government serves. No longer can fact-based advocacy on its own create the kind of long-lasting change the public is demanding, particularly considering the level of disinformation affecting the public’s understanding of our system of governance.

Over the next five years, POGO will grow its civic engagement and citizen-centric advocacy efforts so that it has meaningful activity across the country that results in more public officials pushing and enacting the reforms that eliminate corruption and abuse of power in the federal government.

The goal of the civic engagement program is connecting, through relational organizing and advocacy, with new and existing POGO supporters, stakeholders, and partner organizations to bring more of the public on board to a nonpartisan agenda to end corruption (legal and otherwise) and abuse of power in the federal government.

To achieve this, the project has five intertwining priorities:

1. Finding and connecting to communities are most affected by our issues. This means strengthening our understanding of and messaging regarding how regulatory and policy capture, corruption, and abuse of power affect people in their daily lives, as well as understanding of where people are at when they think about “corruption.”

2. Enrolling, enabling, and empowering new and existing POGO supporters to meaningfully advocate on critical POGO issues in target districts.

3. Strengthening existing and developing new strategic partnerships, both at the local and national levels, for collective action with civil society organizations that have state and local networks (including in target districts) and that see benefit from POGO expertise (not necessarily limited to critical issue areas).

4. Testing and strengthening POGO platforms and tools for informing and engaging new and existing audiences to take meaningful action.

5. Building a stronger sense of a collective identity among POGO supporters.

Scaling POGO’s Civic Engagement Program

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2023</th>
<th>2025</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Advocacy Campaigns</td>
<td>5 Advocacy Campaigns</td>
<td>10 Advocacy Campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Elected Officials/Candidates Publicly Supporting POGO Reforms</td>
<td>10 Elected Officials/Candidates Publicly Supporting POGO Reforms</td>
<td>20 Elected Officials/Candidates Publicly Supporting POGO Reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Ambassadors</td>
<td>20 Ambassadors</td>
<td>100 Ambassadors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Supporters/Ambassadors from Affected Communities</td>
<td>40 Supporters/Ambassadors from Affected Communities</td>
<td>300 Supporters/Ambassadors from Affected Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Strategic Partnerships for Collective Action</td>
<td>10 Strategic Partnerships for Collective Action</td>
<td>25 Strategic Partnerships for Collective Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 Active Supporters in each of 2 Target States</td>
<td>4,000 Active Supporters in each of 10 Target States</td>
<td>At least 8,000 Active Supporters in all 50 States</td>
</tr>
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<td>6 In-District Level Meetings w/ Elected Officials or Staff</td>
<td>50 In-District Level Meetings w/ Elected Officials or Staff</td>
<td>100 In-District Level Meetings w/ Elected Officials or Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 POGO Advocacy Virtual Trainings and Meetings per Year</td>
<td>10 POGO Advocacy Virtual Trainings and Meetings per Year</td>
<td>25 POGO Advocacy Virtual Trainings and Meetings per Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launch POGO Ambassador Program</td>
<td>Launch Young Advocates Program</td>
<td>Civic Engagement Program Active Across 50 States</td>
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1) **Ambassadors (influencers):** Well respected and connected people in target districts who will co-lead with POGO on our advocacy and lobbying efforts at district level.

2) **General supporters:** People on POGO’s email list who take actions to support campaigns (such as sign-ons or calling representative) but are not necessarily in a target district/state.

**Key Impact Indicators**

- % increase of politicians publicly supporting POGO-supported legislation, policies, and actions with respect to identified critical issues
- % increase in active supporters representing communities affected by federal corruption and abuse of power (such as veterans, small businesses, and those communities most systematically marginalized from power)
- % increase in high-level actions taken by POGO supporters (such as district meetings, calls to legislators, personalized communications to MoCs, letters to the editor, and op-eds).
- % increase in actions taken by POGO supporters (such as petitions, calls to legislators, and letter campaigns).
POGO Program Priorities

Investigations, Research, and FOIA

POGO investigations are a core part of the organization. They will remain a key element of the organization’s strategy to combat corruption and abuse of power by the federal government over the coming years.

Our investigative reporting will be independent and unbiased. We will strive for fairness and accuracy—both factual accuracy and the larger truth of the matter at hand. We will undertake investigations with open minds. Our investigations will in no way be conducted to draw predetermined conclusions or advance predetermined policy objectives. Nor will our investigators be under any influence to advance any policy agenda. POGO will disclose in connection with individual investigative reports any conflicts of interest relevant to those reports.

POGO’s investigative arm will continue to pursue and uncover examples of deep systemic issues of corruption, such as the revolving door, industry capture of government agencies, and bad public procurement practices, because other organizations and news outlets are not dedicating the resources to such stories. The team will also undertake a more robust effort to examine abuse of power, such as those involving prisons and detention centers, surveillance abuses, and the influence of dark money and industry on the judicial system.

Investigators and researchers will have beats that mirror subjects POGO is prioritizing and actively pursue stories that will elevate the most pressing examples of systemic wrongdoing and abuses of power within those beats. Members of our investigative team will maintain some flexibility to pursue potential stories outside their beats which could lead to new areas of coverage worthy of exploration. In order to meet the challenge created by the hostile environment for whistleblowers to come forward and to compete with news media organizations and other good government groups, POGO will need to expand its research capacity to obtain documents more aggressively and to leverage open data to inform its investigations.

Therefore, POGO will undergo the following steps so our investigative and research team can be more effective in supporting the overall mission of the organization:

- **Revamp how POGO determines investigative subjects.** Areas of investigation will now be determined by POGO’s organizational priorities. Historically, we have never filtered topic choices with prioritized subject matter or sectors until now. This will mean that POGO investigators will have beats/issue areas they are responsible for looking into and uncovering instances of corruption and abuse of power. Furthermore, POGO has used five guidelines to determine whether we will pursue an issue, but we will now place greater emphasis on one of these guidelines: the urgency of the issue. POGO will also expand its list of considerations to include a sixth guideline: Opportunity to apply a racial justice and equity lens.

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5 The five guidelines are 1) Availability of inside sources or unreported documents; 2) Capacity to make a unique contribution; 3) Opening for positive systemic change in the federal government; 4) Urgency for action; and 5) Ability to broaden public awareness.
• **Continue to invest in researchers and FOIA experts.** In the spring of 2020, as part of its five-year planning, POGO recognized it could greatly benefit from the creation of a robust research and FOIA team by hiring a Director of Research. The rise of data journalism, analysis, and storytelling demands that POGO combine its investigators and researchers under one team. POGO will continue to invest in the hiring of researchers and FOIA experts over the next five years in order to add more capacity for these types of stories.

**Key Impact Indicators**

- Increases in the number of members of Congress asking questions in hearings or sending oversight letters to administration officials based in part on POGO’s investigations and research findings.
- Increase in partnerships with major media outlets, including print and broadcast.
- Increase in federal enforcement agencies following up in response to POGO investigations and research findings.
- Increase in the number of whistleblowers reaching out to POGO.
- Increase in the number of investigations and research findings leading to executive, legislative, or judicial policy reforms.

**Policy Team**

In the early years of POGO, it was the publication of our investigative findings in national news outlets that caught the attention of lawmakers. From spare parts to nuclear security to oil and gas royalties, media coverage was seen as essential to POGO’s strategy to fix the issues uncovered. With the creation of the Congressional Oversight Initiative, POGO developed relationships with Hill staff, becoming a valued resource for their work. Over the years, POGO’s reputation among congressional staff and members of Congress—both Republican and Democat—as a trusted and credible resource significantly grew, and congressional offices began reaching out to POGO not only for help on their oversight work but also on legislation. This resulted in more attention from decision-makers, who were asking for our advice and endorsement of their proposed legislation.

In order to expand our impact, POGO began to grow a dedicated policy team. Over the past three years, the team has grown from one policy counsel to a director of public policy, a policy counsel, a government affairs manager, and three policy analysts. This growth has been necessary to effectively and consistently engage with policymakers, particularly on Capitol Hill, on the array of reforms influenced by our investigative work, but also on an array of good government reforms and constitutional safeguards.

**Major Policy Initiative: Preparing for a Transformative Government Reform Agenda**

A major component of our policy team’s work will be to meet the opportunity to pass major reform legislation in the new congress. The opportunity for major reform will come after the extraordinary abuses of power and ethical lapses of Donald Trump’s presidency, but the timeline for such reform could be short. With Democrats controlling both the White House and Congress, we will need to increase pressure and demand that they continue the work they began under the Trump presidency.

To push this work forward, POGO launched an Ethics and Accountability Initiative and hired the former head of the Office of Government Ethics under Obama, Walter Shaub, to lead the effort. The new initiative will expand our work advocating for robust reforms to executive branch ethics laws, stricter limits on the use of emergency power and the Office of Legal Counsel, and stronger congressional oversight powers.
Regardless of the political makeup, there will be opportunities to advance the ball on this initiative, but the tactics will need to be adjusted to the political reality. POGO will need to leverage its nonpartisan, fact-based approach to navigate these waters to ensure real reform is made that strengthens our system of checks and balances.

**Major Policy Initiative: Executive Branch Focused Advocacy**

A thin silver lining to the countless scandals of the Trump administration is that they brought increased attention to our solutions aimed at addressing the systemic weaknesses that allowed for those scandals. As a result, the incoming administration has already reached out to POGO for our thoughts and recommendations across various issue areas, including but not limited to reforms to DOJ and DOD, as well as ethics standards for the new administration. To take advantage of the new opportunities to engage with and influence policymakers in the Biden administration, the policy team is shifting from focusing almost exclusively on legislative reforms to a more even mix of legislative and executive reforms.

**Key Impact Indicators**

- Increase in reform proposals passed based on POGO’s recommendations.
- Increase in number of members of Congress asking questions in hearings or sending oversight letters to administration officials based in part on POGO’s analyses.
- Increased congressional mentions of POGO by policymakers.
- Increased requests to brief congressional staffers or executive branch officials on our policy solutions.
- Increased executive actions implemented reflecting POGO’s recommendations.

**Center for Defense Information**

The Center for Defense Information joined POGO in 2012. The move was seen as building upon POGO’s legacy work within the Pentagon accountability space. The mission of the CDI team’s work is to secure a more effective and ethical military force at a significantly lower cost:

- Reducing the Pentagon’s excessive budget, including the abuse of off-budget accounts like the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account and duplicate or excessive service contract spending.
- Closing the revolving door that corrupts spending priorities and program management, putting service members’ lives at risk and wasting billions.
- Empowering citizens to feel like they can make a difference in checking the abuses of the military-industrial complex.
- Restoring and protecting meaningful tools for oversight of the Pentagon, including public testing reports, independent cost analyses, pro-taxpayer contracting rules, government access to information, transparency, effective national security inspectors general, congressional staff empowered to oversee national security agencies, and effective national security whistleblower protections.
- Buying weapons that are affordable and work.

**Major Initiative: 2021 Campaign: Defense Accountability**
It’s not a new phenomenon that defense contractors have used the United States’ foreign policy priorities to line their pockets, often sacrificing our real security and the safety of those who serve. The Pentagon’s budget is the largest in history and remains largely unchecked by our elected officials.

The defense industry has done an extraordinary job of politically engineering weapons contracts across congressional districts that weaken the ability to move either party toward accountability reforms. And decades of executive branch abuse of the military force authorizations passed by Congress in the wake of 9/11 and along the way has created a security and safety narrative that is difficult to counter.

POGO has also seen a growing resentment by a majority of members in Congress over executive branch overreach, but they lack the real political will to stand up against this power grab—either because of party loyalty or fear of losing an election, or both.

Growing frustration by the public over a corrupt political system and the success we had in 2019 to raise awareness of the level of industry control over the Pentagon’s budget and policy decisions presents an opportunity to build political support for essential defense accountability reforms. We will use our new civic engagement program to build this support and drive change.

**Key Impact Indicators**

- Increase in the number of meaningful amendments and laws aimed at achieving CDI goals.
- Increase number of times POGO defeats industry-led pushes to capture the Pentagon or Congress.
- Increase in times executive branch adopts POGO policy recommendations or budget cuts.
- Increase in the number of citizens engaging and meeting with their members of Congress on these issues.
- Increase in number of citizens writing letters to the editor on these issues.
- Increase the number of CDI goals and principles included in party and candidate platforms.
- Increase in the number of hearing questions about wasteful spending, transparency, and retaliation.

**The Constitution Project**

The Constitution Project (TCP) joined POGO in December 2017. TCP seeks to safeguard our constitutional rights when the government exercises power in the name of national security and domestic policing. A vital component of this work is also to ensure our institutions serve as a check on that power. The number of issues that could fall into the priority list of the TCP team is vast. After careful planning and examination of the space around us, we have identified these four areas to concentrate our efforts:

- **End government impunity:** Broaden and deepen support for reforms that would make it possible to hold government officials accountable for violating people’s rights.
- **Surveillance:** Safeguarding individual rights when threatened by the use and abuse of excessive government surveillance and emerging technologies.
- **Immigration:** Ensuring that the government exercises its immigration authority in a fair and humane manner, in accordance with constitutional principles.
- **Protecting our institutions that should protect us:** Ensuring our institutions prevent and correct abuses of power, especially by and within the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security.

**Major Policy Initiative: Task Force on Federal Judicial Selection**
Over the last several years, we have watched a fast-paced corrosion of the remaining safeguards on federal judicial selection that have traditionally ensured that federal court judges were selected with some measure of bipartisan consensus, and that ensured the quality of those nominations, thereby protecting the public’s general belief in the legitimacy of this institution. The outsized role that the federal courts have begun to take in our constitutional system, coupled with the guarantee of life tenure and proliferation of special interest groups funding of confirmation fights, however, has raised the stakes on judicial selection to an unprecedented level.

We have convened a task force of current and former federal and state court judges and experts to evaluate the current system and make recommendations for reform. The group will examine the larger, structural problems that have placed so much pressure on the judicial confirmation process. TCP will use these recommendations for years to come in order to support a federal judiciary that protects the rights of all, and that serves as a check on the other branches of government without an actual (or perceived) thumb on the scales of justice.

Major Policy Initiative: Campaign Against Impunity

Police officers, prosecutors, and other government officials—including the President and their top advisors—rarely face prosecution or discipline for violating people’s constitutional rights. There are a number of legal theories that government officials can use to avoid being sued for damages—some of the most important are qualified immunity, the lack of a statute conferring the right to sue federal officials for rights violations, absolute immunity for prosecutors, and claims of state secrets in national security cases. People wrongfully convicted or imprisoned because of law enforcement/prosecutorial misconduct face an uphill battle challenging their detention because of limits on the right of *habeas corpus* passed in 1996. And there is no clear means of accountability for abuses of the Trump administration.

This initiative will work toward legislation and executive action that helps to ensure that individuals harmed can seek meaningful redress from the courts for official misconduct by state and federal officials. It will also investigate, document, and seek official acknowledgment of systemic violations of individual rights that occurred under the Trump administration.

Major Policy Initiative: DOJ Reform is Long Overdue

The Department of Justice has a unique place within our government and society. It has the power to take liberty and at times life. The Justice Department and agencies under its control, like the FBI, Bureau of Prisons, and DEA, possess vast authority and are subject to insufficient accountability and oversight. It can provide legal justification for some of the government’s worst abuses and its decisions and actions can, and do, impact almost every part of government.

The Department is long overdue for systemic reform. TCP, in close coordination with POGO’s policy team, will lead the push to reform the Department of Justice, address myriad concerns relating to politicization of its decision-making, systemic preference for wealthy/politically powerful entities, and structural racism that have long plagued the agency, which adversely affect the equitable pursuit of justice and the separation of powers.

**Key Impact Indicators**

- Increase in the number of amendments and laws aimed at achieving TCP goals passed.
- Increase in the number of executive actions (orders, rulemaking, policies) that comport with POGO values and recommendations.
➢ Number of reversals of executive actions that did not comport with POGO values and recommendations.
➢ Increase in the government’s pursuit of policies and practices in legal proceedings that aim to protect and support constitutional rights.
➢ Decrease in the government’s pursuit of policies and practices in legal proceedings that harm or subvert constitutional rights.
➢ Increase in the number of hearing questions about abuse of power and institutional reforms.

**Congressional Oversight Initiative**

In 2005, as part of its 5-year plan at the time, POGO came to the decision that it needed to have more of a presence on Capitol Hill. At about the same time, we were approached by a staffer asking for advice on how to file a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request—since Congress doesn’t file FOIAs for information but instead just demands the information from the executive branch, we decided to educate staffers about their rights regarding congressional oversight. The two decisions dovetailed nicely, and as a result, POGO launched the Congressional Oversight Initiative to offer oversight trainings to Hill staff. We created a wall between that work and our policy work to ensure the staffers knew our only agenda with the training was to improve their knowledge and skills so they could conduct effective oversight.

In the last five years, the Congressional Oversight Initiative (COI) has grown from a series of monthly seminars and a handbook to the primary professional development resource for congressional oversight and investigations staff.

In the next five years, COI plans to expand its offerings to staff—in particular to teach investigative approaches that do not rely on congressional authorities, which have been weakened over the years; to deepen its working relationship with congressional support agencies; and to make inroads to working with members of Congress directly on improving legislative branch oversight.

**Major Initiatives and Key Activities**

**Adding Online CTP and Boot Camp Modules:** In addition to our in-person trainings, we will convert our training materials into online classes, and staffers will be able to complete CTP and Boot Camp virtually, with testing and certification.

**Freshman Member Training:** By 2025 we will have participated in at least one Freshman Member Training, giving them a better understanding of their authorities and how to use them.

**Custom Member Sessions:** As an offshoot of our freshman training efforts, we will offer oversight briefings for members of committees and caucuses.

**Open-Source and Data-Driven Investigation Classes:** As we continue to train and advocate for traditional congressional oversight authorities, we plan to offer briefings on open-source investigations and data-driven oversight for congressional staff. If committees can no longer rely on their subpoena power to compel production of information, they must be equipped with the most robust open-source investigative approaches available and learn to work with large, publicly available datasets to conduct oversight that the executive branch could otherwise stonewall.

**Congressional Training Program (CTP):** If POGO is able to get a new ethics opinion from the House and Senate that allows for more than nine trainings in a year, it will increase the number of trainings by three and offer them through an official legislative branch office.
Oversight Handbook: We will revise the material to ensure everything we train and brief on is in the handbook, and vice versa, and similarly organized.

Work to help diversify Congressional staff: One of the major challenges for diversifying congressional staff is that many lack the resources to take an unpaid internship to provide them access and professional development opportunities to access fulltime paid positions. POGO will create a certificate and oversight training program for people of color interested in coming to work on Capitol Hill to help make them more competitive candidates.

Oversight Summit: By 2025 we will have grown the summit event to its natural size, about 500 attendees, with strong participation from staffers of both chambers, multiple members of Congress, the IG community, and NGOs.

Key Impact Indicators

➢ % increase in language in major pieces of legislation (such as Appropriation bills) in response to stonewalling oversight requests
➢ % increase in legislative language that provides increased congressional capacity.
➢ Increase in the number of congressional staff trained in our program who report back that they have applied best practices.
➢ Increase in the number of congressional staff trained in our program who report back that they worked with GAO and inspectors general as part of conducting oversight.
➢ Increase in the number of congressional staff trained in our program who report back that they worked with whistleblowers as part of conducting oversight.
➢ Increase in the number of congressional staff trained in our program who report back that they applied our training on open-source and data-driven investigations.
➢ Increase in encore requests by committees to provide trainings regularly for their new staff.

Managing Organizational Growth

Over the next five years, POGO will go through another staff expansion in order to grow its civic engagement program and maintain its effectiveness and relevance as the premiere nonpartisan government watchdog over the next decade.

As the organization expands, the need to clarify, solidify, and more effectively organize our decision-making and supervisory structures based on the functions and pillars of the organization becomes only more crucial. The planned structure (see POGO 2025 Growth Organization Chart) will allow the organization to reduce friction when making cross-team decisions, better convey and implement the vision and strategy of organization leadership, more effectively and quickly identify and respond to the day-to-day needs of the organization, ensure there’s adequate support staff to manage the expected workload, and provide opportunities for internal advancement at the organization, which helps to retain top talent for longer.

A Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The path to equity is long and steep. It requires a deep understanding of root causes, intentional disruption of behaviors that sustain systems of power, and an unrelenting commitment to continuous learning.
POGO is committed to challenging itself and supporting its staff in the continuous learning process to develop the competence and resilience needed to address the individual and collective racism, systems of oppression, and bias that contributes to inequity across marginalized groups. POGO has created an Anti-Racism/Anti-Bias staff committee which will support the Director of Operations as the organization advances DEI strategies.

Throughout this effort to grow, POGO will continue to prioritize the objectives of diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the organization—including throughout its human resources, hiring, leadership cultivation, and other organizational growth processes—while also investing in the necessary training and learning to fully realize the organization’s commitment to be an anti-racist, anti-bias, and fully equitable organization.

In particular, POGO commits to having open hiring processes for any and all executive office positions we hire for in the future, and it will continue to employ, improve, and expand the use of fair, competitive, open hiring processes and other hiring practices across the organization that help to achieve a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization.

**A Commitment to Leadership Growth**

POGO recognizes that fostering leadership growth within the organization provides employees an opportunity to develop the necessary skills to navigate professional leadership opportunities within the organization as well as take advantage of external opportunities that might present themselves. POGO will develop processes to ensure that all leadership growth and professional development opportunities are equitably distributed.

One of the ways POGO will foster leadership growth is by launching the following training and mentoring initiatives.

**Rotating Seats on Leadership Teams**

As we grow, POGO wants to ensure we are offering ways for employees to gain leadership skills and professional development. One way we plan to do this is by having a temporary space for directors to rotate onto the executive team and junior staff to rotate to the director level or other programs that will give junior staff more leadership experience. The structure of these programs are being considered by the directors.

Giving directors and managers an opportunity to join the executive team helps staff members learn nonprofit management, grow their knowledge of the organization and its functions, and exposes them to different business areas. Staff are not only gaining leadership skills, but also gaining knowledge that will help them in their role when collaborating with others in the organization.

Bringing junior staff members to the director level gives staff the opportunity to develop new skills, increases engagement, and amplifies perspectives. One of the most effective ways of learning is getting hands on experience. This allows junior staff to learn skills such as creative problem solving, cross-team collaboration, and leadership, while ensuring diverse perspectives and voices are being heard.

For the organization, this creates more versatile employees and a more transparent organization. POGO prides itself on not only fighting for a more transparent government but also by being a transparent nonprofit organization. Unlike some of our competitors, we publicly post our audited financial
statements and our Form 990 tax documents. Having this role rotation adds another layer to our transparency and accountability to our staff.

**Leadership Training Program**
POGO is committed to supporting professional development training and other opportunities for staff to grow and will work over the course of this plan to launch programs aimed at facilitating those opportunities.

**Expanding the Executive Team**
One of the changes to the organization structure will be adding two new positions to the executive team: an Executive Program Officer and an Executive Development Officer. Increasing the executive team to six members with clear and distinct roles will allow for the executive director to manage the key functions of the organization more effectively.

The Executive Program Officer will oversee the organization’s program teams (investigation and research, policy, CDI, TCP, COI, Civic Engagement, and Ethics and Accountability Initiative) allowing the organization to more effectively organize, align, and execute its programs.

The Executive Development Officer will allow for a more comprehensive fundraising strategy across all of the organization’s development areas and will work with the Executive Director to set the necessary strategy and coordination between its individual giving and foundation work to meet its ambitious growth plans. This position will work directly with the Executive Director. This structure will also allow for the development team to grow its capacity for additional fundraising efforts.

**Growing the Civic Engagement Team**
Growing POGO’s civic engagement program will require a substantial investment of resources over the next five years in order to have the impact we believe the program can have to enacting meaningful, long lasting policy and legislative reforms. Growing the number of campaigns the program can prioritize over time means POGO can sustain citizen-centric advocacy efforts on more of the organization’s policy priorities and take on new priorities without straining the resources or relationships the program has built with supporters. Also, as the program grows in sophistication, POGO will need to add more specialized grassroots and relationship building skills and positions.

**Adding to Support Teams**
Over the course of five years, we will fill out our core teams with additional staff members in order to ensure we are able to deliver on POGO’s mission and scope of work. This will mean adding investigators, researchers, and policy analysts to the organization.

With the increased production of content, POGO will need to invest in formalizing an editing team by hiring a supervising editor, and in increasing the team’s bandwidth by hiring an additional full-time fact-checker and a full-time editor.

POGO’s digital program will need to continue to grow in order support a larger list of email contacts, increased civic engagement advocacy campaigns, and to sustain its digital acquisition efforts.

At the heart of achieving the aggressive growth outlined in the five-year plan is achieving the donation and foundation support necessary to sustain it well into the future. That means POGO will need to invest significant resources into its development teams and strategies needed to raise revenues.
The organization will also need to increase the size of its support capacity in order to manage the organization’s growth and the increased day-to-day demands on those functions. This will mean hiring a full-time HR manager and adding IT skills to the operations manager position.

**Communication Strategies**

The overall goal of POGO’s communication efforts is to effectively communicate to all key audiences POGO’s vision of a functioning government that works for everyone. We accomplish this by building wider brand awareness among individuals who believe corruption and abuse of power are major problems.

**E-Newsletters and E-Courses:**
Email newsletters have undergone a resurgence in popularity and success in the last five years, particularly among newsrooms—thought, in large part, to be due to increasing public distrust of news on social media, dissatisfaction with cluttered, algorithm-controlled social feeds, and a growing desire to create more intentional, curated, and personal news consumption.

POGO’s round-up newsletters, the Weekly Spotlight (formerly the Weekly Reader) and The Paper Trail, were its only consistent newsletter products for many years. In the latter half of 2019, POGO ramped up its offered products and launched Sidebar, POGO’s first attempt at delivering written analysis exclusively via email, and Indispensable, a pop-up newsletter launched during the first Trump impeachment. In 2020, POGO launched The Bunker and Corrupted: The COVID-19 Response, two newsletters designed to break down complex issues into more accessible storytelling and to broaden the awareness of the issues and help reframe the conversation surrounding them.

Case studies from newsrooms and nonprofits suggest that e-newsletters could grow to represent a more significant source of traffic for the organization, a potential source of revenue or fundraising, and a key platform for building strong brand awareness, loyalty, and engagement among audiences.

A review of POGO’s data over the last year seems to affirm this trend. Despite email only driving 2.5% of traffic to the website, it is outpacing traffic brought in via social networks during the same period. Out of that traffic, POGO e-newsletters accounted for 75% of web sessions, with POGO’s Weekly Spotlight bringing in 63% of that total traffic. POGO’s newsletters also average 30%-40% open rates. Also, in 2020 each of POGO’s e-newsletter products brought in revenue for the organization.

Building off these trends, POGO will explore further opportunities for leveraging existing email newsletters to key audiences (government/Hill staff, journalists, and supporters) in addition to capitalizing on new areas of growth, such as pop-up newsletters or e-courses.

E-courses, a much newer offering in the email space and utilized by very few of POGO’s competitors, are an untapped resource for POGO to prioritize in its digital efforts. E-courses, like the Federal Employee Survival Guide that POGO launched in 2019, allow the organization to break down complex messaging for targeted audiences (such as journalists) in a more broad, engaging, and evergreen way than through, for example, a given analysis or investigation.

**Key Impact Indicators:**

- Increase in email traffic to the site.
- Increase in emails subscribed to newsletters and e-courses.
Increase in donation made via newsletters.

**YouTube**

For years, POGO has maintained a collection of videos it has created or produced on its YouTube channel but never really developed a strategy for engaging with users. There are over 2 billion users on YouTube and a recent study by Pew found that one in five users say the platform is particularly important for them in understanding things that are happening in the world. The platform is popular across all ages, genders, incomes, and geographic locations, but its use among those aged 18-24 and 24-34 is especially prominent. YouTube itself claims that the platform reaches more of the people aged 18-34 in the U.S. than any TV network.

Building off current best practice trends for creating engaging content for YouTube, POGO will prioritize engaging this younger audience demographic over this platform. POGO’s creative team will prioritize videos that help explain the organization’s issue priorities and how they fit in the world around us in order broaden POGO’s brand awareness among a younger generation of concerned citizens.

**Key Impact Indicators:**

- Increase in the number of subscribers to POGO’s channel.
- Increase in total number of video impressions.
- % increase of viewers age of 25-34.
- Increase in the number of total views.

**POGO.ORG**

The POGO website is a vital communication tool that plays a major role in how the organization disseminates information, investigative findings, and policy recommendations. The website is the primary storytelling platform for the organization. The website places primary focus on POGO's investigative findings and policy solutions (such as investigations, analyses, reports, and testimonies), with the aim of exposing readers to these issues, capturing their attention, and moving them up the engagement ladder—from readers to action-takers, subscribers, donors, or vocal supporters and advocates.

The website provides these opportunities in a number of ways, allowing readers to:

- Explore content relevant to their interests, while also being exposed to the totality of POGO’s broad work and other issue areas.
- Convert to becoming a more dedicated supporter, such as a donor, email subscriber, or advocacy ambassador.
- Engage actively with POGO’s work, such as by taking action or sharing through social media.
- Learn more about POGO, its mission, or its work broadly.

Over the next five years, POGO will explore bringing in-house much of the website development work by hiring a web developer (coder). This will allow POGO to create more unique user experiences aimed at engaging readers in a way that conveys information, convinces them to care, and motivates them to support POGO without having to pay higher costs of outside contractors. POGO’s investment in telling more data-driven stories will require new ways of communicating those to outside readers and consumers.

**Key Impact Indicators**
Increase in number of returning website visitors.
Increase in how long users stay on the website.
% increase in amount of donations made through the website.
% increase in the number of pieces of content read during a single user visit.

Social Media Strategy
In the past, POGO has used its social media platforms to engage with different audience types: influencers, press, policymakers, donors, and supporters. And while that strategy has resulted in some meaningful engagement, POGO will adjust its social media strategy to help the organization achieve its overall strategy of increasing brand awareness beyond the Beltway and more effectively communicating with those communities most affected by the corruption and abuse of power taking place in our government.

Therefore, instead of social media being a place to simply post links and report out what we have worked on, in many ways it needs to be a parallel venture. We need to take the ideas and research from our reports and explain them in new ways—through infographics and videos, more accessible language, and humanized stories—in order to democratize the way we distribute information about government corruption and abuse of power.

Goal: Diversify and expand audience by making information more accessible and fostering community
POGO will need to make our social media more relatable and accessible:

- Work with experts within the organization to create more multimedia content like quick explainer videos filmed on a smartphone that we can post directly to our Instagram story, or longer ones that can become standalone posts.
- Post infographics that are simplified both in terms of design and the language that they use.
- Use engaging features like Twitter polls and Instagram Q&As, and quizzes to give people new ways to get involved in our content.
- Make our accounts more fun! People like feeling like they are reading the thoughts of real people.

Everyone should have the opportunity to engage with POGO’s work. The first step is making the language accessible for everyone and ensuring that we are talking about all the issues POGO works on, and how they impact people. It is only through making sure that more people understand our work and see themselves in it that we can make more people aware of what government oversight is, how it affects their communities, and why they should care.

We can accomplish this by:

- Making sure that when we are talking about issues of corruption and abuse of power, we talk about how issues impact traditionally underserved and underrepresented communities—for example, the impact of COVID-19 relief on communities of color.
- When possible, find ways to not only talk about these communities but also reach out to them. This will involve story solicitation on Twitter and Instagram, looking into doing Spanish-language translations when and if possible, and highlighting news stories (ideally from local news sources) about individuals affected by government oversight issues.
- Ensuring our social media is accessible to all, including image descriptions for all our images and creating our own in-house captions for videos.
Key Impact Indicators

➢ Increase in followers to POGO’s Instagram account.
➢ Increase in supporter engagement on POGO content across social media channels.
➢ Increase in reach of POGO social media content.

*Increased Marketing Efforts*

POGO will use a combination of digital and out-of-home marketing techniques in order to increase the organization’s brand awareness inside and outside of the Washington, DC area, build awareness of POGO’s investigative findings and policy priorities, and gain support for its civic engagement work.

We found real success in the acquisition of new POGO supporters by using an outside contractor to help with digital advertising on Facebook. POGO’s email list grew from ~60,000 to ~160,000. This effort did come with a significant investment of financial resources. In 2019, POGO’s acquisition strategy mostly focused on growth through third-party petitions (such as Care2.com), which the organization has used before. Over the same period, POGO has not prioritized its out-of-home (or physical) marketing because digital efforts provide more immediate results. However, a single channel marketing approach is limited in its long-term impact on increasing brand awareness.

Over the next five years, POGO will build its capacity to execute a multichannel approach to marketing. Multichannel marketing allows for better engagement and results in greater lead generation (acquisition) and conversions. Multichannel marketing strategy does not only mean running different ad campaigns on different channels and platforms but also using multiple platforms for the same campaign:

- Paid digital ads over Facebook, Instagram, and Google.
- Use of digital re-marketing to micro-target POGO web visitors after they leave our website.
- Use of out-of-home marketing in key target districts.

Key Impact Indicators

➢ Increase in the number of visitors to www.pogo.org.
➢ Increase in the number of users following and engaging with POGO through social media channels.
➢ % increase in the number of web visitors signing up for POGO email.
➢ % increase in the number of re-targeted users who sign up for POGO email.

*Press/Media Strategy*

Over the past few years, the organization has grown and many of POGO’s key issues have dominated the national political news. As a result, POGO has had an increased need for media relations work. The communications manager plans to increase outreach to reporters, producers, and editors. Spending time promoting POGO in the media will increase the number of people who see our work and understand our mission of holding the federal government accountable.

In 2021, the communications team will aim to build POGO’s media presence on several platforms in an attempt to raise the organization’s profile and promote the work POGO does. POGO is already well-established in the government accountability space as a nonpartisan nonprofit with some of the best experts in their fields. The communications team will build on the relationships and goodwill previously
established with members of the media and seek to make inroads with new reporters and outlets, particularly radio and television shows.

To a certain extent, baby steps will make sense as POGO works to increase its media presence. The communications team cannot expect to immediately book all POGO experts on primetime news. To start, it will make sense to target podcasts, daytime cable news shows (both live and taped), and local radio stations. This will increase POGO’s name recognition and help staff gain the experience and clips needed to get onto more prominent programs. Some experts are already more established, however, and the communications team can aim a bit higher with them to start.

As the communications team increases the number of pitches it sends out, it will be important to avoid overwhelming members of the media—even the shortest of interviews takes significant POGO staff time to execute. We must keep track of who is contacted so that the communications team does not bombard reporters with pitches and statements. Pitches should be targeted at small groups of reporters and producers. The benefits of that are two-fold: Members of the media will feel as though they are receiving a personalized, relevant pitch, and they will not be flooded with emails from POGO.

**Key Impact Indicators**

- Increase in the number of news outlets citing POGO’s investigations in their stories.
- Increase in the number of appearances by POGO spokespeople on broadcast media.
- Increase in the number of times POGO is cited in digital and print media stories.
- Increase in the number of POGO op-eds placed in established news outlets (such as the New York Times).

**Creative Team Strategies**

POGO’s creative team acts as in-house support to assist the organization—across teams and platforms—in creative storytelling, user engagement and experience, and branding and design.

As a support team, the creative team primarily seeks to solve organizational problems through design (print, digital, multimedia, or otherwise), strengthen the work of both program staff and other support staff, and help those staff meet their goals. The organization aims to serve a wide swath of audiences and stakeholders: the public, specifically those politically engaged or most affected by government policies and practices; the Hill and other policymakers; foundations and donors; and POGO supporters and advocates.

The creative team’s strategy to solve problems and address needs therefore differs by audience and the goals of the teams achieving that work. Below is a breakdown of creative’s goals for each of the areas the team supports.

**Editorial work (investigations, analyses); political newsroom audience**

- Create reader empathy through creative storytelling and facilitate reader understanding.
- Create and encourage opportunities for readers to discover similar content organically and within the site (that is, externally and internally).
- Improve usability: For this audience, a greater focus on readability and accessibility.
- Provide pathways to conversion (email signup, donations, actions).

**Policy work (letters, testimony, reports); policymaker, governmental audience**

- Embody trustworthiness, gravitas, and expertise.
• Improve usability: For this audience, a focus on quick navigability, digestibility of content.
• Provide opportunities for policymakers to discover similar content within the site.

Fundraising work (operations, outreach, development); foundations, individual, donors
• Communicate impact through layout and visual design.
• Encourage user engagement and activity (conversions, actions, donations).

Grassroots work (outreach); POGO advocates and prospective advocates
• Encourage user engagement and activity (such as signing petitions and writing LTEs)
• Create content that simplifies information and educates audiences.