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MEMO: Deceptive Organizations Infiltrate Civic Engagement Organizations

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MEMORANDUM

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: Alexis Anderson-Reed, Chief Executive Officer, State Voices
Jordan DeLoach, Director of Communications, State Voices

DATE: September 27, 2020

RE: **Project Veritas and Other Deceptive Actors Infiltrate Civic Engagement Organizations**

Overview

Agents for the ultra-partisan misinformation organization Project Veritas and other dark-money political organizations have been discovered attempting to infiltrate a number of nonprofit civic engagement and voter registration organizations in multiple states, including [Wisconsin](#) and [North Carolina](#).

Once our organizations became aware of these infiltrations, several in-state staff members immediately ceased communication and in some cases, contacted local authorities.

Project Veritas, and copycats organizations, have been discredited and prosecuted time and again. That is well known from their previous antics. These are the facts:

- Since at least June of this year, these agents have deployed deceptive tactics, including using fake identities to pose as potential donors, volunteers and documentary film makers, in attempts to infiltrate and entrap real volunteers and community organizations conducting non-partisan civic engagement work in support of free and fair elections.
- These deceptive and clandestine activities were detected and have been brought to the attention of election and law enforcement officials.

These agents have been [connected to Stefan Passantino](#), former Deputy White House Counsel for ethics policy in the Trump administration. Mr. Passantino is the attorney for Blue Sky Med Labs, the registered LLC providing funding for these infiltrations. Passantino is [now part of a new pro-Trump coalition](#) preparing for the possibility of a contested election, according to the *Washington Post*.

In recent days, Project Veritas has posted several messages on social media promoting a forthcoming report about alleged voter fraud and “ballot harvesting.”

- We expect this “report” to follow Project Veritas’s discredited pattern of misrepresenting events through doctored video footage and twisted statements to create a false narrative that accuses their targets of breaking the law.
- Their aim is to threaten and undermine the public’s confidence in the legitimacy and fairness of the upcoming election.

- They have spent months targeting civic engagement groups in North Carolina, Wisconsin, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico Georgia and Florida, asking leading questions about using illegal tactics to engage the public.
- We want to be very clear: Our organizations work with the highest integrity, in compliance with the law to ensure eligible voters can cast their ballots and have their voices and communities heard. That includes ballot collection in states where it is permissible under the law.

The targeted organizations represent a diverse coalition, united by their work to safely ensure access to voter registration and voting for all those who are eligible and to build multicultural coalitions to promote racial and economic justice.

The purpose of this memo is to highlight the main bad actors working on behalf of Project Veritas and other dark politics organizations, and to explain how and where they've attempted to infiltrate these civic engagement groups.

About State Voices

State Voices is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) network of coalitions, advocates, and organizers fighting for a healthy and inclusive democracy.

Our network of 23 nonprofit, nonpartisan state coalitions—called State Tables—works with hundreds of grassroots organizations to break down barriers to civic participation and invest in the leadership and organizing of Black people, Indigenous people, and all people of color (BIPOC. We believe that a healthy democracy is one in which everyone is engaged, represented, listened to, and supported regardless of race, gender, immigration status, sexuality, ability, religion, or class.

Advocates across the network engage in issue-based organizing and civic engagement, civic representation, and civic access. This includes census education and participation, voter registration, voting rights, election protection, voter education, get-out-the-vote, and redistricting.

We are committed to ensuring that all eligible voters have the opportunity to cast their ballot. The current political system in the U.S. creates countless obstacles for many people, especially oppressed and marginalized people, to have their voices heard and advocate for the needs of their communities. We are tireless in our efforts to register eligible voters, ensure that voters have the resources they need to cast their ballot, and push for better legislation to break down oppressive obstacles to the ballot box.

We know that the more we challenge oppression, the more resistance we face. Just as we are tireless in our efforts to fight for a healthy democracy, oppressors in power are tireless in their efforts to maintain their power, and they undermine democratic values in the process. **The vigilance and resilience of nonpartisan organizations are crucial during this time. Our democracy depends on it.**

About Project Veritas

Founded by James O'Keefe, Project Veritas is an extreme right-wing organization that fuels conspiracy theories and misinformation by using secretly recorded and deceptively edited video products. In 2019, according to The New Republic, Project Veritas launched a nationwide effort, codenamed "Diamond Dog," designed to "undermine the integrity of absentee and mail-in ballot counts" in the upcoming presidential election using secretly recorded, undercover videos.

Project Veritas is known for using deceptive editing and misleading tactics in their work. They have been repeatedly [accused](#) of infiltrating private organizations by using fake identities and lying about their intentions.

- In 2018, Bloomberg [called](#) Project Veritas, "a conservative organization known for deceptively edited hidden-camera videos[.]"
- As reported in the *Baltimore Sun*, in 2013, Project Veritas's founder James O'Keefe paid a \$100,000 settlement after releasing an undercover video that the California Attorney General's office [concluded](#) was "selectively edited."
- In 2010, O'Keefe was [arrested](#) and pleaded guilty for entering federal property under false pretenses.
- A 2020 report by The New Republic [described](#) a nationwide effort by Project Veritas to undermine integrity in the upcoming election by using secretly recorded, undercover videos.

At least four agents connected to Project Veritas, or a similar copycat organization, working under fake names have been operating for months in Georgia, North Carolina, New Mexico, Minnesota, Nevada, and Wisconsin.

Project Veritas: History of Failures in Wisconsin

Wisconsin is no stranger to the misleading tactics and conspiracy theories of Project Veritas. In 2016, just days before the presidential election, Project Veritas released doctored videos in an effort to misrepresent the work of civic engagement organizations and undermine participation in our democracy. Wisconsin Attorney General Brad Schimel twice reviewed these videos and found the accusations from Project Veritas to be unfounded.

In 2016, Project Veritas also filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission against Voces de la Frontera Action alleging that the organization had engaged in impermissible activities. These false claims were unanimously dismissed in 2018.

"Kurt Insley" / Christian Hartsock

Posing as a California-based filmmaker from a company called Zeitgeist Pictures, "Kurt Insley" (aka Christian Hartsock) reached out to several organizations in Wisconsin from June through September of 2020 asking to interview staff for a documentary he claimed to be producing about *Gillespie v. Palmer*, a case that was brought before the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1886. Insley / Hartsock used this backstory in multiple conversations with organizations and elected officials in order to gauge their reaction to the idea that "sometimes you have to break the law to do the right thing." He repeatedly raised the example of someone he claimed to know in either California or Texas that was knowingly registering non-citizens to vote, and asked for their reaction to that kind of activity. He also asked if people who were not eligible shouldn't just register to vote anyway and then use that as an excuse to fight for the right to vote.

Connection to Project Veritas

These deceptive provocations raised alarm bells for these organizations, prompting them to send a letter to Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul, calling on [his office to look into these deceptive and suspicious activities](#).

One organization had previously captured a screen image of Insley (see below, left) and an internet search for information on "Kurt Insley" found photographs matching an individual named Christian Hartsock (see below, right). News coverage identified Hartsock as an employee for Project Veritas. In 2019, *The Epoch Times* [reported](#) that Hartsock was "the lead investigative reporter with Project Veritas" and CNN has described Hartsock as one of James O'Keefe's "closest friends."



In 2019, while working for Veritas, Hartsock secretly recorded a conversation with a Google employee using a hidden camera. *The Washington Post* [reported](#): "More recently, Project Veritas published secretly recorded and edited video of Google executive Jen Gennai, a clip that appears to depict her saying Google wants to prevent Trump's reelection. Gennai has said Project Veritas took her comments out of context, and YouTube has removed the video on grounds it violated the privacy rights of a 'third party.'" In 2018, Hartsock presented himself as a teacher named Kurt Kendall from Del Norte High School in Albuquerque as part of an operation targeting the Albuquerque Teachers Federation. In 2017, Hartsock presented himself as a donor named Trent Maynard in an effort targeting the League of Conservation Voters. Both efforts were unsuccessful.

"Brendan Holt"

A second individual using the name "Brendan Holt" posed as a senior member of Our Wisconsin Revolution (OWR), a local civic engagement organization, in order to 1) gain access to private meetings and trainings about local issues, and 2) make connections with other members of the community, including those working to register voters. Holt approached an employee of Wisconsin Voices claiming he wanted to be a volunteer and was subsequently invited to attend a training on voter registration; through his work with OWR, Holt also received access to a private drive for volunteers, and attended local protests and rallies alongside OWR's associates.

Connection to Project Veritas

Like the Project Veritas operative posing as "Kurt Insley," Brendan Holt repeatedly touted the idea of knowingly registering non-citizens and felons to vote—even though it is against the law—in order to bring about a lawsuit and win their voting rights afterward. In the course of his communication with members of Wisconsin Voices and OWR, Holt encouraged them to talk to Hartsock/Insley, indicating that the two were working together.

Other Dark Politics Agents

"James Fortune"

A man using the name "James Fortune" called Democracy North Carolina's voter assistance hotline at the end of June 2020, explaining that he had recently moved to North Carolina from New York and wanted to ensure he was registered to vote. Fortune **told** people that he owned a socially conscious fitness center called "Equality Gym" and that he planned to open a location in North Carolina.

Mr. Fortune made two donations (\$1,500 on July 3rd and \$3,000 on July 24th) to Democracy North Carolina. He expressed interest in supporting additional work connected to encouraging election participation among voters of color, and was referred or introduced directly through Democracy North Carolina development staff to NC Black Alliance, Common Cause NC, and Fortaleza, with whom he spoke in July and August of 2020.

The NC Black Alliance met over a video conference with Mr. Fortune on July 23rd. After determining that Mr. Fortune's interest in their work was not consistent with the organization's focus on Black voters and Black leadership, the organization did not pursue further contact.

Common Cause NC met over video conference or phone with Mr. Fortune on five occasions between August 4th and 13th. Over this period, Mr. Fortune referred the organization to a "Selena Rodriguez," who he described as an experienced organizer who he knew from New York now living in North Carolina through the election season, as a prospective volunteer. Common Cause received a \$1,000 donation on August 7th from the LLC connected to Mr. Fortune.

Fortaleza, a newly formed 501(c)(4) organization focused on North Carolina's Latinx community, met in person with Mr. Fortune on three occasions between August 1st and 17th. In the third meeting, Mr. Fortune brought along a man he described as his nephew, "Javier Rodriguez," who he wanted to place as a volunteer with the organization. Fortaleza received, and returned, two \$1,500 donations from Mr. Fortune, respectively given on August 7th and 12th.

Connection to Right Wing Operative Jason Boles

Each of the donations from "James Fortune" came from an entity called Blue Sky Med Labs LLC ([control number 20091383](#)), a Georgia company established on June 17, 2020. Blue Sky Med Labs's registered agent and organizer is [Jason Boles](#), a Georgia political consultant who is a partner at RTA Strategies. Boles is also affiliated with more than 30 Georgia-based LLCs and the registered agent for several political campaigns, including that of Marjorie Taylor Greene, the Republican nominee for Georgia's 14th congressional district. Mr. Boles's [Twitter](#) account includes a photo of himself and Greene from her primary election victory party. Mr. Boles is also the [designated agent](#) for Save America Stop Socialism, a political action committee run by Marjorie Greene's husband Perry. Marjorie Greene has an RTA Strategy email address listed on Green For Congress' [statement of organization](#), which was filed on February 25, 2020.

Greene, who has [said](#) that Muslims do not belong in government, that the "most mistreated group of people in the United States today are white males", and that she would be "[proud](#)" to see a Confederate monument if she were Black, has also expressed her [belief](#) that there is a worldwide criminal conspiracy working to undermine the Trump Administration. No part of this conspiracy theory, which is referred to as QAnon, has ever been proven to be true.

Connection to the Trump Network

The other registered agent for [Greene's campaign](#) is [Stefan Passantino](#), former Deputy White House Counsel for ethics policy in the Trump administration. Jason Boles's business partner also [disclosed to an Atlanta TV reporter](#) that Mr. Passantino is the attorney for Blue Sky Med Labs. He is [now part of a new pro-Trump coalition](#) preparing for the possibility of a contested election, according to the Washington Post.

"Cara Gifford"

A woman using the name "Cara Gifford" met with members of our organizations—including GA, NM, and NV—from June through September of this year to collect information about our program operations under false pretenses.

During these meetings and conversations, "Gifford" asked for information on a number of issues, including:

- how organizations identify individuals that need to be registered to vote;
- if efforts were targeted in certain districts or focused on particular races;
- if organizations worked on ballot collection;
- for written material describing voter registration and other programs; and
- the best way to connect to organizations in other states.

Connection to Right Wing Operative Jason Boles via Blue Sky Med Labs LLC

"Gifford" sent a donation to one of our organizations from Blue Sky Med Labs, LLC. As noted above, Blue Sky Med Labs LLC is connected to right wing operative Jason Boles.

Conclusion

The links between these operatives, their connections to activity across at least six states and their association with Project Veritas and other dark politics organizations run by a network of extremist operatives, indicate an elaborate and coordinated plan to sabotage civic organizations across the country. The transfer of funds from Blue Sky Medical Labs LLC to the civic organizations as part of this scheme served as cover for their deceitful actions and fake identities.

Project Veritas is preparing to release another deceitful and dishonest "report" targeting civic organizations in an attempt to disrupt the election and undermine public confidence in the outcome. Because of the glaring lack of credibility in previous material sourced by Project Veritas, media outlets are reminded, and requested, to carefully vet any allegations of wrongdoing alleged by agents of Project Veritas before amplifying them on social media or reporting them through your outlets.

For more information, please contact Jordan DeLoach (Director of Communications with State Voices) jdeloach@statevoices.org, (240)-776-2719.