

Embold Research

Democratic and Obama-Era Connections

Prepared for Anne Armstrong | October 20, 2026

Principal finding: Embold is a unit of a company with documented Democratic political origins, an Obama-alumni investor network, former Democratic officials in leadership, and polling partnerships with Obama veterans. These are identifiable corporate, professional and commercial relationships—not a finding that a particular poll was manipulated. [\[1\]](#)[\[3\]](#)[\[5\]](#)[\[7\]](#)[\[9\]](#)[\[15\]](#)

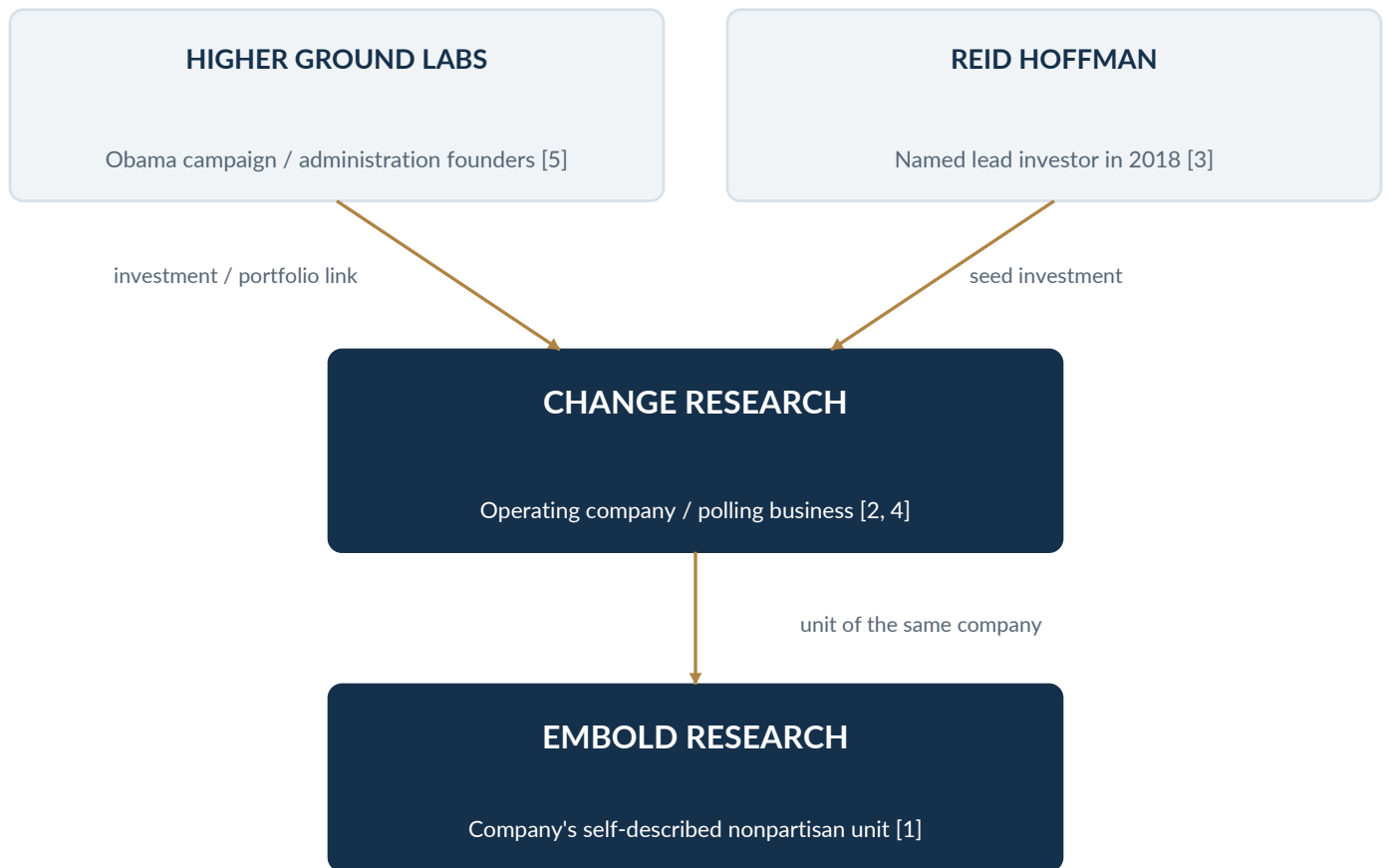
The five principal connections

- 1. Operating company.** Embold describes itself as the nonpartisan unit of Change Research. Co-founder Pat Reilly describes the company's founding purpose in explicitly Democratic terms. [\[1\]](#)[\[11\]](#)
- 2. Investment.** Change Research's 2018 financing announcement names Reid Hoffman and Higher Ground Labs. HGL was founded by Betsy Hoover, Shomik Dutta and Andrew McLaughlin, all with Obama campaign or administration roles. [\[3\]](#)[\[5\]](#)
- 3. Board and personnel.** Embold lists former DNC chief technology officer Raffi Krikorian on its board and Kris Balderston, a veteran of Hillary Clinton's Senate office and the Obama-era State Department, as national director. [\[1\]](#)[\[7\]](#)[\[8\]](#)[\[9\]](#)
- 4. Polling business.** Crooked Media publicly documented its Change Research partnership. Crooked's leadership and hosts include Obama aides Jon Favreau, Jon Lovett, Tommy Vietor and Dan Pfeiffer. [\[15\]](#)[\[17\]](#)
- 5. Zuckerberg-linked professional network.** Board member Erika Rottenberg previously worked at the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI). A separate historical founder listing also connects Jonathan Goldman to CZI. These are professional links, not proof of Meta ownership or survey funding. [\[4\]](#)[\[7\]](#)[\[19\]](#)[\[20\]](#)

Scope. The report covers relationships substantiated in the sources reviewed. It does not claim a complete private shareholder list or identify undisclosed donors. Numbers in brackets link to the source register; source titles link to the original publications.

01 / CORPORATE AND FINANCIAL STRUCTURE

How the organizations connect



Arrows identify documented relationships; no ownership percentage or poll-specific payment is implied.

The ownership question has a limited public answer

The public materials establish the operating relationship between Embold and Change Research and identify historical investment relationships. They do not disclose current share percentages, voting rights, investment amounts, or a complete capitalization table. A board seat is not itself proof of majority ownership. [1][3][4][7]

Shared infrastructure, not merely a similar name

Embold's methodology page says it uses the same methodology and technology as Change Research. The two team pages also list several of the same people, including Mike Greenfield, Kris Balderston and Matt Merriman-Preston. [1][25][26]

Money versus association: the 2018 investment announcement is evidence of financing; employment biographies establish professional ties; a polling partnership establishes a business relationship. None supplies an invoice or bank record for the Pell Center survey.

02 / DIRECT AND HISTORICAL PERSONNEL TIES

People inside the company network

Pat Reilly | Co-founder of Change Research

Reilly's own biography describes the company as "committed to increasing the success of Democratic candidates and campaigns." HGL's 2018 profile says she previously served as campaign press secretary for San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown. Her biography also notes later work with Republican and Democratic business leaders and independent candidates; the founding connection should not be misrepresented as an exclusive description of all her later work. [\[11\]](#)[\[12\]](#)

Raffi Krikorian | Listed Embold board member

The DNC announced Krikorian's appointment as chief technology officer on June 28, 2017. Its announcement assigned him responsibility for technology, security and analytics infrastructure supporting Democratic electoral efforts. Embold's board biography independently records his DNC service. This is a documented former party leadership position, not an inference from his personal views. [\[7\]](#)[\[8\]](#)

Kris Balderston | Listed Embold national director

The State Department announced his appointment as special representative for global partnerships on November 16, 2010, during the Obama administration. The same record says he was Hillary Clinton's first Senate legislative director in 2001 and deputy chief of staff from 2002 to 2009. An employer's 2013 announcement also records service in the Bill Clinton White House, the Senate Democratic Policy Committee under George Mitchell, and Governor Michael Dukakis' Massachusetts office. [\[1\]](#)[\[9\]](#)[\[10\]](#)

Matt Merriman-Preston | Listed head of growth

In a first-person 2020 interview, he described his former business, Ampersand Consulting, as "a small firm that helps elect Democratic candidates." Embold lists his prior ownership of Ampersand and his volunteer board role with Western Pennsylvania's Planned Parenthood Action Council. The latter is an advocacy connection, not a DNC position. [\[1\]](#)[\[13\]](#)

Jessica Mason | Listed senior analyst

Embold's biography identifies Hart Research Associates as her former employer. Hart's political-practice page describes research for Democratic candidates, committees and independent-expenditure groups. This establishes a professional connection to a Democratic-oriented polling firm; it does not establish Mason's personal party registration or identify which candidates she served. [\[1\]](#)[\[14\]](#)

Higher Ground Labs and Obama alumni

Higher Ground Labs is an identified Change Research investor-network connection, not an organization inferred from social contacts. Its own launch statement announced a purpose of helping Democrats win elections. Its portfolio page and later impact review include Change Research. [3][4][5][28]

HGL founder	Documented Obama-era role
Betsy Hoover	Online organizing director for Obama's 2012 re-election campaign; also a founding partner of 270 Strategies. [5]
Shomik Dutta	Senior finance staff on Obama's 2008 and 2012 campaigns; White House special assistant and adviser to the FCC chairman. [5]
Andrew McLaughlin	Deputy chief technology officer of the United States under President Obama. [5]

A further layer: HGL advisers, not Embold directors

The HGL advisory-board page reviewed for this report lists the following people. Their roles create an indirect chain through HGL; the page does not put them on Embold's board or assign them authority over its polling. [6]

HGL-listed adviser	Documented political background
Jon Favreau	Obama's head speechwriter, 2005-2013; Crooked Media co-founder. [6][17]
Jeremy Bird	National field director for Obama's 2012 campaign; his firm subsequently worked for Ready for Hillary. [6][22]
Anthony Foxx	U.S. transportation secretary in the Obama administration. [6][23]
Julius Genachowski	FCC chairman, 2009-2013; subsequently named to Obama's Intelligence Advisory Board. [6][24]

HGL's people page also identifies Gerard Niemira's former Hillary for America product role, adviser Jose Cornejo's DNC and Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee work, and adviser Emily Norman's former Democratic Data Exchange leadership. [6]

Boundary: these records establish an Obama-alumni and Democratic professional network around an investor. They do not show Barack Obama personally owning, directing, or financing Embold.

Polling partnerships and Democratic work

Crooked Media: a documented polling partnership

On June 25, 2019, Crooked Media announced a partnership with Change Research to conduct Democratic presidential-primary polls. This is a first-party description of a research collaboration—not a claim based merely on a shared event or personal acquaintance. [15]

Person at Crooked Media	Obama / Democratic connection
Jon Favreau	Co-founder; Obama head speechwriter from 2005 to 2013. [17]
Jon Lovett	Co-founder; former Obama White House speechwriter and Hillary Clinton speechwriter. [17]
Tommy Vietor	Co-founder; worked for Obama for nine years, including as White House national security spokesman. [17]
Dan Pfeiffer	Host; former Obama White House communications director and senior adviser. [17]

A May 21, 2020 PollerCoaster memorandum written by Pfeiffer identified a jointly conducted Michigan survey and interpreted its strategic implications for Joe Biden. An August 26, 2021 Virginia polling article was jointly bylined by Favreau and Change Research's Ben Greenfield. These records demonstrate repeated collaboration. [16][29]

The parent company advertises campaign work

Change Research's corporate history says it conducted research for House Majority PAC in 2022 and supported Ohio House Democrats in 2024. HGL's 2018 company profile describes work for progressive PACs and candidates and gives Carolyn Nichols' Pennsylvania judicial campaign as an example. These are the organizations' own accounts of their work, not independently audited expenditure totals. [2][12]

Reid Hoffman: investment and explicit political support

Change Research named Hoffman as the lead investor in its April 2018 seed round. Separately, Hoffman publicly endorsed Kamala Harris in 2024 and praised the Democratic Party in his own statement. Together these establish a financial connection to a politically active investor. They do not establish his current stake or any instruction to pollsters. [3][18]

Financial limit: the reviewed partnership announcements and company histories do not specify fees, equity percentages or money paid for the Pell Center survey.

The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative links

Erika Rottenberg: the clearest CZI personnel connection

Embold lists Rottenberg as a board member. Twilio's 2026 SEC proxy statement says she served as CZI vice president and general counsel from 2018 to 2022, then as a strategic adviser from March 2022 through December 2023. The filing also records her earlier LinkedIn general-counsel role. [7][19]

Jonathan Goldman: an additional historical connection

HGL's Change Research portfolio page lists Goldman among the founders. CZI's June 2018 announcement names him as its incoming head of data. The matching professional biographies identify his Level Up Analytics and early LinkedIn work. The company's present history emphasizes Greenfield and Reilly; this report therefore attributes the Goldman founder designation specifically to HGL and does not treat it as a current ownership disclosure. [2][4][20][27]

Obama and Clinton veterans in that CZI network

CZI's dated leadership announcement places Rottenberg and David Plouffe on the same leadership team, and describes two additional hires with Democratic administration or campaign experience. These are **second-degree professional relationships through CZI**, not identified Embold appointments. [20]

CZI-linked person	Relevant political history
David Plouffe	CZI policy-and-advocacy head in the cited period; former Obama campaign manager and senior adviser. [20][21]
David Recordon	CZI technology hire; previously a special assistant to President Obama, working on White House technology. [20]
Osi Imeokparia	CZI technology hire; formerly chief product officer for Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign. [20]

CZI is not Meta Platforms. The cited employment and leadership records concern the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. They do not identify Meta as an Embold shareholder, and they do not document a CZI or Meta payment for the Pell Center poll. Nor do these records make CZI itself an arm of the Democratic Party. [19][20]

The report does not convert a former employer, a common colleague, or a shared technology background into a claim of control. Each additional link has to be read with the intervening organization intact.

What these connections establish

The central finding is organizational, not speculative: Embold operates within a company whose publicly documented history includes Democratic campaign work, financing connected to Obama alumni, a board member who held a senior DNC role, and business partnerships with former Obama aides.

[\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)[\[5\]](#)[\[7\]](#)[\[8\]](#)[\[15\]](#)

What the records support

It is accurate to describe Embold as a self-described nonpartisan research unit within a politically connected parent company. The description “nonpartisan” does not mean that the company’s investors, directors and staff lack partisan professional histories. Conversely, a partisan work history does not, by itself, demonstrate an inaccurate result. [\[1\]](#)[\[7\]](#)[\[9\]](#)[\[11\]](#)

What remains unestablished

The sources reviewed do not supply a complete current shareholder register; a poll-specific funding ledger; evidence that Obama, the DNC, Meta or CZI directed the Pell Center survey; or evidence of intentional alteration of its results. The report therefore does not claim any of those things.

The relevant methodological questions

Embold says it recruits respondents online, adjusts ad targeting while a survey is in progress, and applies post-survey weighting. It also states that it shares Change Research’s methodology and technology. Those disclosures make the underlying recruitment records relevant to independent review. [\[25\]](#)

The most useful records would be the poll’s payer and contract, ad copy and creative, demographic targets, actual advertising settings and exclusions, changes made during recruitment, numerical weighting targets, and documentation of who approved those decisions. Those records could test a concern about bias; the association map alone cannot.

Source qualifications

Historical versus current: dated appointments and announcements are treated as historical facts. Undated website roles are reported as the site’s listings on the review date. Private-company ownership is not inferred from them.

Minor discrepancies: the 2018 seed announcement has an April 16 publication header and an April 18 dateline, so this report uses “April 2018.” Founder narratives and some role descriptions differ across company pages; the text identifies the source of each material claim. [\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#)[\[7\]](#)[\[26\]](#)

Research basis: first-party company and investor disclosures, official government and party records, an SEC filing, and named first-person statements. No conclusion here depends on anonymous social-media allegations.

[SOURCE REGISTER / CLICKABLE ORIGINAL RECORDS](#)

Sources 1-10

Reviewed October 20, 2026. Click a title to open the original publication. Bracketed source numbers in the report link to these entries.

[1] Embold Research

[Our Team](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Corporate-unit description and listed personnel, including Balderston, Merriman-Preston and Mason.

[2] Change Research

[Company](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Founding history, Crooked Media partnership, and self-reported campaign work.

[3] Change Research

[Seed-funding announcement](#)

April 2018. Company announcement naming Reid Hoffman as lead investor and Higher Ground Labs as its incubator-fund partner.

[4] Higher Ground Labs

[Change Research portfolio entry](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Portfolio relationship; lists Mike Greenfield, Jonathan Goldman and Pat Reilly as founders.

[5] Higher Ground Labs

[Progressive Leaders Create Higher Ground Labs to Overcome the Progressive Tech Gap](#)

May 5, 2017. Explicit Democratic mission and Obama-era roles of all three founders.

[6] Higher Ground Labs

[People](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Leadership and advisory-board listings; the relationships are to HGL, not directly to Embold.

[7] Embold Research

[Board of Directors](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Lists Mike Greenfield, Raffi Krikorian and Erika Rottenberg.

[8] Democratic National Committee

[Tom Perez Announces New Chief Technology Officer](#)

June 28, 2017. Party announcement documenting Krikorian's DNC appointment and electoral technology responsibilities.

[9] U.S. Department of State archive

[Kris M. Balderston Announced by Secretary Clinton as the Special Representative for Global Partnerships](#)

November 16, 2010. Official record of Balderston's appointment and Hillary Clinton Senate-office service.

[10] Fleishman-Hillard / PR Newswire

[State Department Official Kris Balderston to Lead Washington, D.C., Office](#)

February 7, 2013. Employer announcement recounting Clinton White House, Democratic Policy Committee and Dukakis roles.

[SOURCE REGISTER / CLICKABLE ORIGINAL RECORDS](#)

Sources 11-20

[11] Pat Reilly

[About](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Founder's own description of Change Research's Democratic purpose and her more recent cross-party work.

[12] Higher Ground Labs

[Company Profile: Meet Change Research](#)

June 1, 2018. Pat Reilly's Willie Brown campaign role, progressive clients, and the Carolyn Nichols campaign example.

[13] Pittsburgh Lesbian Correspondents

[Q&A with Matt Merriman-Preston](#)

March 2020. First-person interview: Merriman-Preston describes Ampersand as a firm helping elect Democratic candidates.

[14] Hart Research

[Political work](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Hart's own description of its research for Democratic office-seekers and party committees.

[15] Crooked Media

[PollerCoaster 2020: The Electability Puzzle](#)

June 25, 2019. First-party announcement of a Change Research partnership for Democratic primary polling.

[16] Crooked Media / Dan Pfeiffer

[PollerCoaster 2020: How To Win Michigan](#)

May 21, 2020. Named partnership and strategic analysis of a jointly conducted Michigan survey.

[17] Crooked Media

[Network: host biographies](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Obama-era work of Favreau, Lovett, Vietor and Pfeiffer; cached search text used where direct loading timed out.

[18] Reid Hoffman

[Public endorsement of Kamala Harris](#)

2024 presidential campaign. Hoffman's own endorsement; not a contribution ledger or evidence of ownership percentages.

[19] Twilio / U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

[2026 definitive proxy statement: Erika Rottenberg biography](#)

2026. CZI general-counsel and adviser dates, plus LinkedIn tenure.

[20] Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

[CZI Expands Technology Team Leadership](#)

June 20, 2018; updated November 2, 2021. Goldman's appointment, Rottenberg and Plouffe on the leadership team, and Recordon/Imeokparia biographies.

[SOURCE REGISTER / CLICKABLE ORIGINAL RECORDS](#)

Sources 21-29

[21] Chan Zuckerberg Initiative / David Plouffe

[How technology can help build a more equitable justice system](#)

March 6, 2019. Author biography identifies Plouffe as CZI policy-and-advocacy head and former Obama campaign manager and senior adviser.

[22] Wabash College

[Bird '00 and 270 - Ready for Hillary](#)

July 10, 2014. Alumni-office record of Jeremy Bird's Obama 2012 field role and 270 Strategies' work for Ready for Hillary.

[23] U.S. Department of Transportation

[President Obama, DOT Secretary Foxx Announce Sixth Round of TIGER Funding](#)

February 26, 2014. Contemporaneous official record of Foxx serving as transportation secretary under Obama.

[24] Obama White House archive

[President Obama Announces More Key Administration Posts](#)

August 28, 2014. Official biography gives Genachowski's 2009-2013 FCC chairmanship and intelligence-board appointment.

[25] Embold Research

[Methodology & Accuracy](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Same technology as Change Research; online recruitment, real-time targeting adjustments and post-survey weighting.

[26] Change Research

[Team](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Current website titles; also establishes personnel overlap between the two brands.

[27] Change Research / Wellfound

[Company and people profiles](#)

Undated; reviewed October 20, 2026. Supplementary identification of Goldman, including Level Up Analytics and early LinkedIn work matching CZI's biography.

[28] Higher Ground Labs

[Measuring Our Mission](#)

February 8, 2021. Investor identifies Change Research within its political-technology portfolio and Democratic campaign ecosystem.

[29] Crooked Media

[PollerCoaster: Terry McAuliffe vs Glenn Youngkin](#)

August 26, 2021. Joint polling analysis by Jon Favreau and Ben Greenfield; separately corroborates the business partnership.