



ZuckBucks, Used Trucks, and Arnold: How South Carolina Took Millions in California Cash to Boost Vote-by-Mail

\$6.5M was only the beginning. They will be back.

February 2022 – South Carolina was not a swing state in November 2020. Yet, millions of dollars from at least three private entities flowed into the state. Plenty of reporting has been done on how Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, through the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL), flooded county election offices in battlegrounds with cash to subsidize election processes preferred by the outside group. But in the Palmetto State, counties and even the state government had hands out for more than ZuckBucks – eventually **totaling \$6.5 million in grants available to be spent as late as Summer 2021.**ⁱ South Carolina demonstrates how the desire to directly influence election administration by funding preferred election processes is a long-term programmatic goal for left-wing nonprofits. And unless the practice is banned by legislation, it will continue.

Three Rivers of Cash Flowing into SC

Zuckerberg, through the 501(c)(3) CTCL, was the largest source of private money given to election offices across the Palmetto State. The SC State Election Commission reported 39 counties receiving a total of \$5.2 million in ZuckBucks. The State Election Commission itself took a **\$1.3 million** grant from the **Center for Election Innovation & Research (CEIR)**. In a smaller effort, even **Arnold Schwarzenegger** was fueling private funding of county election offices through a donation of **\$40,000** from his University of Southern California think tank, the Schwarzenegger Institute.ⁱⁱ See the chart below for a full list of the governmental entities that received private funding.

Zuckerberg via CTCL	\$5,201,955.25
Zuckerberg via CEIR	\$1,267,500.00
Schwarzenegger Inst.	\$40,000.00

Standout Expenditures

Most of the items listed on expense reports are in keeping with what one would expect to see in terms of personal protective equipment and other COVID-related adjustments. But counties receiving both large and small grants took the opportunity to purchase more than office equipment. The CTCL had no discernable

County	Total Grants	Unusual Expenses
Barnwell	\$41,412.00	Storage building
Berkeley	\$550,000.00	Ford F250 transit van, Ford F250 pickup, 16-foot trailer
Dillon	\$34,162.50	Storage building
Dorchester	\$581,000.00	Ford F150, F250 pickup trucks, enclosed trailer
Horry	\$185,472.00	iPads, mobile phones
McCormick	\$10,662.50	Enclosed trailer
Williamsburg	\$100,518.00	Enclosed trailer

controls here, so long as counties claimed their purchases aided in the administration of the election.

What Was a Driving Factor for State and Counties to Seek Grants?

Unlike several of the battleground states, South Carolina was not forced to change its vote-by-mail procedures through litigation. In September, emergency legislation was signed by Governor Henry McMaster to expand the system to all registered voters for only the 2020 General Election. The bill also ordered the State Election Commission to “establish an aggressive voter education program” about the changes.ⁱⁱⁱ The counties then went on a shopping spree for anything related to printer and mail equipment, while the State mounted a public relations campaign to promote the temporary vote-by-mail procedures. The CEIR funded the public relations costs to the tune of \$1.3 million, complete with social media ad buys. Up until the 2020 Election season, the Center for Election Innovation & Research was a modest nonprofit with left-of-center leanings. In August of that year, Zuckerberg parked \$50 million with the organization to give grants similar to those from the CTCL.^{iv}

Did This Money Influence the Outcome of the Election?

The general trend among ZuckBuck-awarded states shows that although turnout was at historic levels nationally in 2020, President Biden saw massive improvements over Hillary Clinton, sometimes in excess of 40 percent. This was not the case in South Carolina. Whereas President Donald Trump saw an overall turnout improvement of 21 percent over 2016 in the funded counties, Biden edged with 28 percent. No counties switched teams in the red versus blue dynamic. 27 red counties and 12 blue counties received grants.

South Carolina serves as a better example regarding the **longer play for influencing election offices from the nonprofit sector**. Amid efforts to ban private funding of elections in some state legislatures in 2021, a justification for the practice began to emerge: *elite donors and interests had a duty to send their money because governments were failing to fund the election process*.^v Framing state and local budgetary authorities as deadbeats essentially became an act of *democracy protection*, a buzz phrase Americans will increasingly hear going forward. True to form, these “bailouts”^{vi} came with strings attached on how they could be spent as a way to usher forth unconventional voting practices. Unless states place safeguards around government responsibilities to citizens (like disinterested funding of the administration of elections), expect more process incursions from nonprofits.

Are ZuckBucks Banned in South Carolina Heading into the 2022 Midterms?

Not yet. The bipartisan H. 3444 holds 26 cosponsors^{vii} and would ban private grants to counties. Without a ban, states could see an arms race between opposed grant-giving organizations with every ideological group trying to exert its influence over the process.

South Carolina’s Reliance on Facebook During the 2020 Election

While the State Election Commission was spending Zuckerberg’s money on Facebook ads granted via pass-thru organizations, it also utilized “established channels through which election officials can report disinformation.” In at least two instances, the SEC alerted Facebook properties of such posts, which were eventually taken down by Instagram and Facebook proper.

PILF President J. Christian Adams

“The South Carolina ZuckBuck effort shows a commitment to building state and local governments’ reliance on corporate interests to run elections going forward. This is about building a sustaining infrastructure to fit ideological tastes. Time is running short for South Carolinians to erase the risk of similar grants affecting 2022.”

Jurisdiction	Grantor	Grant Amount
State Elec. Comm.	CEIR	\$1,267,500.00
Richland	CTCL	\$730,000.00
Charleston	CTCL	\$695,000.00
Greenville	CTCL	\$660,000.00
Dorchester	CTCL	\$581,000.00
Berkeley	CTCL	\$550,000.00
Orangeburg	CTCL	\$217,500.00
Spartanburg	CTCL	\$193,338.00
Horry	CTCL	\$185,472.00
York	CTCL	\$143,356.00
Beaufort	CTCL	\$117,949.50
Anderson	CTCL	\$116,044.00
Sumter	CTCL	\$110,796.00
Florence	CTCL	\$103,000.00
Williamsburg	CTCL	\$100,518.00
Pickens	CTCL	\$65,691.50
Darlington	CTCL	\$58,977.75
Lancaster	CTCL	\$50,880.00
Laurens	CTCL	\$50,880.00
Cherokee	CTCL	\$40,194.50
Chesterfield	CTCL	\$36,225.00
Dillon	CTCL	\$34,162.50
Marion	CTCL	\$33,481.00
Colleton	CTCL	\$32,993.50
Marlboro	CTCL	\$30,086.00
Chester	CTCL	\$28,577.50
Jasper	CTCL	\$27,279.00
Oconee	CTCL	\$27,000.00
Fairfield	CTCL	\$25,305.00
Barnwell	CTCL	\$23,912.00
Union	CTCL	\$22,875.00
Colleton	Schwarzenegger Institute	\$22,500.00
Abbeville	CTCL	\$20,480.25
Edgefield	CTCL	\$20,430.00
Lee	CTCL	\$19,943.00
Hampton	CTCL	\$19,406.25
Barnwell	Schwarzenegger Institute	\$17,500.00
Allendale	CTCL	\$12,556.50
Calhoun	CTCL	\$11,602.00
McCormick	CTCL	\$10,662.50

ⁱ January 12, 2022 letter and attachments from the South Carolina State Election Commission to the Hon. Ralph Norman, U.S. House of Representatives

ⁱⁱ <http://schwarzenegger.usc.edu/about-the-institute/mission>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess123_2019-2020/bills/5305.htm

^{iv} <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/center-for-election-innovation-research/>

^v <https://wamu.org/story/21/03/11/private-donations-helped-pay-for-2020-elections-arizona-republicans-say-no-more/>

^{vi} <https://wamu.org/story/20/12/08/how-private-money-from-facebooks-ceo-saved-the-2020-election/>

^{vii} <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/billsearch.php?billnumbers=3444&session=124&summary=B>