

Future Forward PAC

What Donors Need to Know

A favorite of a handful of Silicon Valley's richest liberals, Future Forward USA PAC (also called FF PAC) formed recently and operated in its first election year in 2020. Not much is known about the super PAC and its internal operations outside of a couple of profiles of the group and its key funders. What is clear is that FF PAC took in a considerable sum of dark money and primarily supported President Joe Biden's campaign.

Facebook co-founder Dustin Moskovitz was the leading individual donor to the super PAC. Moskovitz has touted his data-driven approach to giving, making FF PAC's "content testing" strategy for developing ads a natural fit for him and other tech mega-donors. Using mostly positive messaging spots and testing them on voters native to the regions in which the ad would ultimately run, FF PAC aimed to serve as a counterweight to the liberal super PACs primarily focused on opposition media. That said, FF PAC also spent several million dollars opposing a couple Republicans in Senate races.

This super PAC represents a trend among wealthier donors looking to make a top-down impact on politics through large investments in media. FF PAC touts itself as using inventive strategies, but seems to be informed by old conventional wisdom—namely, the idea that a massive ad purchase late in a race can make a significant impact. But many ad specialists, including the leadership of fellow super PACs, have begun to question the efficacy of such strategies, instead advocating for consistent ad spending that starts earlier and has a better chance of establishing a narrative for voters. Additionally, given the top-heavy nature of FF PAC's donor rolls, smaller and midsized donors are unlikely to have much sway giving to a group like this.

For these reasons, explained in detail in the following brief, Blue Tent considers FF PAC's work a **low priority** and advises donors to merely **consider** giving, instead favoring direct contributions to campaigns or to local organizations focused on grassroots organizing. ([Explore our methodology.](#)) This brief is based on extensive independent research and reporting, including interviews with experts on political media. Blue Tent was not able to reach FF PAC for comment on this report.

What are its core strategies?

FF PAC's selling point is its thoroughly tested ads with messaging designed to maximize the appeal to voters. Although not much is known about the specifics of the strategy, the super PAC is led by and has worked with advertising veterans who focused on this kind of targeting in the past. Most of what is known publicly about FF PAC comes from a [report by Vox media](#), mentioned above, covering the group and Dustin Moskovitz's involvement in it. The article discusses the super PAC's "content testing" method of conducting field experiments on voters after an ad airs in their area—as opposed to showing people the ad and getting feedback before it hits airwaves. Vox noted FF PAC was willing to experiment and try new things, but also noted that not all advertising experts believe this method is necessarily more effective. (See Blue Tent's background brief: [Political Advertising: What Donors Need to Know](#).)

Like many leading super PACs, nearly all of FF PAC's money went into media buys. However, where most of the top liberal outside spenders focus on negative media, FF PAC spent the majority of its money—around \$74 million—on pro-Biden media. While FEC records list nearly \$140 million of the group's spending as "unspecified media," the super PAC reportedly spent [\\$106 million](#) of that on television ads from late September to Election Day—late TV spending was a preferred tactic of Moskovitz, according to a report from Vox media.

[The spots](#) highlighted Biden's goal of addressing COVID-19 while noting Trump's disinterest in containing the pandemic. FF PAC reportedly ran the ads in competitive states like Pennsylvania, Michigan and Florida. FF PAC followed a similar strategy for Senate races, spending heavily in the final weeks of the campaign in states like Texas in hopes of swaying voters.

What is its track record of achieving its goals?

FF PAC technically started its campaign activities in 2018 with an ad [bashing Trump and his supporters](#), but the super PAC's spending started in earnest in 2020. Given that most of its money went toward supporting Joe Biden's successful campaign, the group's limited track record has a high success rate by money spent. Its Senate race spending was a disappointment, however.

FF PAC expected to make an impact on the MJ Hegar race in Texas: Vox reported the super PAC sent a memo to donors saying that, in coordination with the Senate Majority PAC and other liberal outside spenders, it would "blitz the airwaves" in the last two weeks of the campaign to help push Hegar over the edge. The memo reportedly said the effort would give Hegar a "plausible chance" to

win the race; ultimately, Cornyn won reelection by roughly 10 points. Winning a statewide election in Texas is extremely difficult for Democrats, and considering the many actual competitive Senate races in 2020, it's striking that FF PAC chose to make an investment.

This kind of "late blitz" approach has lost salience with many ad experts, including those who spoke with Blue Tent. As early and mail-in voting has become more widespread, particularly in 2020 as many voters sought to avoid physical polling places due to the pandemic, late ad buys end up reaching many people who have already voted. Further, early ad buys give campaigns an opportunity to build a connection with voters and establish a narrative, whereas late blitzes only work on the assumption that most voters do not begin engaging with the election until a few weeks out. (Priorities USA, another prominent Democratic-aligned super PAC, released a [memo](#) this past April advocating for more early ad spending.) That being said, without knowing more details about the exact markets where FF PAC made its buys, it's hard to say whether or not its spending had an impact.

Does it have strong leadership and governance?

FF PAC's website does not have a list of staff or biographies of its leadership, but journalists covering the super PAC report its current president is Chauncey McLean, who led the Democratic Party's media tracking in 2012 and is credited with leading a [new ad-targeting strategy](#) that year, which helped the party better reach specific voters through TV ads. It's unclear what roles McLean served between then and joining FF PAC.

There are a couple of other names listed in FF PAC's 2018 990 tax form, but none of them have a public presence online, and it's unclear if any of them still work for the super PAC.

Is its staff diverse and culturally competent?

Unfortunately, there is not enough publicly available information regarding FF PAC to analyze the group's diversity or commitment to issues of equity. Blue Tent was unable to reach FF PAC to inquire about these questions directly.

What kinds of donors support it?

Moskovitz gave a total of nearly \$47 million to FF PAC in 2020, and FF PAC attracted a handful of other tech moguls: Google's former CEO Eric Schmidt gave more than \$2.5 million; Twilio CEO Jeff Lawson and his wife Erica gave \$6 million; and Evan Williams of Medium gave \$250,000. The

super PAC also took in donations from familiar liberal mega-donors like Susan Mandel (\$2 million), Pat Stryker (\$1 million), Patty Quillin (\$1 million), Joshua Bekenstein (\$500,000) and Vin Ryan (\$250,000).

Dark money comprises a large chunk of FF PAC's funding. The group's affiliated 501(c)(4) Future Forward USA Action, which is not required to disclose its donors, contributed over \$61 million to the super PAC, while liberal dark money behemoth Sixteen Thirty Fund gave nearly \$9 million in funds from unknown sources. Campaign finance researchers will have a better sense of how many gifts and how many donors made these gifts when these groups file their tax forms at the end of 2021, but for now, all we know is that FF PAC benefited significantly from the kind of dark money liberals have mastered in recent election cycles.

FEC records show the super PAC took in only 129 individual donations in the last cycle, with only a couple dozen of those smaller than five figures. FF PAC's funding comes almost exclusively from mega-donors, so smaller and midsized donors are unlikely to impact the group's fundraising totals.

How transparent is it about its spending, results, and learning from its mistakes?

FF PAC claims to have a uniquely effective messaging strategy, but with no internal metrics available, we don't know what kind of influence its ads had on voters—or how the super PAC measures effectiveness for self-evaluation.

We do know that outside of the presidential race, FF PAC spent nearly \$13 million on four Senate races: supporting Democrat MJ Hegar in Texas with \$5.4 million while opposing his Republican opponent Sen. John Cornyn with an additional \$5.4 million; opposing Sen. Susan Collins in Maine with \$1 million, and opposing Georgia Sen. David Perdue and North Carolina Sen. Tom Tillis with more than \$500,000 each. Of those races, Democrats only defeated Perdue in a runoff election. As with FF PAC's spending on the presidential race, it's difficult to draw conclusions on its impact, since so many other groups spent more money on those races.

Considering FF PAC's focus on effective advertising, the super PAC presumably measures the success of its ads with some internal metric, and may have other goals like campaign wins that the group measures itself against. However, with no public-facing or reported information about its internal practices, we don't know what those metrics are. FF PAC is relatively new to the political

scene, so it's unclear how it makes adjustments or responds to failures. As a super PAC, the group is fairly transparent about its spending, but its fundraising is much more opaque. The group took in millions in dark money, much of it from its own affiliated nonprofit, so we don't know exactly who is funding the group.

Does it have clear and realistic plans for the future?

FF PAC has not made any public statements or done any media outlining its plans for 2022 or beyond, and Blue Tent was unable to reach FF PAC with questions about its future plans.

Conclusion

FF PAC quickly earned attention thanks to its deep-pocketed founder and a collection of wealthy liberals interested in trying something new. Unfortunately, it appears much of what it offers comes from the same thinking as establishment groups, but with less political sway or direct connection to the party. Its outsized fundraising and spending also come at a time when strategists are starting to reassess the value of out-spending an opponent. The group's lack of transparency and self-reflection is also a red flag. Small and mid-level donors concerned with elections should consider groups like FF PAC a low priority, and only consider giving to the group. ([Explore our methodology.](#)) Progressives looking to contribute to electoral wins should instead favor direct donations to specific campaigns, while giving to groups focused on grassroots organizing remains the best long term investment for the left.

You may also want to check out:

- [American Bridge 21st Century PAC: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [House Majority PAC: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [Priorities USA: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [BlackPAC: What Donors Need to Know](#)