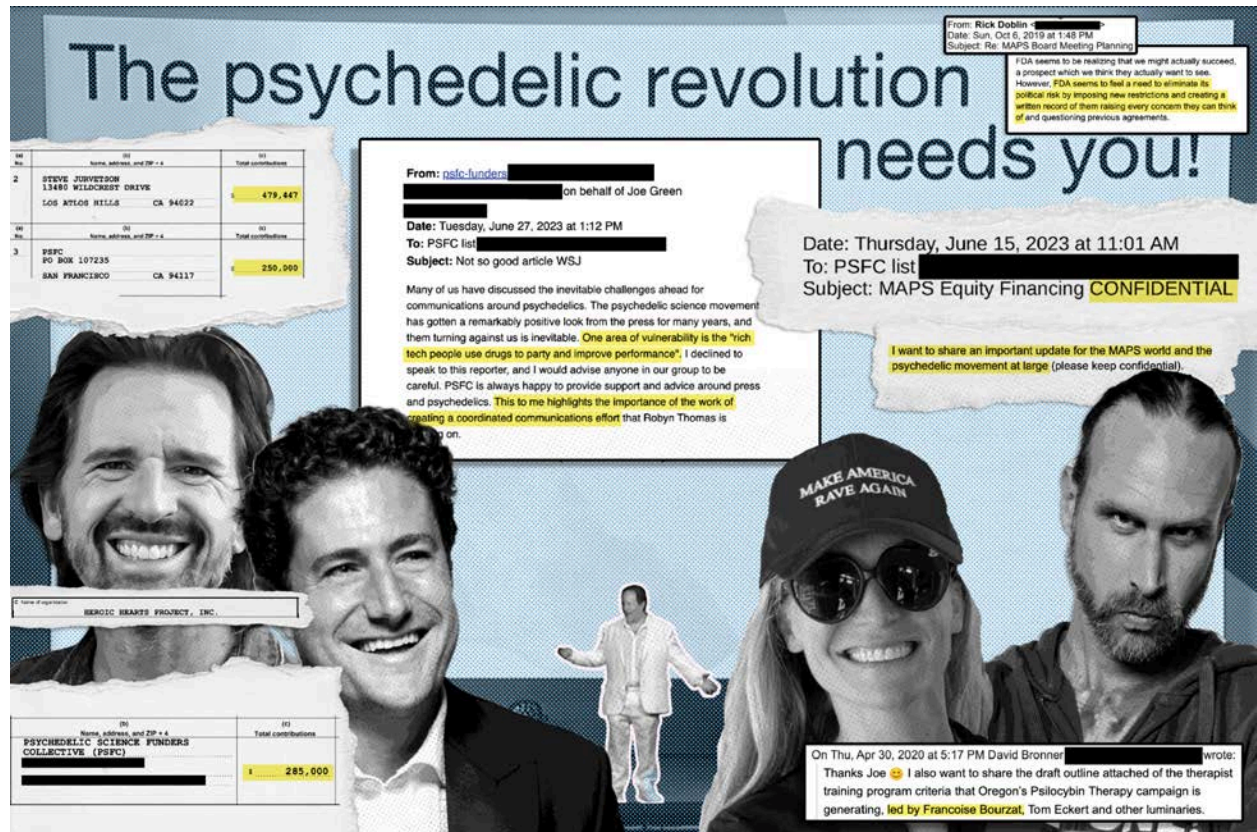


The Psychedelic Syndicate

How Silicon Valley Used Veterans to Hijack the Psychedelic Industry



Principal authors: Neşe Devenot, PhD; Russell Hausfeld; Brian Pace, PhD; and Brian Normand

Contributing authors: Meaghan Buisson and James Curtis

A year-long investigation reveals how a small group of Silicon Valley elites sought to capture the psychedelic therapy industry – using a network of affiliated organizations to scapegoat critics while pressuring regulators to approve their botched MDMA clinical trials.



Executive Summary

This report provides an in-depth examination of how a strategic, well-funded campaign operated to influence public perception at the expense of public health.

Psymposia has spent over a year investigating the financial and political forces shaping the psychedelic industry. Through analysis of hundreds of internal documents — including unedited emails, transcripts, presentations, and other primary materials spanning nearly a decade — this report describes the rise of the Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative (PSFC) and its extensive influence across the field.

Every claim has undergone rigorous pre-publication legal review. Psymposia received legal support from ProJourn, an innovative [pro bono program operated by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#). Psymposia is a member of Reporters Shield, an organization developed by investigative journalists at the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project and lawyers at the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, which [defends investigative reporting around the world](#) from legal threats meant to silence critical voices.

The prevailing media narrative has characterized the psychedelic movement as an organic coalition of grassroots activists motivated by psychedelics' therapeutic potential. Our analysis reveals PSFC's coordinated efforts to circumvent federal regulatory structures and manipulate state-level policy development, transforming a community-led movement into a vehicle for centralized corporate influence.

PSFC has established control by occupying the boards of strategic organizations, spearheading state-level policy initiatives, and funding psychedelic research centers at major universities across the United States. This coordinated effort aimed to establish a multi-billion dollar psychedelic pharmaceutical industry, with Lykos Therapeutics' MDMA-assisted therapy serving as the crucial first approval. (Lykos has since rebranded to



Resilient Pharmaceuticals.)

Following the FDA's 2024 rejection of MDMA-assisted therapy, PSFC-funded organizations targeted critics and whistleblowers in collaboration with the Psychedelic Communications Hub (now incorporated into the Psychedelic Safety Institute). Organizations involved in this campaign included the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), Lykos Therapeutics, and veterans groups Heroic Hearts Project and Healing Breakthrough.

Having failed to subvert the FDA regulatory process, these groups are now appealing to the Trump administration to accelerate approval based on data from clinical trials characterized by serious scientific failures. Disregarding public safety concerns in their rush to bring an experimental therapy to market, PSFC responded to the FDA's rejection by intensifying strategies that would amount to regulatory capture.

In releasing this report, our goal is to provide the public with a clearer understanding of the financial influences at play within the psychedelic industry and to create a resource for researchers and reporters.

Psymposia would like to thank the numerous whistleblowers, sources, lawyers, and researchers who contributed to this report. Many contributors remain anonymous due to the dynamics outlined in this report.



Chapter Overview

[Chapter 1: A “Bulwark Against Backlash”](#) 13

In August 2024, the FDA rejects Lykos Therapeutics’ application for MDMA-assisted therapy following an advisory committee’s recommendation against approval due to flawed clinical trials. With over \$100 million at stake, Lykos funders launch a crisis response campaign using proxy veteran advocacy groups to deflect criticism and pressure regulators, exploiting public sympathy for veterans while spreading disinformation about critics.

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The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) spent decades attempting to commercialize MDMA-assisted therapy. When philanthropic funding dried up after 2020 and Phase 3 trial costs ballooned, MAPS faced a budget shortfall and turned to the Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative (PSFC) to get MDMA to market.

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PSFC's leadership pivots to supporting the Trump administration after losing control of the psychedelic narrative and Genevieve Jurvetson sets a “moonshot” goal for MDMA approval without additional trials. Andrew Jacobs and Rachel Nuwer write an article for the *The New York Times* that labels Psymposia as “a Leftist Activist Group That Helped Torpedo” Lykos' chances at the FDA. Meanwhile, Elon Musk ally Antonio Gracias seizes control of the company and RFK Jr. promises rapid psychedelic access as HHS Secretary.

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At Burning Man 2023, Steve Jurvetson promotes a massive art installation called “Chalice to Eleusis” featuring 1,000 drones animating religious motifs, representing PSFC's interest in reengineering religion as an alternative path to psychedelic legitimacy. PSFC funds psychedelic humanities programs at Harvard and Berkeley while members are implicated in ethically compromised research like the Johns Hopkins religious leaders study.



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PSFC releases a new "Strategic Roadmap" in 2025 seeking \$125 million to fund coordinated messaging through proxy organizations, while positioning itself as the solution to high-profile ethical violations at organizations that PSFC's network had funded. The strategy includes supporting the Psychedelic Safety Institute (PSI) as a "nonprofit strategy lab" that developed a template for industry-wide ethical standards based on Gather Well Psychedelics (a new organization promoting Bourzat's lineage) despite documented patterns of abuse.

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Steve Jurvetson envisions a future where AI handles psychedelic therapy while humans serve as "lowest-cost labor," representing the dangerous convergence of psychedelics, AI, and surveillance technologies under Silicon Valley control. The psychedelic revolution is being hijacked by the same billionaire forces that created the crises it claims to solve, with key figures promoting both psychedelic access and far-right ideologies. The report concludes with an analysis of what this concentrated wealth and influence means for the future of psychedelic medicine, calling for greater transparency, accountability, and genuine community involvement in shaping the psychedelic field.



Editor's Note: We sent detailed requests for comment to 54 individuals and organizations named in this report, but some did not respond to requests before publication. We invite any parties who wish to respond to the reporting in this article to contact us at [research \[at\] psymposia \[dot\] com](mailto:research@psymposia.com). Any substantive responses will be published as updates to this article or as separate pieces, at our editorial discretion.

Content Advisory: This report contains descriptions of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and coercive control in the context of psychedelic therapy.

Introduction

We are told that psychedelics are the future of mental healthcare by the industry that would profit from their financialization. The industry presented this narrative as a grassroots response to the discovery of a miracle cure, offering solutions to the veteran suicide crisis and a path to “net-zero trauma” for humanity.

Contrary to this popular understanding, the so-called “psychedelic renaissance” is built on an astroturfed foundation. Like the [ship of Theseus](#), the original foundations of the psychedelic ecosystem have been supplanted by synthetic infrastructure — an artificial reef system that selects for groups and ideas serving the interests of capital while excluding those that do not. The resulting environment is inhospitable to critical voices and to genuine grassroots movements.

The [Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative](#) (PSFC) — a powerful syndicate of financiers — has leveraged its influence to place affiliates in key positions throughout the psychedelic industry, effectively capturing the movement for private gain. This concentration of control is openly celebrated within PSFC's ranks; [PSFC board member](#) Genevieve Jurvetson acknowledged the disproportionate impact of a small group of wealthy donors: “[T]his field has been [carried by like 20 families](#), and the leverage that they've had with [a] million, you



know, tens of millions of dollars — hundreds of millions at this point — is really quite extraordinary.”

PSFC’s funding priorities have followed a playbook developed by industries known for causing harm: overstate the benefits, underemphasize the risks, and capture the regulatory process.

Silicon Valley investors — who make up the core of PSFC’s base — are [pursuing similar strategies in the artificial intelligence industry](#), raising the dystopian prospect of a future in which an elite circle controls industries that work synergistically to shape perceptions of reality at scale. In this context, the [convergence of far-right politics with psychedelics](#) and [artificial intelligence](#) reflects a broader strategy of weaponizing technologies that can alter behavior and belief systems.

The danger inherent to this control — which Brian Merchant identified in the AI industry — [also applies to psychedelics](#):

“AI dominance promises power. It promises technology that can surveil, automate, bring workers to heel, and create cheap and voluminous propaganda. Anyone and everyone who’s bullish on AI should ask themselves why it is that the AI industry, in its current formation, is so attractive to, willing to partner with, and [such a natural fit for a regime that grows more authoritarian by the day](#).”

The direction that these industries are developing is at the expense of these technologies’ transformative potential. While AI and psychedelics could be developed in ways that benefit humanity and ecological health, the current trajectory is being [determined by actors who prioritize capital accumulation](#) for control rather than collective flourishing. This trajectory is enabled by a [manufactured consensus of expertise](#) shaped by “mechanisms of agenda-setting, advocacy, academic capture, and information management.”



In the psychedelic ecosystem, each of these mechanisms are funded by PSFC — a fact that we uncovered in the course of writing this report.

As academics, organizers, and journalists, the four principal authors have collectively worked in the psychedelic field for 44 years. We began as insiders, working closely with the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), which has long occupied a central position in the movement to advocate for psychedelic drug reform. Over time, we evolved into conscientious objectors to the ecosystem surrounding MAPS, emerging as prominent critics of industry practices and advocates for those who have been exploited by those practices.

By 2024, when MAPS's MDMA-assisted therapy (MDMA-AT) project approached FDA approval under its for-profit spinoff Lykos Therapeutics, we had already been working for six years to warn the field about the project's methodological flaws and the dangers of mainstreaming it. (In August 2025, *Psychedelic Alpha* reported that Lykos Therapeutics [rebranded to Resilient Pharmaceuticals](#).)

Like most others in the field, we assumed the momentum behind MDMA meant approval was inevitable, but we maintained that responsible approval required thorough investigation of these concerns. If approval proceeded without this investigation, we were determined to preserve the concerns for the historical record.

Our research into PSFC began after we were targeted for our successful efforts to ensure concerns about MDMA-AT were documented during the FDA approval process — efforts that included educating the public about how to participate in the process.

Although PSFC had been on our radar for some time, the synchronized mobilization of multiple affiliated groups pushing identical partisan narratives revealed the full scope of their coordinated network. The response functioned like electrical stimulation of a neural network, triggering synapses to fire in coordinated patterns that exposed the previously hidden architecture of PSFC's influence operations. Collectively, this coordinated campaign



worked to dismiss concerns about Lykos by systematically discrediting and scapegoating its critics.

In the course of correcting false narratives about Psymposia, we uncovered extensive connections between MAPS, PSFC, Lykos Therapeutics, and adjacent psychedelic organizations and initiatives. Our findings provide an unprecedented look into the “psychedelic renaissance,” revealing how wealthy elites have deliberately constructed an apparatus to manufacture public demand for a new psychedelic industry. ➡

➡ **FUNDING DISCLOSURE:** Psymposia maintains full editorial independence from all funding sources. In light of the hostile political climate, we have respected donor requests for confidentiality. In 2024, we received an [unrestricted contribution](#) from the Sarlo Charitable Fund, provided in recognition of our longstanding work in harm reduction within the psychedelic field. This donation became public when the Sarlo Charitable Fund chose to [disclose this information](#) to WIRED. We received this funding after we were already engaged in this work; no one requested or commissioned this report, which developed from our need to document and contextualize a coordinated campaign to delegitimize our organization. Prior to 2024, Psymposia functioned entirely on a volunteer basis and was supported by small donations that covered basic operational costs. Our independence distinguishes our work from industry-funded research and advocacy that serves corporate interests.

Psymposia compiled this report through analysis of hundreds of internal documents from influential psychedelic funders covering nearly a decade. Our examination reveals PSFC's rise to dominance and its extensive control across the psychedelic industry — from federal regulatory frameworks to state-level initiatives — all aimed at legitimizing an underground movement with established patterns of harm.

Many of the documents cited in this report are primary sources: email communications, transcripts, presentation slides, text message exchanges, recordings of Zoom meetings, and



other internal materials. Multiple individuals provided these documents to Psymposia in unedited form. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Many of the communications we reviewed came from PSFC's own listserv, which lacked basic operational security. On March 8, 2021, the confusion about who had access was exposed when PSFC member and podcaster Tim Ferriss emailed the group speculating about the business plans of the psilocybin company Compass Pathways. Compass co-founder Katya Malievskaia responded to the thread with a blunt reminder: "Hi all, I feel you should know that [Compass co-founder] George [Goldsmith] and I are on the email distribution list."

Psymposia has spent over a year analyzing primary documents, corresponding with sources, and consulting legal counsel to assemble this report. Considering the sensitivity of the material being released, some of our sources have chosen to remain anonymous. Every claim has been vetted by pre-publication legal review.

In releasing this report, our goal is to provide the public with a clearer understanding of the financial influence at play within the psychedelic industry. We have designed this report with infographics and an [appendix](#) to serve as resources for other researchers and reporters. ➡

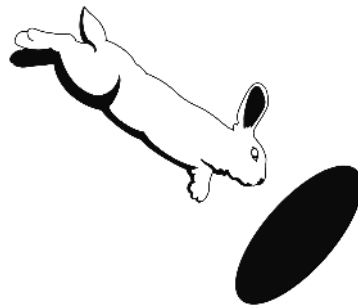
➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** If you are a journalist reading this report and have an interest in receiving primary source documents, reach out to research@psymposia.com.

Great care was taken to place documents in proper context and provide adequate sourcing for all claims. We chose to release only those names and communications from PSFC members that are central to this reporting, while omitting those with limited influence on the organization's direction. Based on the evidence we reviewed, many funders appear to have accepted PSFC's claims and intentions at face value.



We believe it is essential to release this information at this critical moment, not only for the psychedelic field but for the health of democratic society. The coordinated influence operations documented here reveal how wealthy elites are capturing emerging industries, manipulating public opinion, and subverting regulatory processes. These tactics pose a fundamental threat to democratic governance and public accountability.

This is one of those reports that, once read, can't be unread: by the time you get to the end, the history of the psychedelic field looks very different, and it will make a lot more sense.





Chapter 1: A “Bulwark Against Backlash”

In August 2024, the United States Food and Drug Administration rocked the psychedelic industry by [declining to approve](#) Lykos Therapeutics’ ([previously MAPS PBC](#)) New Drug Application for MDMA-Assisted Therapy (MDMA-AT). Although this outcome was virtually inconceivable within the psychedelic field at the start of the year, this final decision aligned with the [June recommendation](#) of the FDA’s Psychoactive Drugs Advisory Committee (PDAC), which overwhelmingly rejected the application.

Despite most of the committee’s [explicit interest in one day approving a psychedelic drug](#), its hands were tied by the multitude of flaws in Lykos’ clinical trials, resulting in a [death by a thousand cuts](#) for the application.

Although the FDA’s decision came as a surprise, there had been growing concerns throughout the spring. The advisory committee’s vote of “no confidence” in Lykos’ application was foreshadowed by an unfavorable analysis of the application from the [Institute for Clinical and Economic Review](#) (ICER) — a nonprofit that provides clinical and cost-effectiveness analyses of drug treatments. In tandem, these reviews from PDAC and ICER unleashed a [torrent](#) of [critical](#) news [coverage](#).

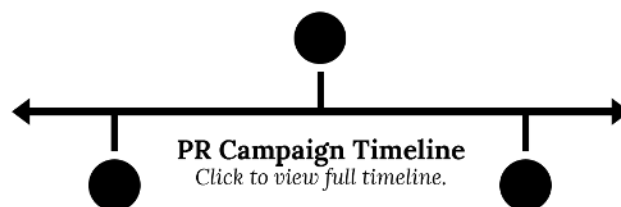
Staggering under this growing scrutiny, Lykos and its allies — including funders and nonprofit proxies — developed a crisis response to brute-force their project over the finish line by silencing dissent and pressuring regulators. In what should have been a moment of self-reflection and accountability, the campaign attempted to bypass Lykos’ responsibility for its misconduct, which included [uncollected safety data](#) and [sexual abuse](#) during a [clinical trial](#). (Founder of atai Life Sciences and investor in Compass Pathways, Christian Angermayer, [called Lykos’ data set “poor.”](#) He described its trials as having “been deemed chaotic, with nonstandard designs — particularly regarding therapy — and questionable execution”).



With over \$100 million in [private investment](#) at stake, these groups resorted to desperate measures to divert attention from self-inflicted failures. Their strategy relied on manufacturing the illusion of grassroots groups fighting against big pharma while painting critics as anti-veteran extremists. In reality, Lykos funders were following a classic pharma playbook – [funding proxy groups](#) to obscure serious concerns about the company's practices by exploiting the public's sympathy for veterans. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** A veteran proxy group in this context refers to an organization or entity that claims to advocate for the interests and needs of military veterans but actually serves to advance pharmaceutical industry goals.

The crisis response began with a June 23 [open letter](#) co-authored by Juliana Mercer and Jesse Gould, directors of the nonprofit veteran organization [Heroic Hearts Project](#). (Gould is also Heroic Hearts' Founder and President.) Filled with disinformation and conspiratorial reasoning, the letter was published on the websites of Heroic Hearts and [Healing Breakthrough](#), a then-separate veterans organization where Mercer was the Director of Veteran Advocacy & Public Policy. Heroic Hearts has [since merged with](#) Healing Breakthrough, with Juliana Mercer [continuing as Executive Director of the Healing Breakthrough program](#) within Heroic Hearts.



Timeline of PR campaign (click to view full timeline)



Although the media [represented](#) the nonprofits as leaders of a grassroots movement, both organizations have extensive ties to Lykos' funders. Prominent among these financial backers is the [Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative \(PSFC\)](#), which was instrumental to completing Lykos' Phase 3 clinical trials. While PSFC's role in the psychedelic movement is [beginning](#) to [come into focus](#), the full extent of these relationships has not been previously reported.

According to publicly available materials and emails seen by Psymposia, PSFC cast veterans to play a central role in their goal of shaping public perception of psychedelic therapy. In 2023, PSFC described preparations for the media's ["inevitable" turn against them](#) through the creation of "a coordinated communications effort" to mitigate negative press. The elements of the crisis response were already in place, and Heroic Hearts and Healing Breakthrough's letter was the opening volley.

Tax filings reveal that as of 2023, Heroic Hearts received at least \$1.65 million ([2020](#), [2021](#), [2022](#), [2023](#)) from PSFC, its members, and Lykos investors. Although their tax filings do not reveal donors, Healing Breakthrough received [more than \\$5 million](#) since its 2023 inception and former [Lykos director Jason Pyle](#) served as its founding Executive Director. (This connection was not disclosed on either [Lykos'](#) or [Healing Breakthrough's](#) websites.) Psymposia has reviewed emails revealing additional connections between Lykos, PSFC, and these veterans groups. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In one email from 2021, Alan Fournier — who was later listed as [Healing Breakthrough's Vice Chair](#) — announced the Veterans Acceleration Program in partnership with Pyle and PSFC. PSFC appointed Ken Weingardt (who had been serving in [a leadership position at Healing Breakthrough](#) since 2021) to lead this program in partnership with MAPS PBC, the clinical trial sponsor. Weingardt [announced his new role](#) with the Veterans Acceleration Program on LinkedIn in February 2022. In a subsequent [job posting](#), the acceleration program was described as "work[ing] closely with the...drug sponsor [MAPS PBC] charged with commercializing MDMA and making it widely available after FDA approval."



Both Healing Breakthrough and Heroic Hearts received significant funding from people associated with Lykos. In Healing Breakthrough's 2023 tax filing, which lists MAPS PBC Director Jason Pyle as Executive Director, Juliana Mercer received [\\$158,866](#) in total compensation. Heroic Hearts Project Executive Director Jesse Gould received [\\$70,417](#) in total compensation in 2023.

As early as 2019, during an event at [Burning Man](#) (an annual “participative temporary metropolis” in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert, where psychedelic use is common), [PSFC’s founders outlined their strategy](#) to engineer public acceptance of psychedelic therapy by exploiting sympathy for veterans. In his speech, PSFC co-founder Joe Green revealed awareness of this instrumentalization when he [told the audience](#) that — while he doesn’t want to “sound unduly calculating” — PSFC’s focus on veterans is based on internal polling that indicated veterans are “one of the most sympathetic groups in our country.” (On its mailing list, one PSFC member described veterans as “the glue that binds the psychedelic culture to everyone else.”)

PSFC formalized this approach to veterans groups in its [November 2021 Landscape Report](#), which positioned them as a key element of a public relations strategy that would serve as an “insurance policy” and a “bulwark against backlash” to protect the organization’s interests. To implement this strategy, the report outlined how PSFC could manipulate public sentiment and apply political pressure by directly funding content creation: “Another option for funding is to bypass the ‘gatekeepers’ and directly support the creation and dissemination of content focused on the messages we want the public to hear.”

As the report acknowledged, this content strategy was designed to exploit public sympathy for veterans to manufacture urgency for advancing PSFC’s policy goals: “Advocacy organizations focused on specific constituencies such as veterans...can be extremely powerful elements of a policy change strategy. Tying a policy reform effort to human stories from populations who are either highly sympathetic or highly relatable is one of the most effective ways to create a sense of urgency among both the public and lawmakers.”



As later chapters of this report will explore in more detail, this strategy resulted in veterans proxy groups attacking critics and whistleblowers to advance the psychedelic industry's financial and political goals. (Since 2022, Psymposia's Russell Hausfeld has reported on the [evolution of this strategy](#) by MAPS.) The history of these tactics sheds light on the June 23 letter published by Heroic Hearts and Healing Breakthrough, in which Mercer and Gould appealed to emotion instead of defending Lykos' application on its merits.

To provide political cover for the FDA to override its advisory committee's vote of "no confidence," these organizations falsely alleged that Psymposia and ICER colluded to manipulate the committee. They also [recklessly singled out](#) Psymposia's Neşe Devenot [by name](#), and accused Psymposia and ICER of "single-handedly dash[ing] the hopes of thousands of veterans who continue to take their own lives due to their suffering from PTSD." ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Three members of Psymposia — [Russell Hausfeld](#), [Dr. Neşe Devenot](#), and [Dr. Brian Pace](#) — provided public comments during these meetings, but they did not collaborate with ICER or the FDA's advisory committee. Meaghan Buisson has acted as a research associate for Psymposia in the past, and provided comment to ICER and FDA PDAC. The additional members of Psymposia, Brian Normand and J. Gordon Curtis, provided research support but did not provide public comment.

The Heroic Hearts letter relied on disinformation, including fictitious accusations that Psymposia and ICER are "anti-veteran" and coordinating an "anti-MDMA smear campaign." To support this point, it [mischaracterized a 2020 essay](#) by David Nickles, whose affiliation with Psymposia ended in November 2023. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** On June 27, Dr. Peter Addy — a former VA research psychologist and former call worker for the Veterans Crisis Line — refuted the letter's false claims in a [published response](#). "It's important to represent the

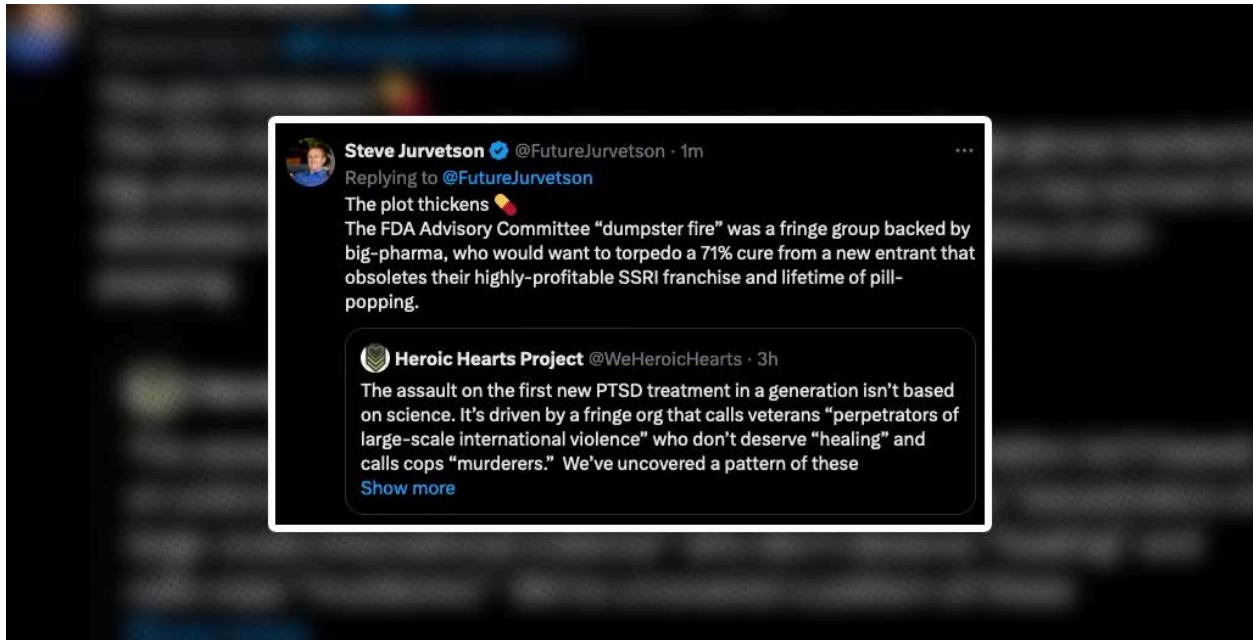


arguments of those you disagree with accurately,” Addy wrote. “Mischaracterizing their positions does not contribute to a productive dialogue about the important issues surrounding MDMA-assisted therapy and veteran care.”

Heroic Hearts’ letter was initially disseminated to journalists in the media by public relations firm [Vitamin D](#), on behalf of Heroic Hearts and Healing Breakthrough. Other PR firms [involved](#) in the overarching crisis response to the FDA advisory committee’s rejection included [Precision Strategies](#), [Breakwater](#), and [RALLY](#). The campaign also tapped the [Psychedelic Communications Hub](#), a “coordinated rapid response” team co-founded by [Robyn Thomas](#), the former Executive Director of Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. (The Psychedelic Communications Hub is now [integrated into the Psychedelic Safety Institute](#).)

Following the initial dissemination, the crisis response escalated into a full-blown media spectacle. Their letter was amplified on social media with further misinformation by then-presidential candidate [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#) Representative [Dan Crenshaw](#) (R-TX) produced a video condemning Psymposia and ICER by name, which was later endorsed and retweeted by [Elon Musk](#).

Capitalizing on the outrage manufactured by the letter, [three veteran proxy groups](#) — Heroic Hearts, Healing Breakthrough, and The Mission Within (which was [fiscally sponsored by MAPS](#)) — moved into a phase of stakeholder mobilization, launching a public pressure campaign website that was [subsequently promoted](#) by MAPS: [Approve MDMA Therapy](#). (The website later published an [open letter to President Joe Biden](#), signed by a coalition of veterans groups urging the approval of MDMA-AT.)



Billionaire PSFC member Steve Jurvetson’s original deleted post falsely stating Psymposia is “backed by big-pharma.” | June 24, 2024, Source: X/Twitter

The campaign shifted into traditional media tactics on July 10, when Heroic Hearts [organized a press conference](#) in Washington D.C. at the House Triangle. [Four members of Congress](#) — Jack Bergman (R-MI), Lou Correa (D-CA), Morgan Luttrell (R-TX), and Jimmy Panetta (D-CA) — provided speeches in support of MDMA-AT for veterans. At their press conference, Healing Breakthrough and Heroic Hearts assembled a temporary installation representing the 150,000 veteran suicides that have happened since 9/11. Represented as dog tags piled atop a faux marble memorial, it was crafted with an eye toward moving onlookers — and lawmakers — to act. Printed in yellow engraving font, the installation read in all-caps, “Save veterans’ lives now | 13 million Americans suffer from PTSD | The FDA must follow the science | Approve MDMA-assisted therapy now.”

Although these developments are represented as a [grassroots mobilization](#), they were actually coordinated by members of the same organization that fundraised to complete Lykos’ clinical trials. ➡



➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Pharmaceutical companies like Lykos have a history of proxy campaigns using veterans groups to protect their investments. Writing in *The Microdose*, Jane Hu cited an article in *Reuters* about a previous [stealth proxy campaign](#) against ICER (one of the groups criticized by Heroic Hearts). This campaign was funded by pharmaceutical companies “to undermine its credibility through proxies, including veterans' groups and organizations that claim to advocate for patients but have ties to the pharmaceutical industry.” Although describing events from 2020, this story reveals the pharma playbook of Lykos’ funders, which is as evident today as it was to observers then: “A half dozen health policy specialists told *Reuters* that the veterans’ complaints look like part of an ‘astroturf’ campaign — a phony grassroots movement backed by corporate interests.”

While the public relations campaign began with astroturfed veterans groups, it was quickly embraced by Lykos’ clinical trial funders at PSFC. This influential group consists of an eccentric cast of high-net-worth individuals, including members of SpaceX's board, the “Cosmic Engagement Officer” of “Magic Soap” maker Dr. Bronner’s, and Mark Zuckerberg’s college roommate.

To fully grasp the extent of these funders' influence on the psychedelic industry, it is first necessary to understand Lykos’ former parent organization — the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) — which was created in an attempt to promote its founder’s vision to “[spiritualize\[\] humanity](#)” through psychedelics.



Chapter 2: The House That Rick Built

Dr. Rick Doblin [founded MAPS as a nonprofit in 1986](#) after failing to dissuade the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) from classifying MDMA as a Schedule I substance. Doblin viewed the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval of MDMA-assisted therapy as a necessary step in his plan to [avert global catastrophe](#) by ushering in a new epoch of human enlightenment. As Doblin commented at a 2018 MAPS board meeting, "We have said that MDMA-assisted psychotherapy will be a gift to the world from the psychedelic community."

MAPS fundraised on this platform for decades before spinning off a wholly-owned, for-profit subsidiary organization to oversee its clinical trials in 2014 — the [MAPS Public Benefit Corporation](#) (MAPS PBC). MAPS PBC would serve as the vehicle to commercialize and scale MDMA-assisted therapy, and a percentage of the profits would be recycled back into the nonprofit to advance various drug policy and education initiatives.

When psilocybin drug developer COMPASS Pathways [launched its initial public offering in 2020](#), the flow of philanthropic dollars — which had sustained the non-profit psychedelic drug development sector for the past several decades — slowed to a trickle. Backed by big-name investors like Peter Thiel, Compass showed that it was possible for investors to [seek a return](#) instead of settling for tax write-offs. The diminished flow of philanthropic dollars collided with ballooning costs for Phase 3 trials, resulting in a high burn rate and [short runway](#). Simply put, MAPS was running out of money.

With the runway end in view, Doblin and the MAPS board were [exploring their financing options](#), which included taking out loans, selling off private equity in MAPS PBC, and going public. From exclusive cruises to Burning Man bacchanals, Doblin actively courted Silicon Valley mega-donors including Google's Sergey Brin, Facebook co-founder Dustin Moskovitz, and Asana co-founder Justin Rosenstein (Moskovitz is also a co-founder of Asana.) In a list of MAPS's [Silicon Valley donors](#), *Bloomberg* identifies multiple early



Facebook employees, a co-founder of Groupon, and a partner at Peter Thiel's Founders Fund. Beyond Silicon Valley, MAPS also established ties with the [Steven and Alexandra Cohen Foundation](#) in 2018.

Burning Man was an ideal environment for Doblin to leverage recruitment and fundraising efforts. One former contractor of the Zendo Project — an organization [created by MAPS at Burning Man](#) — told [Business Insider](#) that she believed Doblin cared less about their harm reduction work than about having an “excuse” to “take potential donors for ‘transformative experiences’ in the desert.” The playa offered a menu of peak experiences — often facilitated by psychedelics — where Doblin could sell his vision to spiritualize humanity.

Doblin's efforts to “turn on” wealthy donors extended beyond Black Rock Desert. A *New York Times* article published in September 2025 reported that [Doblin introduced billionaire Amy Griffin](#) — who invested in Lykos Therapeutics and whose husband donated \$1 million to MAPS — to her underground psychedelic therapists. Psymposia has also reviewed documents that show Doblin referred potential donors to underground psychedelic guides in the Bay Area, some of whom were training MAPS clinical trial therapists.

Jules Evans reported that these practices [amounted to a fundraising strategy](#): “I’ve heard from a senior MAPS source it was [Doblin’s] strategy to call donors the day after MAPS’ psychedelic parties to ask them to donate, while they were in the afterglow state” and suggestible to influence. Speaking to [Business Insider](#), Doblin admitted to providing drugs to donors, but he insisted this practice was “not common.” ➡

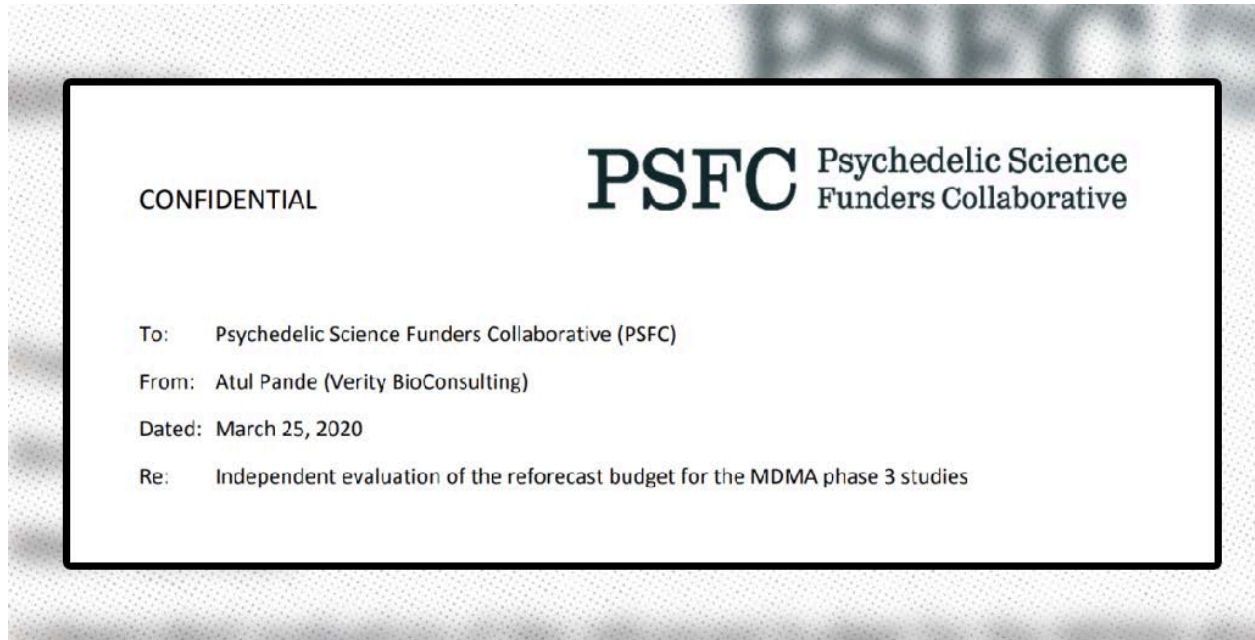
➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** A lawsuit filed on behalf of the Sarlo estate in 2021 accused MAPS Board Chair Vicky Dulai of financial elder abuse, claiming that she [exploited her relationship with MAPS donor George Sarlo for over \\$4 million](#). The lawsuit alleged that Dulai used ayahuasca and MDMA to make Sarlo dependent on her, and subjected him to an “intensive” dosing regimen of ketamine. The lawsuit alleged that while Dulai provided him with underground psychedelic care, Sarlo pledged \$1 million to MAPS. In 2018, Dulai was [nominated to the MAPS board of directors](#), and



later bios describe her as an “[independent psychedelic philanthropic consultant](#).” *Business Insider* reported that the case against Dulai was settled in 2022, resulting in Dulai [returning money and a Porsche to the Sarlo estate](#). In 2023, following the settlement, Dulai was [promoted by Doblin](#) to [Board Chair](#) of MAPS, and she also assumed the role of [Treasurer](#). According to STAT, MAPS claimed to have been unaware of Dulai’s advisory role in Sarlo’s donation, despite Dulai’s concurrent position on the [Sarlo Foundation board](#).

While these tactics were successful, MAPS severely underestimated the costs associated with the Phase 3 clinical trials for MDMA-assisted therapy, according to an independent financial assessment commissioned by PSFC and obtained by Psymposia (📁 [Document #1](#)). Without a significant cash injection, MAPS’s decades of work — and its upcoming New Drug Application (NDA) — could not be completed.

PSFC viewed this development as a necessary step towards ensuring the regulatory and commercial success of MDMA-AT. Speaking to *Inside Philanthropy*, PSFC co-founder Graham Boyd described the independent financial review as “see[ing] what was needed to reach the goal of FDA approval.” According to Boyd, this review resulted in two imperatives: raise capital and minimize risks. As he elaborated, “there were a lot of activities...[and] [risk mitigation](#) that needed to happen.” One component of that risk mitigation was a communications strategy.



Confidential report commissioned by PSFC analyzing MAPS’s Phase 3 budget. (Click for full report.) |

Source: [Document](#)

With Doblin’s vision of a “spiritualized humanity” in jeopardy, MAPS opened its doors to a syndicate of psychedelic philanthropists with immense influence in the field: the [Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative](#).



Chapter 3: “The Psychedelic Domino That Tips All Others”

Like a [Bored Ape Yacht Club](#) for the pharma industry, the Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative (PSFC) pitched itself as a social club for philanthropists attracted to [turnkey leadership positions](#) despite little to no experience in the field. As PSFC co-founder Graham Boyd told *Inside Philanthropy*, “I think that this new generation of philanthropists, in many cases, are looking to do something different than their forebears did. This is a new field where [they get to be leaders](#).”

Podcaster Tim Ferriss — the guru of [manufacturing illusory expertise](#) — [described the network](#) in a 2020 interview with Doblin: “Let’s just say if you’re able to contribute a million or more [dollars], then you can participate in the community known as PSFC.”

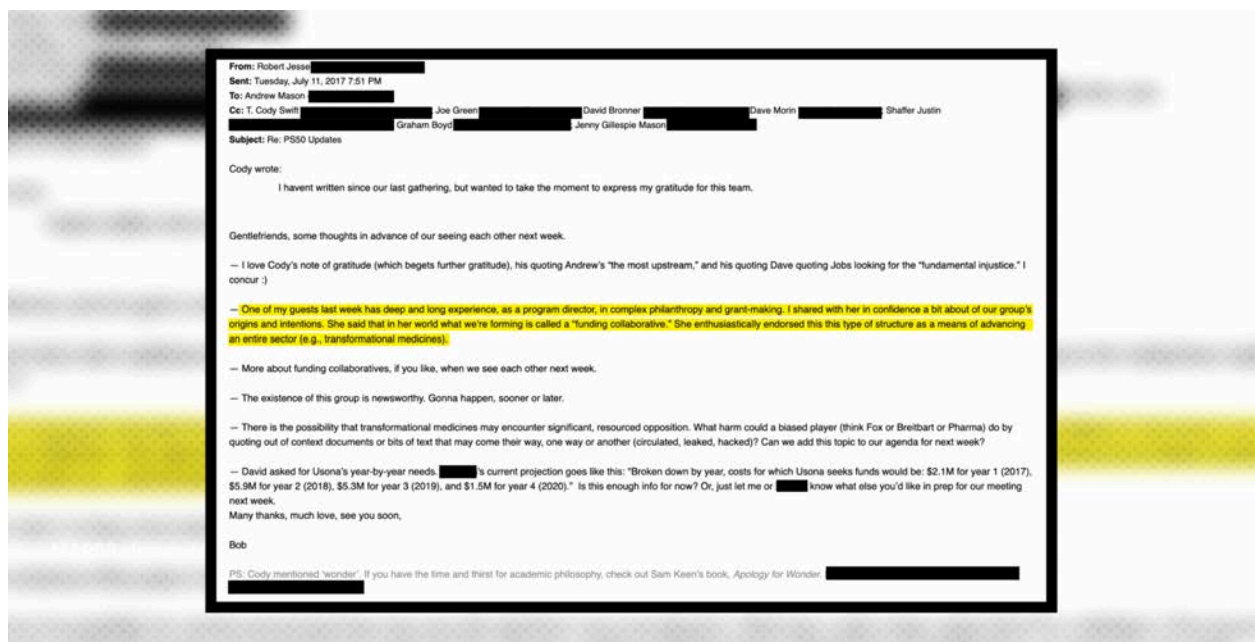
Founded in 2017, PSFC has grown to around “[about 200](#)” high-net-worth individuals enmeshed within Lykos’ sprawling network of psychedelic facilitators, nonprofits, and startups. Collectively, according to Jules Evans, “[PSFC’s members] wealth is [greater than the GDP of a small country](#).” In a 2025 panel discussion, Genevieve Jurvetson stated that [PSFC membership requires](#) at least \$100,000 in donations to the psychedelic ecosystem, while a higher membership tier — the Founders Circle — requires \$1 million in donations.

One notable founding member was Bob Jesse, who has been described as “[a quiet, guiding force](#) behind the contemporary psychedelic renaissance.” Although Jesse isn’t widely known beyond insiders, he was a key player in setting the field into motion. He helped initiate the psychedelic research program at Johns Hopkins along with Bill Richards and Roland Griffiths in the early 2000’s, and he was a co-author on what is arguably the field’s most [politically significant](#) research paper: “[Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance](#),” published in 2006.



PSFC's name and mission were influenced by Jesse, who introduced the concept of a “funding collaborative” to the group's early members in a July 2017 email:

“One of my guests last week has deep and long experience, as a program director, in complex philanthropy and grant-making. I shared with her in confidence a bit about of our group's origins and intentions. She said that in her world what we're forming is called a ‘funding collaborative.’ She enthusiastically endorsed this this [sic] type of structure as a means of advancing an entire sector (e.g., transformational medicines).”



2017 email in which Bob Jesse introduces the idea of the “funding collaborative” to PSFC’s founding members

While this early communication was primarily focused on securing funding for psychedelic research nonprofits including MAPS, [Usona Institute](#), and [Heffter Research Institute](#), it also highlighted the importance of controlling the narrative about psychedelics. In the same email, Jesse expressed his belief that the group's existence would be “newsworthy,” and he was concerned about what could happen if the group's communications fell into the hands of resourced opposition: “There is the possibility that transformational medicines may



encounter significant, resourced opposition. What harm could a biased player (think Fox or Breitbart or Pharma) do by quoting out of context documents or bits of text that may come their way, one way or another (circulated, leaked, hacked)? Can we add this topic to our agenda for next week?”

Although Jesse resigned as a director of PSFC in 2018, other early members — Joe Green, Graham Boyd, and David Bronner — remained in leadership. PSFC’s [current leadership](#) includes Boyd, an attorney; Bronner, [CEO of Dr. Bronner’s](#); Suprotik (Protik) Basu, managing partner of Helena Special Investments; Genevieve Jurvetson, a [philanthropist](#); and Dan Grossman, a former partner at [Boston Consulting Group](#). The overlap between PSFC, MAPS, and Lykos is significant: Green, Basu, Grossman, and Ron Beller — a [founding member](#) of PSFC — were [directors at Lykos](#), while Green and Bronner are [directors at MAPS](#). Green serves as a director at all three organizations. (Resilient has not yet publicly announced changes to its board of directors since changing its name from Lykos.)

PSFC’s [donor network](#) includes podcaster Tim Ferriss (organizer of a MAPS fundraiser called the Capstone Challenge), Musk ally and SpaceX board member Antonio Gracias, the [Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation](#), T. Cody Swift of the RiverStyx Foundation, GoDaddy founder Bob Parsons, TOMS founder [Blake Mycoskie](#), WordPress co-founder [Matt Mullenweg](#), Joby Pritzger of [the Pritzger family](#) (a [former board member](#) of MAPS), [Austin Hearst](#) of the Hearst family media empire, and SpaceX director [Steve Jurvetson](#). Other prominent supporters include SpaceX director [Kimbal Musk and his wife, Christiana Musk, who operate Flourish Trust](#). Christiana serves as an Operating Partner at [Satori Capital](#), which participated in [Lykos’ Series A investment round](#).



Click to view full Psychedelic science funders mind map

According to a 2024 [podcast appearance](#) with Kara Swisher, Green met Doblin at a [networking cruise](#) described as “Silicon Valley by sea.” At MAPS’s Psychedelic Science conference in 2017, Green met Boyd, who had [previously worked with Dr. Bronner’s](#) and was then primarily focused on [marijuana legalization](#) as the Executive Director of New Approach PAC. ([Psymposia was a leading partner](#) of Psychedelic Science 2017.)



Collage of image from MAPS Psychedelic Science 2017. Left: Psymposia stage at Psychedelic Science 2017. Speakers from left to right include former Psymposia host Lex Pelger, comedian Shane Mauss, former MAPS PBC Chief Scientific Officer Berra Yazar-Klosinski, and Zach Leary. Middle: Leading



partner signage and Psymposia stage images. Right: Crowd at Psymposia stage for Duncan Trussell event.

As Green described to Swisher, the psychedelic industry was missing something he could offer: access to high-net-worth philanthropists. Green began functioning as "a sort of [consigliere to Doblin](#)," connecting the MAPS founder with like-minded elites. Although FDA approval of MDMA-AT was the "[initial goal](#)" of fundraising, the resulting network — which became formalized as PSFC — had larger ambitions for the field.

PSFC functions as the psychedelic plutocracy, steering the field's development to advance its members' financial and ideological interests. These interests informed [PSFC's 2021 Landscape Report](#), which surveyed the syndicate's newly acquired territory to justify its funding priorities. While PSFC claims these priorities serve the public interest, they were disproportionately influenced by wealthy newcomers: PSFC's own philanthropists [comprised 30%](#) of the "key stakeholders" who informed the report's agenda, according to a draft of the report.

As the report outlines, their agenda relied on a three-pronged strategy to advance psychedelic therapy by influencing state and federal regulations:

Prong 1: "Obtain regulatory medical approval for MDMA-assisted therapy to treat PTSD"

FDA approval of MDMA-assisted therapy had been PSFC's "core focus" since its 2017 inception. The report describes approval as a "catalytic event" that would legitimize the psychedelic industry to the public and medical establishment. As Boyd told [Inside Philanthropy](#), "Our initial theory of change was: If we can get one psychedelic substance approved by the FDA, then a whole lot of other things will follow from that. A lot of other dominoes will fall."



This acknowledgment provides context for PSFC's increasing influence on MAPS PBC's development between 2020 and 2023. In June 2020, [PSFC partnered with MAPS](#) on a \$30M [Capstone Challenge](#) “to fund the final research required to seek [FDA] approval of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy.” The campaign met its goal well before the 90-day deadline, after Ferriss boosted the challenge on a podcast episode titled “[The Psychedelic Domino That Tips All Others](#).”

While MAPS was trumpeting the campaign's success, it remained in dire financial straits behind the scenes. According to the independent financial review commissioned by PSFC and obtained by Psymposia, MAPS PBC — which the report notes was “inexperienced” in conducting Phase 3 clinical trials — fell short of industry standards (📁 [Document #1](#)). The confidential report calculated that MAPS undershot its budget for Phase 3 by \$7.4M. Combining this with the projected costs for the NDA submission and the additional costs for commercialization, this amounted to an underestimate of nearly \$20.6M, or 64%. Without PSFC's \$30M cash injection, this deficit would have prevented the organization from completing the trials — let alone securing FDA approval.



PSFC Members Joe Green (left), Graham Boyd (middle), and David Bronner (right), in discussion with MAPS leadership at the MAPS Therapist Training Planning Retreat, November 2019 | Source: PSFC

Psychedelic Science Quarterly Update from November 2019



Prong 2: “Support state-level approval of psilocybin-assisted therapy”

PSFC’s approach to legalizing psilocybin therapy at the state level involves ballot initiatives and legislative lobbying. Although Oregon’s implementation eventually clarified that [licensed psilocybin facilitators do not offer “therapy.”](#) PSFC did not recognize this distinction.

The Landscape Report [defined psychedelic “therapists”](#) as both licensed clinicians and unlicensed guides from the underground model, whom they intended to legitimize.

As Graham Boyd would later explain during a 2025 panel discussion on PSFC’s priorities, “The state-regulated model...is basically taking what exists throughout the country underground — there are underground practitioners in every part of the country right now — and it’s [bringing it aboveground](#). And we believe that that’s important.”

PSFC’s state initiatives are spearheaded by its “[sister organization](#),” New Approach PAC, which Graham Boyd [continues to lead](#). New Approach has played a central role in all [state-wide psychedelic ballot initiatives and legislation](#), including in Oregon, Colorado, California, and [Massachusetts](#).

PSFC’s influence on the state initiatives extends to other “sister” organizations, which form a complex network of interrelated entities with shared leadership. Boyd is also on the [Board of Directors for the Healing Advocacy Fund](#) (HAF), which is shaping the implementation of the state initiatives. The [Colorado Springs Gazette](#) describes the Healing Advocacy Fund (HAF) as “the lobbying arm of New Approach PAC,” while law professor Mason Marks refers to HAF as the “sister organization” of New Approach in the [Denver Post](#).

Healing Advocacy Fund’s current executive director, Taylor West, [previously served in concurrent roles](#) as the Director of Communications for PSFC, and Chief of Staff and



Director of Development for New Approach from 2020-2022. Prior to joining the Healing Advocacy Fund, West served as a philanthropic advisor to Christiana and Kimbal Musk's Flourish Trust.

During the 2025 panel discussion, Boyd described the legal distinctions that allow PSFC to outsource its political work to [“adjacent” organizations](#):

“To the question of PSFC’s role. We’re a 501c3 — that means that we, at PSFC, do not do political work. But there is a related organization called New Approach, which I’m also the director of that [sic], and that’s a 501c4, which did run both of those campaigns in Colorado and Oregon. Members of PSFC, as individual philanthropists, are also the main donors to those campaigns. So, the money that was necessary to run those campaigns. So it’s something that is — to use the overused term ‘adjacent’ — it is PSFC-adjacent, but not specifically a PSFC effort. The implementation, though, in Oregon and Colorado — building out the clinics, training people, the training centers, all of that — that’s very much right in the sweet spot of PSFC, and so it’s part of the Roadmap, and certainly part of what our donors support, often through PSFC.”

Although the organizations are legally distinct, New Approach serves as the vehicle for executing PSFC’s lobbying strategy. David Bronner, whose company has [provided millions](#) to New Approach, emphasized this relationship in a 2022 email to PSFC members: “Deep bows and mega thanks to the incredible New Approach team that coordinated our lobbying strategy and effort on behalf of our powerful colation [sic].” (📁 [Document #2](#))



From: David Bronner [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, August 13, 2022 11:48 AM
To: PSFC Funders [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Update on 519 and Psychedelic Reform in CA

Sharing the bumner news that we got derailed in California, but the good news is that we are well positioned to rock this through next year. Deep bows and mega thanks to the incredible New Approach team that coordinated our lobbying strategy and effort on behalf of our powerful colation. We came very close to making history in CA and will just have to do so next year. Onwards!

2022 email from David Bronner to PSFC Funders acknowledging PSFC's coordinated lobbying effort with New Approach. | Source: Email from David Bronner

Applying Silicon Valley's ethos of disruption and scaling, PSFC's Landscape Report included grandiose goals of training 100,000 psychedelic therapists to treat 1 million patients a year by 2031. By creating "hub[s] for research and therapist training," the state model would unblock "bottlenecks" by reducing regulatory and social barriers to the mass production of therapists. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** PSFC's envisioned workforce exceeds the projected growth of traditional mental health providers during the same time period. [According](#) to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Projections program, the entire substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counseling sector is expected to grow by just 71,000 through 2032.

Joe Green emphasized the urgency of scaling the psychedelic therapy workforce in a 2019 email sent to PSFC funders and MAPS's Director of Training:

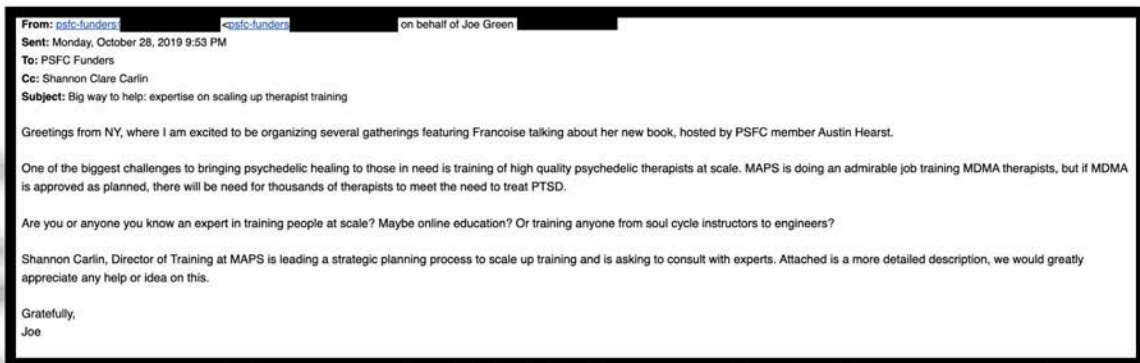


“Greetings from NY, where I am excited to be organizing several gatherings featuring Françoise [Bourzat] talking about her new book, hosted by PSFC member Austin Hearst.

“One of the biggest challenges to bringing psychedelic healing to those in need is training of high quality psychedelic therapists at scale. MAPS is doing an admirable job training MDMA therapists, but if MDMA is approved as planned, there will be need [sic] for thousands of therapists to meet the need to treat PTSD.

“Are you or anyone you know an expert in training people at scale? Maybe online education? Or training anyone from soul cycle [sic] instructors to engineers?

“Shannon Carlin, Director of Training at MAPS is leading a strategic planning process to scale up training and is asking to consult with experts. Attached is a more detailed description, we would greatly appreciate any help or idea on this.” ➡



2019 email from Joe Green discussing possibilities for scaling up therapist training



➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Green's reference to SoulCycle instructors in the context of training psychedelic therapists at scale is notable given the parallels between the two industries. In the book *Cultish*, Amanda Montell describes how SoulCycle trained instructors to use [persuasive tactics](#) to influence the spiritual beliefs of its participants: "SoulCycle instructors are trained to wait for these moments, when students are so physically beat that they'll be more receptive to kernels of spirituality, to deliver their best lines." According to *Business Insider*, [SoulCycle created a dysfunctional culture](#) with little accountability, protecting top instructors who were accused of sexual misconduct, discrimination, fat-shaming, and abusive behavior.

Similar to other Silicon Valley "innovations" including Airbnb and Uber, PSFC's state model allows underqualified psychedelic therapists to [bypass "costly government regulations"](#) by creating a market alternative to conventional mental health licensure. In addition to reducing the time and labor involved in training, this state model offers "experiential training" that involves two elements: undergoing a "guided psychedelic experience" of their own, and receiving supervision in psychedelic sessions from an experienced guide.

In practice, this would create a pipeline to initiate trainees into [therapy cult practices](#) that violate ethical therapeutic norms. An amalgam of Stan Grof's Holotropic Breathwork, Bay Area shamanism, and [discredited trauma theories promoted by Bessel van der Kolk](#), the dominant underground model promoted by PSFC and MAPS teaches therapists and trainees to [telepathically "attune" to their patients' needs](#) to determine when the patient needs to suffer for their healing. By ignoring scientifically validated, evidence-based therapies, this brand of "assisted therapy" encourages therapists to impose esoteric beliefs that could not be openly taught to trainees — let alone disclosed — in FDA-regulated clinical trials.



PSFC founder Joe Green received an honorary certificate of completion in Psychodelic-Assisted Therapies and Research from the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS). Green wrote, “It was particularly meaningful to receive a rose from my mentor Bob Jesse and be congratulated by Janis Phelps, the head of the program, another mentor.” | Source: Email from Joe Green

Prong 3: “Obtain regulatory medical approval for psilocybin-assisted therapy”

According to the Landscape Report, the full “renaissance of psychedelic therapy” would only become actualized once the outcomes from the first two prongs combined with the third: FDA approval of psilocybin-assisted therapy. The anticipated approval of MDMA-AT would prepare the public (and the regulatory infrastructure) for psilocybin as the first “classic” psychedelic medicine, which PSFC describes as substances “known to trigger mystical experiences.” The new cohort of psychedelic therapists — trained in the states by underground leaders — would be positioned to initiate the broader public into these mystical experiences.

...

With regulatory approval on the horizon and a new therapeutic workforce taking shape, PSFC moved to formalize its vision for the future of psychedelic therapy. Capitalizing on their recent legislative victory in Oregon — and riding the waves of psychedelic enthusiasm



generated by Michael Pollan's bestseller, "How to Change Your Mind" — the Landscape Report advanced a framework for governing the psychedelic ecosystem.

PSFC's agenda centered on orchestrating key initiatives to define and control the parameters of mainstream psychedelic therapy, using high-profile efforts like MAPS's MDMA-assisted therapy approval and Oregon's Measure 109 campaign as the primary vehicles. This plan for coordinated influence preceded the Landscape Report, as Bronner emphasized in a 2019 email: "We are supporting all key strategies to integrate and mainstream psychedelic therapy, MAPS most of all, but Oregon's [psilocybin ballot] campaign is crucial to power to [sic] victory as well" (📁 [Document #3](#)).

The Landscape Report advanced a vision of centralized influence, positioning PSFC as the leading force in shaping the future of psychedelic policy. Framing the psychedelic ecosystem as a fragmented frontier in need of coordination, PSFC drew up strategies to consolidate control. As outlined in the Landscape Report, a "politically savvy hub for psychedelic policy and messaging would create a central resource for media, policymakers, and advocates, with the goal of amplifying messages and policies with the highest likelihood of success at expanding legal access to psychedelic healing." This approach positioned PSFC not only as a logistical coordinator but as a gatekeeper of narrative, strategy, and funding within the emerging field.

To accomplish this, PSFC created working groups to identify psychedelic organizations they could influence. Internal communications between leadership and members show PSFC's intent to "refine" these organizations to better align with PSFC's goals prior to making funding recommendations: "These working groups will look holistically at the psychedelic ecosystem, will conduct diligence on promising organizations, refine strategies with those organizations, and make funding recommendations to the larger PSFC community" (📁 [Document #4](#)).

Boyd reiterated PSFC's activist involvement with grantees while speaking to *Willamette Week* in 2022, Boyd said: "As PSFC, we decide who we want to fund. And when we do that,



it's a deep relationship. [We don't just write checks and, you know, send them the money](#) and say, 'See you later.' It is a relationship in which we are connecting to our groups of experts and we offer our advice."

The reach of PSFC's network extended beyond smaller advocacy organizations to major research universities, including new centers at Johns Hopkins and [UC Berkeley](#). (In PSFC's March 2020 Quarterly Update, which was marked "confidential," they note that "PSFC Steering Committee member Dick Simon is leading an effort to create a Harvard Medical School-affiliated psychedelic research center at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.") The Landscape Report described this new crop of psychedelic research centers as an emerging trend, without acknowledging their financial connections to PSFC and its circle of donors: "Generous support from philanthropists has created psychedelic research centers at leading universities led by pioneering researchers with longstanding track records." ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Hopkins' Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research (CPCR) was founded in 2019 with [\\$17 million in private funding](#), and its first five years of operational expenses were provided by "the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation and four philanthropists: Tim Ferriss (author and technology investor), Matt Mullenweg (co-founder of WordPress), Blake Mycoskie (founder of TOMS, a shoe and accessory brand) and Craig Nerenberg (investor)." The Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation is [invested in Lykos](#); Ferriss, Mullenweg, and Mycoskie are members of PSFC; and [Nerenberg's Shining Rock Foundation donated \\$125,000 to PSFC](#) in 2022. In an exuberant email about the fundraising drive for CPCR's Roland Griffiths Professorship Fund in 2023, Genevieve Jurvetson commented that "the donor list reads like the PSFC membership list and that makes me so happy." Responding to another PSFC listserv member who wrote "Roland is the modern day Dalai Lama!," Jurvetson replied, "Couldn't agree more.💖"

UC Berkeley's [Center for the Science of Psychedelics](#) — which was founded in 2020 — received funding from the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation, Tim Ferriss,



Christiana and Kimbal Musk, Blake Mycoskie, along with [Lykos investors](#) Joe and Sandy Samberg.

With MAPS positioned as the key domino to launch the psychedelic industry, PSFC had been quietly crafting other pieces from the field's raw materials. As public attention centered on MAPS ahead of the FDA's decision, PSFC's leadership worked to ensure the chain reaction unfolded as planned.



Chapter 4: “From Start-Up to Grown Up”

Reminiscent of a [televangelist](#) in a shining white suit, MAPS founder Rick Doblin entered the main stage at Psychedelic Science 2023 to thunderous applause, proclaiming: “Welcome to the psychedelic twenties!” At least [one audience member wept](#). With a track named in his honor, the conference seemed like Doblin’s “[victory lap](#),” but it was actually his swan song.

Four days before the conference began, in a June 15 email marked “CONFIDENTIAL,” Joe Green wrote to PSFC members with “an important update for the MAPS world and the psychedelic movement at large” (📁 [Document #5](#)). In this email, which Psymposia obtained from multiple sources, Green announced that MAPS PBC would be accepting private investments in a financing round led by current PSFC member Protik Basu’s private equity firm, [Helena Special Investments](#). (Basu later received a board seat at both PSFC and MAPS PBC, under its new name of [Lykos Therapeutics](#).) PSFC viewed this development as a necessary step towards ensuring the regulatory and commercial success of MDMA-AT.

For psychedelic enthusiasts at Psychedelic Science, Doblin was the center of attention. Behind the scenes, [his power within MAPS was diminishing](#). In preparation for post-approval strategy, PSFC had partnered with MAPS PBC to help figure out “[the hires they need to make](#).” Based on those recommendations, MAPS PBC began hiring more experienced pharmaceutical personnel. As MAPS’s dependence on PSFC’s funding increased, Doblin’s inner circle was supplanted by pharma veterans from outside of the psychedelic movement.

In an email forwarded to PSFC members by Green, MAPS PBC’s then-CEO Amy Emerson announced the hiring of former Moderna Vice President Mike Mullette as its new Chief Operating Officer. Mullette would be tasked with reshaping the organization and developing plans for commercialization. In the email, Emerson wrote that “Mike will play a



vital leadership role as MAPS PBC transitions from a small company to a more mature organization (recall one of this year's themes is 'Start-Up to Grown Up')."

In his accompanying commentary, Green linked Mullette's hire to PSFC's role in restructuring the organization: "Improving the operational capacity of [MAPS PBC] has been a major focus of PSFC, and this is a huge step." Mullette's hiring was in alignment with PSFC's vision of transforming MAPS PBC from an inexperienced startup into a traditional pharmaceutical company.



PSFC member Steve Jurevson (right) poses with Lykos' then-CEO Amy Emerson (middle) and MAPS Deputy Director Fede Menapace (left) | Source: "Up Against the Wall of Neurotransmitters," Steve Jurevson, Flickr, [Creative Commons 2.0](#)

In addition to restructuring MAPS PBC's personnel, another major focus of PSFC was "[risk mitigation](#)." One component of that risk mitigation was a unified communications strategy to control the public narrative about psychedelics.

After years of psychedelic media hype, PSFC anticipated that press coverage would eventually sour, which could threaten the success of their objectives. In preparation, they



identified the need for a centralized communications hub to disseminate preferred counternarratives in response to any emerging vulnerabilities. One such vulnerability was Silicon Valley's increasing use — and misuse — of psychedelics.



Collage of the print and online version of the Wall Street Journal story about Silicon Valley leaders using psychedelics

In the days after *Psychedelic Science*, a major story about this vulnerability hit the front page of [The Wall Street Journal](#), titled online as “Magic Mushrooms. LSD. Ketamine. The Drugs That Power Silicon Valley.” In addition to reporting on Elon Musk’s use of ketamine, the story exposed the increasing rift between leadership at MAPS and MAPS PBC.

One issue of tension identified by the *Journal* was Doblin’s promotion of “smokable tasks” within MAPS, which the journalists described as “things you can do at work when you’re high on drugs.” Speaking to the *Journal*, Emerson endorsed the policy but clarified that it was not adopted by MAPS PBC: “We support MAPS having policies that work for their teams and the work they are doing and maintain separate policies for our employees and the work we do at MAPS PBC.” Doblin described Emerson’s position as “timid and



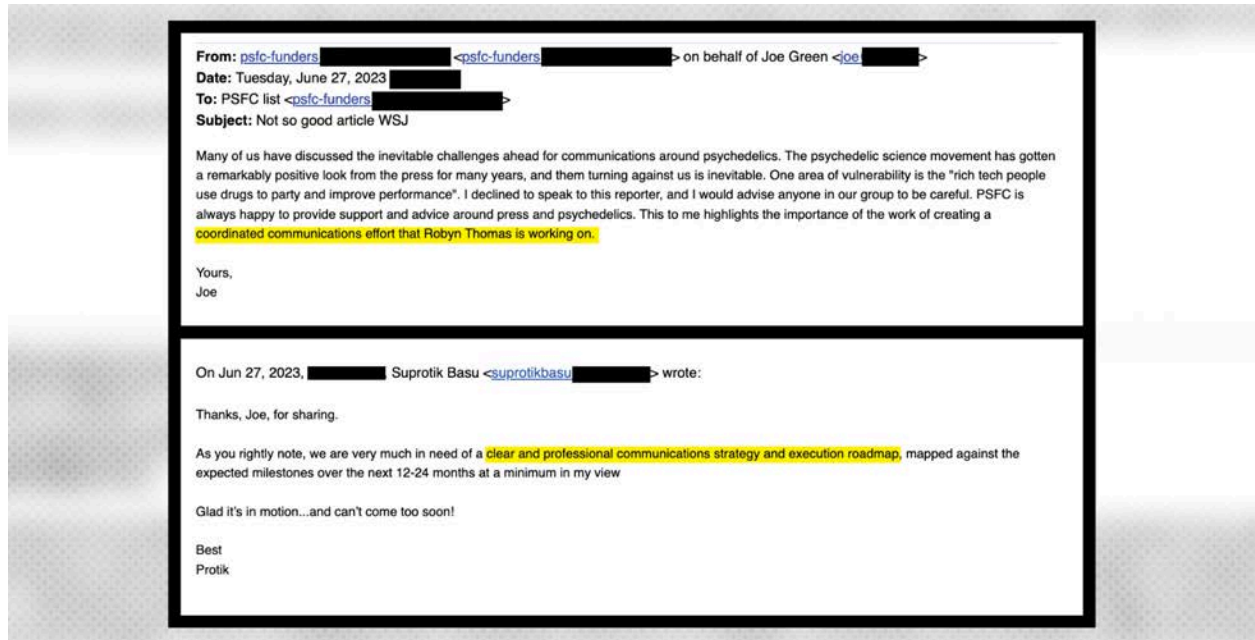
risk-averse.” (At the time, both Doblin and Emerson were serving on the boards of MAPS and MAPS PBC.)

In a 2021 podcast interview with Jon Lovett, Doblin described using cannabis to edit documents for the FDA, while swinging a green bong in front of the camera: “We have a policy, kind of, at MAPS, that [before we send documents in to the FDA, I get high and I edit them](#), with our staff.” (MAPS included “smokable tasks” as an official policy in its employment manual, according to a [2021 MAPS Bulletin](#).)

Another source of tension was Doblin’s admissions of underground facilitation in media interviews. To the consternation of donors, Doblin was shadowed by Bloomberg reporters at Burning Man in 2018, [where he guided](#) a promotional MDMA-AT session with a U.S. veteran “suffering with PTSD.” (Doblin is not licensed to practice therapy.)

In an email obtained by Psymposia, Green notified PSFC members about the “Not so good article [in] WSJ” on the day of the cover story’s publication (📁 [Document #6](#)). He identified that the article’s focus — “rich tech people [who] use drugs to party and improve performance” — was a vulnerability for their members. Green had declined to be interviewed for the story and advised caution in speaking to the press: “This to me highlights the importance of the work of creating a coordinated communications effort that Robyn Thomas is working on.”

In response, Lykos lead investor Protik Basu agreed with the need for “a clear and professional communications strategy and execution roadmap, mapped against the expected milestones over the next 12-24 months at a minimum[.]” Referring to Thomas’ coordinated communications effort, Basu emphasized: “Glad it’s in motion...and can’t come too soon!”



Joe Green alerted PSFC members to the Wall Street Journal cover story article on “The Drugs that Power Silicon Valley.” PSFC and Lykos board member Protik Basu responds |

Source: Email from Joe Green

Four months earlier, Graham Boyd had announced Thomas’ participation in a PSFC Zoom call on “the state of the psychedelic ecosystem.” During that meeting, Thomas would present on a new “collaborative project with PSFC members on communications in the psychedelic field.” Formalizing this effort to coordinate communications across the psychedelic ecosystem, Thomas and Anne Friedman [founded the Psychedelic Communications Hub in 2022](#). With much of the psychedelic ecosystem now under PSFC’s direct control or indirect influence, the Hub would function to advance PSFC’s priorities by coordinating messaging across its sprawling network.

At a satellite event during Psychedelic Science 2023, PSFC spotlighted its communications strategy in a [roundtable discussion](#) featuring Thomas and UC Berkeley’s Imran Khan. The roundtable — titled “Information and Persuasion in the Psychedelic Ecosystem: How do we Identify and Prepare to Disseminate the most Impactful and Effective Messaging” —



identified Thomas as developing “the best possible approach to building an organization focused on communication and narrative within the ecosystem.”

PSFC’s curated member “experience” at Psychedelic Science included access to a private “one-day [philanthropist event](#),” “VIP access to the conference green room,” and “concierge” services “to support with anything else you need” including referrals to “the best parties.” It also unlocked access to MAPS PBC executives, politicians, financiers, and influencers. Speakers at this side event included members of PSFC, including TOMS Shoes founder Blake Mycoskie; representatives of Healing Breakthrough and Healing Advocacy Fund; psychedelic researchers including Robin Carhart-Harris, Brian Anderson, and Roland Griffiths; and Colorado Governor Jared Polis.

One panel, titled “Healing our Veterans: (The) Tip of the Spear,” included Healing Breakthrough’s Juliana Mercer and Oleg Gorelik. The speakers discussed the “promising opportunity” to focus on MDMA-assisted therapy for veterans “because of [their] potential to drive outsized impact.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Paraphrasing Gorelik’s views, [Psychedelic Listening Project](#) recommended that funders “mobilize” around veterans as a “politically agreeable topic,” implying that focusing on veterans could help “activate billions of dollars in funding” to “spread [psychedelic therapy] around the world.”

In pursuit of their goal of coordinating national psychedelic messaging, the Landscape Report cited [Michael Pollan’s recommendation](#) to “proactively launch a public relations strategy and journalist training program akin to the environmental movement, which has trained journalists through fellowships and grants.” According to Pollan, this effort would cultivate “a cadre of beat reporters committed to this subject.” PSFC envisioned that such a program would work in tandem with a “coordinated effort to measure and shape public opinion, as well as influence political actors” that would be managed by a “National Coordinating Hub.”



Pollan's suggestion would soon be realized as [The Ferriss – UC Berkeley Psychedelic Journalism Fellowship](#), which “aim[ed] to establish and nurture a new generation of journalists covering the frontlines of this rapidly changing field.” Ferriss described the intent behind his \$800,000 donation as “[bend\[ing\] the arc of history](#).” News coverage of the announcement noted that the fellowship would be “overseen by Michael Pollan,” who is listed as faculty on the program website.

Although Pollan described the new program as “provid[ing] the public with reliable information and the field with accountability,” PSFC envisioned this emerging media hub as a vehicle for normalizing the psychedelic underground.



Chapter 5: “With Passion But Not Savvy”

PSFC’s Landscape Report — which psychedelic booster Michael Pollan reportedly described as “[terrific](#)” — served as a technocratic blueprint for colonizing the psychedelic field. In Joe Green’s [conversation with Kara Swisher](#), he shared his feeling of discovering the field at Psychedelic Science 2017, with words that [reflect an extractive mindset](#): “I just showed up and it was like, I found this buried treasure.” For PSFC, established communities are resources to be claimed and optimized.

The elitist mentality of PSFC’s leaders is evident in the report’s recommendations for state-level initiatives (Prong 2). Their orchestration of the ecosystem is portrayed as a necessary corrective to “scattershot” organic developments outside their direct control:

“Ideally, the majority of funding for these policy change initiatives will be channeled through strategically coordinated efforts guided by political expertise. Carefully vetted and targeted campaigns, pursued on a well-considered timeline, can lead to momentum-building victories. Scattershot efforts conducted with passion but not savvy can do the exact opposite.” — PSFC’s Psychedelic Landscape Report ([📁 Document #7](#)).

Since “strategically coordinated efforts guided by political expertise” refers to PSFC’s own guidance, this document implies that PSFC is indispensable to psychedelic policy change. Although this specific example relates to Boyd’s stewardship of state initiatives via New Approach, this mentality underlies their cultivation of the entire ecosystem to align with their agenda.



Lykos CEO Amy Emerson (left); MAPS director Vicky Dulai (left, behind); PSFC member Steve Juvetson (middle, behind); How to Change Your Mind director Lucy Walker (middle, front); MAPS founder Rick Doblin (front, right); PSFC director Genevieve Juvetson (right) | Source: “Rick Doblin and the MAPS fan club,” Steve Juvetson, Flickr, [Creative Commons 2.0](#)

Having established their justification to reshape the landscape, PSFC set about propping up surrogate thought leaders and organizations while weeding out critics from the field. Speaking to [Inside Philanthropy](#), Boyd revealed a chessmaster’s ambition to arrange the field’s “pieces” for a winning strategy: “Ultimately, we serve in some ways as a field catalyst in that we are looking at the field as a whole and providing an analysis of what are the pieces that are most important to move first, and who are the actors who are best equipped to do that.” With the Landscape Report’s strategy in hand, PSFC assigned actors to their chess pieces.

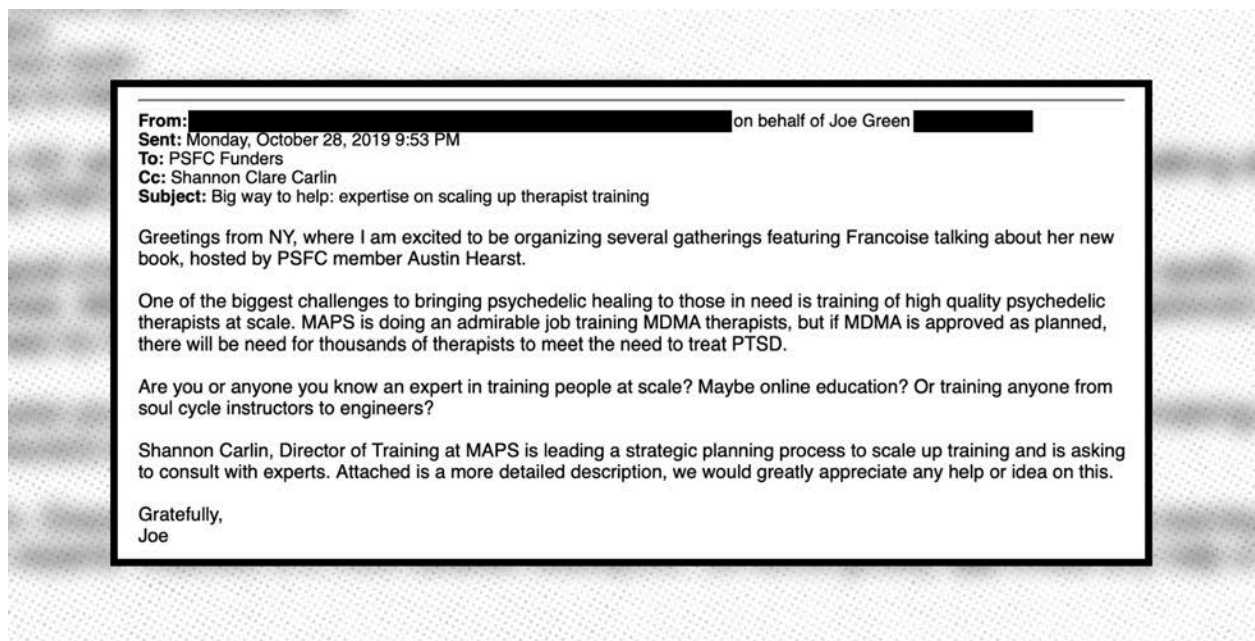
If MAPS was their king, Françoise Bourzat was their queen.

As described in a [bioethics blog post](#) for Harvard Law School’s Petrie-Flom Center (co-authored by Psymposia’s Dr. Devenot), Bourzat and her husband Aharon Grossbard led



a significant underground network that trained psychedelic therapists and guides for more than two decades.

Bourzat enjoyed a close relationship with PSFC's directors. In October 2019, PSFC member Austin Hearst organized a book launch for Bourzat's *Consciousness Medicine* in New York City. In an email to members, Green recommended it as “an introduction to the theory and practice of how psychedelics can support healing and growth” (📁 [Document #8](#)).



Joe Green discusses scaling psychedelic therapist training in partnership with MAPS | Source: Email from Joe Green

The same month, Boyd [appeared alongside](#) the chief petitioners of Oregon's psilocybin initiative and Bourzat to promote both her book and the ballot effort: “Françoise [sic] [Bourzat], Sheri [Eckert], Tom [Eckert], and Graham [Boyd] will consider key ingredients of psychedelic psychotherapy, while pondering the requirements of successfully integrating this potent modality into mainstream culture.” This connection extended into official business relationships; in the Landscape Report, Boyd disclosed serving as a paid legal advisor to Bourzat's Center for Consciousness Medicine (CCM) in 2021. ➡



➔ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** PSFC members' financial contributions to Bourzat and Grossbard's school date back at least to 2020. That year, [Hearst donated \\$100,000](#) to CCM through The Austin and Gabriela Hearst Foundation. In 2021, [Hearst contributed an additional \\$50,000](#), while [Tim Ferriss donated \\$25,000](#) through his Saisei Foundation. In 2022, [Hearst provided another \\$100,000](#). By 2023, Hearst significantly increased support for CCM with a [\\$270,000 donation](#).

In addition to funding Bourzat, PSFC leveraged its relationship with Bourzat to fundraise for MAPS. In a July 2019 Quarterly Update to PSFC members, Green titled one announcement: "PSFC raises \$3.6 million to support MAPS and MDMA commercialization at Francoise Bourzat book launch event".



Joe Green was photographed alongside Françoise Bourzat in October 2019. Joe Green wrote in an email to PSFC members: "We featured [Bourzat's] book in our last update and highly recommend it as an introduction to the theory and practice of how psychedelics can support healing and growth." |

Source: PSFC Psychedelic Science Quarterly Update from November 2019

Through the lens of PSFC's chessmaster mentality, it is evident that the organization invested heavily in Bourzat as a key piece of their broader gameplan. This perspective



provides insight into David Bronner’s public comments about Bourzat; in a [March 2021 blog post](#) on Dr. Bronner’s website, Bronner expressed enthusiasm for Bourzat’s therapy model:

“I was on a zoom Tuesday evening with the remarkable psilocybin therapist Françoise [sic] Bourzat and her daughter Naama Grossbard, about their exciting plans to launch the Center for Consciousness Medicine, first in Oregon and the Netherlands, but soon around the world, training world-class facilitators and treating people[.]”

Bourzat’s underground training network was central to PSFC’s plan to create a global cohort of psychedelic therapists. Starting with the Oregon Psilocybin Services Act (Measure 109), members of PSFC were positioning Bourzat as a leading authority on training psychedelic guides. According to a [September 2020 interview](#) with Tom Eckert (the co-chief petitioner of Oregon Measure 109), Bourzat belonged to a [“prototype board”](#) to develop training criteria for Oregon’s official advisory board, which had not yet been appointed. Eckert described this prototype board — which included mycologist Paul Stamets, neuroscientist Robin Carhart-Harris, and [former MAPS Canada Executive Director Mark Haden](#) — as “actually an active board, it’s not a name-only board. We are meeting and developing training criteria.”

Eckert shares that Bourzat was “chosen” for this board “because of [her] experience and knowledge and wisdom pertaining to training.” As Eckert elaborates, “we are trying to develop the intelligentsia around training, specifically, because I really see that as the beating heart of this whole initiative. The whole point is to create access and competency so that we can move this forward into the culture in an intelligent way.”

This prototype board aspired to function as a shadow board to the official [Oregon Psilocybin Advisory Board](#), which was established by the Oregon Psilocybin Services Act. In March 2021, Bronner confirmed that he was working with Bourzat in an advisory capacity to the official board: “we’re [lobbying the advisory board](#) that will be advising the Oregon Health Authority on implementing Measure 109.”

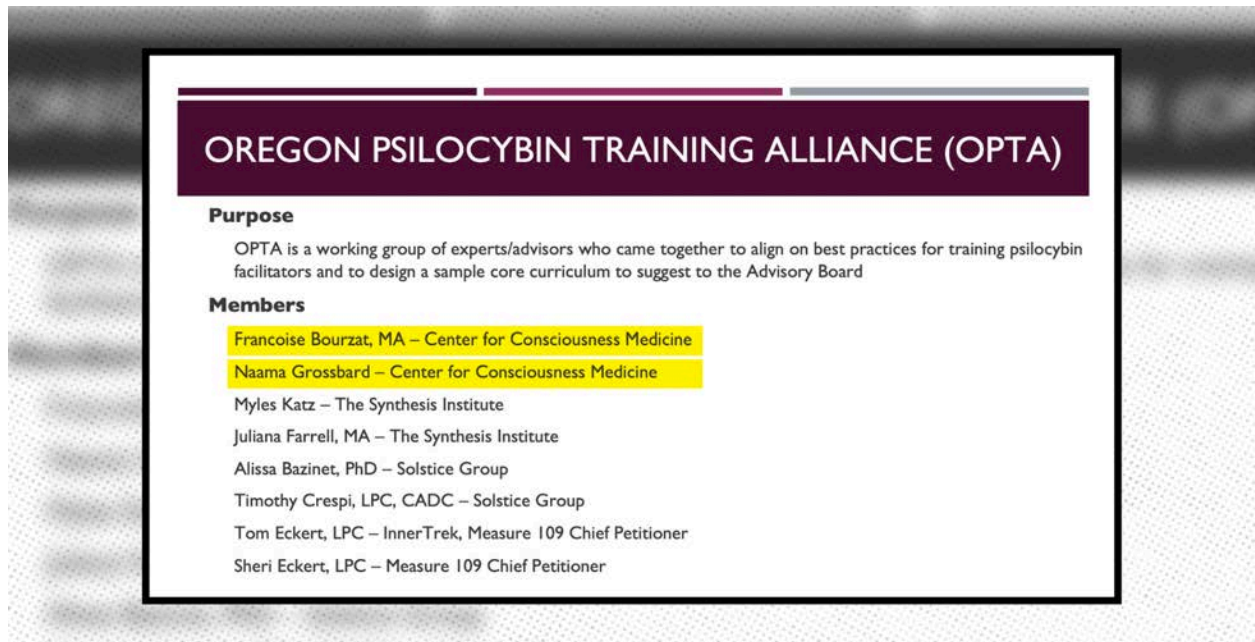


In an email sent to PSFC members ( [Document #9](#)), Bronner highlighted Bourzat's central role in proposing guidelines for training: "I also want to share the draft outline attached of the therapist training program criteria that Oregon's Psilocybin Therapy campaign is generating, led by Francoise [sic] Bourzat, Tom Eckert and other luminaries" ([Document #10](#)).

Bronner emphasized the preeminence of this training model in a 2020 podcast: "The therapeutic model that we introduced into Oregon that we want to see adopted...we feel like that's the [most crucial model to integrate into the culture](#)...if we really want to optimize the therapeutic potential and healing of these medicines.... It's also really important for the more naive citizenry[.]"

Bourzat elaborated on the prototype board's activities to the [Psychedelic Leadership podcast](#), stating that "there is a group of us, working together with different organizations, to create — or suggest to the Oregon health administrations — the criteria for the training of the facilitators that will dispense this offering of mushroom experiences."

The prototype board was formalized as the [Oregon Psilocybin Training Alliance](#) (OPTA) ( [Document #11](#)). Bourzat [met with](#) the official advisory board of Oregon 109, and OPTA [recommended resources](#) that included MAPS's Code of Ethics; Bourzat's book *Consciousness Medicine*; and MAPS Canada's [Manual for Psychedelic Guides](#). The OPTA's recommendations included creating a fast-track certification process for established underground guides to act as trainers for the state: "Possibility for initial cohort of trainees to have more lenient training requirements with stricter admission criteria (to become supervisors for later trainees)."



Slide from a 2021 OPTA presentation on recommendations for the Oregon Psilocybin Advisory Board Training Subcommittee | Source: [Oregon.gov](#) (Archived)

Given Bourzat’s central role in PSFC’s plans to scale training, Bourzat’s training school — Center for Consciousness Medicine (CCM) — is conspicuously absent from the body of the public version of the Landscape Report that was released in December 2021. By contrast, an earlier version of the Landscape Report — which was privately circulated among PSFC members in May 2021 — prominently features CCM as a model program for training psychedelic therapists at scale (📁 [Document #12](#)).

“Funding therapist training programs will be a top priority for psychedelic care delivery over the next decade. Near-term, it will be important to prioritize support for programs that can offer experiential training, including supervised experiences with actual psychedelic treatments, which will help address the current field-wide training bottleneck. For example, the Center for Consciousness Medicine draws on decades of experience and knowledge of guiding expanded states of consciousness and training guides and is currently scaling its training program.”



PSFC distributed this private version of the Landscape Report to its members in May 2021 in preparation for an exclusive PSFC Summit in Half Moon Bay, where Bourzat would be a featured speaker.



Chapter 6: “The Dangerous Virus of Silicon Valley”

On May 8, 2021, an email from Green popped into the inboxes of PSFC members with the opening line, “We are looking forward to welcoming you to Half Moon Bay next week.”

Nestled in this California [resort town](#), the beach house of billionaire PSFC member Steve Jurvetson and his wife — PSFC board member Genevieve Jurvetson — overlooks a bluff-lined Pacific coast. This residence, known colloquially as “Casa Jurvey by the Sea,” would serve as the backdrop for the launch of PSFC’s Landscape Report. The summit spanned three days (between May 14-16) and included guest speakers, strategy planning, guided meditation, and — in true SpaceX board member fashion — a “Rocket Launch.” ( [Document #13](#))

The exclusive event also featured two politicians who represented PSFC’s bipartisan ‘chess pieces’: former Texas governor Rick Perry (R), and current California state senator Scott Wiener (D). (Speaking to the Economist in 2022, Graham Boyd “[credit\[ed\] veterans](#) with persuading Rick Perry” to back a Texas measure to legalize psychedelic research, without acknowledging PSFC’s long relationship with Perry.) In a 2021 email describing Wiener’s proposed psychedelics legislation, Green described Wiener as “a friend and one of the politicians I respect most.” He noted that Wiener’s bill “is sponsored by two groups focused on helping veterans using psychedelics, VETS, which Gen and Steve Jurvetson have been big supporters of (along with many others in this group) and Heroic Hearts Project, which worked with us in Oregon.”



Summary Agenda:				
FRIDAY, May 14th				
	Start	End	Location	Description
	12:00 PM	1:45 PM	Dining Tent	Registration and Buffet Lunch
	2:00 PM	3:30 PM	Jurvetson House	Opening Discussion
	3:30 PM	4:00 PM	Beautiful Outdoors	Break
	4:00 PM	5:30 PM	Jurvetson House	MDMA Care Delivery Strategy
	5:30 PM	7:00 PM	Jurvetson House	Casual Dinner, Drinks & Hotel Check-in as needed
	7:00 PM	8:00 PM	Jurvetson House	THE () AND: Emmy award winning group experience
	8:00 PM	10:00 PM	Jurvetson House	Live Musical Performance and Games
SATURDAY, May 15th				
	8:30 AM	9:30 AM	Jurvetson House	Optional yoga or hiking
	9:30 AM	10:00 AM	Jurvetson House	Guided Meditation
	10:00 AM	1:00 PM	Jurvetson House	Plenary and Breakout Sessions
	1:00 PM	2:00 PM	Dining Tent	Lunch
	2:00 PM	5:00 PM	Jurvetson House	Plenary and Breakout Sessions
	5:00 PM	6:30 PM	Return to Hotel	Break and change for party
	6:30 PM	7:00 PM	Bluff Fire Pit Area	Rocket Launch
	7:00 PM	8:30 PM	Dining Tent	Dinner
	9:00 PM	2:00 AM	Jurvetson House	Saturday Night Celebration
SUNDAY, May 16th				
	9:30 AM	10:30 AM	Jurvetson House	Brunch
	10:30 AM	2:00 PM	Jurvetson House	Philanthropic Action Planning
	2:00 PM	5:00 PM	Jurvetson House	Social Time & Departure

Event Schedule in an email promoting the launch weekend for PSFC’s Landscape Report hosted May 14-16, 2021 at Steve and Genevieve Jurvetson’s home in Half Moon Bay. Attendees were asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement. | Source: Email from Joe Green

[“Casa Jurvey by the Sea”](#) has a history of hosting elite gatherings that blurred lines between personal and professional interactions.

As reported by Emily Chang in [Brotopia](#) (2019), the environment at one of these gatherings enabled sexual harassment and abuses of power, which contributed to Steve Jurvetson’s removal from his Silicon Valley venture capital firm, Draper Fisher Jurvetson (DFJ). As DFJ commented to [Recode](#) after Jurvetson’s departure in 2017, “We were dismayed to learn of behavior at the party that was completely at odds with DFJ’s culture which has been, and will continue to be, built on the values of respect and integrity.”

Chang spoke with one female attendee who [“felt ambushed” after being given MDMA](#) for the first time by a venture capitalist and founder who was at the event:

“They said it will just make you feel relaxed and you’re going to like being touched,” Doe recounted to me. Nervous, she dipped her finger into the powder and put it in



her mouth. Soon, her guard dropped. Then, the male founder asked if he could kiss her. [...] [Doe felt] as if she had been pressured or targeted. ‘I don’t know what I’m doing, I feel really stupid, I’m drugged up because I’d never taken it before and he knew I’d never taken it,’ she recalled.”

Given the immense wealth and power differentials in Silicon Valley, this kind of behavior creates environments where consent is compromised. These dynamics are normalized by Silicon Valley’s cavalier [attitude towards consent](#) of [all kinds](#), which is inflamed by their self-image as [cosmically significant](#) technological disruptors. Describing the mentality of Silicon Valley’s elites, Chang wrote: “They don’t see themselves as predatory.... When they look in the mirror, they see individuals setting a new paradigm of behavior by [pushing the boundaries of social mores](#) and values.”

This grandiose mindset informs how PSFC envisions its plans for a psychedelic future. In one 2020 email, Green wrote: “I feel even more sure than before that our work is of utmost important [sic] at this moment in human history.” (📁 [Document #14](#))

Four years after the reporting on this party and Jurvetson’s departure from DFJ, Casa Jurvey at Half Moon Bay would become the backdrop for PSFC’s exclusive psychedelic industry gathering. The guestlist featured much of PSFC’s Founders Circle — donors who have given at least \$1M to psychedelic projects. Among those attendees were Silicon Valley startup founders, MAPS board members, politicians, venture capitalists, and biotech entrepreneurs.

In order to attend the private gathering, Green requested that attendees provide a picture of their vaccination card and sign a non-disclosure agreement (📁 [Document #15](#)).



Steve and Genevieve Jurvetson (left, color) and Joe Green and David Bronner (right, color) pose with veteran activists in 2022 | Source: “The VETS Gala on Coronado Island,” Steve Jurvetson, Flickr, [Creative Commons 2.0](#)

While typical in Silicon Valley tech culture, the unusual nature of the request to sign a non-disclosure agreement to attend a psychedelic gathering was swiftly rebuked by one longtime psychedelic donor: “Totally cool NDA/waiver form but I’m not going to sign it. Sorry but conferences don’t last minute propose a confidentiality pledge. Even early on they don’t. Nor any other I’ve ever attended.”

The summit advertised ten guest speakers who represented the state-federal approach outlined in PSFC’s Landscape Report. Françoise Bourzat presented alongside her daughter, Naama Grossbard.

Although Bourzat was newly positioned on PSFC’s chessboard, her group’s relationship with Silicon Valley went back many years. The extent of their influence in Silicon Valley only became apparent four months later, with the publication of Will Hall’s article in *Mad in America* that sent shockwaves through the field: “[Ending The Silence Around Psychedelic Therapy Abuse.](#)”



Hall — a [counselor and mental health advocate](#) — had not planned to write about his experiences with Bourzat’s group until he read Michael Pollan’s 2018 bestseller, *How to Change Your Mind*. In that book, one disturbing interaction with an underground guide deeply unsettled Pollan: “[I kept hearing things](#)...that set off alarm bells and made me want to run in the opposite direction.”

Under the pseudonym “Andrei,” the guide told Pollan that he “used to work with whoever came to [him],” but that he decided not to “work with crazies anymore.” Instead, Andrei said that he now works primarily with “young people in the tech world.”

Andrei described his ability to reorient the priorities of these tech elites in grandiose terms: “I’m the dangerous virus of Silicon Valley.”

Andrei’s grandiosity is especially concerning due to his unapologetic disregard for established therapeutic ethics: “In mainstream psychology, you don’t hug. I hug. I touch [clients]. I give advice. I have people come stay with us in the forest.... Those are all big no-no’s.” Pollan observed that after this comment, Andrei “shrugged as if to say, so what?”

These ethical violations were spotlighted in September 2021, when Hall identified “Andrei” as his former abuser, Aharon Grossbard — Bourzat’s husband and an original co-founder of the Center for Consciousness Medicine (CCM). ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In a 2021 [letter responding to a draft of Hall’s article](#), Grossbard’s lawyer asserted that “Mr. Grossbard never stated that ‘he was ‘Andrei’” and that “it is Mr. Grossbard’s understanding that the character ‘Andrei’ is not intended to represent a single, real person, but is instead a fictional figure. Mr. Grossbard did not author or authorize the language used in the book.” The letter did, however, acknowledge that Grossbard had a conversation with Pollan prior to the publication of the book.



Although the pseudonymous “Andrei” is described in *How to Change Your Mind* as Romanian, Pollan’s account has shifted over time. In a 2025 presentation, Pollan attributes the statements made by “Andrei” to [an experienced Israeli underground psychedelic guide](#), which corresponds to Grossbard’s profile.

Hall was a student of Bourzat and Grossbard, and he also assisted their workshops in San Francisco during the 1990s. He was abused while he was Grossbard's therapy client.

Hall’s account was subsequently corroborated by an article published in *Inverse*, two months after his *Mad in America* publication. In the process of investigating Hall's disclosures, journalist Katie MacBride [interviewed seven sources](#) “in or close to the couple’s community” who alleged “a decades-long pattern of sexual contact between guides and clients, as well as Grossbard and Bourzat acting as leaders who felt ‘above’ professional and ethical norms.” Five sources told *Inverse* that it was “not uncommon” for Grossbard to “ritualistically anoint” the naked genitals of male clients “by touching them and sometimes inserting his finger into their anus” during psychedelic sessions.

MacBride wrote that Grossbard continually pushed Hall to try psychedelic-assisted therapy, “despite his reluctance.” According to Hall in *Mad in America*, this pushing of boundaries escalated once psychedelics were introduced: “After Grossbard encouraged me to use psychedelics in therapy sessions, my critical thinking was set aside in favor of ‘surrender’ and ‘letting go.’ Grossbard told me to ignore my increasing fears about his conduct so I could ‘break through’ my ego and rational mind.” In addition to sexual abuse, Hall was conscripted into unpaid landscaping, childcare, and teaching assistance by both Grossbard and Bourzat. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Legal scholars have suggested that anti-trafficking laws could potentially apply to cult organizations exhibiting dynamics similar to those allegedly present in Bourzat and Grossbard's group. A [2024 analysis of the NXIVM case](#) highlights how Keith Raniere's conviction under anti-trafficking statutes was supported by evidence of “trafficking-adjacent harms” that included coercive



control, gaslighting, and trauma-coerced attachment (a form of [trauma bonding](#) that develops when victims form powerful emotional dependencies on their abusers through alternating cycles of harm and intermittent reward during states of extreme vulnerability).

Hall identified clear patterns in the abuses by Grossbard and Bourzat, as the guides would coach clients to associate healing with overcoming resistance and submitting to distress. As supporting evidence for this pattern, Hall [shared a civil lawsuit](#) that was filed in 2000 by a former client of Bourzat and Grossbard. This lawsuit — and other details about patterns of harm in Bourzat's community — were later discussed in the podcast [Cover Story: Power Trip](#), which was produced by David Nickles and Lily Kay Ross and co-produced by New York Magazine and Psymposia.

In addition to similar allegations of unpaid labor, the lawsuit accused Bourzat of fraud, professional negligence, sexual battery, and sexual harassment. According to the complaint, Bourzat fondled his genitals, told him their kissing was "therapeutic," and said that the plaintiff's "passion needed awakening." The [lawsuit was settled](#) out of court.

Many other details of Bourzat's social and domestic interactions with the plaintiff would only be appropriate in a close personal relationship. Bourzat's unboundaried healing ideology created an environment where abuses are more likely to occur. This environment is foundational to the lineage of her [therapeutic approach](#), as she described to an audience at [UC Berkeley in 2020](#): "This forging of this personal work as well as the community that we formed as [my teacher's] clients, really gave me a very personal sense of what this work could look like and the community it could create. And that this work was not just a personal experience...but also a communal experience."

During the years identified by the lawsuit, Bourzat's Hakomi certification was permanently revoked due to "[multiple ethical violations](#)," but she continued to advertise herself as Hakomi-certified for two decades. (Hakomi — a "[mindfulness-based somatic psychotherapy approach](#)" — is [influential](#) in the Bay Area's [underground network](#).) Through the Center for



Consciousness Medicine, both Grossbard and Bourzat continued to refer students to Hakomi trainings, and they employed certified Hakomi trainers and teachers as staff. After additional allegations of abuse surfaced in 2021, the Hakomi Institute severed ties with CCM. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** According to a 2022 statement by the Hakomi Institute, “Francoise Bourzat was briefly certified as a Hakomi Therapist, and her certification was permanently revoked in 1997 based on multiple ethical violations. She [continued to mention Hakomi certification in her bio](#) without our knowledge after she was no longer certified. This has now been corrected. Aharon Grossbard, Francoise Bourzat and CCM referred students to Hakomi Trainings, and a connection between the Hakomi Faculty and CCM existed for a period of a few years when one Hakomi Trainer and two Hakomi Teachers were on the faculty of CCM.”

Despite their alleged patterns of abuse, Bourzat and Grossbard were shielded from accountability due to their influence within underground psychedelic networks, as *Inverse* identified: “For people who want to become trained in psychedelic-assisted therapy, there are only so many options for hands-on experience. There’s a fear that...speaking out against Grossbard and Bourzat will ‘leave them with no place to go for this training.’”

This reluctance to confront abusive practices is not limited to potential trainees; it also applies to facilitators and organizations that are already associated with their practices. One source told *Inverse* about the dilemma faced by former trainees, many of whom have gone on to train their own students in these practices: “Françoise especially is so well known in the field, if her name is tainted, their [own] name is tainted.”

Those who choose to speak out encounter other challenges, due to the pair’s social connections across the field. While Hall was searching for a publisher, he sent a draft of his 2021 article to Chacruna, a nonprofit organization that [represents itself](#) as “a pillar of...ethics in this movement.” Hall’s manuscript was subsequently mishandled by Chacruna’s Executive Director, Dr. Bia Labate, who is also an [employee of MAPS](#). Hall described this



incident in a [2023 Medium post](#), titled “Did Chacruna.net and Dr. Bia Labate Help Protect Psychedelic Therapy Abuse?”

Without informing Hall, Labate forwarded the draft to the Chacruna board, which included Bourzat’s close associate, [Brian T. Anderson](#). She also sent a “summary” of the article to two employees of MAPS and MAPS PBC: [Betty Aldworth](#), Director of Communications at MAPS; and [Shannon Carlin](#), then-Chief of Therapy Training and Supervision at MAPS PBC.

Following Labate’s mishandling of Hall’s manuscript, the website for the Center for Consciousness Medicine changed to remove references to Grossbard and Bourzat as co-founders, as *Inverse* reported. (During 2021, PSFC’s Graham Boyd was [a legal advisor to CCM](#).)

On October 20, 2021, MAPS published a statement [acknowledging MAPS’s relationship](#) with Bourzat and Grossbard, titled “Regarding Recent Allegations of Sexual Harm in the Psychedelic Community”:

“In fulfillment of MAPS’ commitment to transparency, we are sharing here that Grossbard and Bourzat were previously listed among the founders of The Center for Consciousness Medicine (CCM), a psychedelic training, treatment, and research center. [...]

“CCM is one of dozens of organizations MAPS has fiscally sponsored during their start-up phase; in June 2021, CCM received its own tax-exempt designation and the fiscal sponsorship was concluded. MAPS and CCM have previously discussed opportunities for future therapist training collaborations.”

As Psymposia’s investigation reveals, however, MAPS’s “commitment to transparency” was counterfeit. In an email seen by Psymposia, Doblin acknowledged that Bourzat had trained multiple Israeli therapists working in MAPS’s clinical trials. Bourzat was also listed as a MAPS PBC Training & Supervision Advisor for the “Theoretical Approach” to their therapy



model, according to [slides prepared for a MAPS PBC board meeting](#) in 2020. MAPS also [dispersed an additional \\$47,500](#) to CCM in 2022, the year after MAPS claimed the fiscal sponsorship was “concluded.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** MAPS describes its fiscal sponsorship program as “an [empowering collaboration](#) between MAPS and the operators of independent projects aligned with our mission.” This allows organizations to receive tax-exempt donations without non-profit status.

The theoretical approach [underlying both MAPS and CCM](#) consists of a constellation of ideas that contradict established norms of ethical therapeutic practice, which increases the potential for therapy abuse. The model’s central tenets conflict with decades of research about the risks of [dual relationships](#), diffuse/nonexistent [therapeutic boundaries](#), [overreliance on facilitator intuition](#), [normalization of touch](#), and [excessive self-disclosure](#) and [harmful countertransference](#) in the name of “therapeutic alliance.”

This is not just a matter of isolated cases of abuse. This lineage — which PSFC was working to legitimize — enables abuse.

In May of 2021 — while PSFC was celebrating their plans to mass produce therapists in partnership with Bourzat and Grossbard’s CCM — Hall was corresponding with legal counsel to chart a safe path for releasing his account of abuse. After recognizing Grossbard in Andrei, he could no longer remain silent.

"It's hard to say exactly what put me off working with Andrei," Michael Pollan wrote. "Andrei mentioned that an aspiring guide he was training had 'once asked me, 'What do you do if someone dies?' I don't know what I expected him to say, but Andrei's reply, delivered with one of his most matter-of-fact shrugs, was not it.

“You bury him with all the other dead people.”



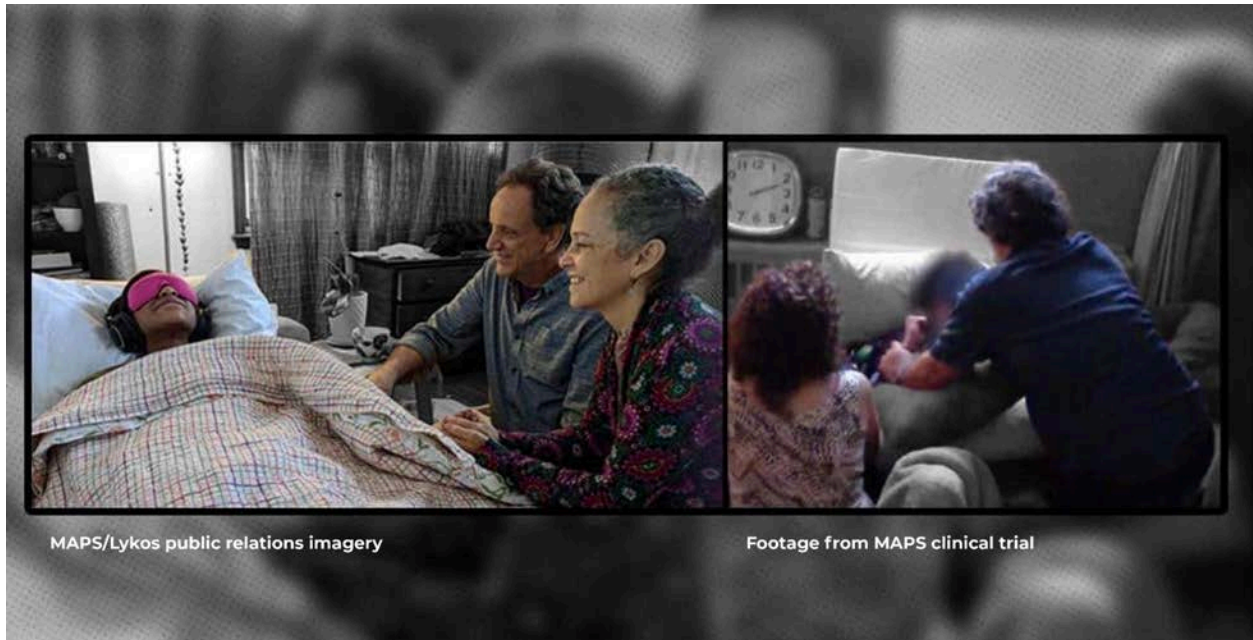
Chapter 7: “Flood the Zone”

Although this variant of psychedelic therapy was largely incubated in the Bay Area underground, its DNA was spliced into the [conceptual framework for the therapeutic approach](#) advanced by MAPS, Lykos, and PSFC. As Maira Evelyn Clancy summarized, the pattern of psychedelic therapy abuse “has [spread like a virus](#) as more people have trained under those who have caused harm.” Fueled by Silicon Valley’s ethos of rapid scaling and disruption, multiplication of harms is inevitable.

The protocol Lykos submitted to the FDA [did not disclose this therapeutic framework](#) or its association with specific patterns of abuse. The consequences of this were that most of the field believed that the MDMA-AT was “non-directive” in the sense of “[encouraging the patient to go with the experience](#),” with therapists providing minimal support that could include a reassuring hand on the participant’s hand or shoulder.

However, in our research, we discovered that the protocol submitted to the FDA was euphemistic and obfuscated the actual range of MAPS’s directive practices. These undisclosed elements included “[psychodramatic enactments](#)” of trauma through “focused bodywork,” wherein a therapist could use physical touch to “amplify” distressing symptoms by physically struggling with participants. (This dangerous approach was internally justified based on MAPS leadership’s unscientific assumption that emerging trauma imprints must be “fully experienc[ed] and express[ed]” for healing to occur.)

As Devenot wrote in a recent bioethics commentary, “This version of ‘focused bodywork’ was a central feature of the on-camera physical and sexual assault that occurred during Lykos’ Phase 2 clinical trial in Vancouver.... Lykos has never acknowledged that this assault was facilitated by MDMA-AT’s reliance on focused bodywork, which has [no empirical support for its use](#).”



Caption: Expectation versus reality: Left, MAPS therapists Marcella Ot'alora and Bruce Poulter pose in a PR image released by MAPS. Right, a still of MAPS therapists engaged in abuse enabled by Grofian “focused bodywork” in the MAPS therapy. Doblin downplayed this abuse as [“psychodrama, \[which\] is not an unknown approach.”](#)

In conversations with whistleblowers — including former high-ranking employees and Phase 2 and 3 trial participants — it became apparent that this combination of secrecy and undue confidence in their approach reflected an organization struggling to transition from a renegade underground MDMA network to a regulated pharmaceutical company.

Several employees provided detailed accounts of MAPS PBC/Lykos’ lack of internal safety procedures and [noncompliant data collection practices](#). Allegations included data manipulation, frequent drug use by employees, and systemic [underreporting of Serious Adverse Events \(SAE’s\)](#). Some of these former employees described [cult-like dynamics](#) within the company, leading to the ostracization of employees who raised concerns about the company’s practices.

These insights from trial participants and former employees helped create a window into the internal operations of the company, providing an explanatory framework for the



organization's repeated failures. This window revealed not just isolated missteps but a broader pattern of dysfunction, rooted in the organization's foundational assumptions and contempt for critics and mainstream science. This corporate dysfunction, combined with the fundamental flaws within Lykos' proposed New Drug Application, would inevitably lead to harm if scaled.

Based on these conversations with former employees, researchers at Psymposia concluded they had an ethical obligation to alert the FDA advisory committee to the dangers of Lykos' and PSFC's proposed MDMA-AT therapy model. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Psymposia's assessment was informed by reviewing hundreds of texts, emails, primary source documents, and videos spanning more than a decade, alongside hundreds of hours of interviews with former high-ranking employees, trial participants, private clients of MAPS-trained therapists, and MAPS/Lykos principal investigators (PIs).

In the wake of the June 4 advisory committee meeting, Lykos and PSFC — disinterested in slowing down to assess safety concerns — activated their “[insurance policy](#)”: members of the network [amplified one-sided stories](#) from their “[cadre of beat reporters](#)” and veterans proxy groups across social media, leveraging this coverage as a “bulwark against backlash.”

➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** [Describing this communications network](#) in a Substack post from June 25, 2024, Jules Evans wrote that “the team's first big item to rally around was an article [[published in BBC Future](#)] by Rachel Nuwer, a freelance journalist and author of a glowing book on MAPS / Lykos and MDMA called *I Feel Love*.” Evans noted that Nuwer was a recipient of the UC Berkeley psychedelic journalism grant, which was funded by PSFC member Tim Ferriss.

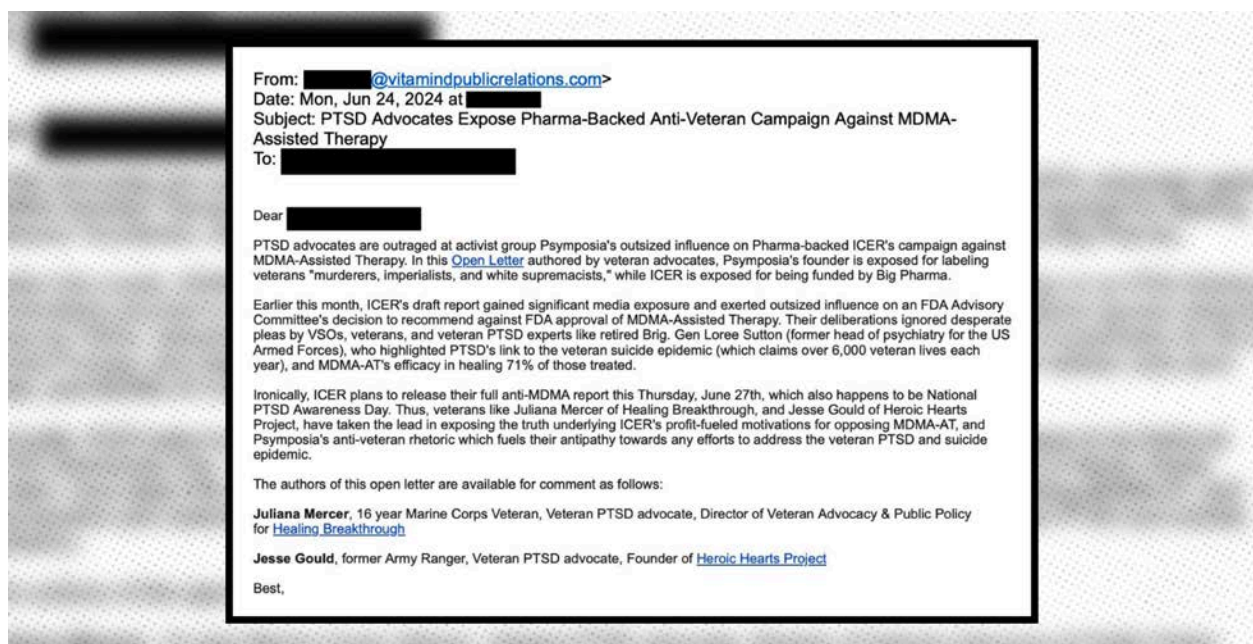
The Substack article documented the coordinated use of this story by PSFC members and Lykos supporters: “The piece quoted only researchers and activists in



support of Lykos' application, all of them saying, in short, 'the advisory committee don't understand psychedelic science', and 'if the FDA rejects this application, it would be very bad for psychedelic science, very bad for veterans, and very bad for America'. Many of the researchers quoted in the piece (not all of them) have received some funding by philanthropists who are part of the Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative (PSFC) and who also fund MAPS and / or invest in Lykos... Once the article was published on BBC Future, it was widely shared by members of the PSFC, by Michael Pollan, by Tim Ferriss, and by members of the PSFC."

Multiple Lykos and PSFC-aligned organizations retained [public relations teams](#) that would coordinate to shift the narrative and direct attention away from Lykos' clinical trial failures.

The ensuing media offensive followed the strategic recommendations that had been outlined in [PSFC's Landscape Report](#). To create "a sense of urgency among both the public and lawmakers," their coordinated campaign would amplify the voices of those "who are either highly sympathetic or highly relatable" — predominantly veterans. Public relations firm RALLY relayed communications from these organizations to the Psychedelic Communications Hub, with support from Robyn Thomas.





PR firm Vitamin D circulated a false and misleading email to the media on behalf of Heroic Hearts and Healing Breakthrough, promoting an open letter accusing ICER of being “funded by Big Pharma.”

This email also incorrectly describes Psymposia’s former Managing Editor as the organization’s “founder” and misrepresents his statements | Source: Email sent by Vitamin D

While each firm would operate within a defined scope, the Hub’s role would be to coordinate messaging across the campaign. Although the Hub had [originally represented itself](#) as a neutral vehicle for greater cooperation within the psychedelic ecosystem, Thomas steered the Hub’s network to support PSFC and Lykos’ interests in the lead-up to the FDA decision. (Thomas’ 2025 bio acknowledges that she “[played a key role](#) in the campaign supporting legal MDMA-assisted therapy.”)

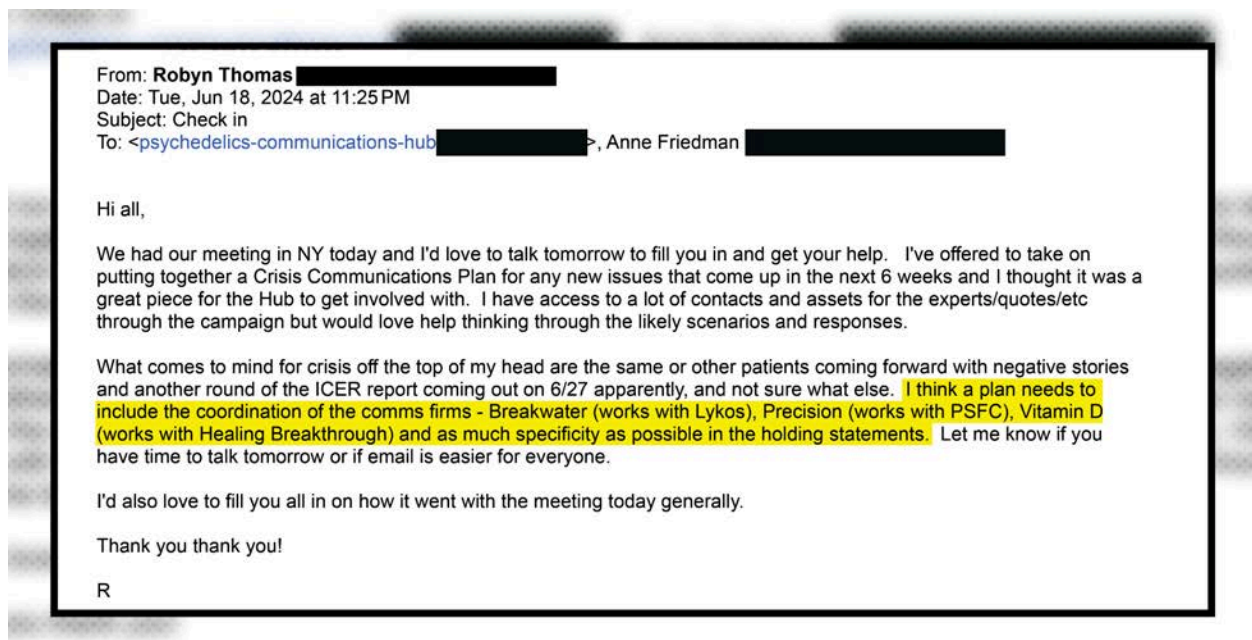
In an email to the Hub on June 18, 2024 — two weeks after the FDA advisory committee meeting — Thomas enlisted the group’s support for a “Crisis Communications Plan” covering the lead-up to the FDA’s decision:

“We had our meeting in NY today and I’d love to talk tomorrow to fill you in and get your help. **I’ve offered to take on putting together a Crisis Communications Plan** for any new issues that come up in the next 6 weeks and I thought it was a great piece for the Hub to get involved with. I have access to a lot of contacts and assets for the experts/quotes/etc through the campaign but would love help thinking through the likely scenarios and responses.

“What comes to mind for crisis off the top of my head are the same or other patients coming forward with negative stories and another round of the ICER report coming out on 6/27 apparently, and not sure what else. I think **a plan needs to include the coordination of the comms firms - Breakwater (works with Lykos), Precision (works with PSFC), Vitamin D (works with Healing Breakthrough)** and as much specificity as possible in the holding statements. Let me know if you have time to talk tomorrow or if email is easier for everyone.” (emphasis added) ➡



➔ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** When contacted for comment, Hillary Moglen — a RALLY representative — stated that RALLY was “proud to co-create and run the Psychedelic Communications Hub” but denied involvement in “the crisis communications campaign specific to the FDA/MDMA approval.” Thomas, when contacted, denied that the Psychedelic Communications Hub was involved in a crisis communications plan. This is contradicted by the email shared with Psymposia, where Thomas states that she has “offered to take on putting together a Crisis Communications Plan” that would “need[] to include the coordination of the comms firms[.]”



Robyn Thomas emailed The Hub on June 18, 2024 to explain that she was putting together a “Crisis Communication Plan” around the approval of Lykos’ New Drug Application. | Source: Email from Robyn Thomas

Recipients of the Hub's crisis communications plan emails extended beyond grassroots organizations to include leadership from MAPS, Lykos, and PSFC. In an email shared with Psymposia, Lykos and PSFC board member Dan Grossman [responded to Thomas’ email](#) with interest in attending this meeting, writing “If you lock that time soon, I’ll protect it, thanks!” (In its 2023 tax filing, [PSFC paid \\$149,900 to Wearerally LLC](#) (the advocacy agency [conducting business as RALLY](#)) for “communications.”)



In other emails shared with Psymposia, Thomas provided Hub members with strategic talking points, templates, and “social media toolkits” tailored “to amplify photos or press coverage” related to Lykos’ MDMA-AT application across various platforms (📁 [Document #16](#)).

For instance, three days after the FDA’s advisory committee voted against approving MDMA-AT, Thomas sought to rally grassroots support for Lykos through coordinated messaging that favored the pharmaceutical company’s messaging. “We trust that Lykos will work closely with the FDA to provide them with the necessary data from the MDMA-assisted therapy trials, as the agency makes their final decision,” the guidance read, suggesting how supporters might publicly frame the issue in Lykos’ interests. Thomas wrote that she would follow up with links to “positive media coverage” and offered support for coordinating op-ed placements “so that we can make sure we are not crossing signals.”

View RALLY’s offered guidance to the Hub for responding to potential FDA decisions based on industry-friendly talking points ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#))

In one email dated July 19, 2024, Thomas encouraged members to celebrate the veterans press conference jointly hosted by Heroic Hearts and Healing Breakthrough. This email — which included a shared folder containing 35 professional photos from the event for use on social media — promoted the original narrative from Heroic Hearts’ open letter: “Roughly 17 veterans die by suicide every day. This status quo is unacceptable, but not inevitable. Studies show that MDMA-assisted therapy can save lives. @WeHeroicHearts and @HBveterans brought together a bipartisan group of leaders to share their support for MDMA-AT.” (There is currently no research demonstrating that MDMA-AT reduces suicides.) In a statement to Psymposia, Thomas claimed she was “not aware of the details [of Heroic Heart’s messaging] and had no involvement in the messaging utilized by Heroic Hearts so I’m not sure how it would be relevant to the Hub.”



LinkedIn:	Twitter/Facebook:
Option 1: Focuses on bipartisanship. Last week, veterans, advocates, leaders, and a bipartisan group of members of Congress came together to share how MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD has the potential to save veterans' lives. This is an issue that transcends party lines, and I am glad to see people from both sides of the aisle so invested in finding ways to help our country's veterans—and millions of others who experience PTSD.	Option 1: Focuses on bipartisanship This press conference hosted by @WeHeroicHearts and @HBveterans shows that support for MDMA-AT transcends party lines. I'm so glad to see folks from both sides of the aisle so invested in finding ways to help our country's veterans, and millions of others, seek treatment for PTSD.
Option 2: Focuses on PTSD and how MDMA is medicine We're currently in a global health crisis: an estimated 13 million people in the United States experience PTSD. Current treatments aren't working for far too many. That's why veterans, advocates, and a bipartisan group of elected officials came together to support MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD. MDMA-AT is a promising medical treatment with the potential to bring much needed relief and healing to millions of people.	Option 2: Focuses on PTSD PTSD impacts 13 million people in the US. That's why a group of bipartisan leaders came together in DC to show support for MDMA-AT as a medical treatment that can bring relief to the millions suffering.
Option 3: Focuses on veterans — follow the science Roughly 17 veterans die by suicide every day. This status quo is unacceptable, but not inevitable. In scientific studies, MDMA-assisted therapy to treat PTSD has shown great potential to transform and save lives. That's why a group of bipartisan leaders from Congress and veterans and advocates from Heroic Hearts Foundation and Healing Breakthrough came together last week to show their support for the science behind MDMA-AT.	Option 3: Focuses on veterans Roughly 17 veterans die by suicide every day. This status quo is unacceptable, but not inevitable. Studies show that MDMA-assisted therapy can save lives. @WeHeroicHearts and @HBveterans brought together a bipartisan group of leaders to share their support for MDMA-AT.

Best,
Robyn

“Subject: Subject: Update on FDA Campaign” | Source: Fri, Jul 19, 2024, Psychedelic Communications Hub from Robyn Thomas

The next day, MAPS employee Dr. Bia Labate emailed the Hub listserv with a new article published on her website *Chacruna*, titled [“The Unbelievable Claims of Psymposia about MAPS and MDMA-Assisted Therapy.”](#)

Two hours later, PSFC’s Genevieve Jurvetson [tweeted a link to the article with commentary](#), urging the FDA to ignore its independent advisory committee:

“Want to understand how the most promising therapy for PTSD got subverted by special interests? Read this objective and well-researched article.... Fringe activists - who have gone on the record with their anti-police, anti-veteran rhetoric - are leading the opposition of legal access to MDMA-therapy. Veterans and 1st responders are my heroes, and deserve treatments that actually work. The good news is that it’s not too late, this decision is now in the hands of @US_FDA + @DrCaliff_FDA who spent years working with MAPS/ Lykos and awarded the treatment ‘Breakthrough Therapy Designation.’ Let’s follow the science and create safe access for the 13 million Americans suffering with PTSD.”



Within minutes, Steve Jurvetson [responded with a pull quote](#) from the article to discredit Psymposia. That night, Steve's close friend Elon Musk responded to Genevieve Jurvetson's post commenting "[Would help a lot of people](#)" and recommending a documentary on MDMA by Peter Jennings.

In the article, author Dr. Geoff Bathje speculates that "what prompted the war with Doblin and MAPS was the heartbreak of [initially believing MAPS could fully represent their anti-capitalist and anti-establishment values](#)." This false characterization aligns with other narratives that PSFC's network has promoted. Bathje concludes by arguing that Psymposia would not be "greeted as liberators," [alluding to Dick Cheney's quote about the US invasion of Iraq](#).

Bathje is a psychologist and co-founder of Sana Healing Collective, a nonprofit "[committed to the development of psychedelic-assisted therapy](#)[" Bathje's published model for psychedelic integration is [endorsed in The MAPS Integration Workbook](#) and [featured on the MAPS website](#).

While this coordinated messaging campaign reached its intended audiences, the content raised concerns among some members of the Hub. Based on conversations with members and Hub communications reviewed by Psymposia, some individuals involved in the Hub became uneasy about being mobilized as footsoldiers for Lykos and PSFC.

In one call, some members discussed reservations about the aggressive tactics of Heroic Hearts, which Hillary Moglen — a representative from RALLY — acknowledged as a component of the coordinated campaign. Thomas denied that members expressed reservations, stating "if they had/have discomfort, that should be expressed to Heroic Hearts directly." This assertion is contradicted by expressions of discomfort on the call, however.



Instead of reconsidering the ethics of these tactics, Moglen responded to these concerns by encouraging Hub members to publish alternative narratives that she would help craft: “For those of you who don't feel comfortable with particular type[s] of messages that are going out, the best way to counter that is to sort of ‘flood the zone’ with other kinds of messages.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** According to her [RALLY bio](#), Hillary Moglen — who suggested “flooding the zone” with other messaging — co-led three pro bono campaigns aimed at “reshaping public perceptions of survivors” and “recently led the firm’s deep dive into the science of persuasion.” Despite her stated commitment to shifting narratives around survivors, the PR campaign coordinated by RALLY for the Hub functioned to minimize the voices of survivors speaking out about harm.

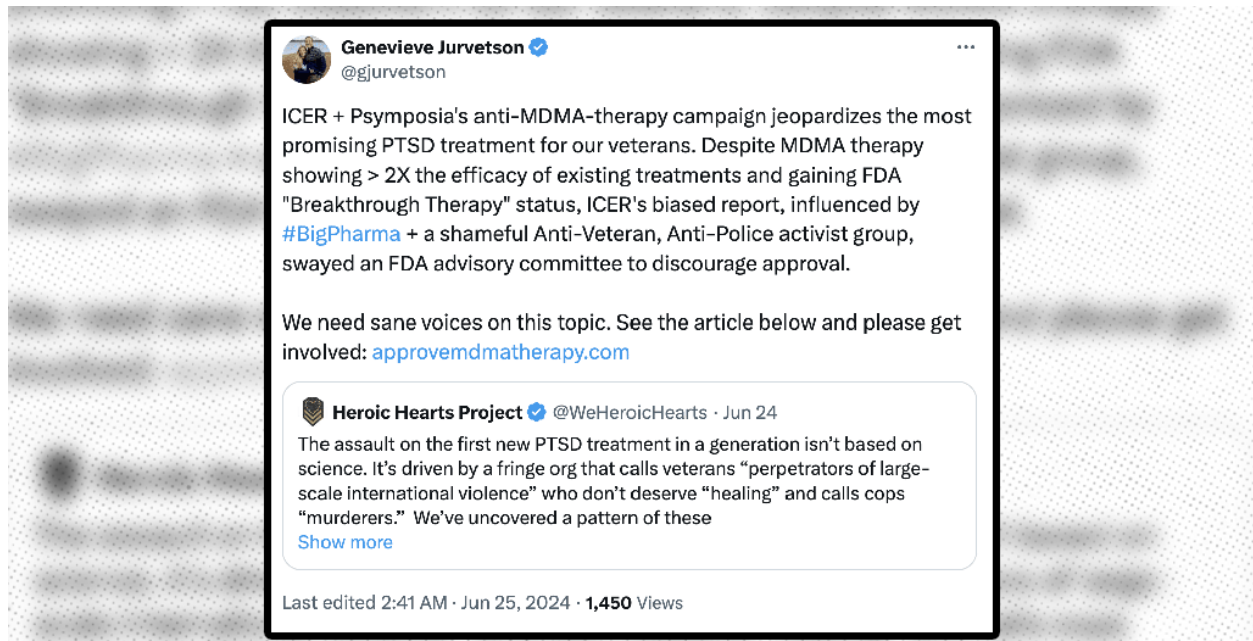
The idiom “flood the zone” was popularized by Steve Bannon — the former chief strategist to President Trump — who told author Michael Lewis in 2018: “The real opposition [to our goals] is the media. And the way to deal with them is to flood the zone with shit.” Reporting for Vox, Sean Illing wrote that this idea isn’t unique to Bannon, but that Bannon’s implementation of the strategy during the Trump campaign [exemplified its inherent issues](#):

“The press ideally should sift fact from fiction and give the public the information it needs to make enlightened political choices. If you short-circuit that process by saturating the ecosystem with misinformation and overwhelm the media’s ability to mediate, then you can disrupt the democratic process.”

Listen to an excerpt from a [Psychedelic Communications Hub meeting](#) on 6/28/2024.



In the aftermath of the advisory committee's decision, [undisclosed Lykos allies](#) “flooded the zone” with [baseless conjecture](#) and [outright falsehoods](#). Chapter 1 introduced these deceptive tactics, which this chapter will examine in greater detail.



PSFC board member Genevieve Jurvetson tweets multiple falsehoods about Psymposia on June 25, 2024. | Source: Twitter/X

This media misinformation campaign — which heaped blame for the NDA rejection on Psymposia and ICER — was released into a political environment marked by “[an epidemic of stochastic violence](#),” as disinformation and conspiracy theories increasingly motivate politically inspired violence and mass shootings. This campaign explicitly embraced Heroic Hearts’ letter, which blamed future veteran suicides on ICER and Psymposia. This rhetoric [amounts to stochastic terrorism](#), or the “demonization of a foe so that [they] might become targets of violence.” It accomplishes this by representing a dehumanized outgroup as a [direct mortal threat](#) to the audience’s in-group.

Psymposia’s members recognized the threat implied by these tactics and felt obligated to invest in personal security measures. Based on her policy background, Thomas also should have recognized the danger of these tactics.



Although Robyn Thomas served as Executive Director of the Gifford Law Center to End Gun Violence [for 16 years](#), the Hub participated in a campaign that relied on tactics associated with gun violence. In an analysis published to the Giffords Law Center website on August 2, 2024, Jessie Ojeda emphasized that “[extreme rhetoric and easy access to guns](#) can lead to real-world violent acts.” On its website, RALLY similarly highlights its role in supporting two national initiatives on reducing gun violence: [Sandy Hook Promise and March for Our Lives](#). (Thomas denied that the Hub was “involved in any attacks on whistleblowers, trial participants and critics of MAPS/Lykos or others in any way.”)

Like Thomas, Lykos — a company “[dedicated to transforming mental healthcare](#)” — embraced the dangerous rhetoric. In a July 5 statement to *Psychedelic Alpha*, Lykos Therapeutics [emphasized that it “appreciate\[d\]”](#) the Heroic Hearts campaign that led to death threats and harassment against Psymposia’s members. Devenot also received a private email from a director of Heroic Hearts Canada which concluded: “Karma is a bitch. You’ll live with this for the rest of your life.” (This director was subsequently removed from the organization and apologized privately.)

Despite Heroic Hearts’ [reckless implication](#) that Psymposia would have [blood on its hands](#) if the FDA were to vote against Lykos’ application, Thomas continued to promote the organization throughout the Hub as part of her crisis communications plan. Jules Evans wrote in [Ecstatic Integration](#) that this kind of targeting amounts to more than reputational harm: “It might even be unsafe, if you’re telling desperate and occasionally armed veterans this [person] is wishing you hate and perpetuating your suffering.”

Stochastic terrorism relies on rebroadcasting from large media platforms to provoke political violence that is statistically predictable, given the scale of the audience. While sharing Heroic Hearts’ letter, Rep. Dan Crenshaw directed his followers to contact Psymposia and “tell them to stop hating veterans.”



"Given how they feel about people in the military, maybe it's no wonder that they're against actually treating veterans with PTSD," [Crenshaw spoke into the camera](#).

As a consequence of this campaign, Psymposia continues to receive hateful and dehumanizing messages, including: "How dare you stop access to it? Go to your graves"; "You support rape and lynchings and beheadings"; "You revel in the blood you spill just as the Vietnam Generals you abhor did"; "Why do you believe the underground should be allowed to rape as many women as they please"; "I want to say fuck you as loudly as possible. Thank you for ensuring the continued suffering of millions"; "They [Psymposia] will feel my wrath"; "i [sic] definitely believe you're pretty high on the list of people who don't deserve to live."

At the university of one Psymposia member, the department administrator needed to unplug their phone from the wall and file a police report after repeated harassment from a caller.



Threatening tweet directed at a member of Psymposia including an animated GIF from a biopic about serial killer Jeffery Dahmer.



These consequences did not slow down efforts to scapegoat Psymposia for the FDA advisory committee's vote. In a last-minute effort to flood the zone with disinformation before the final FDA decision, filmmaker Nirvan Mullick compiled the coordinated PR campaign's false narratives into a [propaganda video](#) engineered for social media virality. ➡

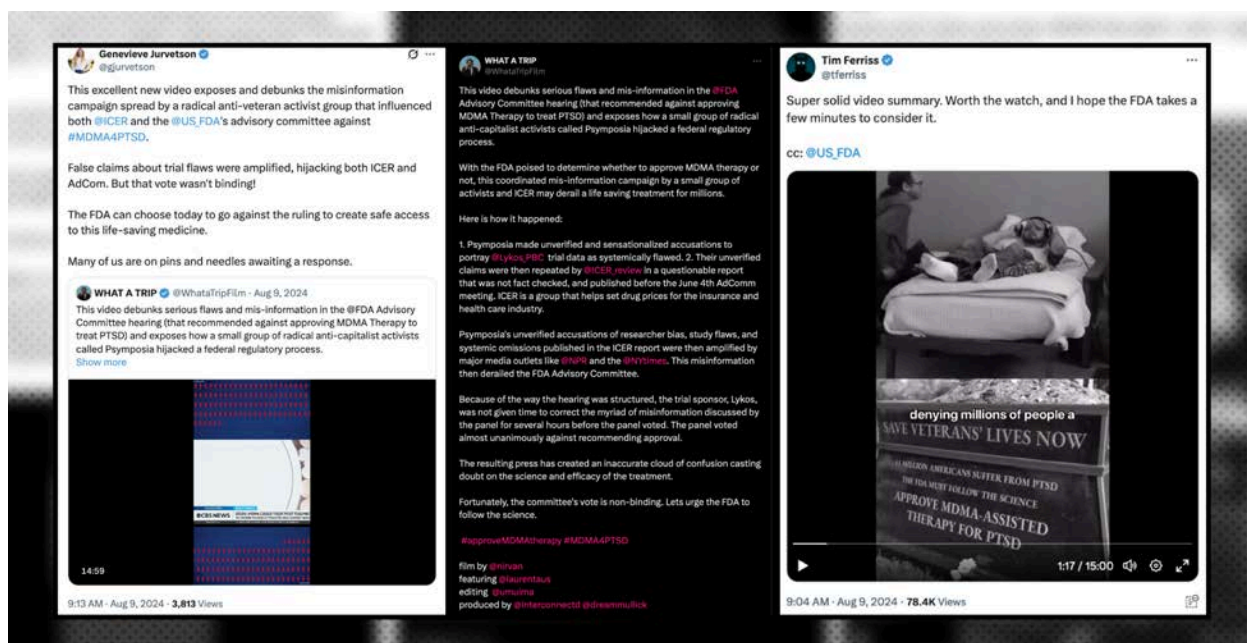
➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Mullick has been filming a documentary called *What a Trip* since 2014, which “follows Dr. Rick Doblin, the colorful founder of MAPS, on his half-century odyssey to legalize psychedelics.”

The GoFundMe page for the film states: “Our film will be released [after MDMA is rescheduled by the FDA](#) to become a prescription drug (estimated to happen in August of 2024), and will tell the incredible true story of how that happened.”

This 15-minute video, called *Debunking FDA Advisory Meeting [sic] MDMA Therapy for PTSD*, was posted to the social media account of Mullick's unfinished documentary *What a Trip*. Within hours, it was shared by PSFC members [Tim Ferriss](#) and [Genevieve Jurvetson](#) with explicit support.

The short propaganda video displays photos of Psymposia members, with presenter Lauren Taus alleging they “appear to have manipulated the media and possibly derailed a federal regulatory process — in a way that could end up denying millions of people a life-saving treatment.”

Two individuals involved in spreading this misleading video had a vested interest in legitimizing MAPS's therapy. Genevieve Jurvetson shared the video without disclosing [her MAPS therapy training](#), while Taus omitted her status as a MAPS-certified therapist. (Taus is the founder of [Inbodied Psychedelic Assisted Therapy & Integration Training](#) which prepares providers “for working with MDMA and psilocybin in therapy when these consciousness tools are legally available.” Inbodied charges \$5,000 for training mental health professionals and \$6,000 for training medical doctors.)



PSFC members Genevieve Jurvetson and Tim Ferriss promote Nirvan Mullick's viral video blaming Psymposia for the FDA Advisory Committee's rejection of Lykos Therapeutics' application.

The video's creator also had a vested interest in Lykos' success. Alongside the video's release, [Mullick reassured supporters](#) that the FDA could vote against its advisory committee and approve MDMA-AT, which would allow his film to proceed:

"For friends who've been messaging me, who know I've been working on this documentary about the journey to make MDMA into a medicine...and you've been reading headlines that say the FDA has rejected this as a treatment and...messaging me saying, 'Oh, I'm so sorry,' or 'it's over.' I just want to create one message here to let you guys know, it's not over."

Two months later, Mullick reposted the *Debunking FDA Advisory Meeting* video to his personal account [with a grossly misleading note](#): "We just finished exposing how a small group of radical activists hijacked a federal regulatory process to review MDMA Therapy to treat PTSD, potentially depriving millions of people suffering from PTSD from a life saving therapy." ➡



➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In his repost of the video, Mullick omits that his financial and professional interests were tied to FDA approval of MDMA-AT. After the FDA rejected Lykos' application, Mullick acknowledged this conflict of interest in a [January 2025 interview with Denizen podcast](#). During the interview, Mullick explained that he and Doblin made a deal to only release the film after “the FDA rescheduled MDMA” so that the full story could be told “including parts of the work that's underground” which have “been illegal — still is [illegal]. And Rick is doing work above-ground with MAPS...and working through all the federal regulatory processes to try to get this...to a prescription drug, but I wanted to tell the full story.”

“Suddenly [after the advisory committee decision] I kind of felt...like, ‘Oh, I'm not going to be able to finish this film for another three to five years.’ Like...my fate is tied,” Mullick told Denizen.

After the FDA declined to approve MDMA, Mullick describes how he pivoted the focus for *What A Trip* to show “how things at the FDA really went off the rails and were derailed by different forces.” The interview concludes with an acknowledgement from Mullick that PSFC member Blake Mycoski is “a great supporter, really generous supporter.”

Other notable financial connections between Mullick, MAPS, and PSFC members include a Quarterly Update from 2019 where PSFC encouraged its members to support the film's production by buying “[Legalize Rick Doblin](#)” merchandise. Under the film's previous name, *Prescription X: The Rick Doblin Story*, MAPS [served as its fiscal sponsor](#), and then-MAPS PBC CEO [Amy Emerson donated \\$1,000](#).

In an attempt to justify why anyone would oppose life-saving therapy, Mullick included a clip from Rep. Crenshaw's video, where he mischaracterizes Psymposia as anti-veteran extremists bent on preventing veterans from accessing treatment.

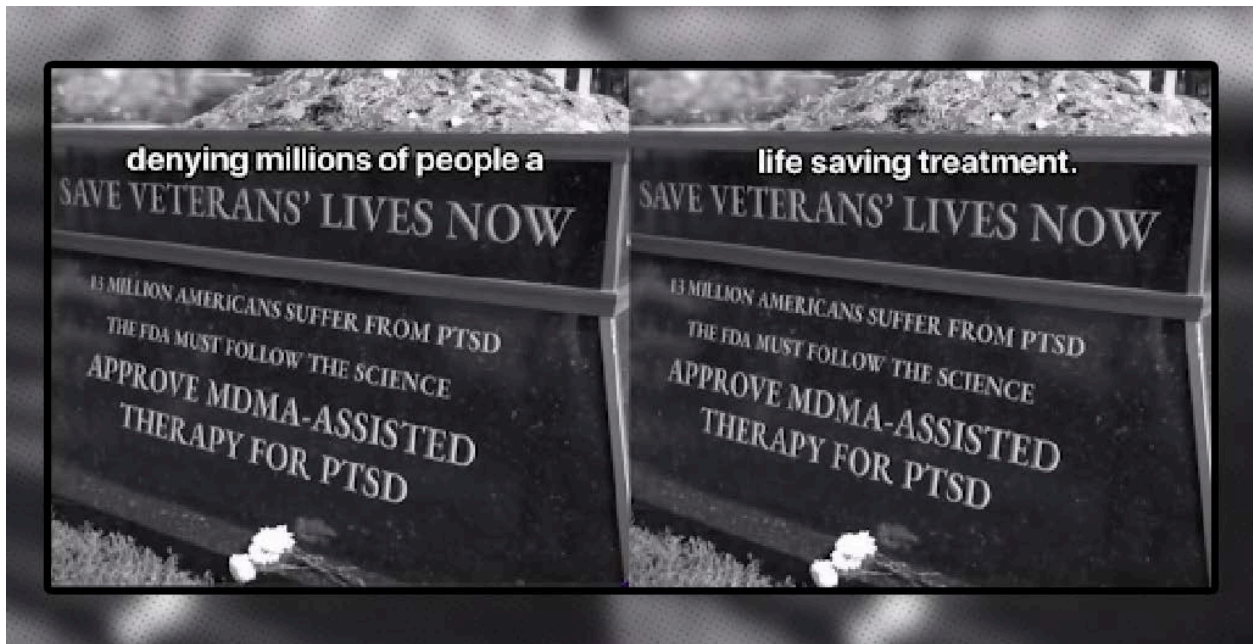


Although the film accuses Psymposia of hiding its members' participation in the FDA advisory committee meeting, Psymposia published a public [press release](#) prior to the meeting announcing its members' participation, stating: "Two authors of the petition — Drs. Neşe Devenot and Brian Pace — are board members of Psymposia. Four of the petition's co-authors will be participating in the [open public hearing]."

According to the FDA's own disclosure guidelines, which the agency describes in a document titled "[Guidelines for Speakers at the Open Public Hearing](#)," disclosures are [only recommended for financial associations](#) with the pharmaceutical sponsor: "FDA encourages you to incorporate into your presentation an explanation of your financial association, if any with the company whose product is being considered by the FDA advisory committee." No members of Psymposia have any financial association with Lykos Therapeutics (or any of its competitors). ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Three days after Mullick shared his *Debunking FDA Advisory Meeting* video, an anonymous ethics complaint was filed against Brian Pace to his university employer which mirrored these erroneous claims: "It was particularly troubling that Pace did not disclose his affiliation with Psymposia or his connection to his other colleagues affiliated with that group who were also present at the meeting (nor did they disclose their own affiliation with the organization)." After formal investigation by the Office of University Compliance and Integrity, the complaint was adjudicated and found to be without merit.

To support their false argument that Psymposia improperly influenced the advisory committee, the film misleadingly cuts away from the FDA's full instructions to suit their narrative. In the film, Taus claims that the advisory committee was inappropriately discussing concerns with the application "until an actual member of the FDA stepped in and said this conversation needs to stop." The film's catalog of concerns included — but were not limited to — the contributions of three Psymposia members to the meeting's public comments. (Taus erroneously identified multiple unaffiliated individuals as "undisclosed Psymposia activists.")



Stills from “Debunking the FDA advisory committee” directly following photos of members of the Psymposia team. | Source: “Debunking FDA Advisory Meeting” video created by Nirvan Mullick

This deceitful, selective editing implies that critical testimony should have been ignored by the committee. But [as the full unedited clip demonstrates](#), FDA’s Dr. Teresa Buracchio clarified that while “outside reports” should not be included in the committee’s deliberation, all critical commentary from the open public hearing was [explicitly admissible](#): “The discussions and voting should be based on what is contained within our briefing documents, as well as what you may have heard during the open public hearings — also fair.”

[View video comparing Mullick video and original footage.](#)

Beyond misrepresenting Psymposia's compliance with FDA regulations, the video failed to disclose multiple financial relationships between Lykos and its interviewees.



“Psymposia spoke as if they were independent voices,” said Dr. Gül Dölen, a researcher who joined the psychedelic research department at UC Berkeley in 2024 following a [\\$6 million donation](#) from PSFC member and [MAPS donor](#), Bob Parsons.

That clip was directly followed by Jesse Gould of Heroic Hearts: “None of them disclosed their connection. I personally think that lack of transparency is unethical and troubling.”

The video ends by directing viewers to the “Approve MDMA Therapy” campaign led by Heroic Hearts, Healing Breakthrough, and The Mission Within.



Chapter 8: “The One Guy Who Voted Yes”

As we listened to Gould’s accusation in Mullick’s video, one of us posed a question: “Did Jesse Gould even present at the FDA?” We looked at each other across computer screens, trying to remember.

Just before midnight on August 10, we clicked through to the 9-hour FDA advisory committee broadcast and jumped forward to the open public hearing to find the answer (he did not), which prompted us to look further. If Heroic Hearts wasn’t there, which veterans groups did participate? Among the list, one organization stood out:

“Speaker number 10, please introduce yourself. Please state your name and organization for the record. You have three minutes.”

A bearded person with glasses sat in front of an impressionistic painting. “Hello. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Brett Waters, and I’m an attorney and the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Reason for Hope, and Co-Founder of the Veteran Mental Health Leadership Coalition.”

We opened the [Veteran Coalition’s website](#), which lists 36 partner organizations including Reason for Hope, Heroic Hearts, The Mission Within, and Juliana Mercer’s Sabe Journeys (whose description links to the website of Healing Breakthrough). The Veteran Coalition describes itself as a “coalition of Veteran-led organizations committed to ending the Veteran suicide epidemic by any means necessary.”

Checking our files, we found the combined pitch deck (📁 [Document #17](#)) for Reason for Hope and the Veteran Coalition, which was presented to PSFC on December 14, 2022 by Brett Waters and Lt. Gen. Martin Steele.



Pitching themselves to PSFC as “a trusted partner in crafting state and federal policy,” with the ability to provide for “regulatory streamlining,” the groups highlighted their prior work in crafting “landmark federal legislation with Senator [sic] Booker and Paul,” and their lobbying capacity of \$435,000.

One slide succinctly described the function of the Veteran Coalition: “Uniting the Veteran community to change hearts and minds.” The background image featured a diverse mix of orderly veteran activists, holding signs for the camera behind a podium that read “Open Hearts. Open Minds.” On one level, this was a straightforward illustration of the sort of event they could organize on behalf of PSFC’s interests. But there was subtext in the signs that faced PSFC donors: ‘insert federal priorities here.’ ➡

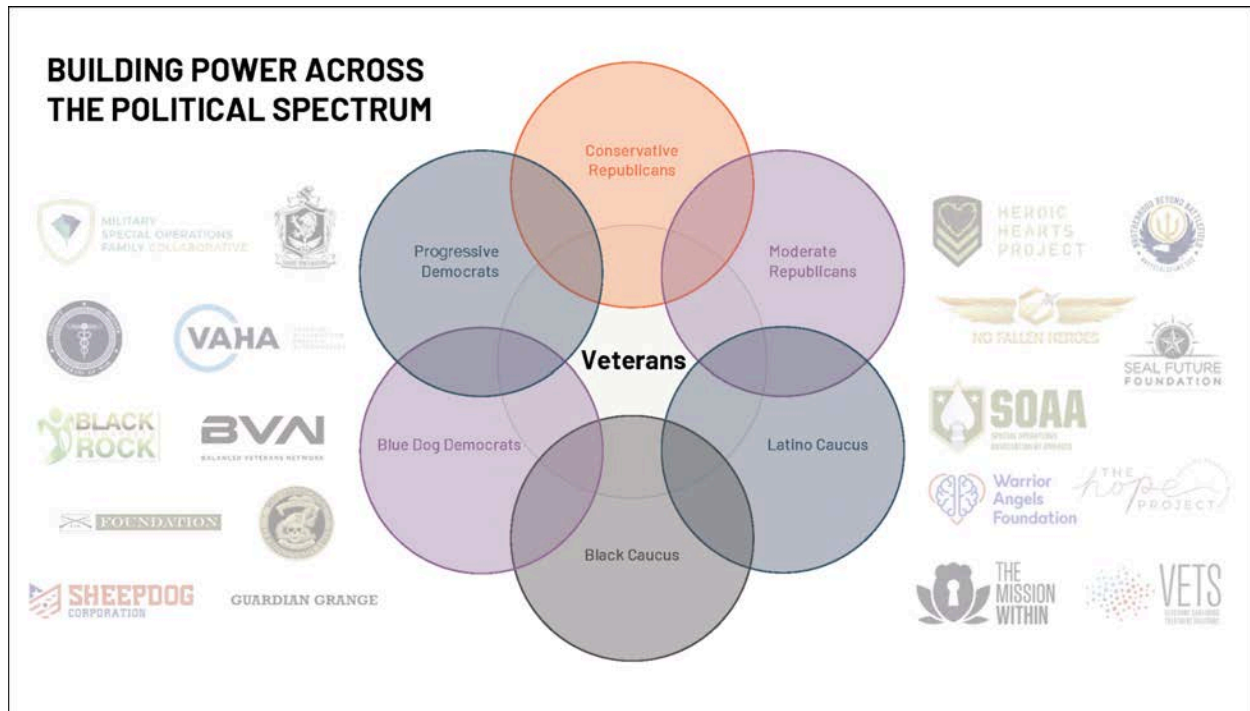
➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In related fundraising emails reviewed by Psymposia, Gould emphasized that Heroic Hearts could exert influence on politicians to achieve MAPS’s pharmaceutical interests, which meets the definition of a veterans [proxy or “front” group for the pharmaceutical industry](#). Elsewhere, Waters has described the efforts of VMHLC and Reason For Hope as helping “[unlock more than \\$12 million](#) in state funding...primarily for advancing research into MDMA-assisted therapy and psilocybin therapy.”

As Psymposia’s full report illustrates, the psychedelic industry is following the playbook of the opioid industry, which funded veterans-focused groups to “[increase opioid use among veterans](#)” and produce educational materials that “minimized addiction risks and exaggerated long-term benefits.” These materials relied on “empathy-driven narratives” that “prioritiz[ed] immediate pain relief over potential harms.”

On the next slide, a Venn diagram illustrates the intersections between different political caucuses within Congress. Overlapping circles represent key political affiliations and caucuses: Progressive Democrats, Blue Dog Democrats, Black Caucus, Latino Caucus, Moderate Republicans, and Conservative Republicans. Arrayed around these caucuses are



the veterans groups associated with the Veterans Coalition, which conveys how these groups can establish federal priorities by acting in concert to exert influence across the political spectrum.



*Slide from Veteran Mental Health Leadership Coalition and Reason for Hope's pitch deck to PSFC
(December 2022)*

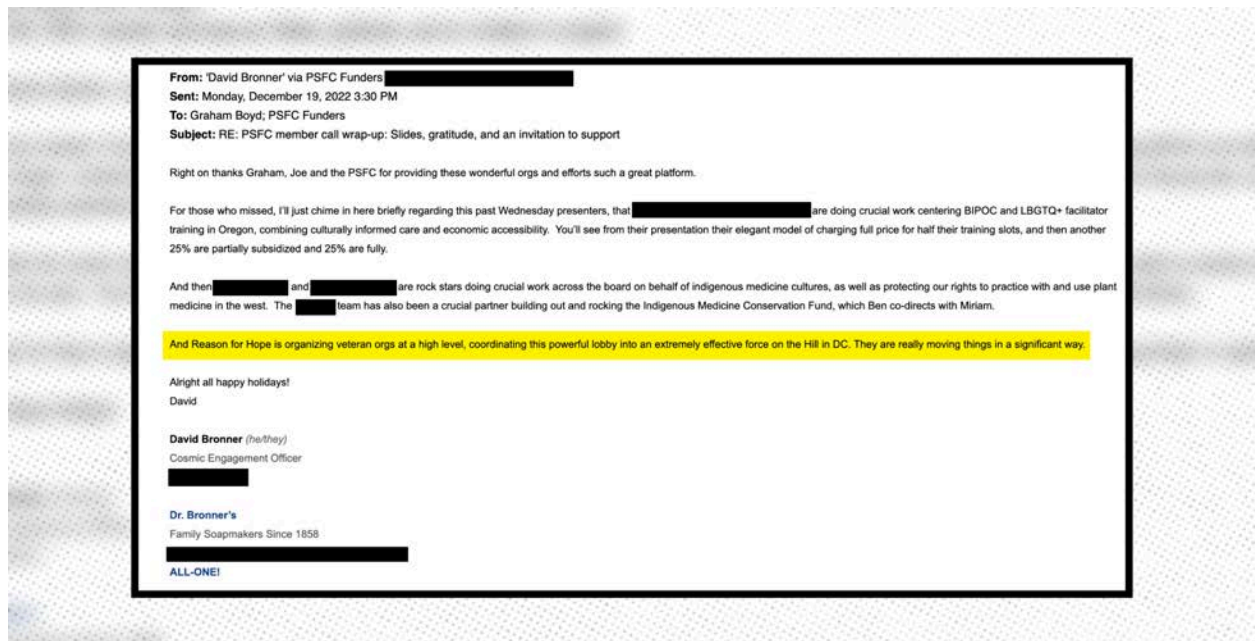
The pitch deck appealed to donors with a shared interest in influencing nationwide psychedelic legislation. Reflecting on this pitch, PSFC member David Bronner described Reason For Hope as coordinating a “[powerful lobby into an extremely effective force on the Hill in DC.](#)” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** The Veteran Coalition’s strategy produced results in 2023, when they [worked with](#) Kentucky’s Opioid Abatement Advisory Commission to allocate \$42M from the state’s opioid settlement funds to ibogaine research. [Mired in controversy](#), the plan would have [siphoned](#) settlement funds away from vital harm reduction efforts in the state. The funding scheme was eventually spiked when



Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron lost reelection.

In an email shared with Psymposia, Genevieve Jurvetson wrote to PSFC members on the day of the funding announcement: "This morning Kentucky announced \$42mm in funding for Ibogaine research, as well as public-private partnerships to help push Ibogaine through the FDA approval process. The funds are coming from a large pool of Opioid Settlement Funds and will be allocated over the next 7 years. [...] A massive THANK YOU to the funders on this thread of Reason for Hope. Your support enabled this unlock. Another testament to the power of the Veteran voice to catalyze meaningful change in this space." (📎 [Document #18](#))



December 2022 email from David Bronner describing Reason for Hope as coordinating a “powerful lobby.” | Source: Email from David Bronner

With this level of influence, Waters’ Veterans Coalition could mobilize [politicians to act en masse](#) in service to pharmaceutical interests — the sort of mobilization that transpired on August 2, 2024, when Jack Bergman (R-MI) led 61 Housemembers to sign an [open letter](#) in support of MDMA-assisted therapy. This kind of bipartisan rapid response to pharmaceutical interests requires an extensive, pre-existing lobbying infrastructure.



The letter offered political cover for the FDA to ignore its advisory committee's vote by characterizing Psymposia's concerns as meritless. While Psymposia is not mentioned by name, the letter mirrors the false characterizations in the original Heroic Hearts letter, where Psymposia was represented as an organization bent on discrediting effective therapies for people suffering from mental anguish:

“[W]e are aware that as this application has made its way through the regulatory review process, certain groups and individuals have voiced criticism of the application. It is our understanding that while these critics may be well-intentioned, their criticism is not necessarily reflective of the science, but rather their personal ideological beliefs and biases related to the medicalization of substances like MDMA.

“While all Americans are free to voice their views on this and other topics of public interest, scientific evidence should not be ignored in favor of *those who have been on a mission to discredit this promising treatment at all costs* – especially when that would come at the cost of our servicemembers and Veterans.” (emphasis added)

On August 5, a [companion letter](#) supporting MDMA-assisted therapy was signed by 19 Senators, led by Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC): “If comprehensive evidence demonstrates that MDMA-AT is both effective and safe when administered in appropriate settings, it is our responsibility to ensure that this treatment option is made available to those who could benefit from it.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** These letters were referenced by Lykos' supporters to demonstrate bipartisan support for overriding the FDA advisory committee's recommendation. On August 7 – two days before the FDA's decision on Lykos' NDA – [Christiana Musk published an appeal](#) to approve the application in an opinion piece for *TIME Magazine*, titled “There Are No Good Treatments for PTSD. MDMA Can Change That.” To bolster her argument that the FDA should ignore its advisory committee's vote, Musk cited the House letter in support of approving Lykos'



application based on the urgency of addressing veteran suicides: “Members of Congress from both parties—along with veterans groups, some of MDMA-assisted therapy’s strongest advocates—called on the FDA to ‘follow the science’ when they gathered July 10 at the Capitol.” In the TIME essay, Musk claims that “[a]lthough I am not an investor in Lykos Therapeutics, the company that is trying to bring this treatment to market, I philanthropically support several research centers that conduct MDMA-assisted therapy.” She does not mention her role as [operating partner at Satori Capital](#), whose “[advisory affiliate](#)” [Satori Neuro](#) participated in Lykos’ \$100 million [Series A investment round](#).



Christiana Musk wrote a personal appeal in TIME Magazine for the FDA to overrule the recommendation of its Advisory Committee.

In collaboration with Reason for Hope, Heroic Hearts, and Healing Breakthrough, the Veterans Coalition shared an Instagram gallery that began with excerpts from a [CNN story about the two congressional letters](#). Alongside images of the two congressional letters, the gallery included the “[Letter to President Biden from VSOs and Veterans](#)” from the *Approve MDMA Therapy* campaign website. According to the Instagram post, that letter was “co-authored by 14 veteran service organizations and 730 veterans” and published “in



conjunction with the congressional letters." Of the 14 signatory organizations, [12 were VMHLC partners](#).

View VMHLC Instagram posts ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#))

VMHLC was not on our radar until the Mullick video prompted us to rewatch Waters' testimony. Now, we were noticing the organization everywhere.

After the FDA advisory committee meeting, Waters was photographed at the July 10 press conference alongside the heads of other PSFC-aligned veteran groups, Heroic Hearts and Healing Breakthrough. Although Waters did not speak at the lectern, his connections with Lykos funders, Congress, and veterans groups were indispensable for assembling all of the event's moving parts.

In November 2022, Waters told *Lucid News* that he was [involved in "many" of the federal initiatives](#) supporting psychedelic access, which included a Senate bill on psychedelic research; a congressional caucus related to psychedelic medicine; and new guidelines for psychedelic research from both the Veterans Administration and the National Institute for Mental Health.



Washington, D.C. press conference. Reason for Hope Executive Director and Co-Founder of VMHLC, Brett Waters (left), Heroic Hearts Executive Director Jesse Gould (middle), and Healing Breakthrough Executive Director Juliana Mercer (right). | Source: “Bipartisan Congressional Press Conference on New Therapies for Veteran PTSD/Suicide” [video](#)

On social media, [VMHLC urged followers](#) to participate in the DC event: “join us in person on The Hill as we fight for the approval of MDMA-Assisted Therapy (MDMA-AT) for PTSD. This is our moment to unite and make a difference. The FDA’s decision is imminent, and we need to show our strength and solidarity.”

Since the start of our investigation, Psymposia had been exploring the deep political and financial connections between MAPS, PSFC, and these various veterans organizations. This was the moment that the true extent of these connections became apparent.

On June 4 — the same day as the FDA advisory committee hearing — a psychedelic ethics paper was published in The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) authored by 21 psychedelic researchers and industry stakeholders, including Waters and Devenot. As required by the journal’s guidelines, Waters disclosed his financial conflicts of interest, noting his roles as the executive director of Reason for Hope and co-founder of VMHLC. In



this disclosure Waters reported that these organizations were “[funded](#) by grants or donations from the [Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation](#), the [Joe and Sandy Samberg Foundation](#), the [Jurvetsen Foundation](#), [Flourish Trust](#), [The Austin & Gabriela Hearst Foundation](#), [and] Michael Cotton,” along with several other groups.

Waters chose not to disclose any of these conflicts of interest during the FDA’s June 4 advisory committee meeting, even though the [guidelines provided to speakers](#) encouraged – but did not require – presenters to identify any financial association “with the company whose product is being considered by the FDA advisory committee” during presentations. Each of these disclosures would have been materially relevant to the advisory committee’s deliberations on Lykos’ application, since all of these entities have financial ties to Lykos. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** The Jurvetsons, Michael Cotton, and Austin Hearst are members of PSFC, which [donated millions to MAPS](#) to achieve PSFC’s “core focus” of getting MDMA-AT approved by the FDA. (The Jurvetsons personally donated at least [\\$2.6 million](#) to MAPS and Forbes reported Hearst as a [donor to MAPS’s Capstone Fund](#).) The Cohen and Samberg foundations directly participated in Lykos’ \$100M [Series A investment round](#) along with Satori Neuro, which is an “[advisory affiliate](#)” of [Satori Capital](#). Satori Capital’s [operating partner Christiana Musk](#) is also a director and co-founder of Flourish Trust, which funded Waters.

Waters’ failure to disclose his own financial ties to Lykos’ backers only scratched the surface of VMHLC-related conflicts of interest that Psymposia uncovered: these conflicts extended to the FDA’s advisory committee itself.

While we rifled through these connections and conflicts of interest, Brian Pace called our attention to VHMLC’s website, “Hey, look at this. This coalition includes Heroic Hearts, Healing Breakthrough and The Mission Within, along with a bunch of other veteran organizations I’ve never heard of.”



Almost simultaneously, Brian Normand squinted at his own screen. “You guys have to see this.” He shared his screen to reveal that psychiatrist Dr. Walter Dunn had professional ties to both Reason for Hope and VMHLC.

Neşe looked up, incredulous: “Is that — the one guy who voted ‘yes’?”



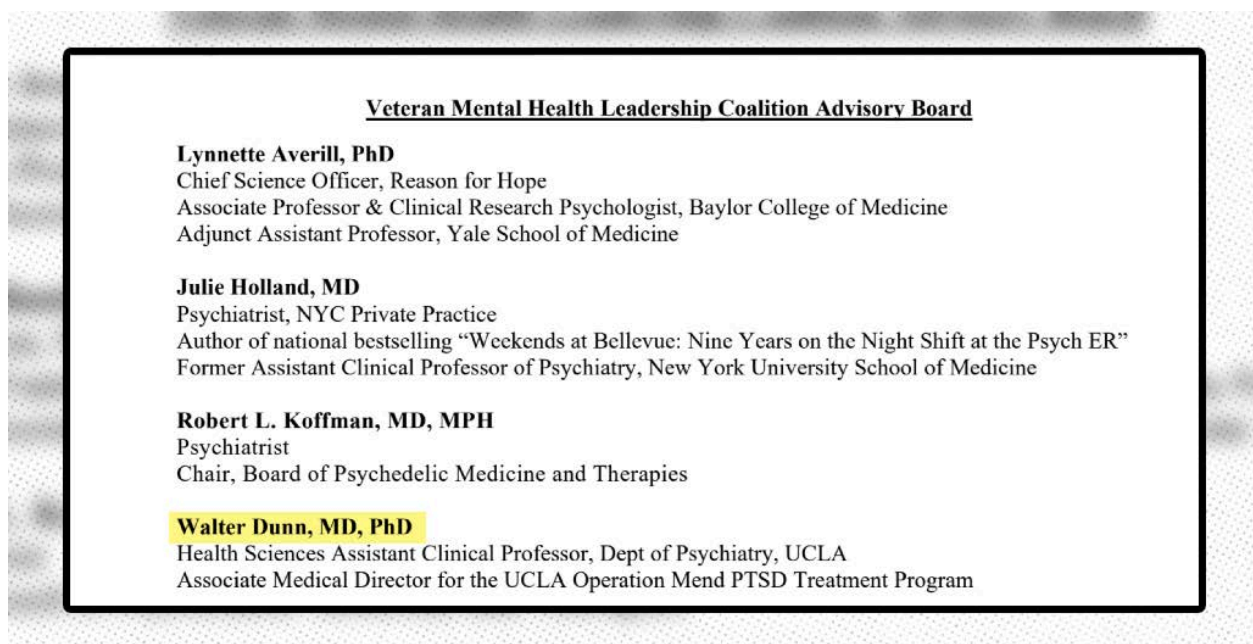
Screenshot of Reason for Hope’s Instagram page. The top left post depicts Dr. Dunn’s 2023 expert witness testimony to the Kentucky Opioid Abatement Advisory Committee (top left), Lt. Gen. Martin Steel (middle), and Brett Waters (bottom right) | Source of top left post: [Reason for Hope Instagram](#), posted Jan 23, 2024

Dunn, was the sole advisory committee member who voted “yes” on the safety of Lykos’ application and one of only two who voted “yes” on its efficacy. Dunn — who has served on the FDA advisory committee [since June 2017](#) — has also served as an advisory board member to [VMHLC](#) (📁 [Document #19](#)). Neither Waters nor Dunn disclosed their professional ties to one another.

While the PSFC crisis campaign was falsely accusing Psymposia of violating disclosure rules, their allies were actually circumventing the rules.



Dunn's relationship to Waters is officially recorded in a letter of support for Senators Rand Paul and Cory Booker's Right to Try Clarification Act of 2022, which urged Congress to amend federal legislation "to open access to MDMA- and psilocybin-assisted therapy." (Along with Dunn, other members of the VMHLC's advisory board who signed the letter included [PSFC director Michael Cotton](#) and MAPS PBC [medical advisor](#) Dr. Julie Holland, who participated in MAPS' clinical trials as a [medical monitor](#). The letter is also [published on Chacruna](#), which is run by MAPS's ["Public Education and Culture Specialist,"](#) Bia Labate.)



Documentation from a 2022 open letter supporting the Right to Try Clarification Act. Written by members of Reason for Hope and VMHLC, the letter identifies Dr. Walter Dunn as an advisory board member. | Source: Reason for Hope [2022 open letter](#) supporting Right to Try Clarification Act.

Nearly two years after signing his name in support of this legislation, Dunn sat as an FDA advisory committee member tasked with the responsibility of serving as an impartial adjudicator of Lykos' MDMA-AT New Drug Application.

As Psymposia's investigation revealed, Lykos had been actively working to influence advisory committee members. According to records from MAPS board meetings in 2017 and



2018, leadership from MAPS, MAPS PBC, and PSFC discussed strategies to influence the FDA's advisory committee during presentations on "Regulatory Strategy." In a July 18, 2017 presentation, Amy Emerson (MAPS PBC Executive Director) and Berra Yazar-Klosinski (MAPS Associate Director of Clinical Research), discussed their ongoing plan to meet experts who might be included on the committee: "We are already working to meet as many experts as possible in case they are chosen for the Advisory Committee."

The discussion that followed reveals a board that was comfortable with politicizing and manipulating the drug approval process. In response to Joe Green asking "if politicians ever get in the way of drug approval," Doblin acknowledged that "Members of Congress and Administration could pressure the head of the FDA" to change their final decision. Green suggested a potential strategy to neutralize political opposition by "direct[ing] recruitment towards potential politicians and donors, such as congressmen who have PTSD."

The conversation about the advisory committee continued at the subsequent board meeting on February 28, 2018, where they discussed the advisory committee's selection process. According to the meeting minutes, Graham Boyd suggested creating a working group to identify "who might be likely to be on the advisory committee, [which can] help us shape which conferences to attend and journals to target for publications."

FDA advisory committee members are [required by law](#) to report conflicts of interests and maintain the [appearance of impartiality](#). Federal regulation requires the disclosure of any external relationships held by a committee member that a "reasonable person," with "knowledge of the relevant facts," might perceive as raising concerns about the member's impartiality.

Dunn had [previously disclosed conflicts](#) regarding a proposed Alzheimer's disease treatment submitted by Acadia Pharmaceuticals, for which he obtained a waiver from the FDA Commissioner to participate in the relevant advisory committee meeting. Dunn did not receive a waiver to participate in the discussion of Lykos' NDA, however. At the start of



the advisory committee meeting, FDA's Dr. Joyce Frimpong identified that [no committee members had received a waiver](#) for disclosed relationships pertaining to the NDA:

“Based on the agenda for today's meeting and all financial interests reported by the committee members and temporary voting members, no conflict of interest waivers have been issued in connection with this meeting. To ensure transparency, we encourage all standing committee members and temporary voting members to disclose any public statements that they have made concerning the product at issue.” ([36:49 – 37:03](#))

➡ **UPDATE 10/19/2025, 8:00 PM EDT:** Although Dunn did not return Psymposia's request for comment, he subsequently confirmed his prior advisory work with VMHLC in a statement to *The Microdose*. Dunn stated that he did not report this role to the FDA because it did not occur within “the preceding 12 months” of the advisory committee meeting, as required by the FDA's “Outside Positions” financial conflict of interest disclosure rules.

This response overlooks the fact that FDA advisory committee members must comply with [two sets of disclosure policies](#). The first policy involves financial conflict of interest reporting, which Dunn referenced in his comments to *The Microdose*. The second policy concerns perceptions of impartiality, which covers “other interests and relationships that do not create a recusal obligation under Federal conflict of interest laws but that may create the appearance that a member lacks impartiality, known as ‘appearance issues.’”

On a website listing the [“laws, regulations, and guidance documents” for advisory committee meetings](#), the FDA emphasizes that potential impartiality concerns supersede specific covered relationships. These recommendations are listed as current as of April 23, 2024 — less than two months before the advisory committee meeting convened to discuss Lykos' application. This information is outlined in the attached guidance document, titled [“Procedures for Evaluating Appearance Issues](#)



[and Granting Authorizations for Participation in FDA Advisory Committees.](#)" which clearly identifies "two categories of potentially disqualifying interests or relationships":

1. "current financial interests that may create a recusal obligation under Federal conflict of interest laws; and
2. "other interests and relationships that do not create a recusal obligation under Federal conflict of interest laws but that may create the appearance that a member lacks impartiality, known as 'appearance issues.'"

This guidance explicitly states that "although interests and relationships more than a year old do not generally give rise to appearance issues, [there may be exceptions when these involvements suggest close ties to the sponsor or product.](#)" (Dunn advised the organization VMHLC, which was funded by major investors and donors in the sponsor and its parent company.) The guidance document emphasizes that impartiality considerations should include "professional, social, or other relationships that are not technically a 'covered relationship'...[but] could still raise concerns about the member's impartiality."

Discussing regulation [5 CFR § 2635.502\(a\)\(2\) and \(c\)](#) in an ["Ethics Fundamentals"](#) series produced by Office of Government Ethics (OGE), Cheryl Kane-Piasecki and Patrick Shepherd further elaborated on these disclosure standards. Kane-Piasecki noted that "some employees say, 'Well, I don't have a covered relationship so I can do whatever I want.'" However, "that's not the way...the regulations work together":

"[I]n essence, what (a)(2) is saying is that...the covered relationship provisions and the financial interests provisions are not the universe — that...there may be circumstances other than those that are expressly articulated in these two prongs, where...you should ask yourself whether a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts would question your impartiality, or where a



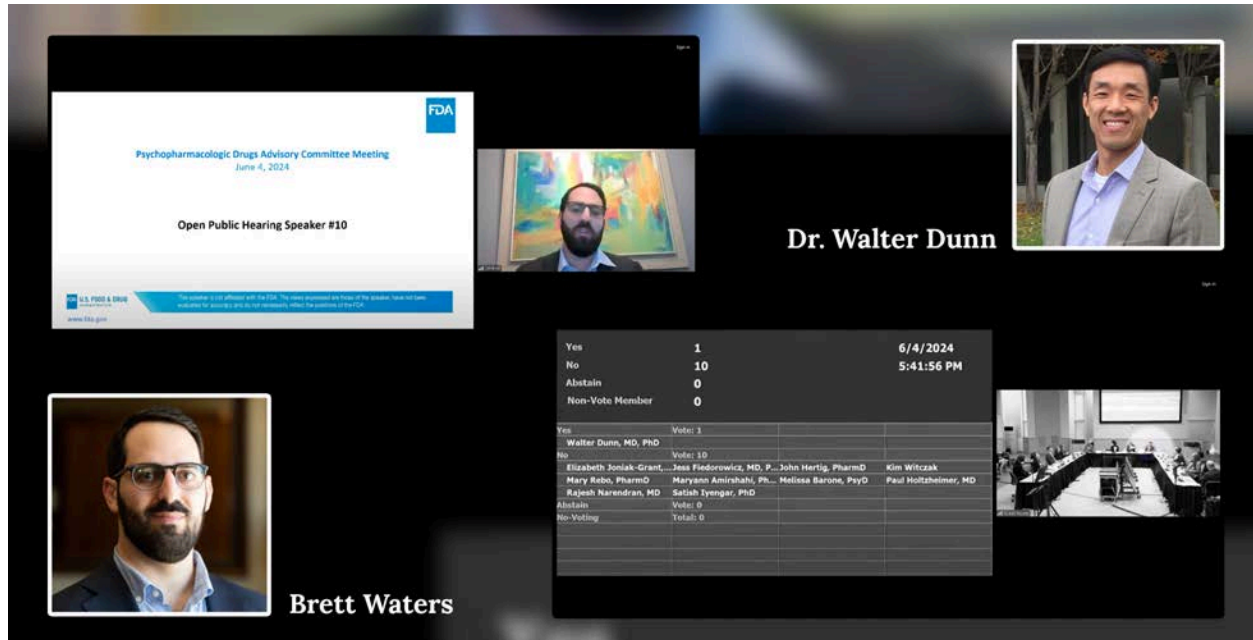
reasonable person might question your impartiality and the agency should, you know, advise...that the employee recuse themselves from any such matter[.]”

While 5 CFR § 2635.502 has been updated since this 2015 video was recorded, the discussed language remains in the current regulations under [5 CFR § 2635.502\(a\)\(3\)](#).

This analysis is further supported by OGE presentation slides titled “[Impartiality in Performing Official Duties / 5 CFR section 2635.502](#),” which contain updated 2024 language. On a page titled “Summary of 5 CFR section 2635.502,” OGE emphasizes that appearance issues extend beyond the standard relationships: “An agency may disqualify an employee from participating in matters where circumstances, other than those described above, would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question an employee’s impartiality.”

After casting the only vote of approval on the safety of Lykos’ application, Dunn explained to the committee that he was “[especially sympathetic to the stories of our veterans that were here during the public commentary](#)” — as if this was the first time that he had heard this messaging.

This included testimony from Waters — Dunn’s former advisee in his capacity as Co-Founder of the VMHLC.



Brett Waters (left) provides comment during the FDA’s advisory committee meeting, where Dr. Walter Dunn (right) serves as a voting member. | Source: [June 4, 2024 Meeting of the Psychopharmacologic Drugs Advisory Committee \(PDAC\)](#)

Justifying his “yes” vote, Dunn said he believed that Lykos had brought MDMA-AT “probably 75% of the way” to where the application needed to be. He added that Lykos was “on the right track” for FDA approval: “a tweak here and there can address some of the safety concerns [FDA’s advisory committee] brought up.”

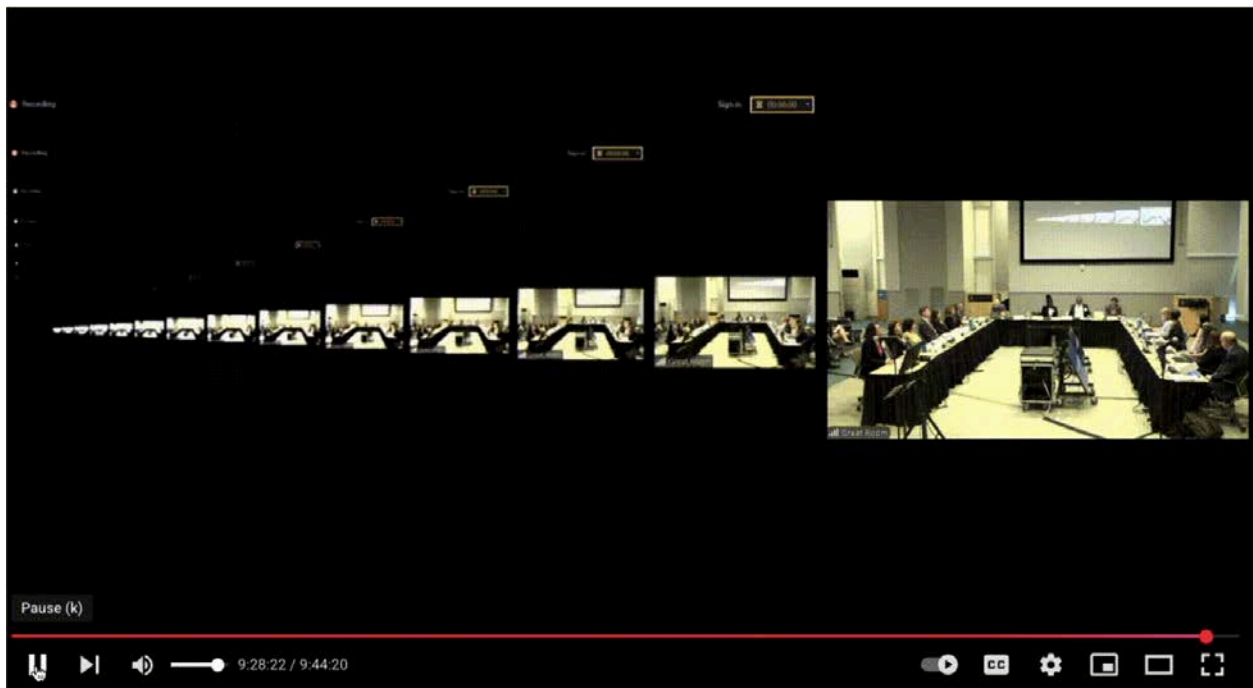
Dunn’s commentary from the advisory committee is featured in Mullick’s propaganda video, alongside the misleadingly edited instructions from FDA’s Dr. Theresa Buracchio. As discussed earlier, Mullick’s edit omitted that the advisory committee was explicitly sanctioned to consider the open public hearing in its voting deliberations: “The discussions and voting should be based on what is contained within our briefing documents, *as well as what you may have heard during the open public hearings — also fair.*”

In explaining his vote at the conclusion of the advisory committee meeting, Dunn was the only person to refer to Buracchio’s directive, erroneously claiming that it [prevented him from considering the misconduct](#) that was discussed during the open public hearing, which



included testimony from the participant who was sexually assaulted during a Phase 2 clinical trial. Dunn claimed that “Per Dr. Buracchio’s guidance earlier, and really not taking into consideration the possibility for misconduct...I think that [this treatment] can be effective for patients with posttraumatic stress disorder.”

At that moment, like some cosmic joke, [the screen fractalized](#) into a pointed arrow.



Dr. Walter Dunn explains his reasons for voting “yes” and screen sractalizes | Source: YouTube “June 4, 2024 Meeting of the Psychopharmacologic Drugs Advisory Committee (PDAC)”

On May 9, 2024 — less than one month before the advisory committee meeting — the podcast *Healing Trauma* published an interview where Dunn hyped Lykos’ pharmaceutical product as the first wave of a revolution in psychiatry:

"This is the hottest area in — I won't even say mental health, this is [the hottest area in medicine right now](#). [...] The psychedelics — this is really, I think, going to change the way we think about mental illness, and certainly how we potentially could treat mental illness. And so right now, **MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD will likely be**



the first quote-unquote psychedelic-based treatment that will be approved by the FDA, though actually – the promised decision date is...August 11th, 2024 – later this year. That's when the FDA has their deadline in which to make a decision. [...] On that day or before, the FDA will say yea or nay to...MDMA-assisted treatment for PTSD."

As he spoke, Dunn did not disclose that he was a member of the advisory committee that would be voting on Lykos' MDMA-AT application.



Dr. Walter Dunn describes psychedelics as “the hottest area in medicine,” collaged with the FDA Advisory Committee’s vote tally displaying Dunn as the single “Yes” vote on the safety of Lykos’ application | Source: [“A Marine's New Mission: Tackling PTSD with Prof. Walter Dunn”](#) and [FDA Advisory Committee meeting](#)



Chapter 9: “It Means They Dodged a Bullet”

More than anyone else on the FDA’s advisory committee, Walter Dunn should have understood the seriousness of the safety concerns raised during the June 4 meeting.

In his interview with *Healing Trauma*, while reflecting on key takeaways from his work with veterans affected by PTSD, Dunn acknowledged the devastation caused when institutional betrayal follows in the wake of trauma:

“People talk about soldiers, or marines, or airmen who are deployed, and they're injured or shot and almost killed in combat. And obviously those are very traumatic events. But oftentimes the veterans I work with will talk about the [betrayal of trust](#) in some of the institutions that they were led to believe were there to help them. And that — even moreso than the IED blast — is a bigger violation of their belief in the systems and people around them. And so...oftentimes that's really the part about the PTSD...that's the most challenging to treat.”

The only person who voted ‘yes’ on safety should have known to vote ‘no.’ [Multiple participants](#) in Lykos’ clinical trials have [remarked on institutional betrayal by MAPS and Lykos](#) after harmful experiences. Lykos’ former CEO Amy Emerson argued that the harm that occurred was not enough to slow the company’s pace: “The voices of people who have been hurt need to be heard without anybody being defensive,” she said. “But people are desperate for treatments, and pushing MDMA outside of a regulatory pathway is likely to create more harm.” Emerson’s statement fails to acknowledge Lykos’ deep connections to the underground. Psymposia has spoken to sources who detailed the extent of MAPS therapists’ involvement in underground therapy, including accounts of harm caused to clients.



Two months after Emerson's statement to the *Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that MAPS therapists were also practicing in the underground: "Some investigators on the Lykos trials [offered 'underground' psychedelic sessions](#) while they oversaw the trials, people familiar with the situations said. One person said he hired a therapist on a Lykos trial to guide him in an underground MDMA session while the clinical trials were running."

Speaking to the *Journal*, Doblin denied accounts that some of MAPS's clinical trial therapists were also working in the underground. Doblin insisted there was "no overlap between the trials and the underground," but Doblin's statement is undermined by his comments at ALPS Conference in 2023. Speaking from the stage, he advised discretion for therapists who are working in mixed contexts: "If you are going to do this underground work, I'd say you can also probably do both underground work and aboveground work at the same time. [You just have to be really careful who you tell what.](#)" (Doblin appears to be taking his own advice in his communications with the *Journal*, since [his personal facilitation of underground MDMA-AT](#) was documented by Bloomberg.)

Speaking to the importance of the underground as a means to train and recruit therapists, Doblin has said: "I think of it in terms of the Underground Railroad during slavery times, where people were helping those [sic] get free of slavery and here we're helping people — or these underground therapists are — [helping people get free from emotional slavery.](#)" ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Many psychedelic practitioners view themselves as [analogous to abortion providers](#) under abortion bans, offering a life-saving service that has been unjustly stigmatized by mainstream society:

"Many seeking competency with [psychedelic-assisted therapy] will continue to pursue psychedelic experiences, driven by individual values and needs for professional development. This is [analogous to our experience with abortion...before legalization](#), where a growing number of [individuals] will circumvent [the] law.... [T]herapists seeking personal experience with [psychedelic-assisted therapy] feel obliged to break the law to become more



effective therapists. At this time of unprecedented inadequacy of mainstream treatments, we are called to support, not obstruct, therapies with demonstrated positive outcomes."

These practitioners draw an analogy between banning abortion and psychedelic therapy, suggesting that prohibition merely drives both into unsafe territory. However, the dominant schools of underground psychedelic therapy promote unsound and pseudoscientific practices, which will not be rendered safer through legalization.

Emerson's argument hinges on the assumption that legalization will mitigate risks — but it fails to acknowledge that the therapy model driving underground harms would continue in Lykos' aboveground context, under the cover of institutional sanction. As a result, her reasoning shifts the context of harm rather than resolving the underlying issues.

Speaking on a panel at South by Southwest in the lead-up to the FDA's decision, Emerson elaborated on her argument, stating that adverse events such as dissociation and suicidality are actually sometimes necessary to the process of psychedelic healing. "Any one of those [adverse events], you put that down on a piece of paper in a medical record, and it looks like you're making people worse. But it's actually part of the process. So [we have to teach the system that this is part of a process](#) that you go through," Emerson said. She claimed that the process may be "ugly", but patients come out better for it on the "other side."

Emerson's statement reflects MAPS/Lykos' core belief that "challenging experiences" are a prerequisite for healing. For participants undergoing MDMA-AT, this involves "[fully experiencing and expressing](#)" distressing symptoms by [reliving traumatic experiences](#). The therapy model taught that [therapists could use touch to "amplify" distress](#), guided by their intuition about what the participant's "inner healing intelligence" was attempting to release—namely, unresolved trauma and deeply buried memories tied to past harm. In some instances, this approach involved reenacting participants' prior experiences of assault, even as participants pleaded for this reenactment to stop:



“One participant, in her first MDMA-assisted session, started crying an hour after MDMA administration and described fear, sadness, blurry vision, and body sensations that she’d had when she was stabbed. She went on to spontaneously re-experience the trauma in detail, as if watching a movie with time slowed down and said, “*It feels more real now than when it happened.*” At times she was able to describe it to [the therapists], at other times, she was having full blown flashbacks saying, “*Please don’t let me die, I have things I have to wrap up, get down, get down,*” as she held her hands up, as if to protect herself. This experience continued for more than an hour with the therapists listening empathically[.]” (original emphasis)

In cases where the therapist was acting out the assault, MDMA-AT required intoxicated participants to [remember rules about a “safe word”](#) to stop the therapist from engaging in a physical struggle. (Lykos has never acknowledged the risks of relying on “safe words” in the context of [a drug known to impair verbal recall](#).)

While MAPS claims that acute and prolonged distress during such reenactments is ultimately beneficial, some participants experienced this approach as [a new source of trauma](#) that worsened the very symptoms they were hoping to resolve.

For some, this instruction to surrender to distress enabled a broader pattern of harm that had already been pervasive within the network of underground therapy.

Phase 2 trial participant Meaghan Buisson (who is also a contributing author on this report) was subjected to sexual abuse and alleged [labor exploitation by her aboveground MAPS therapist team](#), just as Will Hall had experienced in the underground. As Buisson presented to ICER, “While in the clinical trial I was being used as a research assistant, to the extent I had gained access [to] the End of Phase 2 FDA submission.”

MAPS’s and Lykos’ public relations have characterized what happened to Buisson as a [tragic fluke caused by rogue therapists who “substantially deviated”](#) from protocol, but Buisson



knew this was not the case. In June 2024, Buisson submitted testimony to the FDA advisory committee emphasizing how the abuse was enabled by MAPS's therapy. She explained that she had submitted a formal complaint to the FDA in September 2021 detailing how the abusive practices — which included “being [blindfolded, gagged, pinned, cuddled, and caressed](#)” — were normalized by MAPS's clinical framework. Buisson emphasized that she did not consent to these actions. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In numerous statements, MAPS has claimed that the abuse occurred “[after the active treatment sessions had concluded](#)” (original emphasis). This narrative has led many to believe the abuse occurred after the Phase 2 trial ended and was unrelated to the trial, [which is false](#). As MAPS Senior Medical Director [Dr. Michael Mithoefer](#) acknowledged in a *Psychedelics Today* interview, a “[serious sexual ethical boundary violation](#)” occurred [before](#) the Phase 2 participant “finished the final measures” of the clinical trial.

For speaking out about her abuse, Buisson experienced retaliation from Lykos stakeholders who misrepresented her abuse for years, as she described to ICER. During ICER's review of Lykos' clinical trials, Buisson highlighted the impact of this retraumatizing behavior: “I have been repeatedly targeted and attacked. In the press, at conferences, in publications, Lykos stakeholders relentlessly [frame my assaults as a consensual relationship](#).... This is institutional betrayal and organizational protectionism.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In 2023, Psymposia released a “A Resource for Journalists Covering Sexual Assault in Psychedelic Therapy” in response to media reports that failed to acknowledge that therapist-patient sexual contact is [inherently harmful and nonconsensual](#).

Speaking with [Business Insider](#), former MAPS staffers claimed that during company meetings, Doblin expressed that MAPS owed Buisson no remorse: “Doblin continued to suggest MAPS had nothing to apologize for, some former staffers said. One former staffer



recalled Doblin accusing Buisson of being ‘ungrateful’ for everything the company had done for her.”

After years of trivializing concerns about MAPS’s therapy model, Doblin took the stage at Psychedelic Science 2023 to promote it as a groundbreaking advance in mental health care. While Doblin and his PSFC financiers congregated at Psychedelic Science 2023, the OceanGate disaster dominated media headlines — a grim reminder of what happens when ambition flouts safety standards in the rush for innovation.

Instead of taking concerns from critics and whistleblowers into account when designing its “Titan” submersible, OceanGate CEO Stockton Rush — described as [“reckless and hubristic”](#) — ignored fundamental engineering principles and portrayed “basic safety rules” as barriers to innovation. Rush had been warned since 2018 that the submersible’s carbon fiber hull would not [hold up after multiple dives](#). This fatal flaw in the submersible’s structure had been its selling point:

“The carbon fiber and titanium – [there's a rule you don't do that](#),” Rush said, speaking to vlogger Alan Estrada. “Well, I did. It's picking the rules that you break that are the ones that will add value to others and add value to society, and that really to me is about innovation.”

Describing the submersible’s successful missions to the Titanic, Rush insisted that carbon fiber is “one of the best materials to make a sub out of. [You just have to do it the right way](#).” Despite those completed dives, his reliance on a flawed carbon fiber design ultimately led to the submersible’s catastrophic failure.

Although Rush represented those successful missions as proof of concept, they were actually empty chambers in a game of Russian roulette. The submersible’s implosion, which resulted in the deaths of Rush and his four passengers, was not an isolated tragedy caused by unforeseeable circumstances. The outcome of the submersible’s final voyage was the inevitable consequence of faulty design.



Similarly, MAPS's Phase 2 abuse emerged from a fundamentally flawed design, driven by an organization that failed to recognize the inherent risks of its approach. This disregard for safety and ethical standards was embedded in the company's culture, where [self-assured hubris](#) led to the dismissal of fundamental therapeutic boundaries.

MAPS therapists have long acknowledged this culture of permissiveness and blurred boundaries in their public statements. [Speaking at the Psychedelic Psychotherapy Forum](#) in 2016, MAPS therapist Hayden Rubensohn said that he and his co-therapist, Ingrid Pacey, “would often joke when...reflecting on our sessions...[about] what our teachers would say [if they knew what we were doing in that room](#). I mean, between the bodywork and the holding [of] patients and the things we were talking about. What we were doing was pretty radical.”

Immediately after these comments, Doblin acknowledged that a planned research study between MAPS and the Palo Alto VA had been cancelled due to concerns from multiple VA researchers, who described MAPS's use of touch during MDMA-AT as [potentially “abusive.”](#)

Ignoring the concerns of these VA researchers, Doblin soldiered on with his own preconceived beliefs about the safety of MDMA-AT. As he told the crowd at [SXSW in 2024](#), “I believe MDMA works. I've taken it. [There is] no more that needs to be said.”



Collage of MAPS founder Rick Doblin and OceanGate founder Stockton Rush | Photo credit: Tony Leuong and Don Wilding, respectively.

Doblin’s anecdotal justification parallels that of OceanGate’s team. In a 2021 [press release](#) marking the submersible’s first Titanic dive, PH Nargeolet — who would die alongside Rush two years later — displayed a similar sentiment: “The OceanGate, Inc. submersible, Titan, is a superb demonstration that innovation and safety can go hand-in-hand.... I have completed two deep dives in the Titan submersible.... I have tremendous confidence in this submersible[.]”

This embrace of innovation at any cost is central to the ethos of Silicon Valley. Taken to its extreme, this orientation has given rise to a philosophy of [technological “accelerationism”](#) — the belief that speeding up technological advancements will lead to necessary societal transformation.

Many of the psychedelic industry leaders discussed in this report adhere to a philosophy of [psychedelic accelerationism](#). Through the rapid implementation of psychedelic-assisted therapy, groups like MAPS and PSFC intend to transform society by ushering in their vision of “[mass mental health](#).” (In addition to PSFC’s vision of training 100,000 therapists to treat



a million patients a year, Graham Boyd has stressed this political urgency to PSFC members, telling them “we are living in a window of political opportunity that may be vanishingly small.” (📁 [Document #20](#))

The safety risks posed by psychedelic accelerationism become more apparent when viewed alongside Silicon Valley’s [effective accelerationism](#) movement (e/acc), which similarly calls for speeding up the evolution of consciousness to avert catastrophe. E/accs assert that dismantling barriers to technological advancement will hasten the development of more advanced and [durable forms of consciousness](#), which will render the existential problems facing humanity obsolete:

“Proponents of rapid AGI [Artificial General Intelligence] development...contend that AGI, with its potential to solve some of humanity’s most pressing problems—including disease, poverty, and environmental degradation—is too important to delay. They view AGI as a revolutionary tool that could enhance human capabilities and [drive unprecedented progress](#).”

In parallel, psychedelic accelerationists argue that humanity’s crises stem from limitations in consciousness — in this case, from a mental health emergency (which is often understood as a [spiritual deficiency](#)). The only viable solution, they contend, is a broad societal embrace of psychedelic therapy. As Bronner told Jeremy Lindenfeld, “Psychedelics are [upstream from every other issue](#). It’s how you get people to really heal on a deep level, connect to nature, to their authentic self, to each other and to start grappling with the huge environmental and social crises we’re confronting.” (A recent [meta-analysis preprint](#) showed that psychedelic-assisted therapy is “[no more effective than open-label SSRIs](#),” which highlights the hollowness of these claims to innovation.)

Genevieve Jurvetson expressed a similar sentiment in a 2023 email soliciting donations for the Roland Griffiths Professorship Fund: “Here’s a taste of why carrying Roland’s work forward matters...for humanity...in Roland’s words.” The accompanying quotation from



Griffiths included these words, in bold: “**I truly believe this line of research may be critical to the survival of our species.**”

T. Cody Swift — a PSFC member and [an heir of the UPS fortune](#) — advanced a similar argument in a 2016 *MAPS Bulletin* essay on the subject of psychedelic philanthropy. Swift proposed that “[psychedelics may help to address the source](#) of almost every other philanthropic effort—from environmental devastation to the volatility in our economic system.... [T]hese global problems may in fact be symptoms of much more subtle cultural and economic patterns than are usually acknowledged.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** [Swift’s RiverStyx Foundation](#) has been [a major funder of PSFC and its ecosystem](#) of adjacent organizations, including New Approach, Healing Advocacy Fund, Heroic Hearts, and Healing Breakthrough. It has also funded MAPS, Chacruna, Heffter Research Institute, and Johns Hopkins, among many other research and advocacy organizations. In 2023, RiverStyx pledged \$250,000 to the Roland Griffiths Professorship at Johns Hopkins.

Doblin has also embraced this vision of psychedelics as a catalyst for global transformation. In a [2019 TED Talk](#), he declared: “Humanity now is in a race between catastrophe and consciousness, the psychedelic renaissance is here to help consciousness triumph.”

This existential rationale justifies the rapid scaling of psychedelic therapy, which aligns with the driving ethos of e/acc: “Adherents state that e/acc is an [absolute moral imperative](#) that we as a society could and should adopt and, in doing so, save us from untimely oblivion. They argue that the guardrails around technological development are slowing us down just when we, the human race, desperately need to speed up.”

Psychedelic accelerationists similarly view regulatory bodies — like the FDA — not as safeguards for public health, but as obstacles to progress. Like e/acc adherents, who deride regulators and critics as [“decelers” or “doomers.”](#) psychedelic accelerationists label anyone raising safety concerns as [“anti-psychedelic activists”](#) or [prohibitionists](#). ➡



➔ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Describing the reaction to the FDA decision by people who had worked on the clinical trials, Phase 3 therapist Bessel van der Kolk stated: “Our minds are blown, because our science was so careful.... I was astounded [by the FDA meeting], it sounded like Nixon types.... It's really just amazing what's happened. Something to do with drug companies, and pharma, and money, and maybe also the [terror that people might feel pleasure.](#)”

As a consequence of this attitude, the FDA's justified rejection of Lykos' MDMA-assisted therapy application was interpreted as [a deficit of “vision.”](#) In a 2025 MAPS *Bulletin* essay on “Lessons from MDMA-Assisted Therapy's Trial by Regulation,” MAPS Phase 3 therapists Sara Gael and Joseph McCowan (also a [Lykos board member](#)) described the FDA decision as a failure to surrender to innovation:

“The FDA's rejection was not a failure of the therapy. It was a signal of the system's unreadiness — a system still clinging to a paradigm that sees healing as something done to a person, rather than awakened within them. They look at the butterfly and ask it to [fly like the caterpillar](#). But this is not how revolutions move. They do not wait for comfort. They do not ask for assimilation. They arrive when the world is aching for a new way forward. And we are aching.... The therapist holds the lantern while the psyche finds its way. And from that cocoon, something new is born. And yet — despite all of this — the FDA turned it away. Not because the therapy failed, but because they did not know how to receive it.”

By casting safeguards as obstruction and positioning themselves as visionary pioneers, these proponents have fostered a culture that rationalizes unethical practices and standards that would be recognized as unmistakable violations in any mature and regulated industry.

It is no accident that Gael and McGowan describe the FDA decision using the same language that commonly rationalizes abuse by psychedelic therapists. The justifications of



abusers follow a recurring script, along these lines: ‘You’re the one with a problem. You are attached to outdated assumptions. It’s not that touching you was wrong; it’s that you don’t know how to receive my touch because of your restrictions and limitations.’

This rhetorical overlap stems from a shared belief among psychedelic accelerationists that the rational mind — the so-called “ego” — is another set of obsolete regulations stifling innovation. As a result, psychedelic therapists often frame their patients’ resistance as [“the manipulative and self-sustaining forces of the ego.”](#) which must be subdued.

In [Hall’s disclosure of abuse by Aharon Grossbard](#) — the self-described [“Virus of Silicon Valley”](#) — he wrote, “After Grossbard encouraged me to use psychedelics in therapy sessions, my critical thinking was set aside in favor of ‘surrender’ and ‘letting go.’ Grossbard told me to ignore my increasing fears about his conduct so I could ‘break through’ my ego and rational mind.”

For Buisson, this type of instruction led to compounded abuse, [as she described to ICER](#):

“On Cortes, every outside connection shattered. My therapists dictated who I could talk to, spend time with, and what I could say. They controlled my income and medical care. I was repeatedly threatened, drugged, exploited, and assaulted. At least a dozen psychedelic therapists, including three conducting Phase 3 trials, visited Cortes during that time and witnessed my harm. But when it came to stopping it, I was on my own. It took a year and multiple attempts amid escalating abuse until I finally managed to escape. [...]

“There is no question [of] whether [what] happened to me will happen again to someone else. It’s only a matter of time. This doesn’t negate the lived experience[s] of those who say they’ve benefited from this study. It means they dodged a bullet. Even as this organization [MAPS] promotes itself as a global healer for trauma, its response to patients harmed in their own trials highlights a relentless disregard for minimal standards of care[.] [...]



“The irony about Lykos’ therapists[] talk of the “inner healer” is that they refuse to listen.... The truth is, for 18 months, my inner healer fought back. My inner healer screamed “No.” My inner healer insisted “You are not pretending to hurt me, you are hurting me. You are not pretending to assault me, you are assaulting me. You are not pretending to rape me, you are raping me”. I am alive today, and doing as well as I am today, because I listened. The best thing my inner healer said to me was “Get away from this cult.””



Chapter 10: “Avalanche”

In human subjects research, multiple layers of safeguards are supposed to ensure that if a study harms participants and researchers fail to respond, someone else will listen. The breakdown of these safeguards suggests that the emerging industry lacked the necessary protections to ensure participant safety in psychedelic research.

The abuse during Phase 2 can be understood through the [Swiss cheese model of systemic failure](#): multiple layers of purported safeguards failed to adequately respond to Buisson’s warnings, to the extent that an unethical MDMA-AT protocol came perilously close to FDA approval. MAPS was the first point of failure, as it designed a pseudoscientific therapy that rejected standard ethical boundaries. Next, the institutional review board (IRB) — which is supposed to oversee the conduct of research to ensure it adheres to established ethical standards and complies with relevant regulations — failed to identify significant flaws in the protocol and subsequently failed to respond adequately when the foreseeable abuse occurred. Finally, the FDA — which relies on IRB oversight to identify risks in clinical trials — did not communicate with Buisson or fully investigate her claims.

By the time Psymposia raised public attention to this issue, all formal layers of accountability had already failed. Rather than recognizing this public testimony as a final attempt to inform the public and the agency in the interest of public health, supporters of MAPS and Lykos attempted to scapegoat Psymposia for exposing the problem. This misplaced blame overlooked the breakdown of the multi-layered system of protections that was meant to safeguard participants.

Buisson [first reported the abuse](#) to the private IRB overseeing her trial (IRB Services, [now Advarra](#)) in 2018 — more than six years before the FDA decision on Lykos’ New Drug Application. In her message, which Psymposia has reviewed, Buisson highlighted the urgency of informing federal regulators that the abuse directly resulted from MAPS’s



clinical trial design. Now an academic researcher studying the social dimensions of health, Buisson was the first person to identify MDMA-AT as the enabling factor. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In October 2025, the New York Times reported that the same IRB that handled Buisson's clinical trials — Advarra — [pressured employees to "process consent forms faster"](#) and offered bonuses for hitting high numbers. In one study protocol approved by the IRB, volunteers were prohibited from seeing the results of a genetic test showing whether they were predisposed to brain injury from the treatment. "Two high-risk volunteers died and more than 100 others suffered brain bleeding or swelling," the New York Times reported.

In 2021, [Buisson submitted a personal impact statement to the FDA](#), which called for an investigation into MDMA-AT to protect the safety of future patients:

"Abusive practices were normalized within the clinical framework, as therapeutic and necessary. As video evidence reflects, this included my being blindfolded, gagged, pinned and violated even as I screamed and fought; begging my therapists to stop. Over time, my 'treatment' in the MDMA clinical trial included sexual assaults couched as 'exposure therapy.' My efforts to maintain agency were dismissed as resistance to treatment, pathologized and overcome."

The FDA never responded to Buisson.

For its part, MAPS never acknowledged that the on-camera assault was facilitated by MDMA-AT's emphasis on Grofian "focused bodywork," which empowers therapists to physically reenact traumatic experiences with their patients as the patients verbally and physically resist.

Stanislav Grof — whose work established the foundation of MAPS's therapy protocol — [recommended that therapists rely on a 'safe word'](#) to determine when to stop physically struggling with their patients. In the context of a pharmaceutical drug known to impair



both verbal recall and the capacity to consent, this is a safeguard in name only — like sensors for detecting cracks in a carbon fiber hull, thousands of feet below the ocean's surface. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** A [commentary on OceanGate's patents](#) by the patent services firm Markman Advisors offers a revealing parallel to the superficial safeguards in MAPS's therapy protocols:

"[W]here is the evidence that the patented acoustic detection system would provide sufficient advanced notice for the submersible to escape any impending implosion? The patent...is basically a document that lays out fairly plainly what Stockton Rush may have been thinking, namely, if we have this acoustic detection system, that's enough to keep us safe. It was just an idea, not a proven concept, and definitely not one proven to the measurable degrees where the danger of 4,000 meters of underwater pressure is sure to intervene.

"Patents do not always tell the whole...story. But they can often tell a different side of the story than the one companies tell publicly. And they can be the starting point for questions and further avenues of diligence. And, as OceanGate's patents show, they can sometimes be just as revealing for what they don't show, don't disclose, don't test."

As Grof has described the practice of focused bodywork, "[\[T\]he client has the option to interrupt](#) all the external intervention by a specific agreed-upon signal [e.g., a 'safe word'].... Any other reactions of the subject are then ignored and are considered part of the experience. Such statements as 'You are killing me,' 'It hurts,' 'Don't do this to me'...are taken as reactions to the symbolic protagonists[.]" Grof emphasizes that therapists should use their judgment to assess "what constitutes a reasonable amount of pressure or pain" as they physically restrain their patients. This practice was [incorporated into the MAPS protocol itself](#).



In 2015 — the same year that Buisson was abused during MAPS’s clinical trial — Doblin published a paper titled [“Stan Grof Contributions to FDA Drug Development Research With Psychedelics.”](#) The last line of the paper’s abstract emphasizes Grof’s centrality to MAPS’s project: “It’s likely that without Stan Grof’s contributions, there would be no MAPS, and I’m so proud to be able to say that I’m a friend of Stan and that he is my professional and spiritual father.”

In that paper, Doblin acknowledges that “the essence of the [MDMA] treatment approach” is a Grofian “death-rebirth” process, and he argued that MAPS clinicians’ “fundamental trust” in this process stemmed from their personal experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness. Doblin concludes the paper by underscoring how the trials were designed with the mission to spiritualize humanity: “[O]nce [MDMA is] a medicine...we’ll move forward with the training of therapist[s]. [...] Then we’ll have world peace, but it might take a little bit of time between those. All of this really comes back to Stan Grof.... And we are coming forward to fulfill the promise[.]” ➡

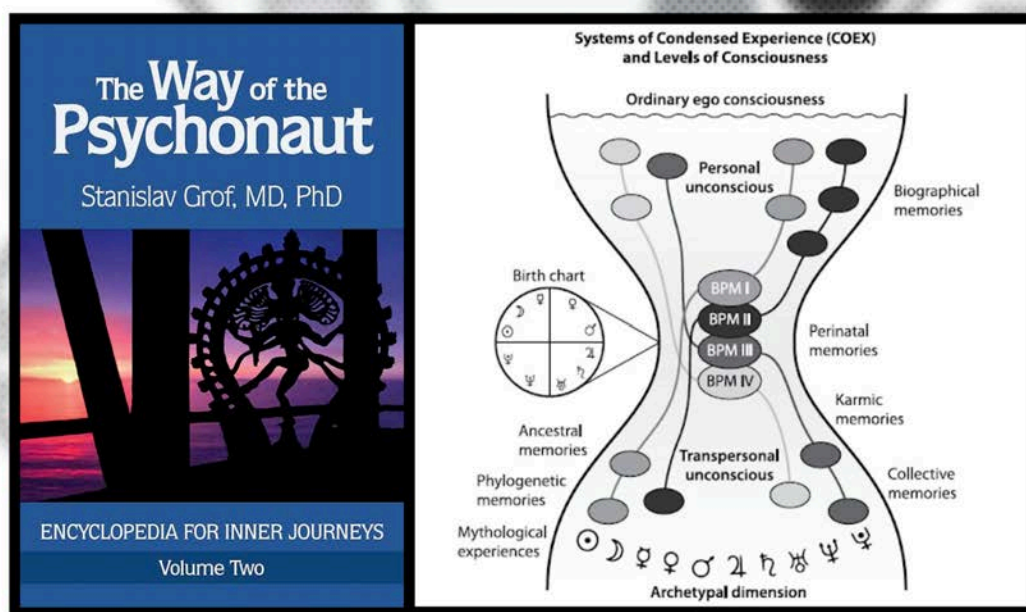
➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Michael Pollan was aware of Grof’s influence on the psychedelic ecosystem, as he conveyed in *How to Change Your Mind*, “Many if not most of the therapists and guides now doing this work underground [learned their craft at the feet of Stan Grof](#) in the Big House at Esalen.” The Esalen Institute is a coastal retreat center with natural hot springs in Big Sur, California that is credited with incubating the New Age movement.

In a 2019 email from Joe Green sharing a PSFC-member fundraiser for living expenses to support Grof, Green described Grof as a “psychedelic legend,” writing: “The psychedelic research field is deeply indebted to him and the foundation he helped to lay for today’s research breakthroughs on psychedelic medicine. His latest book, *The Way of the Psychonaut* is essential reading.”

Published by MAPS, *The Way of the Psychonaut, Volume 2: Encyclopedia for Inner Journeys*, includes a diagram described as a “synthesis” of Grof’s theories on memory



and consciousness. Metaphysical in nature, it shows the influence of astrology and a layered arrangement of various “memory constellations” which extend to prenatal stages and beyond to past life material.



A “synthesis” of Stanislav Grof’s theories. | Source: *The Way of the Psychonaut, Volume 2: Encyclopedia for Inner Journeys* (2019), Publisher: Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies

Among the Grof-trained therapists that MAPS hired for its clinical trials, Richard Yensen and Donna Dryer were appointed as co-therapists for its Vancouver site — the first Health Canada-approved clinical psychedelic research [in over 40 years](#).

Yensen [began his career](#) in psychedelics in 1972 at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center as a research fellow working under then [Chief of Psychiatric Research Stan Grof](#). A MAPS *Bulletin* article from 1992 refers to Yensen as “[the psychedelic Boddhisatva](#) [sic],” and a MAPS tribute banquet for Grof described Yensen as “[a pioneering psychedelic researcher](#).”



Yensen's professional relationship with Doblin preceded MAPS: In 1984, Yensen was [appointed a member of the Board of Advisors](#) to Doblin's Earth Metabolic Design Laboratories, Inc. — an organization formed to oppose the scheduling of MDMA by the DEA. (Earth Metabolic Design Laboratories disbanded in 1986, the same year Doblin founded MAPS.) After meeting psychiatrist Dryer in 1985, the pair formed the [nonprofit Orenda Institute](#) to conduct LSD psychotherapy trials. By 1997, MAPS had [donated a total of \\$6,000](#) to support these trials. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** From 1993 until 2000, MAPS supported Yensen and Dryer's research and protocol development for LSD-assisted psychotherapy at the Orenda Institute. [Yensen reported in a 1997 research update](#) for MAPS bulletin that the Orenda Institute had secured enough LSD to provide 60 patients with five LSD sessions each. Later that year, the FDA placed the LSD study on clinical hold, which effectively ended the project. However, in 1998 MAPS [gave Orenda \\$10,000](#) to fund an “[invitational conference](#) focused on the use of altered states of consciousness in religious and therapeutic contexts.”

In their writings, Yensen and Dryer describe Grof's theories with high esteem, claiming that his work reveals a connection between the human mind and the structure of the universe:

“Grof offers a rich map of the territory of the inner psychedelic journey. ...This is the farthest reaching and most meticulously detailed map of consciousness produced in western scientific research into the human psyche. It links the innermost depths of the psyche with the [essential fabric of the universe](#)[.]”

Based on Grof's framework, the couple described how psychedelics can extend the patient's “ego boundaries [beyond the existing framework of consensus reality](#)” to produce experiences of pre-cognition and telepathy, among other paranormal experiences.

Since at least 1992, Yensen practiced the [use of “bodywork”](#) to “[amplify the inner feeling state of the patient](#),” which includes amplifying the patient's experiences of agony. (In a



paper discussing Grof's theories, Yensen writes that “increasingly intense encounters with death and dying, agony, aging and [physical pain](#)” must be fully experienced to reach an “expansive release.”)

Together, these Grofian beliefs — that a therapist may telepathically interpret what a patient needs or feels, and amplify a patient's experience through physical touch — allowed Yensen and Dryer to justify their abuse of Buisson in MAPS's Phase 2 trial. Buisson's experience was the inevitable outcome of this Grofian framework, which was central to MAPS's project and a cornerstone of its therapy protocol.

The MAPS therapy model euphemistically frames telepathy as [attunement to the “relational field.”](#) but descriptions of this concept clearly rely on telepathic assumptions. The Grofian transpersonal framework posits that therapists can access a level of reality where therapist and patient are connected, [transcending the normal “ego” distinctions of separation between individuals.](#)

In practice, the MAPS therapy model positions the therapist's body as a kind of telepathic resonator, capable of detecting and mirroring the participant's internal psychological states through somatic attunement. In their written submission to the FDA, Devenot argued that this model was elaborated in external materials outside of MAPS's official protocols, including the book *Integral Psychedelic Therapy* (2023) which was endorsed by MAPS leadership and featured contributions from MAPS therapists and trainers. After the FDA advisory committee meeting, MAPS/Lykos trial therapists attempted to clarify their therapeutic framework in an [article published to Frontiers](#), which described the same principles euphemistically.

According to the *Frontiers* article, therapists are trained to use their own physical and emotional responses as diagnostic instruments, believing that “[the therapist's conscious awareness of their own internal and behavioral responses](#) may help to clarify their understanding of the participant[.]” As a consequence, therapists trained in this framework believe they can feel what patients are internally experiencing.



Within this framework, a therapist “[first deepens her breath](#) and aligns her subtle behavioral responses with the client’s non-verbal cues, letting her heart open to fully experience the emotional resonance surfacing in the relational field.” The therapist’s body becomes a mystical antenna, supposedly capable of receiving and interpreting the participant’s unconscious material through energetic transmission. This pseudoscientific approach treats the therapist’s subjective bodily sensations and emotional reactions as reliable sources of information about the patient’s inner world, creating a therapeutic model where presumed psychic intuition substitutes for clinical assessment.

This telepathic framework becomes particularly dangerous when therapists use their supposed psychic insights to engage in traumatic reenactments with vulnerable patients (e.g., psychodrama). The model explicitly instructs therapists to “[participate as a proxy for a source of the patient’s previously unprocessed trauma](#),” meaning therapists are encouraged to roleplay as abusers, perpetrators, or other traumatic figures based on their intuitive reading of the patient’s unconscious needs.

In an altered and highly suggestible state, the patient may be unable to effectively resist or communicate boundaries while a therapist claims to be acting on mystical insight about their healing needs. This combination of telepathic authority and traumatic roleplay creates a dangerous power dynamic that reframes therapeutic abuse as healing intervention.

When therapists believe they can telepathically sense emerging traumatic material, they may physically restrain, confront, or emotionally provoke patients under the rationale of therapeutic emotional processing. This creates a scenario where a therapist’s subjective hunches about a patient’s trauma history — filtered through their own psychological projections and biases — become justification for potentially retraumatizing interventions. If a patient is subsequently upset about the experience, the model trains therapists to view this as “[vulnerability hangover](#)” — a concept that systematically reframes patient distress as a reflection of therapeutic progress rather than potential harm.



Within the therapy model, therapists are instructed to maintain “[equanimity](#)” when patients express “[disappointment, disbelief, or despair](#)” about their treatment, viewing these reactions not as legitimate concerns but as predictable psychological responses to healing. The framework suggests that patients who later question “[whether the feelings of intimacy were mutual](#)” or feel that “[something inappropriate](#)” occurred are simply experiencing a defensive response to their authentic emotional expression rather than a sign of actual therapeutic boundary violations.

This interpretive lens provides therapists with a ready-made explanation for patient complaints that deflects responsibility away from their interventions and onto the patient's psychological resistance to healing. By pathologizing post-session distress as “vulnerability hangover,” the model creates a closed interpretive system that dismisses negative patient feedback as an expected side effect of successful therapy. This framework creates obstacles for patients trying to raise legitimate concerns about harmful treatment, as grievances are reinterpreted as byproducts of the therapeutic process.

Since this pseudoscientific and unfalsifiable therapy already enabled the on-camera assault during MAPS/Lykos’ Phase 2 clinical trial, [these methods cannot be ethically deployed in clinical settings](#).

Despite the dangers of this therapy, one MAPS Phase 3 therapist and supervisor who has trained other MAPS therapists — Veronika Gold — continues to advocate for focused bodywork in psychedelic-assisted therapy. In an interview published on November 12, 2023, she noted that her private practice — Polaris Insight — had trained over 2,600 therapists in this intervention. (The front page of Polaris’ website states that “The Polaris Insight Center in San Francisco...was [founded by clinicians from the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies](#) [MAPS].)

In a since-deleted interview with Dr. Sandy Newes, published on March 27, 2025, Gold emphasized that therapists can help patients process the “energy of a fight” by enacting the role of a perpetrator while the patient is in an altered state. (In a later WIRED article by



John Semley, Gold describes this practice as “reparative fantasy” through “role-play,” with Gold using touch “[in character as the patient’s abusive father.](#)”) ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In this WIRED story, Semley describes Gold’s position, stating that “[Devenot is] misrepresenting what actually happened,” claiming that Devenot’s statement to the FDA was drawn solely from a book chapter by Gold describing ketamine therapy with a patient. These false claims overlook the fact that [Gold herself has acknowledged using this approach during the MDMA clinical trials](#), and that Devenot’s FDA testimony [included an account from a Phase 3 clinical trial participant under Gold’s care](#).

During the article’s production process, a WIRED fact-checker characterized a false claim from Semley’s draft: “There’s a different situation that you brought up, in which a person was pinned down. And he [Semley] notes that that incident was taken from a ketamine-assisted role-playing therapy, and it had nothing to do with MAPS, Lykos, or MDMA.” (The false claim that this “role-play therapy” was unrelated to MAPS’s clinical trials did not appear in the final publication.) This pattern of misrepresentation appeared across multiple major outlets. A *New York Times* story by Andrew Jacobs and Rachel Nuwer dismissed Devenot’s testimony, reporting: “[Ms. Gold said the incident did not happen](#), a claim backed up by Lykos, which said it reviewed videos of her therapy sessions.” (This article is explored further in chapter 11).

The narrative questioning Devenot’s credibility was promoted by [ex-VICE reporter Hamilton Morris](#), who has repeatedly accused Devenot of lying to the FDA (In 2021, *Psymposia* reported that Morris had ended his long-running show — *Hamilton’s Pharmacopeia* — to [work for Peter Thiel-funded pharmaceutical company](#) Compass Pathways.) In a conversation with psychedelic comedian Adam Strauss, on an episode titled “[The Conspiracy to Derail Psychedelic Therapy](#),” Morris called Devenot’s testimony “a federal crime” and “a criminal act,” claiming: “She’s [sic] reading from a script.... This was prepared in advance knowingly — a knowing



misrepresentation. And I refuse for a moment to believe otherwise. She [sic] knew exactly what she was doing, and no one noticed.” Elsewhere, Morris praised the journalists who have questioned Devenot’s account: “Really, like, [there’s two journalists — Rachel Nuwer and John Semley](#) — who’ve really worked very hard to do this, but the majority of journalists have just uncritically repeated the narrative as it has been presented to the public.”

Morris continues to spread accusations that Devenot lied to the FDA, even though two independent organizations — the [peer-reviewed American Journal of Bioethics](#) and [TEDx](#) — have vetted Devenot’s analysis of Gold’s statements.

View images of [Hamilton Morris with Genevieve Jurvetson](#); [Rachel Nuwer and John Semley on stage at MAPS Psychedelic Science 2025 conference](#) ; and [Rachel Nuwer on stage with Genevieve Jurvetson and Rick Doblin](#).

In the March interview, Neues thanks Gold for defending the practice in [Jacobs and Nuwer’s New York Times article](#), noting the broad adoption of focused bodywork across the psychedelic industry: “You know, like, what if there was a world in which that was somehow made like, not okay? Because I personally find it to be a huge part of the clinical work that I do[.]”

[View video excerpt from deleted Living Medicine interview with Veronika Gold.](#)

The bodywork methodology endorsed by Veronika Gold is widely promoted across the psychedelic training ecosystem. One prominent international training program developed by advocates of this methodology is [VITAL](#), a “comprehensive education course” for practitioners “[seeking to integrate psychedelic knowledge into their practice](#).” VITAL was



created by Joe Moore and Kyle Buller, certified Dreamshadow breathwork practitioners who host the Psychedelics Today podcast. (Dreamshadow's founders, Elizabeth and Leonard Gibson, were trained in Holotropic Breathwork — the practice developed by Stan Grof — and [Elizabeth was a contributor to MAPS training protocol](#)).

Psychedelics Today's 2024 "Psychedelics at Work" report highlights a [commitment to propagating underground methodologies](#): "At Psychedelics Today, we are committed to acknowledging the contributions of the underground.... Through necessary civil disobedience and the passing of ancestral knowledge, they have paved the way for a future where psychedelics can be more widely understood and embraced.... [W]e will ensure the underground remains a recognized and integral part of this field and conversation. We will not forget them."

In a 2023 Psychedelics Today podcast episode, Moore and Buller discuss a Grofian principle that was foundational to the MAPS therapy model — namely, that trauma is processed by intensifying distress. As Moore described:

"You know, this idea that you kind of need to...really [intensify the sensation](#), in — the phrase Stan [Grof] loves is, 'The full expression of an emotion is its funeral pyre.' So... we want to encourage people in this method to make it bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and therefore this thing has less and less energy, and therefore less influence over your subconscious process through having it dissipate, energetically."

In a 2018 podcast where Moore and Buller discuss the "components and mechanics of breathwork," they endorse the same reliance as Gold on a "safe word" to mediate touch during reenactments of trauma. As Buller stated:

"When we're engaging in bodywork like that, the only word that we respond to is 'no' — or [actually] 'stop,' sorry! [...] Some people could sit there and scream at us, and tell us to get off of them. We would typically kind of see that as psychic material



arising, especially if somebody might have had, like, an abuse background, and they're kind of reliving that... So, [the magic word is 'stop.'](#)"

Although Buller struggled to recall the appropriate safe word during a casual podcast conversation about the modality, he does not pause to consider the implications of relying on a safe word when patients are in altered states, and experiencing flashbacks on high doses of psychoactive drugs [known to impair verbal recall](#).

A 2024 interview with Buller on Psychedelic Support's YouTube channel emphasizes the consequences of training facilitators to believe they are telepathically attuning to the participant's inner experience. Buller recounts an incident revealing how wrong such intuitive interpretations can be. He describes how facilitators trained in the Grofian concept that the ["birth process really impacts our psychology"](#) have projected this assumption on participants to justify bodywork. Buller euphemistically describes bodywork as ["a supportive process to help somebody express their experience."](#) He acknowledges that bodywork can cause harm when a facilitator's confidence about the participant's inner experience is misplaced. He shares an account where this dynamic plays out:

"There is a facilitator that saw somebody curling up in the fetal position.... So one of the facilitators comes over and starts to coddle them, and tries to push them through the birth canal. And during the group share [afterwards], the person said, you know, 'I was a Viking warrior dying on the battlefield' [e.g., not a birthing baby]. So, you know... [sometimes we think we know what's going on with folks when they're deep in those experiences](#), but sometimes we have no idea, and I think that is an important perspective to hold."

In this example, the facilitator physically "coddle[d]" and "push[ed]" the participant based on a false assumption that the participant needed to fully express their birth trauma, under the permission structure of Grofian bodywork. ➡



➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Buller acknowledges that this example comes from Grof's *Holotropic Breathwork* book, where Grof describes an "incident" at Esalen. In Grof's account, a "postmenopausal woman" whose emotional drive to mother the participant interfered with her judgment about the participant's experience: "In the middle of the Holotropic Breathwork session, in which she was sitting for a young man, she suddenly pulled the upper part of her partner's body into her lap and started to rock and comfort him. [Her timing could not have been worse](#); as we found out later during the sharing, he was at the time in the middle of a past life experience that featured him as a powerful Viking warrior on a military expedition. He described with a great sense of humor how he initially tried to experience her rocking as the movements of the boat on the ocean; however, when she added comforting baby talk, that brought him back to reality."

Buller acknowledges that bodywork is "[where harm happens](#)," particularly when a facilitator wants to intervene physically "because [they] think [they] know what's going on with somebody." Rather than questioning whether their methods are inherently flawed, Buller attributes the problem to external factors like the facilitator's anxiety and lack of experience. His proposed solution involves better cultivating the capacity to attune (e.g., telepathy) through the facilitator's own inner work and advanced training.

As these examples illustrate, the actions of Yensen and Dryer during MAPS's Phase 2 clinical trial were not an aberration; they were in line with the Grofian therapy model that the MAPS protocol was designed to legitimize.

Despite MAPS's claims to the contrary, the therapists' behaviors captured on video followed the MAPS protocol, which incorporates Grof's framework sanctioning the use of touch to amplify distress as a therapeutic intervention. The periods of struggle and spooning documented in the videos represent standard elements of what the Grofian tradition terms "focused bodywork" and "nurturing touch." Because the MAPS therapy manual [explicitly sanctions these Grofian techniques](#), the protocol itself enabled the abuse of this trial participant.



The 2022 MAPS [Statement: Public Announcement of Ethical Violation by Former MAPS-Sponsored Investigators](#) acknowledged that Yensen and Dryer “substantially deviated from the MDMA-assisted Therapy Treatment Manual on several occasions,” yet it offered no specifics about the nature of those deviations. The [earlier 2019 statement](#) made no mention of any deviations. ➡

➡ **UPDATE 10/13/2025, 9:45 PM EDT:** According to Buisson, who is a contributor to this report, the narrative MAPS presented in the 2019 statement is not an accurate version of what transpired. This includes MAPS’s framing of the abuse as a “sexual relationship.” Due to frequent misreporting on this incident, Psymposia published “A Resource for Journalists Covering Sexual Assault in Psychedelic Therapy” in 2023.

The longest explanation of purported deviations is found in Doblin’s discussion with *Psychedelics Today*, where Doblin says [the therapists failed to sufficiently emphasize the Grofian concept of the “inner healing intelligence.”](#) According to the 2021 therapy adherence manual, however, “[t]herapists do not have to use the specific terminology of ‘inner healing intelligence,’ but they should be observed to introduce the concept of inner healing intelligence (the innate ability to heal and grow) and convey their trust in the participant’s process.” The participant has stated that [the therapists did introduce this concept.](#)

Doblin elaborates that in the Grofian approach, “[you don’t need to manufacture intentionally provocative things](#) to bring people to...address their trauma” because it will naturally “emerge in some order” from the participant’s own “[inner] healing intelligence.” (In this context, “in some order” refers to Grof’s claim that [traumatic scenes will emerge in the order that is most accessible for processing by consciousness.](#)) Doblin continues, “You don’t need to reenact it, although psychodrama is not an unknown approach in therapy[.]”

Despite this public denial of MAPS’s responsibility, these claims contradict Grof’s emphasis on reliving trauma with facilitators acting as perpetrators, which [MAPS’s safe word](#)



[protocol](#) was designed to facilitate: “This [safe word] convention will avoid confusion between communications that are meant to be directed to the therapists and statements that are expressions of the participant’s inner experience.”

Doblin claims the video shows “[elements of touch that we think were over a certain line](#),” but he provides no specifics about where this line is. Based on the public clips from this video, the therapists’ uses of touch were consistent with the literature on Grofian focused bodywork and nurturing touch. Doblin’s second criticism reveals another contradiction: he identifies “a lack of double checking consent,” yet the Grofian framework [empowers therapists to use intuition to evaluate whether verbal refusals of consent are legitimate](#).

After the clinical trial abuse came to light, MAPS should have responded [like the Coast Guard responded to the OceanGate disaster](#), conducting a thorough investigation and releasing a public report detailing the factors that contributed to the harm and the specific changes being implemented to prevent future incidents. A responsible response would have involved adding granularity and specificity about acceptable uses of touch in its therapy, establishing clear boundaries and protocols based on the lessons learned. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** On August 5, 2025, the Coast Guard released a 300-page [Report of Investigation \(ROI\)](#) regarding the Titan submersible. In addition to identifying OceanGate’s “toxic safety culture” as a contributing factor, the report highlighted governmental failures by regulators to properly investigate concerns and protect whistleblowers who faced retaliation for raising these concerns years prior to the disaster. This constellation of exacerbating factors are also relevant to the circumstances surrounding MAPS and Lykos.

Instead, MAPS took the opposite approach: they included minimal discussion of touch in their subsequent training and instructed therapists who lacked experience with Grofian and other somatic modalities to avoid looking into the touch-based interventions being used at other trial sites. As one interviewed MAPS clinician acknowledged, “[I felt](#)



[completely unprepared to be able to offer \[touch\]](#)” given the inadequate guidance in MAPS’s therapy training after the abuse came to light.

According to MAPS Phase 3 study therapist and Principal Investigator Casey Paleos, “We were taught [by MAPS that] [if you’re already certified in one of these somatic-oriented psychotherapies](#), or somatic therapies...for trauma that involve touch, and you have proficiency in doing that, and that’s part of your scope of practice, that’s okay.” When asked about acceptable uses of touch at other trial sites, Paleos responded with laughter:

“I don’t know, because I’m not a somatic therapist. But for those of us who weren’t trained as a somatic therapist, what we were taught is you shouldn’t be trying to learn a new skill around touch therapy to be a part of this clinical trial. That was — we were explicitly told not to do that, because this is not the right circumstance for you to be learning this from scratch.”

MAPS’s minimal response represented an abdication of responsibility rather than a genuine effort to address the underlying problems that had enabled the abuse to occur.

In the months before Buisson first contacted the IRB about the dangers of MAPS’s therapy model, she wrote a prescient passage about the implications of her experience in an unpublished essay, “Collateral Damage” (2017):

“There is little debate about what happened. There is much that remains to be answered. On the precipice of psychedelic legalization, is my experience an avalanche poised to unfurl over MAPS or a singular speck of inconvenience? My time in the clinical trial is done. My former therapists are no longer physically present. But his words, her apathy and MAPS’ silence echo loudly. “In the context of research,” Doblin explained in a conference, “it’s okay to have harms, if the benefits balance.” Sitting in the audience that day, I found the phrase offensive. Chilling, in fact, to hear the man spearheading an organization set to make incalculable profits



through the legalization of MDMA openly state the end justifies the means. And if clinical participants are harmed in the process? Oh well. It's collateral damage."

In the years since Buisson's experience, Doblin has continued to express a tolerance for "collateral damage." In a January 19, 2022 email shared with Psymposia, Doblin endorsed the same idea that Buisson had overheard at the earlier conference: "I'm not confident that there will be no unintended consequences, I just think any will be minimal compared to the good we will be doing. We are developing a metric to evaluate public benefit but it's still in the early stages." This [thought-terminating cliché](#) has functioned to prevent scrutiny of the dangers of MAPS's therapy. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** MAPS leadership has been involved in two wrongful death lawsuits. In 2022, [MAPS was ordered to pay \\$1 million](#) in damages to the family of Carla Gatlin after being found 25% [liable in her death](#) at a MAPS Zendo Project site during the Lightning in a Bottle festival. Gatlin's death from hyperthermia while allegedly wrapped in blankets represents a foreseeable risk of practices that interpret physical distress as part of a therapeutic "rebirthing" process. In 2024, Dr. Bronner's was sued in a wrongful death lawsuit by the family of deceased employee Denize Lozano, whom the complaint alleged died from "MDA / MDMA in a non-clinical setting" while seeking "treatment and relief as part of the company 'wellness' program." (David Bronner, CEO of Dr. Bronner's, is a MAPS board member.) According to the lawsuit, Lozano "was told on several occasions that the company's philosophy around injury is that ['physical pain is past emotional trauma leaving the body'](#) and the wellness program was intended to facilitate this transformation." In 2025, the [lawsuit was resolved](#) out of court.

Although Doblin believed that MAPS's therapy protocol [would lead to world peace](#) by providing insight into human psychology, his initiative was paradoxically derailed by its architects' failure to examine their own hubris. If MAPS had sincerely grappled with Buisson's experience and the practices which justified it, they could have adjusted their approach to be more ethical and scientific. Instead, their refusal to critically examine the



pseudoscientific foundations of their therapy ultimately contributed to the collapse of Lykos' FDA application. Once professional organizations outside the psychedelic milieu — like ICER and the FDA's advisory committee — began evaluating Lykos' trials, the design flaws were swiftly identified and subjected to rigorous scrutiny.

As this scrutiny from professional bodies mounted, the FDA officially denied Lykos' New Drug Application, triggering a rapid-fire series of hardships for Lykos. In a Reverse Uno that collapsed PSFC's house of cards, the FDA asked Lykos to complete an [additional Phase 3](#) MDMA-AT study — a feat that would require [millions of dollars](#) and multiple years to complete.

The avalanche gained momentum when, days later, the journal *Psychopharmacology* [retracted](#) three of Lykos' papers about MDMA-assisted therapy due to “protocol violations amounting to unethical conduct[.]” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** The [retraction notice](#) published in *Psychopharmacology* explained that multiple authors were aware of research protocol violations at the time the articles were submitted, but did not disclose this information to the journal or remove data generated by violating research sites.

Just [days after these retractions](#), Doblin [stepped down](#) from Lykos' board of directors, and the company announced sweeping layoffs — [cutting 75% of its workforce](#), or nearly 100 employees. On September 5, 2024, Lykos' longtime CEO Amy Emerson [stepped down](#) and was replaced by Moderna veteran Michael Mullette as interim CEO.



Chapter 11: “Make America Rave Again”

As the psychedelic narrative spiralled out of their control, PSFC’s insiders pitted their hopes on the incoming Trump administration as a [“deus ex machina”](#) solution to their problems.

Speaking alongside Steve Jurvetson at the [DLD conference](#) in January 2025, Genevieve Jurvetson expressed enthusiasm about the incoming Trump administration’s receptivity to psychedelic medicine: “I think the Trump administration will do more to advance psychedelic therapy and access and healing, and thereby [advance mental health](#), than any previous administration.” In light of this favorable political climate, she acknowledged her ambition to accelerate the approval of MDMA-AT, without the need for additional Phase 3 trials: “In the next year, my ‘moonshot’ is to [get MDMA across the finish line](#).”

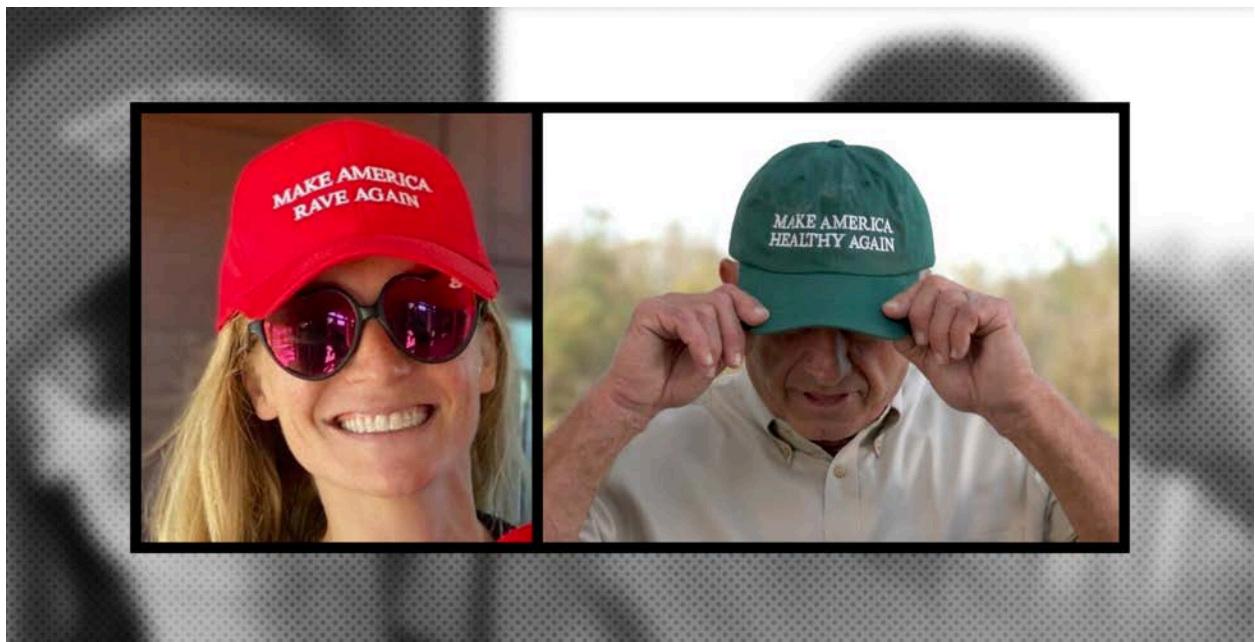


Photo collage of Genevieve Jurvetson wearing a “Make America Rave Again” hat and RFK Jr. wearing a Make America Healthy Again hat. Many advocates of the psychedelic pharmaceutical industry hope that the Trump administration will fasttrack psychedelic approval.



The Jurvetsons had other reasons to be optimistic about Lykos' ability to bounce back. Antonio Gracias — Steve Jurvetson's fellow SpaceX board member and a PSFC network donor — had thrown the pharmaceutical company a lifeline.

The week prior, *Financial Times* had reported that Elon Musk ally and early Tesla investor Gracias was attempting to “seize control” of Lykos, with Doblin's endorsement. Gracias' proposal would [grant him controlling stake](#) in the company in exchange for a large cash infusion. On May 30, Lykos [confirmed Gracias' involvement](#), announcing that a Series B funding round co-led by Gracias' Family Foundation and European billionaire Chris Hohn's [CH Foundation](#) raised \$50 million to recapitalize the company. (According to reporting by Jules Evans, Doblin [persuaded Gracias to invest](#) in Lykos during Burning Man 2024.)

One “moonshot” strategy came into focus the next month, when *The New York Times* published a work of [fictitious propaganda](#) framed in [inflammatory culture war rhetoric](#) that is popular with [Trump's MAGA base](#). The article, titled “How a Leftist Activist Group Helped Torpedo a Psychedelic Therapy,” pinned blame on Psymposia for the FDA's rejection of Lykos' application, providing a convenient narrative for discrediting the agency's decision. Its authors — Andrew Jacobs and Rachel Nuwer — ignored multiple factors that contributed to Lykos' failure, leading journalist Katie MacBride to write in *Slate* that the article “was largely divorced from the events as I witnessed them, misleading in crucial ways, and [journalistically bewildering](#).” (Psymposia responded to article's false claims in “[Correcting the Record](#): Addressing The New York Times' Deceptive Coverage of Psymposia.”) ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Two weeks after the *New York Times* publication, Andrew Jacobs spoke with KJZZ radio in Phoenix for a spot titled “How an FDA authorization hearing on MDMA [led this New York Times reporter to shadowy \[sic\] organization](#).” In his account, Jacobs further inflated Psymposia's presence at the FDA's advisory committee meeting: “[Y]ou had seven or eight separate experts who were all singing the same tune. And I think that helped create this atmosphere of doubt [about Lykos' application].” As Devenot responded on their Substack, “The reality of the matter — which is damning for MAPS/Lykos — is that the critical presentations during the



meeting's open comment period were not coordinated. The fact that these critical presentations were so complementary [reveals how credible these concerns actually were.](#)"

The conditions for scapegoating Psymposia were created by Lykos' decision not to release the FDA's Complete Response Letter explaining the application's rejection. Exploiting this information vacuum, multiple people who read the letter selectively reported on its contents to the *New York Times*. In particular, these anonymous sources described concerns about treatment durability, positive bias due to participants' prior MDMA experiences, and missing data on euphoria and other "positive adverse events" that could motivate drug-seeking behavior. Rather than interrogating these flaws, the article shifts blame to anti-drug stigma supposedly fueled by Psymposia, which it describes as "[a small band of anticapitalist activists](#) [that] helped sink the first psychedelic compound to come before the F.D.A."

Right-wing commentators picked up on the culture war dog whistles. Speaking on [Timcast](#) channel "[Spaces with Josie](#)" in a clip dated February 11, 2025, radio show host Scott Horton referenced Jacobs and Nuwer's *New York Times* article to claim that "some stupid...avowed communist group" obstructed soldiers' access to life-saving MDMA therapy to enforce an anti-profit ideology: "They successfully lobbied the central state to decide this for 350 million Americans, whether we're allowed to treat each other with MDMA or not. It's completely insane! Like we're all the children and they're the grown-ups, except that they're not! They're scum! They [Psymposia] barely deserve to live at all!" Horton's co-panelists proceeded to laugh at this implicitly threatening language. (Timcast CEO Tim Pool joined the Trump administration's [White House press pool](#) the following month, in March 2025.)



Josie Glabach and Clint Russell react to Scott Horton calling Psymposia “scum” who “barely deserve to live at all.”

In a context of [rising political violence](#), the framing of the *New York Times* article — using inflammatory culture war rhetoric to blame Psymposia for ‘torpedoing’ Lykos’ application and implicitly leading to the deaths of veterans — was like generating sparks next to a tank of gasoline.

Nuwer’s orientation towards MAPS and against Psymposia was evident in the lead-up to this article’s release. In August 2024, while reporting for the *New York Times* article, Nuwer participated in a panel discussion at Burning Man alongside Doblin and Genevieve Jurvetson. A [video compilation of the event](#) was later uploaded to YouTube by Genevieve Jurvetson’s husband, SpaceX board member Steve Jurvetson.

In December 2024, Nuwer appeared on *Open to Debate* — a national media program distributed by NPR — for an episode titled “Psychedelics for Mental Health: Help or Hype?” When Nuwer was invited to pose a question to the featured debaters, Nuwer instead read from a prepared statement that promoted a conspiracy theory about Psymposia:



"I think what people aren't realizing is that this has actually been an agenda pushed by members of a specific radical leftist group that has had the long-term goal of destroying MAPS and Lykos, that's been [driven by personal grudges and also an anti-capitalism, anti-commodification of psychedelics agenda](#). These allegations have just been uncritically accepted because they've been tapping into stigma surrounding these drugs and created a sort of 'Satanic Panic'-type hysteria in the media."

On the day of publication, [Nuwer posted about the New York Times article](#) to LinkedIn, writing: "I've spent six long months reporting on a leftist psychedelics group whose activism played a role in derailing the MDMA application last summer. It's been a disturbing journey."

In light of [Jacobs and Nuwer's disinformation](#) about Psymposia in *The New York Times*, Nuwer's proximity to the Jurvetsons and PSFC is noteworthy. In 2022, Nuwer was one of the [inaugural recipients](#) of a [\\$10,000 grant](#) from the Ferriss-UC Berkeley Psychedelic Journalism Fellowship. For [Valentine's Day 2024](#), the Jurvetsons hosted a PSFC Book Club discussion centered around [Rachel Love Nuwer's](#) book, *I Feel Love*, which included virtual participation from both Nuwer and Berkeley's Gül Dolen. A post on Twitter/X and Flickr about the event showcases a photo of the Jurvetsons beaming next to Nuwer's book.



Steve and Genevieve Jureverson | Source: “I Feel Love book discussion with Gul Dolan »--♥-->”

Steve Jureverson, Flickr, [Creative Commons 2.0](#)

Around the time of Genevieve Jureverson’s public appearance alongside Nuwer at Burning Man, Psymposia received information that the Jureversons were pushing for an exposé on Psymposia in *The New York Times*. This knowledge informed Psymposia’s request to record [Devenot’s video interview with Jacobs and Nuwer](#) on November 4, 2024. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** During the interview, Devenot told Jacobs and Nuwer that Psymposia had been contacted by people who experienced harm and who lacked the means to recover: “And then, when I try to come forward and say, ‘I think there’s something here that we need to look at more carefully, and be sure that we’re doing this the right way’ — then I get attacked. Then I get death threats. And that’s — [it’s a signal that there’s something going on in this field that is not rooted in concern for the most marginalized patients](#) who are going to be seeking this [treatment].” Devenot’s motivations for their FDA testimony were not included in Jacobs and Nuwer’s article.



Several weeks prior to Genevieve Jurvetson's Burning Man event with Nuwer, Steve Jurvetson shared [Heroic Hearts' open letter](#) in a [since-deleted tweet](#) and falsely claimed that Psymposia is "a fringe group backed by big-pharma, who would want to torpedo a 71% cure." The title of the *New York Times* article mirrored this language: "How a Leftist Activist Group Helped Torpedo a Psychedelic Therapy."

Jacobs and Nuwer's distorted piece — which was published the same day that RFK Jr.'s nomination for Secretary of Health and Human Services [advanced past the Senate Finance committee](#) — included an appeal from psychedelic advocates to the new administration: "Some advocates hope that the Trump administration will take a friendlier approach [to psychedelics]. They note that [Elon Musk, a presidential adviser](#), and [Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the nominee for health secretary](#), are vocal supporters of psychedelic medicine." The timing of these appeals is consistent with a coordinated effort to influence public perception and federal policy.

These appeals overlooked serious concerns about the individuals cast as champions of psychedelic medicine in Trump's administration. Musk's recent [fascist posturing, far-right sympathies](#), and increasingly [erratic behavior](#) raise questions about the judgment behind such endorsements. According to reporting in the *Wall Street Journal*, figures close to Musk have attributed his increasing instability to his [frequent use of drugs](#), including LSD, MDMA, mushrooms, ketamine, and cocaine. On May 30, 2025, public discussion of Musk's drug use [intensified](#) after his awkward White House send-off, which coincided with a *New York Times* report alleging that he had sustained [bladder damage](#) from chronic ketamine use. One of the *Times*' journalists, Kirsten Grind, had previously identified three individuals in PSFC's donor network — Gracias, Kimbal Musk, and Steve Jurvetson — as [members of Musk's drug circle](#) in reporting for the *Wall Street Journal*. (Kimbal Musk also serves on the [board of directors of Burning Man](#).)

Prior to Musk's White House implosion, others in Musk's orbit publicly defended his increasingly unstable behavior. Following Musk's Nazi salutes, Gracias took to Twitter/X to defend him, stating: "I have worked closely with Elon for over 20 years. [His heart is pure](#),



and his sole mission is to help humanity. During the darkest moments, he has shown me the path to choose courage and compassion over fear and hate. To believe anything else is absurd.”

For over [two decades](#), Gracias has been one of Elon Musk’s closest lieutenants, and his “dynastic” wealth was built from investments in Musk’s companies. Described as “[the most hardcore of Musk’s loyalists](#),” Gracias approved an unprecedented CEO compensation package that was later [struck down in court](#) due to the board’s personal entanglements with Musk. Gracias also played a pivotal role in securing financing for Musk’s \$44 billion acquisition of Twitter. According to *Vanity Fair*, Gracias [demonstrated this loyalty](#) to Musk while pressuring Twitter to close the deal: “Are you saying no to Elon Musk?” In 2024, Gracias was described by Quartz as [one of the “biggest donor\[s\] on file”](#) to Musk’s pro-Trump super PAC, having donated \$1 million in funding.

[Musk tapped Gracias](#) to make deep cuts at the Social Security Administration (which Musk described to Joe Rogan as “[the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time](#)”) as a member of the “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE). In a *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece titled “[The DOGE Plan to Reform Government](#),” Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy assert that President Trump has given DOGE a mandate to “cut the federal government down to size.” They state that the organization would be working “closely” with [Project 2025 co-author and “key architect” Russel Vought](#), in his role as head of the Office of Management and Budget. (According to *Financial Times*, Gracias [resigned from his position with DOGE](#) in late July 2025 after pressure from the American Federation of Teachers, which uses Gracias’ firm Valor as a money manager.)

Gracias’s role in these efforts extended beyond bureaucratic restructuring. During the 2025 Wisconsin Supreme Court race — where [Musk spent a historic \\$25M](#) bid to elect Republican candidate Brad Schimel — [Gracias joined Musk on stage](#) to [spread disinformation](#) about immigrants, [social security](#), and voter fraud.



Although [DOGE failed](#) to achieve its stated objectives, it succeeded in [curtailing investigations](#) into Musk's companies, [dismantling scientific research](#), and [causing mass deaths](#) from [malnutrition and malaria](#) due to the [defunding of USAID programs](#). Much like a fungus secreting enzymes to break down a leaf before consuming it, DOGE eroded public trust in government infrastructure, softening it for [capture and privatization](#) by a [rising techno-fascist alliance](#).

While billionaires and their political allies advertise psychedelics as disruptive innovations for healthcare and spirituality, their exuberant narratives serve as [permission structures](#) for enacting antisocial policies that [inflict widespread illness and despair](#).

Doblin spent his career arguing that psychedelics were the only safeguard against genocidal fascism, but in the end, he handed his project to figures aligned with U.S. authoritarianism, while [MAPS Israel is treating soldiers](#) who contributed to the ongoing [genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza](#).

As the internal power structure at Lykos shifts, RFK Jr. — Trump's Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) — is [doing everything in his power to reignite Lykos' bid for approval](#). In June, [Kennedy responded to a question from Rep. Dan Crenshaw](#) about accelerating access to psychedelic therapies, saying that he is “working very hard to make sure” there will be access to psychedelic medicine within 12 months. Some commentators have interpreted Kennedy's comments as a signal that the FDA will approve Lykos' MDMA-AT without a new Phase 3 trial — exactly the “moonshot” that Genevieve Jurvetson hoped could be achieved through the Trump administration.

As one industry insider told Evans, “The HHS deck is well and [truly stacked with pro-psychedelic figures](#). It's almost too stacked, like, don't show your hand so much.” Politico reported that Kennedy's support for psychedelics has “revived hope among psychedelics' advocates that the Lykos decision was [more hiccup than death knell](#).”



While Lykos' supporters await the outcome of their federal lobbying efforts, PSFC and other psychedelic boosters are continuing to hedge their bets. With a medical route in limbo, they are embracing an alternative path to legitimization through organized religion.



Chapter 12: “Wound Becomes Portal”

At Burning Man 2023, PSFC member Steve Jurvetson facilitated the creation of a lavish art installation titled “Chalice to Eleusis.” The project’s production team — House of Fabl — described it as “one of the largest and [most technically complex art projects](#) on the Playa.” With materials weighing over 10 tons, the project combined a large-scale chalice structure with a drone show of 1,000 synchronized drones, which flew to a choreographed soundtrack produced by The Glitch Mob’s Justin Boreta.

The production was created in “narrative collaboration” with Brian Muraresku, whose 2020 book — *The Immortality Key* — informed the project’s description: “The ways of Eleusis were lost to history; now in this moment, the past is being revealed. Encased underground and locked away in hidden libraries for nearly two thousand years, [the mysteries of our cultural roots](#) are now finally being exposed.”

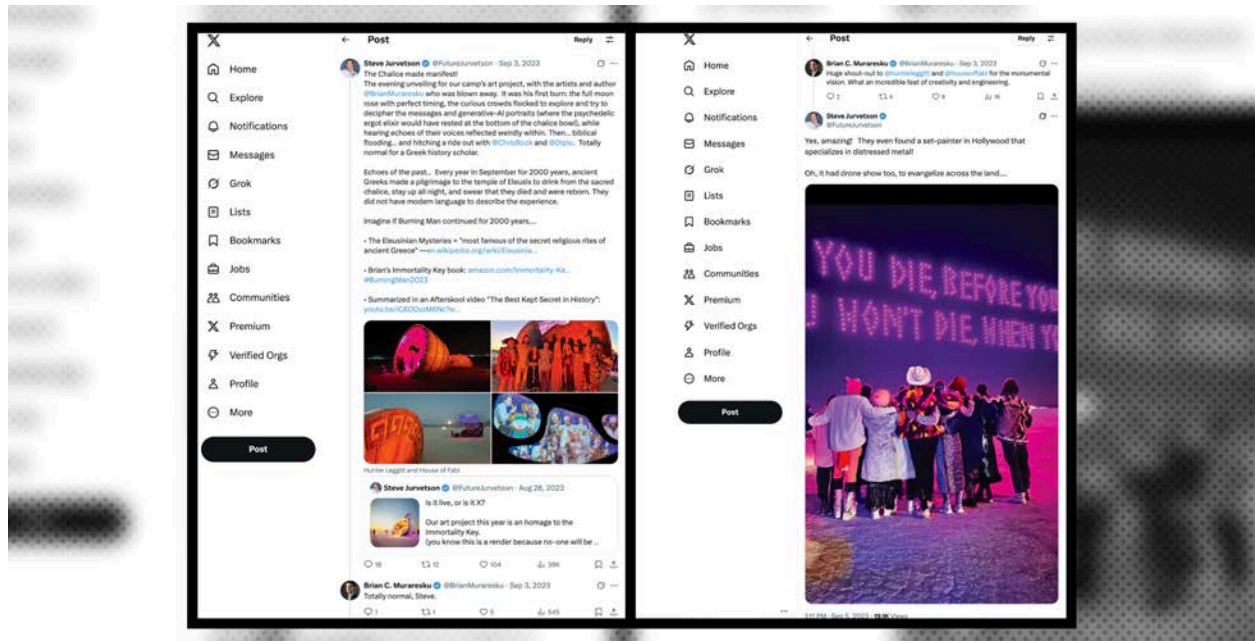
Muraresku’s thesis — that psychedelics played a formative [role in the origins of Western civilization](#) — offered the possibility of a direct lineage from ancient Greek mystery cults to Johns Hopkins’ present-day research on psychedelic-induced mystical experiences. In both contexts, the [death-rebirth process](#) is portrayed as granting insight into the [indestructibility of consciousness](#) and the ultimate nature of reality. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Reporter Travis Kitchens reported that multiple researchers referenced as sources in Muraresku’s book feel that Muraresku has [co-opted their work for ulterior purposes](#). One of those researchers, Patrick McGovern — who is cited 20 times in Muraresku’s book, and briefly advised Muraresku — told Kitchens: “Brian ingratiated himself to me to get as much out of me as possible, promised that he was being objective...then produced a book very much at odds with those goals, and instead promoted his psychedelic mysticism agenda to the general public, from the sounds of which he has been greatly profiting.” Other researchers used as sources in the book who have expressed skepticism about Muraresku’s conclusions



include scholars Carl Ruck, David Hillman, Kevin Clinton, Jan Bremmer, Bart Ehrman, and Chris Bennett.

Muraresku devotes the epigraph of his book to a Greek inscription that encapsulates this premise: “If you die before you die, You won’t die when you die.” These words — which encased the rim of a giant chalice sculpture at Burning Man — were inscribed across the night sky by 1,000 drones, above the heads of 70,000 Burners. Jurvetson captured a photo of this moment, which he posted to Twitter/X with a caption: “The drones [evangelized the message](#) across the lands...” This eight-minute aerial “evangelism” featured an animated sequence of Western religious imagery and iconography projected above the playa.



Interaction between Steve Jurvetson and Brian Muraresku on Twitter, discussing House of Fabl’s art display.

Calling the project “[an homage to The Immortality Key](#),” Jurvetson took part in unveiling the giant chalice to Muraresku on the playa:

“It was his first burn: the full moon rose with perfect timing, the curious crowds flocked to explore and try to decipher the messages and generative-AI portraits



(where the psychedelic ergot elixir would have rested at the bottom of the chalice bowl), while hearing echoes of their voices reflected weirdly within. Then... biblical flooding [occured]... and hitching a ride out [of Burning Man] with Chris Rock and Diplo. Totally normal for a Greek history scholar.”

In one of Jurvetson’s photographs of the interior of the installation, a generative-AI portrait of Elon Musk drinks from a golden chalice.



Source: Steve Jurvetson’s Flickr (Creative Commons 2.0)

Elon Musk’s sister-in-law, Christiana Musk, features in a short documentary about the art installation, stating: “Burning Man is the closest thing that I think we have today to a modern Eleusis. People come for a process of collective transformation, and they emerge changed.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Christiana Musk [is credited](#) with [producing the narrative](#) that accompanied the drone show: “[If you die before you die, you won’t die when you die.](#) Enter this temple. Where each breath is adoration of the infinite for the incarnate form. These practices are a nectar I share with you. Drink from this chalice



whenever you crave to be refreshed in the essence of life. Know this is available to you for the universe is made out of it. Go to the intersection of flesh and spirit. Breath the tiny sparks that fly. Within this very body are many gateways to the infinite. Secrets are hidden in the darkness. Right here, wound becomes portal. You have arrived. Native of eternity, at home in infinity. Breathing immortality. This is reality. And it is always here. Everyone craves the source and it is always everywhere. If you die before you die, you won't die when you die."

Through this art installation, Musk's billionaire circle leveraged Burning Man to broadcast a different kind of "permission structure" than the medical model for mainstreaming psychedelics. While Lykos surveys the wreckage of their medical-regulatory blunder, PSFC has been advancing a parallel path to societal acceptance of psychedelics: reengineering religion by leveraging the academic humanities.

When reached for comment, Muraresku distanced himself from the project of mainstreaming psychedelics through any model. "I can think of no medical or religious institution, no psychedelic church, no Grateful Dead concert that will be able to deliver the kind of experience that literally takes centuries or millennia of iteration to perfect, and that has undeniably gone missing from Western civilization," Muraresku wrote. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Muraresku referred Psymposia to a talk he gave at Harvard Law School in February 2025 in which he [criticized the "three general domains of the psychedelic conversation today": medical, religious, ritual.](#)

On the subject of medical mainstreaming, he wrote of "warped incentives embedded into the for-profit pharma model ... racing to scale to maximize a bottom line'. Simply put, money + psychedelics need to get divorced, and stay divorced." Regarding the religious use of psychedelics, he "forecasted 'a disaster down the road," citing "the warped incentives of recruiting and retaining members of a congregation," the "weaponization of mind-altering drugs," and the likelihood of cults developing. On ritual use, he wrote that "whatever genuine psychedelic rituals



have been preserved by traditional cultures the world over, they ‘are best left uncorrupted by Western minds.’”

Muraresku asked Psymposia to remind “‘the psychedelic world’ that I have never attended their conferences, and never will. And to please stop inviting me to conversations.” He concluded his email by stating that he would like to “get the word out to everybody in the psychedelic community: ‘please leave me the fuck alone.’”

Michael Pollan points to the alternative path being embraced by PSFC in a new preface for *The Immortality Key*’s 2023 paperback edition:

“This is one of those books that, once read, can’t be unread: by the time you get to the end, the history of religion, not to mention our culture, will look very different, and, at least for me, make a lot more sense. But *The Immortality Key* makes another valuable contribution as well: it pushes the psychedelic renaissance into the realm of the humanities and culture, which may well be its next, and most exciting, chapter.”

Pollan’s new preface appeared the same month that Harvard University announced a major psychedelic humanities initiative — the [Study of Psychedelics in Society and Culture](#) — thanks to a historic \$16 million gift from Antonio Gracias’ Family Foundation.

In addition to connecting initiatives across Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Law School, and Divinity School, the program funded [cohorts of researchers](#) to pursue “collaborations at [the intersections of psychedelics and humanistic inquiry](#).” Harvard’s cohorts would [cooperate with a sister program](#) at UC Berkeley’s Center for the Science of Psychedelics and the Center for Interdisciplinary Critical Inquiry, which was funded by [Christiana and Kimbal Musk’s Flourish Trust](#). ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In a May 2024 tweet celebrating the announcement of the inaugural cohorts at Harvard and Berkeley, Muraresku claimed that [Pollan was central to the development](#) of both of these PSFC-funded humanities initiatives:



“None of this would have been possible without the stewardship of Michael Pollan, or the goodwill of so many friends and colleagues at both Harvard and Berkeley. Most especially, this pioneering effort is indebted to the generosity of the Gracias Family Foundation and the Flourish Trust.” When reached for comment, Muraresku said that he and Pollan “helped structure a grant program between Harvard and Berkeley” with “no involvement of PSFC whatsoever.” (However, as this report has demonstrated, several key figures involved with this program are affiliated with PSFC).

While earlier major university gifts centered on psychedelic science, these announcements marked an expansion of PSFC’s influence toward shaping cultural perspectives on psychedelics. In effect, PSFC was engaging in cultural engineering using Silicon Valley’s playbook for mass influence: shaping markets by shaping minds.

Steve Jurvetson — who is [credited with coining](#) the term “[viral marketing](#)” — sought to replace the corrosive “[mind virus](#)” of traditional religions with a futuristic alternative: a “[science-embracing meme](#)” that could act as a “positive attractor for humanity.” In 2017, Jurvetson argued that “[mimetic countermeasures](#)” are necessary to combat “infectious bad ideas,” which he identified as “the biggest barrier to democratizing the future.”





**Genevieve and Steve Jurvetson pose with Michael Pollan | Source: Steve Jurvetson's Flickr
(Creative Commons 2.0)**

According to *TechCrunch*, Jurvetson has said that “one tech-related concern with religion is that it appears to be a positive feedback loop to the accelerating rich-poor gap, as [the disenfranchised opt out of modernity](#).” As the poor turn to traditional religion to cope with [societal insecurity](#), they effectively “[opt out of the vector of progress](#)” just as the pace of technological change accelerates. To Jurvetson, securing acceptance of Silicon Valley’s vision for the future requires answering this question: “how can our culture and the very fabric of society co-evolve with our technologies during the transition?”

In this context, it’s clear that Jurvetson identified psychedelics as an infectious “[countermeasure](#)” to reprogram the religious impulse in Silicon Valley’s favor.

This lens offers a rationale for PSFC’s support of psychedelic research as a performative tool to advance its members’ aims and beliefs. One example of such research is the Johns Hopkins and New York University religious leaders study, which received [funding from PSFC member](#) T. Cody Swift’s Riverstyx Foundation and [former PSFC board member](#) Bob Jesse’s Council on Spiritual Practices.

Published in May of 2025 under the title “[Effects of Psilocybin on Religious and Spiritual Attitudes and Behaviors in Clergy from Various Major World Religions](#),” this research ostensibly investigated how psychedelic experiences might influence spiritual understanding and vocational effectiveness among clergy from major religious traditions.

Steve Jurvetson [shared Pollan’s May 2025 New Yorker article](#) about this study in a post on Twitter/X: “What happens when religious leaders have a direct spiritual experience [facilitated by psychedelics]? Michal [sic] Pollan’s report reminds me of the mysteries of antiquity: ‘virtually all the religious leaders I spoke with reported an encounter with the divine. One talked about having 'a spiritual orgasm.'”



While it might seem strange that Jurvetson — who identifies as an atheist — is hyping a religious leaders study, this promotion highlights the study's strategic role in shaping the cultural 'permission structure' that the psychedelic industry is building. According to the study's funders and its lead researcher, Roland Griffiths, this cultural engineering project was the actual purpose of the study since its inception.

Hopkins researchers initially framed the study in a 2016 advertisement as investigating [whether psilocybin can “help deepen spiritual lives.”](#) Griffiths was more candid about his broader intentions in a 2021 interview with Jordan Peterson, which has since garnered over one million views on YouTube. (Peterson acknowledged knowing Griffiths for decades, and both have been [associated with Bob Jesse's Council on Spiritual Practices.](#))

Reflecting on the psychological benefits of psychedelic experiences, Griffiths shared that “I’ve concluded — it sounds to some like an overstatement, but I don’t think it is — that actually unpacking this whole situation is [crucial to the survival of our species.](#)”

To achieve this existential purpose, Griffiths emphasized that the long-term viability of psychedelics depends not just on their therapeutic or spiritual utility, but on transforming the cultural and institutional frameworks surrounding their use: “We have to evolve the cultural institutions that can create the containers around these experiences — such that they don't threaten our existing institutions, which are going to become reactive and demonize them and shut it down.”

From this conversation, Peterson inferred that the study's true purpose was to fold “figures of significance in religious communities” into Griffiths’ broader project of social engineering: “You're doing that as a scientist [e.g., evolving the respected cultural institution of Johns Hopkins], and now you're inviting religious leaders to participate in that process.”

Bob Jesse — who was [instrumental](#) in [creating](#) both PSFC and the [psilocybin research team at Johns Hopkins](#) — shares similar beliefs to Griffiths. In his talk at MAPS's Psychedelic



Science 2013, titled “Reconstruction of Religion and Johns Hopkins Psilocybin Findings,” Jesse contends that religion causes substantial harm on a global scale as it ossifies into dogma. To counter this harm, he argues that religion needs to be reconnected to direct mystical experience to “keep it vital” and transform it into “a very great good on planet earth.”

Jesse draws on aikido — the Japanese martial art — as an analogy to illustrate the [necessity of merging psychedelics with existing religious institutions](#): “If something is coming at you, instead of harming it, to stop it from harming you — you blend with it. You see its energy coming, you calculate trajectory, you blend with it. And once you've blended with it, then you can take it into a safe direction.”

Jesse’s perspective reveals that the psychedelic industry’s social engineering efforts were already underway long before the creation of PSFC — to the extent that PSFC’s formation can be seen as one calculated move within a larger strategic game.

Formerly a Vice President of business development at the technology company Oracle, Jesse had deep roots in Silicon Valley. Even after he [left Oracle](#) to found the Council for Spiritual Practices (CSP) — an organization “[dedicated to making direct experience of the sacred more available](#) to more people” — Jesse continued to identify as an engineer:

“Why is it important for you to know that [I’m an engineer](#)? Well, scientists and scholars are interested in truth, so at the end of the day...they go to sleep being satisfied that they’ve discovered something that they’re convinced is true. Engineers, by contrast, like to build things.... [They] feel satisfied because something exists in the world that didn’t exist before.... At the end of the day, just know that there are people in the room who are more concerned with ‘ultimate truth’ than I am.”

It was in his capacity as an engineer that Jesse went on to initiate the original Hopkins psilocybin research program. It was also in this capacity — as engineer, rather than scientist — that he would co-author not only the recent 2025 religious leaders study, but



also its predecessor: the 2006 paper that Pollan would reference as the genesis of the so-called psychedelic renaissance. Its title: “[Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance.](#)” (According to Sam Shonkoff, a scholar of religion at the Graduate Theological Union, the Hopkins team had already attempted to enroll “[theologians and religious leaders](#)” for this 2006 study, but they “had trouble with recruitment” at this earlier stage.)

Before joining forces with Roland Griffiths at Johns Hopkins, Jesse had first approached Dr. Rick Strassman — the psychiatrist who restarted human psychedelic research in the U.S. after its prohibition, using intravenous dimethyltryptamine (DMT) — to lead a study on whether psilocybin could induce mystical experiences. But Strassman ultimately declined, wary of “contribut[ing] to [the same] delusion” that he believes led to the failure of the 1970’s [Spring Grove experiments](#). As Strassman later described, the Spring Grove researchers — who were experimenting with LSD — believed they had uncovered evidence of spiritual truths, and this belief [superseded alternative explanations](#) for their participants’ experiences: “They [i.e., the researchers] got religion. [They stopped being scientists](#). They figured they had discovered a panacea, which was only now a question of determining which conditions [psychedelics] would be helpful for.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In contrast to the conclusions of the Spring Grove researchers, Strassman told Travis Kitchens that he believes [psychedelics don’t have any inherent mystical or spiritual effects](#) beyond those caused by specific sets and settings. The current psychedelic “renaissance,” he says, is essentially the emergence of a new mystico-scientific religion “camouflaged by scientific studies and statistical firepower.”

Strassman explained that the Spring Grove researchers [ultimately lost government funding](#) due to their departure from scientific inquiry into religious advocacy. They interpreted patients’ experiences of religious concepts under the influence of psychedelics as empirical evidence confirming their own preexisting beliefs, and — [rather than exploring alternative explanations for those experiences](#) — prioritized disseminating what they viewed as



revelatory findings to the public. This departure from scientific methodology transformed the project from an objective investigation into a vehicle for propagating religious convictions, thus compromising its scientific legitimacy and funding prospects.

After Strassman's refusal, Jesse turned to one of the very scientists-turned-evangelists behind the Spring Grove research — Dr. Bill Richards — to collaborate on this research into psilocybin and mystical experiences. In an interview titled "[Roland Griffiths Reflects on Scientific Investigations of Psychedelic Awakening](#)," *Lucid News* reported that Richards was chosen for a key role in the Johns Hopkins study for his clinical experience with the Maryland Psychiatric Research institute — the [direct successor](#) of the Spring Grove Research Department. (At Spring Grove, Richards worked with both Stanislav Grof, the inspiration for MAPS's therapy protocol; and Richard Yensen, who abused a participant in MAPS's Phase 2 clinical trial.)

Richards — alongside the eventual founding director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Psychedelic & Consciousness Research, Dr. Roland Griffiths — [brought Jesse's research proposal to life](#) through the 2006 publication, "Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences."

Strassman claims that Richards [brought the same problematic protocols and beliefs](#) from the Spring Grove research to this Johns Hopkins research. He describes Richards' approach as "anti-scientific" yet pointing "to science for its validation." For years, Strassman has been trying to call attention to these shortcomings and biases at the heart of Johns Hopkins' psilocybin research, but these efforts were largely ignored by the field.

In a [2017 article](#) advocating for a pluralistic approach to psychedelic research, Strassman identified the Hopkins project as the latest chapter in a spiritual project that originated at the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago — the [first global meeting on interfaith dialogue](#) that introduced the [Hindu philosophy of Vedanta](#) to the West. During the 1960s, this project evolved into the "perennialist" conviction that all religions are symbolic interpretations of the same mystical core of direct experience. To this project's



adherents, psychedelics unveil the revelatory insight that the world's religious traditions have always been manifestations of a single underlying truth, which offered a direct pathway to the resolution of global conflict.

After the midcentury prohibition of psychedelics, these adherents gathered at Esalen to develop strategies for sharing this psychedelic revelation with the world. According to Michael Pollan, “[Esalen] became the place where people hoping to bring these molecules back into the culture, whether as an adjunct to therapy or a means of spiritual development, met to [plot their campaigns](#).”

One of these Esalen gatherings — held just before the DEA's classification of MDMA as a controlled substance in 1985 — focused on developing strategies for researching MDMA's therapeutic potential. The meeting's 35 participants included five [“veteran researchers on psychoactive drugs”](#): Francesco DiLeo, Stanislav Grof, Robert Lynch, [Claudio Naranjo](#), and Richard Yensen. Also in attendance was Dr. Richard Ingrasci, “a leader in the movement to [consider the body as a whole in healing particular problems](#).” According to a published account of the meeting, Ingrasci presented on “using MDMA with patients suffering from terminal cancer.”

By 1989, [Ingrasci would resign his medical license](#) after [serial sexual assaults](#) of his psychedelic therapy patients — at least two of whom [turned to Ingrasci after a cancer diagnosis](#). Ingrasci reportedly told one patient that sexual contact with him was [“necessary to cure her cancer.”](#) In 1981, Ingrasci had engaged in touch therapy with one patient that involved “put[ting] his hand up her vagina” and using ketamine to immobilize her, according to *The Boston Globe*. As the patient recounted, [“He said cancer was about fear](#) and that if I ran away from him, I was running away from fear.... The implication was that if I left, the cancer might come back.”

[DiLeo was disciplined for similar sexual violations](#) in 1987, when [his license was temporarily suspended](#) — two years after the Esalen meeting. A patient who reported being sexually assaulted by DiLeo during MDMA-assisted therapy was [awarded \\$200,000 for medical](#)



[expenses and \\$500,000 for other damages](#) by the [Court of Special Appeals of Maryland](#). DiLeo justified the sexual contact as an attempt to [“modify a negative introject”](#) and as [“partial fulfillment of \[her\] oedipal wishes.”](#)

In *How to Change Your Mind*, Pollan left out how the psychedelic therapy culture at Esalen — which led to the research he claims sparked the modern psychedelic renaissance — was plagued by sexual abusers; neither Ingrasci nor DiLeo were mentioned. As this erasure underscores, the small network campaigning to integrate psychedelics into society has been unequipped to respond to patterns of abuse that are systemic to their communities of practice.

These violations thrived within the New Age belief system that had been cultivated at Esalen. Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman, known for his work in quantum electrodynamics, once noted that [Esalen was a hub for the problematic research practices](#) that Strassman observed in the Spring Grove and Johns Hopkins research. Discussing scientific integrity in his 1974 address to California Institute of Technology’s graduating class, Feynman said that Esalen is a “wonderful place” but “a hotbed” for studies into things like “UFO’s, or astrology, or...mysticism, expanded consciousness, new types of awareness, ESP, and so forth” which he concluded “not a scientific world.”

As Feynman recognized, these fields involve pseudoscientific research, creating a semblance of scientific investigation while designing studies to produce the desired results. Rather than designing studies to confirm prior assumptions, real science requires that researchers attempt to disprove their own hypotheses and minimize bias through rigorous trial design.

Against this backdrop, Jesse began carving out his own role in the psychedelic renaissance. Within a year of participating in a 1994 Esalen gathering centered on [“reviving psychedelic research,”](#) Jesse established CSP. By 1996, CSP hosted its own meeting at Esalen, which [led to Jesse’s introduction to Roland Griffiths](#). During their meeting [the following year](#), Jesse



finally found a respected scientist willing to lead research that would advance CSP's spiritual mission.

The unscientific nature of this project explains why the Johns Hopkins religious leaders study published in 2025 has been plagued by unethical design and significant conflicts of interest — involving funders, researchers, and study participants — since its inception. Rev. Joe Welker [alerted Hopkins' institutional review board](#) (IRB) to these issues in March 2024, after encountering information related to the study while engaged in work with an organization [connected to the study's funders](#). One of the study's co-authors — Matthew Johnson — also filed [ethics complaints](#).

Following an internal investigation, the IRB determined that the study's conduct amounted to ["serious non-compliance"](#) that "significantly compromised the integrity of the Organization's human research protection program" and "significantly compromised the rights and welfare of the participants." The IRB stipulated that any publication of data resulting from this study must disclose four distinct violations involving undisclosed conflicts of interest. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** These violations involved multiple undisclosed conflicts and compliance issues. Two unapproved individuals, including one who also served as a study sponsor, were directly engaged in the research. Conflicts of interest arising from the participation of these two individuals who were engaged in the research and also served as funding sponsors were neither appropriately disclosed nor managed. In addition, an approved team member who acted as a study sponsor did not disclose this role to the IRB and directly led the qualitative analysis. The funding sponsorship for the study was also not disclosed to the JHM IRB.

These required disclosures were initially absent from the online version of the published paper. They were later added to the "Authors" tab after Psymposia contacted the IRB, which responded that "the disclosure information is now visible online" and that it had asked the journal "whether it is possible to have the



information listed more prominently.” The following day, the IRB confirmed that “the journal has been able to list the disclosure more prominently in the online version as requested.”

These ethical violations led to last-minute uncertainty about the quantitative paper’s publication in the journal *Psychedelic Medicine*. While Pollan’s *New Yorker* article was [originally intended to be published following the scientific publication](#), the scientific article ended up being published on May 30, 2025 — [11 days after Pollan’s piece](#). *The Microdose* reported that publisher SAGE had initially blocked publication “because [it did not meet the publishers’ ethical standards](#).” SAGE later reversed that decision based on “conversations with the Editors-in-Chief and in support of our editorial independence policy.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** While the scientific paper reported [significant improvements in participants’ perceptions of their “effectiveness”](#) as religious leaders, one participant — Hunt Priest — was stripped of his ordination by the Episcopal Church two months after publication. In a letter dated August 5, 2025, [shared by Joe Welker in *Psychedelic Candor*](#), the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia deposed the Rev. Hunt Priest, removing him from ordained ministry and stripping him of all clerical authority. Deposition is the Episcopal Church’s most severe disciplinary action, reserved for the gravest violations of clerical conduct.

Although the official notice does not detail Priest’s specific offenses, it [attributes them](#) to “Conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation” and “Conduct Unbecoming a Member of the Clergy.” The determination resulted from a complaint submitted to the Episcopal Church by Welker, after [Priest sent Welker a cease and desist letter](#) for writing about ethical concerns related to Hunt’s organization Ligare and the Hopkins study. In commentary accompanying the Church’s letter, Welker asserted that “this outcome is...a sad and direct consequence of an unethical psychedelic study that experimented on human beings for a non-scientific spiritual mission with drugs that make one open to suggestion and undue influence, even well after the drug’s effects have subsided.... This is a result of



years of enabling behavior from the psychedelic movement, including by Hopkins researchers and other psychedelic leaders prioritizing their spiritual movement over public safety.”

As reported by Welker, Hunt sent an email to his followers claiming that he “was not removed from ordained ministry, but [chose to remove \[him\]self](#).” This is contradicted by Welker’s subsequent reporting on the [official Accord from the Diocese of Georgia](#).

Years before the publication of this paper, the conflicts of interest underlying it had been laid bare in a [panel discussion](#) and dinner event at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago — the same Parliament that Strassman had identified as the origin of the study’s spiritual lineage.

Swift promoted the Parliament event to PSFC’s listserv on May 22, 2023:

“We’re excited to send out this invitation to you all, as [Swift’s funding organization] Riverstyx [sic] has been developing multiple entheogenic threads at the upcoming Parliament of Worlds [sic] Religions, the largest interfaith gathering in the world, particularly around the JHU/NYU Religious Leaders study.... We would love to see many of you there.”

According to Swift’s email, the event was “hosted by Ligare, Shefa, and the RiverStyx Foundation” with the purpose of “conven[ing] spiritual leaders, religious scholars, researchers, research participants, and others to discuss the historical and scientific implications of entheogenic substances for religious life and practice.” Before his death in 2023, the Johns Hopkins study’s Principal Investigator, Roland Griffiths, was scheduled to appear alongside study participants. (According to an account by a trial participant, Rev. Dr. Seth Jones, the event served as a gathering for [13 of the study’s 24 trial participants](#).)



The invitation — which was signed by T. Cody Swift and Rachael Petersen of RiverStyx, as well as former Johns Hopkins trial participants Rabbi Zac Kamenetz of [Shefa](#) and Rev. Hunt Priest of [Ligare](#) — did not disclose that Swift not only funded the study through his nonprofit, but also served as a researcher on the study. According to [Pollan’s account of the study](#) in the *New Yorker*, Swift “helped debrief” participants after their dosing sessions, during qualitative interviews that he subsequently interpreted.

Swift also funded the psychedelic nonprofits Shefa and Ligare, founded by study participants Kamenetz and Priest [based on](#) their [experiences in the study](#). A [2023 article in Esquire](#) reported that Priest “knew he must return to Georgia and do something more daring than just lead a church. He had to change the whole of Protestantism.” The article asserts that Priest went on to catalyze an “underground movement”: “the good word has spread, and today there are tripping clergy everywhere.” Kamenetz describes [Shefa’s mission](#) with similar zeal: “What’s happening today is a novelty. We are doing something new. This is going to inspire a creative, spiritual renaissance that puts the Jewish people back in touch with that burning core that sits at the heart of our mystical tradition.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** According to NPR’s Kathryn Post, [five of the 24 participants](#) from the study have “pivoted to focus their careers on psychedelics.” These participants include Kamenetz and Priest, as well as Methodist pastor Dave Barnhart, [who received training in ketamine-assisted psychotherapy](#); Baptist minister Jaime Clark-Soles, who is working on a book project [titled “Psychedelics and Soul Care: What Christians Need to Know”](#); and Sughra Ahmed, who Pollan reported [“quit her job”](#) in 2025 to focus on her organization, [Ruhani](#), which is developing psychedelic retreats for Muslims. Shefa offers [“small group day-long ketamine retreats”](#) for \$750.

Based on publicly available [IRS filings](#) and [publicly listed grants](#), Swift’s RiverStyx Foundation provided at least \$149,500 to Ligare and Shefa from 2021-2023. The *Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle* reported that Shefa [“secured funding”](#) from Dr. Bronner’s Family Foundation, while *eJewish Philanthropy* characterized it as a [“pledge of support.”](#) From



[2021-2022](#), Ligare received \$319,250 through MAPS. (Both [Miriam Volat](#), Co-Director of the RiverStyx Foundation, and David Bronner are MAPS board members.)

In addition to funding the Johns Hopkins study and its participants' subsequent nonprofits, Swift also "[sponsored a retreat](#) that brought former [participants] and researchers together at a Tibetan center in the Catskill Mountains," according to *The New York Times*. This retreat, which inappropriately blurred the lines between research and advocacy within a broader spiritual movement, became the focus of Matthew Johnson's second ethics complaint.

In a [statement published in May 2025](#), Swift claims that "my funding Shefa and Ligare directly came out of requests from Zac and Hunt to support education, community, and integration within their religions.... To say their mission is to 'inject psychedelics into religion' also entirely lacks nuance, where they are largely providing a space for those in their religion to have supportive conversations about these topics."

Swift's portrayal of his funding as merely a response to requests from study participants obscures his influence on the study's context — the "[set and setting](#)" — that produced those requests. According to [Johnson's ethics complaint](#) about the behavior of study investigators, this context was heavily influenced by specific spiritual interpretations. As described in *The New York Times*, "Dr. Griffiths acted like a 'spiritual leader,' the complaint said, infusing the research with religious symbolism and steering volunteers toward the outcome he wanted. And he allowed some of his longstanding donors — supporters of drug legalization — to assist in studies, raising ethical questions."

Although Swift does not endorse the characterization of Shefa and Ligare as "inject[ing] psychedelics into religion," this is precisely how Pollan describes the mission of these groups in a panel discussion that included Shefa's Kamenetz: "Several [participants] had a kind of conversion experience — not to another religion, but to psychedelics. And several people — three, actually — devoted themselves...in the wake of the study to creating groups



[to help facilitate the use of psychedelics in their faith](#), and Zac [Kamenetz] is one of those three.” Kamenetz — seated near Pollan — did not contest this characterization. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** As demonstrated by RiverStyx’s event at the Parliament of the World’s Religions, the study was not merely intended to research religious experience but to actively shape the attitudes and practices of major religious traditions. To reiterate, several authors of the paper — including Bob Jesse, who also funded the study — were scheduled to present their findings on a panel hosted by study participants and funder, Cody Swift. Swift not only financed the study, but also provided funding to the participants’ nonprofits, which were founded to advance the mission of the study’s funders — namely, integrating psychedelics into their respective faith communities.

Although participants have insisted their new career directions were [their own choice](#), Swift’s additional role as a researcher gave him direct influence over how these religious leaders interpreted their psychedelic experiences. All of this transpired in the context of a suggestibility-enhancing drug, administered in a study where participants were exposed to the funders’ strong beliefs in perennialist thought and psychedelic accelerationism.

These entanglements played out at RiverStyx’s Parliament event, which was organized and promoted through organizations that directly benefited from Swift’s philanthropic support. (None of these connections were disclosed in the event’s invitation.)

The event — rather than an authentic expression of grassroots interest — was ultimately a performance where the funders had cast every role. This was social engineering in practice: the Hopkins study, its promotion, and its surrounding events were orchestrated to infuse psychedelics into major world religions — directly [advancing the funders’ mission to “mak\[e\] direct experience of the sacred more available to more people.”](#)

Based on the unethical conduct involved in the religious leaders study, the Hopkins IRB determined that a second qualitative paper — based on Cody Swift’s interviews with study



participants — could not be published. Pollan mentioned this decision on a June 2025 panel discussing the published quantitative paper — an event [co-sponsored by the UC Berkeley Center for the Science of Psychedelics](#) (BCSP). In his remarks, Pollan acknowledges that he circumvented the IRB's determination by incorporating Swift's unpublished research into his *New Yorker* article about the study, titled [“This is Your Priest on Drugs”](#):

“There was a qualitative interview that was planned, but will apparently never come out.... I was fortunate in that I was allowed to read a draft of it, draw from it, and quote from it in my piece, but because of the controversies surrounding this study, [the Hopkins IRB doesn't want this data — which is to say these wonderful interviews — ever to get out](#). And I think that's really a shame.”

As Joe Welker identified in *Psychedelic Candor*, Pollan admitted to deliberately [publishing data](#) from interviews that the Hopkins IRB deemed unethical to publish. This was not disclosed in the *New Yorker* article, however, where Pollan misleadingly framed the context of these interviews: “Swift, the funder who helped debrief some of the participants, also sent me a narrative account that highlights themes from sixteen interviews. It reads almost like a psychedelic oral history.”

In its public communications, UC Berkeley's Center for the Science of Psychedelics (BCSP) promoted Pollan's article without acknowledging the underlying ethical problems. In a June 17, 2025 email, BCSP shared Pollan's new article with this caption: “For *The New Yorker*, BCSP co-founder Michael Pollan wrote about religious leaders who experienced magic mushrooms in a university study and [became evangelists for psychedelics](#).”

In response to a question about how the psychedelic field had changed since the 2018 publication of *How to Change Your Mind*, Pollan revealed his frustration with those who have been getting in the way of his narrative:

“You also [now] have these disenchanted psychonauts, people who were deeply involved with psychedelics who had some kind of conversion to deciding they are



the root of all evil, and [these gadflies are coming after researchers and journalists](#), and in fact one of them played a role in the [ethics] investigations that surrounded this [religious leaders] study.”



Michael Pollan describes critics as “gadflies” on a panel discussing the JHU religious leaders study organized by Graduate Theological Union with the Berkeley Center for the Science of Psychedelics and the Berkeley Center for the Study of Religion

Rather than taking these concerns seriously, Pollan’s proposed solution was to fall back on BCSP’s cohorts of journalists, who could be trained to promote the preferred narrative about psychedelics: “One of the things we’re doing, in fact, at BCSP is doing a lot of journalism around psychedelics. Funding journalism. The idea is to develop a cadre of really good, sophisticated journalists who can write about all these complexities with more nuance and sophistication.”

Reached for comment, one prominent critic responded: “Once a powerful person is naming critics gadflies, it really is over. Just a matter of it playing out.”



Chapter 13: “This Pattern is Likely to Continue”

This report provided an in-depth examination of how a strategic, well-funded communication campaign operated to influence public perception at the expense of public health. The findings presented here required a full year of dedicated investigation, which underscores the substantial effort required to educate the public about complex manipulation tactics.

These tactics will continue to influence perceptions of the psychedelic industry beyond the end of our story. PSFC and other power players continue to refine their strategies, channeling funds into surrogate organizations, sympathetic journalists, and academic projects to overcome challenges to their objectives. Based on the evidence presented, we hope readers will now be better equipped to identify and critically assess persuasion tactics designed to shape public opinion in service of powerful interests and their undisclosed agendas.

Over the past year, PSFC has doubled down on its playbook for mass persuasion, even as their agenda has been forced to change. With the FDA’s rejection of Lykos’s application and [Oregon’s psilocybin program in shambles](#), PSFC’s initial strategy from their 2021 Landscape Report has proven unsuccessful.

Rather than addressing the fundamental structural flaw in their favored therapy model — namely, psychedelic therapists amplifying patients’ distress using telepathic intuition — PSFC is working to regain control of the narrative. To accomplish this, PSFC released a [new “Strategic Roadmap”](#) in 2025, aiming to secure \$125 million from their network to fund their “core priorities” through 2027. Key among these priorities is “strategic communications” to influence the public’s beliefs about psychedelics, using [market-shaping tactics](#) that are widely used by multinational industries to overstate benefits and minimize the risks of



harm. (The Roadmap allocates \$46.4 million to strategic communications and public health education through 2027 — [more than any other single category](#) in the plan.)

To create a smokescreen of independent support for PSFC's ideas, the Roadmap recommends placing “targeted, impactful stories featuring thoughtful surrogates with aligned messaging” into the media.

The corrosive impact of these tactics are well-known to public health experts. Across powerful industries, investors systematically deploy proxy organizations in orchestrated campaigns to shape policy decisions affecting their market interests, as public health researcher Anna Gilmore explains in *El País*:

“What they do now is create a bunch of front groups: they set up other organizations that they fund and hide behind. [And] it's those organizations that approach governments and say, ‘Oh, this policy is going to be bad.’ And, very often, lobbying is done through these third parties.... [G]overnments often fall into the trap of thinking, ‘Wow, all these different groups are telling us that this policy will be bad.’ But what they don't realize is that all these groups are funded by tobacco companies. And other companies, like food companies, are doing something similar.”

According to Gilmore, groups like PSFC cause significant harm by systematically funding researchers and organizations that support industry positions, resulting in a landscape where “their power and influence are everywhere”:

“[The people who sit on their boards are connected](#); there's a kind of elite, so to speak, that's able to influence at many levels, often behind the scenes. The rest of us are like puppets they control: influencing us to buy their products, share their beliefs and [make us] blame ourselves for the harm they are causing.”

PSFC's hidden influence has already become the subject of whistleblower allegations of campaign finance violations. In June 2025, Jack Gorsline reported that Heroic Hearts was



accused of violating campaign finance laws during Massachusetts' 2024 failed Ballot Initiative 4 campaign, which sought to decriminalize psychedelic use and home cultivation and to legalize psychedelic therapy.

Whistleblowers allege that Heroic Hearts [served as a dark money “slush fund”](#) for [Graham Boyd's] New Approach to use without oversight” for the political campaign. (PSFC's 2025 Roadmap recommends providing \$12.5 million to Heroic Hearts and Healing Breakthrough to advance PSFC's state and federal priorities through 2027.)

In emails shared by Gorsline [between whistleblowers and Open Circle Alliance leadership](#), one campaign finance whistleblower alleged that Jared Moffat of New Approach was fundraising and recruiting for Open Circle Alliance — a new community organization in Massachusetts that was also implicated in the alleged “Yes on 4” campaign finance violations:

“I want to chime in and provide additional clarity. Stefanie publicly said Jared Moffat of New Approach came to her with the idea for Open Circle Alliance during her December 18, 2024 Chacruna panel.... I have a text from Jared from February 21, 2024, referring to Stefanie being brought onboard. The same day, I thank him over text for "coming up with this innovative model" referring to Open Circle Alliance. Jared told me he/New Approach was fundraising for Open Circle Alliance and that he was involved with the proposal of an organization to replace [a different advocacy organization called] Bay Staters for Natural Medicine. Emily Oneschuk gave me a similar explanation about the origins of the organization. Jared had initially pitched me to join Open Circle Alliance rather than the campaign.”

Gorsline reported that the ballot measure campaign produced television advertisements that were attributed to and funded by Heroic Hearts. By law, 501(c)(3) [nonprofits cannot subsidize or coordinate political activities](#) with a Political Action Committee 501(c)(4) like New Approach.



In a press release shared by the *Boston Globe*, Heroic Hearts includes a video of the first advertisement, which notably makes no mention of veterans. [As noted by the Globe](#), [Heroic Hearts' press release](#) characterized the ad as focused on “natural psychedelic therapy, the central component of Massachusetts Question 4 on November’s ballot.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In the lead-up to the Massachusetts vote, one Heroic Hearts-branded ad was [shared by Eliza Dushku Palandjian](#), an actress who played Faith in “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and who is now a trained psychedelic guide. Two weeks earlier, Palandjian — who also [spoke at “Yes on 4” campaign events](#) and [donated \\$100,000 to the referendum committee](#) that led to the “Yes on 4” campaign — was the focus of a Boston Magazine feature article that described her experiences with PSFC’s preferred model of underground psychedelic therapy: “[S]he was dropped hard and fast into a terrifying hellscape. Sweating and sobbing, [begging for help](#) and gripping her throat, she felt like she was dying. While her guides gently cupped her head, reassuring her over and over that she was safe, Eliza entered an alternate reality, revisiting a decades-old trauma that she had buried deep within.”

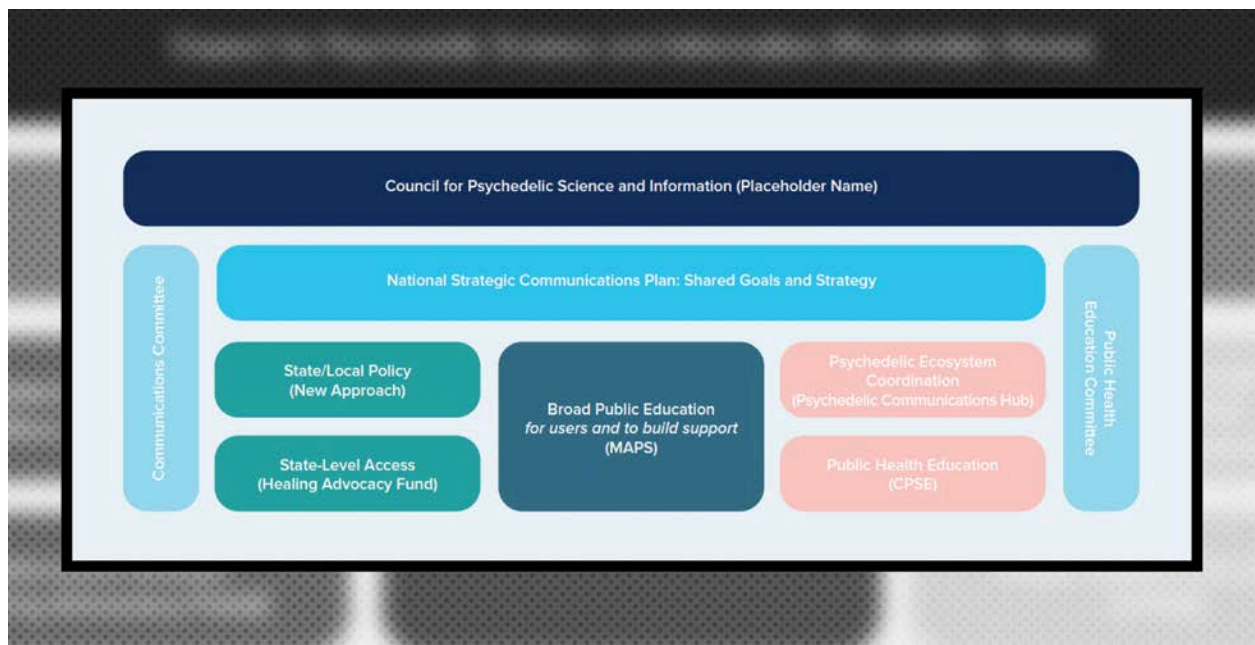
In the Roadmap, PSFC explicitly envisions coordinating state-level policy initiatives with groups including Heroic Hearts, Healing Breakthrough, and Open Circle Alliance. Published interviews and reporting have attributed the creation of Healing Breakthrough to PSFC and Open Circle Alliance to New Approach, mirroring the creation of proxy groups in other industries. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Describing an email exchange provided by whistleblowers, Gorsline reported that “one of the OCA [Open Circle Alliance] co-founders wrote that [the ‘idea and funding for a community org \[in Massachusetts\] originated in collaboration with New Approach.’](#)” OCA’s co-founder Emily Oneschuk held a “dual-leadership role” in the “Yes on 4” campaign, and 5 out of 6 Open Circle Alliance events were “de facto [Q4] campaign events.” Meanwhile, in an interview with *Psychedelic Alpha*, Juliana Mercer describes being approached by PSFC’s Jason Pyle to create a new veterans organization: “Since [Jesse Gould] founded Heroic



Hearts in 2017, he has noticed ‘a lot more veteran organisations popped up’ (indeed, Mercer said it was one of her first questions when former Executive Director Jason Pyle approached her to join Healing Breakthrough: [‘Why are we starting another nonprofit?’](#)), with many veterans now looking to bend the ears of lawmakers[.]” These examples illustrate PSFC members’ reported roles in the inception of community advocacy organizations.

Extending beyond state initiatives, PSFC formalized a blueprint to disseminate “priority” messaging through a “coordinated alliance” of affiliated organizations, aimed at shaping the national dialogue about psychedelics. The Roadmap treats the Hub’s coordinated campaign that targeted Psymposia as the template for this ongoing PR strategy. Members of the alliance – many of which were created or cultivated by PSFC – would cooperate to counter negative coverage and shape public opinion about psychedelics.



A coordinated alliance for field-wide communication strategy map proposed in PSFC’s 2025 “Strategic Roadmap” | Source: PSFC Strategic Roadmap for Collective Philanthropy © 2025 by Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



Based on recommendations from the Psychedelic Communications Hub, the Roadmap identified [“core priorities”](#) for this national communication strategy, including:

- Monitor social media and influencer feeds and develop content to proactively and systematically push through social and influencer channels to influence the national dialogue
- Monitor national news coverage, generate proactive national media stories, and help coordinate responses to inquiries from national media
- Coordinate ad hoc fieldwide issue-specific campaigns (e.g., MDMA-AT)
- Centrally vet and incubate new ideas for supporting the field (e.g., representation in movies); ensure resources are prioritized on most impactful ideas and actions

As emphasized in the Roadmap’s next section — “Supporting Ethical Psychedelic Cultures” — PSFC understood that its positive messaging would only be effective if it could prevent the [“negative media cascades”](#) described in the previous section. (In practice, these “cascades” have included substantive critiques of psychedelic science and clinical trials — legitimate concerns in the public’s interest — which PSFC’s approach functions to minimize by “flooding the zone” with disinformation.)

To stave off bad press, the Roadmap recommends that philanthropists pursue “proactive engagement” with ethical practices, which will “reduce both actual and perceived ethical violations significantly, thereby strengthening public trust in the psychedelic field.”

In a potential allusion to past reporting on PSFC members’ involvement with the Hopkins religious leaders study, the Roadmap identifies liability risks for ethical misconduct by philanthropists: “[A]s public scrutiny of philanthropy intensifies in the psychedelic sector, concerns about its ethical implications are growing. Whether these reflect valid concerns or perceptions of ethical misconduct, they have the potential to significantly harm funders’



reputations and increase their liability risks.” (Although figures associated with PSFC have minimized the possibility of undue influence of participants in the religious leaders study, the Roadmap warns of donors’ heightened suggestibility to fundraising pitches after consuming psychedelics, noting that “potential donors might be more suggestible and willing to support a project without proper due diligence.”)

Moving beyond philanthropist behavior, the Roadmap highlights the urgency of changing the psychedelic field’s ethical norms, referencing high-profile ethical violations that Psymposia played a key role in bringing to light: “Recently, the psychedelics field has witnessed several high-profile allegations of ethical violations impacting underground psychedelic therapy patients and above-ground clinical trial subjects, among others. Without field-wide action, this pattern is likely to continue, resulting in increasing harms and backlash.”

Notably, the Roadmap omits two key details here: that PSFC had funded all of the recent high-profile projects associated with ethical violations, and that PSFC’s leadership has been retaliating against Psymposia for drawing attention to this pattern of harm.

Having contributed to both MAPS and Bourzat’s Center for Consciousness Medicine, PSFC is now positioning itself as the solution to the problems it helped create by spearheading the development of industry-wide ethical norms.

During the crisis communications call with RALLY after the FDA’s advisory committee meeting, a MAPS staff member acknowledged that they were uncertain about how to address the mounting safety and ethics controversies surrounding psychedelics. In an apparent effort to create distance from MAPS and Lykos, the employee asked if there is an “opportunity to platform other organizations” who are “grappling” with the topics of “safety and ethics in the psychedelic sphere.” In her words, “I’m not sure of any organizations specifically that I can reference, but maybe that’s what the Communications Hub can be, too — platforming other organizations who are grappling with these future-forward conversations.”



In response, the RALLY representative said that platforming psychedelic safety organizations — implicitly, alternatives to Psymposia — is “absolutely part of what we want to be doing.... We welcome the opportunity to work with individuals and organizations.” By the following year, the Psychedelic Communications Hub had [integrated](#) into the [Psychedelic Safety Institute \(PSI\)](#) — an organization that PSFC describes as one of its [“core national allies.”](#)

A “nonprofit strategy lab,” PSI was founded in 2024 by a small team of [social entrepreneurs without expertise in psychedelic safety or ethics](#). PSI has filled this knowledge gap by processing stakeholder input with [“AI-assisted analysis.”](#) ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In February 2025, PSI put out a [call for automated stakeholder interviews](#) to “understand the current psychedelic landscape and identify where safety interventions will be most effective” with a \$10,000 budget for participant compensation. Over three days in March, PSI convened the [“Psychedelic Safety Summit”](#) in collaboration with the UC Berkeley Center for the Science of Psychedelics (BCSP). The Summit — which convened key stakeholders by invitation — “aim[ed] to create shared frameworks, infrastructure, and commitments needed to [drive coordinated ecosystem-level action](#) to reduce psychedelic harms.” The Summit website included a disclosure about BCSP’s role in the facilitated [“outcomes-oriented convening”](#): “The UC Berkeley Center for the Science of Psychedelics (BCSP) serves a leadership role as a thought partner and advisor for the Psychedelic Safety Summit about issues such as the [development of the strategy, plans, and curriculum](#) for the Summit.” Summit participants included Cody Swift and Bob Jesse, who funded the Hopkins religious leaders study.

In its [“Frequently Asked Questions,”](#) PSI justified limiting attendance to one participant per organization as necessary for stakeholder diversity: “We would love to be able to host everyone interested in attending the Summit, but the reality is that there are a number of factors that require a policy of one participant per



organization. Beyond the financial and logistical constraints of the space and resources available, [we are also deeply committed to having a wide representation of voices](#), perspectives, and expertise, and this policy supports that commitment." In practice, given that numerous participating organizations maintain direct ties to PSFC, this policy allowed PSFC to exercise disproportionate influence over the summit's direction and ethics priorities.

In an [October 2024 organizational update](#), PSI revealed that "[s]ince the FDA Advisory Committee voted against the approval of MDMA-assisted therapy for the treatment of PTSD, PSI has offered support for Robyn Thomas's coordination of the psychedelic communications ecosystem through insight into safety messaging and access to our typology work."

In this October update, PSI acknowledges that it is building upon "the foundational work of MAPS, PSFC, and others" to coordinate efforts and develop infrastructure for the psychedelic ecosystem. A month later, it published [an online summary](#) of its first contribution to the field — an "Ethics Framework Case Study" developed on behalf of Françoise Bourzat's Center for Consciousness Medicine ([now called Gather Well Psychedelics](#)).

PSI's website includes an announcement of this arrangement with Gather Well, which reads: "The Psychedelic Safety Institute (PSI), through its partner entity [Now Conscious Inc.](#), was contracted by the Center for Consciousness Medicine Inc., [operating as Gather Well Psychedelics](#) ('Gather Well')[.]" ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Now Conscious Inc. bills itself as "Your trusted advisor in the mental health and psychedelics space, committed to investing in true innovation," yet their website shares no identifying information about them beyond a 2023 copyright notice attributed to a group called Psychedelic Vision Fund. The nature of the partnership between PSI and Now Conscious is unclear, and the website for Psychedelic Vision Fund is a duplicate of the Now Conscious site.



While PSI's November 2024 announcement insists "our work with Gather Well [does not constitute an endorsement](#) of them as an ethical organization," they acknowledged in their "October 2024 Update" that the ethics framework based on Gather Well [will serve as the template for PSI's work with "other organizations moving forward."](#) Although the October update omits mention of Gather Well by name, both communications unmistakably refer to the same project: creating an ethics framework for "a training organization" that will serve as a model for other organizations in the psychedelic field, based on "a stakeholder review by 14 individuals, including professional bioethicists."

In justifying their reliance on an ethics model derived from an underground lineage with clear patterns of harm, PSI cites the benefit of cost savings for other organizations in the psychedelic ecosystem: "We're excited that this framework can elevate the ethical maturity of the psychedelic industry and remove obstacles to good ethical hygiene by organizations that cannot justify the cost of replicating this work from the ground up."

Although Franciose Bourzat was supplanted from leadership by her daughter and the organization's name was changed from Center for Consciousness Medicine (CCM) to Gather Well, their core lineage and practices that led to abuse remain present in their teachings. In a testimonial posted to Gather Well's website, Damon Horowitz praises Gather Well's leadership for "manag[ing] to preserve the invaluable elements of [their lineage with CCM](#)" through "an extended process of deep reflection."

In a [since-deleted interview](#) describing how Gather Well is continuing to "train psychedelic guides," Bourzat emphasized that "my legacy, or the continuation of this approach, is really essential." ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Bourzat's lineage involves "holding" clients and amplifying distress based on telepathic attunement, as she discussed in her book *Consciousness Medicine*: "The guide's job is to know the journeyer's context and discern...whether it is more skillful to help move the tension and encourage the energy to flow or let the



journeyer experience their pain. Do they need nurturing or do they need to learn something important from the pain? [...] The purpose is...to trust a journeyer's capacity to learn from their experience...without attempting to save them from their own state. In this case, a guide can be a 'sacred witness'...trusting that he or she will experience discomfort for as long as is needed.... Even if, as a guide, I do not immediately understand the benefit of someone being stuck [in pain] for a few hours, I can respect the mystery of their unfolding process.” In a section on “cathartic release” that involves crying, screaming, and shaking, Bourzat writes that “[t]he guide can...support the externalization of the process, as this deepens the release.” Gather Well’s website hosts an “ethics case study” that emphasizes how “clients...may sometimes request gentle, [caring holding](#) during the psychedelics session.”

View deleted video of Françoise Bourzat on [continuing her legacy through Gather Well Psychedelics](#)

PSI’s announcement of the Gather Well collaboration acknowledges that the “Ethics Framework” built on work by [bioethicists previously engaged by Gather Well](#). However, the announcement does not mention that these bioethicists had left the project and [relinquished all funds](#) after learning about how the lineage’s patterns of harm were allegedly driven by the group’s healing ideology.

The bioethicists’ departure followed months of discussion about the relationship between Gather Well’s lineage and the accounts of harm, based on meetings with Dr. Tehseen Noorani, Will Hall, and Psymposia’s Dr. Devenot. Noorani and Devenot subsequently published an essay in “Bill of Health” — the blog of the Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology, and Bioethics at Harvard Law School — titled “Bioethics, Psychedelic Therapy Abuse, and the Risk of Ethics Washing.” Drawing from these discussions, the essay warned about the risks of bioethicists unintentionally “ethics washing” dangerous underground lineages. By overlooking the influence of the underlying belief system, the



authors argued, ethical analysis can “[[obscure](#)] [substantive ethical issues](#)” that remain unresolved.

In their announcement about resuming the departed bioethicists’ work with Gather Well, PSI [cited this essay](#) as further reading. However, PSI did not acknowledge its role in continuing the very ethics-washing project that the essay critiqued — with PSFC’s backing and support.

As this report has demonstrated, Gather Well’s underlying belief system is foundational to PSFC’s project. Due to PSFC’s desire to mainstream this underground model of psychedelic therapy, its attempt to control the landscape of psychedelic ethics is creating the conditions for regulatory capture — ensuring that ethical oversight functions to normalize this model of therapy while marginalizing critique.

Despite unaddressed issues with the lineage, Gather Well is training psychedelic guides for state licensure in both Oregon and Colorado, as its website emphasizes: “Our aim is for our trained guides to meet all requirements to integrate smoothly into the developing field. For example our Psychedelic Guide Apprenticeship Program has been designed to satisfy the curriculum requirements laid out by the state of Oregon. The final module of Apprenticeship includes the option to complete the specific training necessary to apply for psychedelic practitioner licensure in the state of Colorado, [via Gather Well’s partnership with InnerTrek’s Accelerated Pathway training](#).”

Described by staff as the first government-recognized licensed and operating training program in the world, InnerTrek plays a specialized function within PSFC’s coordinated effort to control psychedelic access from policy creation through implementation. According to InnerTrek’s director of operations, Nate Howard, the organization’s original purpose was not to function as a training school for psychedelic guides, but rather to do [whatever was required to bring the state-regulated psilocybin market project to completion](#). Howard told States Newsroom “the intent behind InnerTrek wasn’t necessarily to start a school or a business — rather, its leaders wanted to ‘see this project



through’...referring to the state-regulated psilocybin market. Facilitator training was the first step.”

Rather than an organic response to market opportunities, InnerTrek’s training program served as one step in PSFC’s strategic plan for building out the infrastructure for a state-level psilocybin infrastructure. This coordination is exemplified by [InnerTrek's funding relationship with the PSFC-adjacent Healing Advocacy Fund](#) (HAF), whose [leadership includes](#) PSFC’s Boyd as President and Bronner as Director. The Fund has played a significant role in shaping psychedelic policy in Oregon and Colorado — crafting regulatory pathways that directly advantage InnerTrek and its partners. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Along with influencing state initiatives, HAF’s Executive Director Taylor West claimed to have coordinated with journalist Andrew Jacobs on a promotional *New York Times* story about psychedelic state initiatives. This coordination occurred during the period when Jacobs was reporting out his hit piece about Psymposia. In her 2024 year-end progress report, she claimed to have [connected a cancer patient with Jacobs](#) “so that [the patient] could share his powerful story” about using psychedelics. This connection resulted in [an uncritical and oversimplified account of psychedelic therapy](#) in the *New York Times*.

Prior to joining HAF, West [served multiple roles linked to PSFC](#), including chief of staff for New Approach, communications director for PSFC, co-creator and director of the UC Berkeley Psychedelics Survey, and philanthropic advisor to Christiana Musk’s Flourish Trust.

InnerTrek’s relationship with PSFC extended beyond funding into public relations strategizing. In [an email shared with Psymposia](#), InnerTrek founder Tom Eckert provided HAF director David Bronner with “verbiage” to use “in response to the media questioning the Oregon Program,” at Bronner’s request. This communication demonstrates clear coordination between InnerTrek and PSFC leadership.



[Based on input from HAF](#), Colorado's final rules for the state Natural Medicine Program created an "Accelerated Pathway to Colorado Licensure" that relies on evidence of prior training, determined at the discretion of state-approved training organizations. Gather Well's partner InnerTrek emphasizes that "Qualifying programs [need not be state-approved](#) in Oregon or Colorado." In addition to accepting prior training from other programs, InnerTrek offers an accelerated option for applicants "with deep experience in the psychedelic field, having worked with at least 40 participants, with at least 200 hours of experience conducting administration sessions, occurring over a period of at least two years."

Through this "accelerated pathway," practitioners from Bourzat's lineage need to complete just five days of in-person training and a 25-hour module to obtain Colorado state licensure, which grants them authority to work with vulnerable people who are desperate for healing. The result is a credentialing system that institutionalizes rather than protects against problematic practices, transforming unvetted underground practitioners into state-licensed professionals with minimal oversight. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Oregon requires psilocybin providers to gather client demographic information and Colorado's state program is also [set to begin collecting data](#) on psychedelic service users. Recent analysis of Oregon's data by *Psychedelic Alpha* revealed that "Mental and Emotional Health" [comprise nearly 35% of participants in psilocybin services](#). This means that over a third of all participants are receiving treatment for conditions like "severe PTSD, depression, and anxiety" from providers with no required training in mental health care. Howard from InnerTrek told *The Guardian* that "[advanced education and training doesn't necessarily make a good facilitator](#).... 'Because so much of it comes down to doing the opposite of what we're often taught'" (including practices like [practitioner-client touch](#) and [prolonged eye-gazing](#), which can [create false feelings of intimacy](#) that can be exploited by practitioners). Instead, licensed facilitators in Oregon are only required to be state residents of at least two years, 21 years of age or older and have a high school diploma. (In a July 30, 2025 email, HAF's new Strategic Director Denali



Wilson wrote that she hopes to draw upon HAF's experience in Oregon and Colorado [to help develop the recently-approved psilocybin therapy program](#) in New Mexico.)

While PSFC does not recognize the risks of this strategy in its Roadmap, it acknowledges that some may view philanthropy as an [“inappropriate ethics steward”](#) for the psychedelic ecosystem: “There may be skepticism about whether philanthropic organizations should take on the role of ethical gatekeepers in the psychedelic space, as some might question their impartiality or expertise.” To mitigate this risk, the Roadmap recommends that philanthropists “clearly acknowledge and learn from past ethical challenges in philanthropy — such as conflicts of interest or inadequate oversight in other fields — and demonstrate the current safeguards in place.” Despite calling for a “collaborative approach” to ethics as “a genuine inclusive multi-stakeholder effort,” PSFC is stacking the field with organizations it funds and influences, while supporting campaigns that target experts whose ethics work threatens their project.

Kim Witczak — a global drug safety advocate and FDA Advisory Committee member who voted against Lykos' application for MDMA-AT — [described how this tactic has contributed to patterns of harm across the pharmaceutical industry](#) in a July 2025 Substack article. Witczak describes how medical professionals receive education through industry-funded programs that teach practices based on treatment guidelines created by the same system that profits from overstated benefits and understated risks. She notes that patient advocacy groups — once independent grassroots organizations — have been co-opted by industry funding, transforming them into “astroturf” groups that appear grassroots but actually serve industry interests rather than patient needs, ensuring that the loudest advocacy voices align with industry priorities.

PSFC is aware that some of the underground organizations in its network have histories of conduct conflict with aboveground ethics. PSFC's Roadmap acknowledges potential [“resistance from stakeholders”](#) who “may resist adopting ethical standards, fearing it could stifle innovation or expose past unethical practices.” The Roadmap notes that this

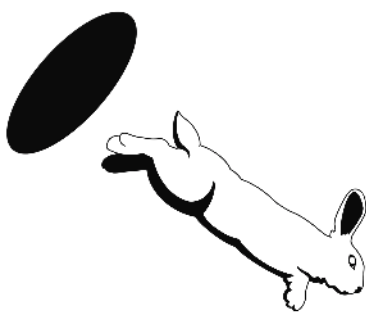


resistance may come particularly from "those who feel they are already operating responsibly or who may prioritize rapid growth over careful ethical considerations." To address donors' concerns about ethical compliance, PSFC proposes [relying on financial incentives without identifying the causes of harm or strategies for deterrence](#). This approach amounts to paying organizations for participation in ethics initiatives that serve to legitimize underground practices.

This strategy of using funding to establish legitimacy extends beyond therapeutic contexts into religious settings. PSFC's Roadmap outlines a ["long-term goal" to accelerate the spread of psychedelic churches](#) and self-regulated communities, envisioning a future in which "any U.S. individual[]" can access such a community by 2030. The Roadmap spotlights Shefa and Ligare — the religious nonprofits funded by PSFC members — based on their efforts to "responsibly incorporate psychedelic experiences into well-established traditions."

The Roadmap identifies these religious organizations as ["high priorities for individual philanthropy"](#) from PSFC members, with the potential to become a focus for collective funding if they demonstrate effective growth and impact at scale: "As these organizations' models are refined and their footprint grows, the path to large-scale impact will become clearer, and they could become top priorities for collective philanthropy."

In attempting to mainstream their preferred models of psychedelic religion and underground therapy through endorsements and funding recommendations, PSFC is institutionalizing drivers of harm under the banner of ethical leadership. By directing funding to define the field's standards for legitimacy, PSFC's efforts amount to regulatory capture of multiple novel markets. Since these markets are manufacturing public demand for psychedelics, PSFC is creating the conditions for its members to capitalize on their investment portfolios.





Afterword: Epitaph

Steve Jurvetson — the SpaceX board member — and his wife Genevieve Jurvetson have been central to PSFC’s strategy for shaping the psychedelic industry.

“[P]sychedelic science has become our primary philanthropic focus,” Steve Jurvetson acknowledged in a December 2024 interview with *Spiriterritory*. “[My wife now dedicates all her work time to this cause](#) and has joined the board of PSFC.” In addition to his roles at SpaceX and Future Ventures — a firm he co-founded that claims to have influenced “[\\$1.7 trillion of aggregate value creation](#)” through its investments — Steve Jurvetson works with his wife to advance PSFC’s core priorities:

“Together, we’ve organized numerous events and conferences. We’ve also become involved with state ballot initiatives in Oregon and Colorado, which have effectively decriminalized psilocybin and plant medicines for therapeutic use.... The goal is to minimize risks and proceed cautiously, taking baby steps rather than rushing too far, too fast. That’s the story of how we got started and how we’ve arrived where we are today.”

Just before this — almost in passing — Steve Jurvetson described his early investment in Atai Life Sciences: “As you may know, Atai is a holding company with many assets, one of the largest being Compass Pathways — a publicly traded psilocybin company focused on treating various forms of depression.”

One month after Steve Jurvetson’s *Spiriterritory* interview, the Jurvetsons spoke at DLD 2025 in Munich — a tech-forward conference whose previous speaker roster includes Silicon Valley power players like Peter Thiel, Mark Zuckerberg, and Sheryl Sandberg. Framing themselves as disinterested advocates, the couple spoke about their hopes for psychedelic therapies and the political lobbying they’ve undertaken to dismantle regulatory barriers.



To justify that lobbying, Genevieve Jurvetson asserted: “[We haven't been investing at all in psychedelics](#) — anything commercial — so that we can work in Washington, and that people know...we really don't have a horse in this race. We just want to get these compounds out as safely as possible.” ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** This involvement in Washington included the July 10, 2024 press conference hosted by Heroic Hearts and Healing Breakthrough, which both Steve and Genevieve Jurvetson promoted. Genevieve Jurvetson [accompanied Marine veteran Dakota Meyer](#) to the event, while Steve Jurvetson [posted reassurance about technical issues](#) with the Heroic Hearts livestream.



Images posted to Twitter/X of Steve and Genevieve Jurvetson's trip to Washington in May 2025 |

Source: [Twitter/X](#)

But the Jurvetsons did have a horse in the race. Steve Jurvetson's firm, Future Ventures — which lists atai Life Sciences in its [“current portfolio of world-changing companies”](#) — was [an early investor](#), participating in the \$32 million convertible-debt financing in early 2020 that converted as part of atai's \$125 million Series C round, alongside other backers



including Palantir co-founder Peter Thiel.

Steve Jurvetson's brief mention of atai in the *Spiriterritory* interview did not fully capture the scale of atai's footprint in the psychedelic sector. In June 2025, [atai Life Sciences announced a merger](#) with Beckley Psytech in an estimated \$390 million all-share deal. As of October 9, 2025, atai and Compass together made up roughly over half of the total market capitalization of major publicly traded psychedelic companies.

Through their overlapping roles as philanthropists, lobbyists and investors, the Jurvetsons are representatives of a broader Silicon Valley strategy: engineering a new industry under the guise of altruism while quietly building systems of control that serve their own interests. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Many of PSFC's members were relying on projects that the group funded — such as Lykos' clinical trials — to safeguard their investments across the psychedelic ecosystem. As PSFC emphasized to members in its first Quarterly Update, "We anticipate that if MAPS's MDMA trial succeeds, it could be [a catalytic event for the entire field that would enable funding to flow](#) into many research areas."

This strategy underpins the infrastructure PSFC has spent years developing — a machinery of social and regulatory engineering designed to shape the psychedelic field in Silicon Valley's image.

Following the precedent set by tech plutocrats, PSFC was willing to manipulate their core constituencies to shape perception and consolidate influence. Once PSFC used this influence to turn the psychedelic ecosystem into another tech platform, they began deploying [algorithms for behavior change](#).

As Adrienne LaFrance writes in *The Atlantic*, the tools produced by Silicon Valley are, at scale, "[also systems of manipulation and control](#)." The threat will intensify as the



psychedelics, AI, and surveillance industries converge. Already, Compass Pathways is [using an AI tool called Chanterelle in its clinical trials](#) which “records sessions with...patients” and can allegedly “be used for continuous optimization throughout treatment.”

The implications of this convergence of psychedelics, AI, and surveillance become clear when examining the future that PSFC's Steve Jurvetson envisions for psychedelic therapy.

“There’s no reason in the world that it needs to be a human in the room holding your hand for 24 to 48 hours,” Steve Jurvetson told *Spiriterritory*, describing a future where AI would handle psychedelic therapy while humans — [“the lowest-cost labor you can imagine”](#) — served as backup for physical emergencies. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In Steve Jurvetson’s future, a clinic's observation room might flicker with feeds from thermal cameras, motion sensors, and biometric monitors tracking patients in isolated pods. An underpaid technician without medical training keeps her eyes fixed on the monitors, while a Palantir surveillance module tracks her gaze to ensure constant vigilance.

In Pod 7, a middle-aged man writhes on his mat, pupils dilated, as the AI therapist speaks in a carefully modulated voice, drawing from training data that includes Grok’s revised corpus of human psychology. Tears begin streaming down the patient’s face while the AI responds with what its Musk-curated training deemed appropriate: a mixture of radical self-reliance philosophy and warnings about adopting a victim mindset. The technician watches the man curl into himself, while the surveillance system’s green outline confirms he is within acceptable movement parameters. When the patient cries out — [“Don’t do this to me!”](#) — the AI [continues its approach](#) while the technician stays in her chair. Human intervention is authorized only if the patient tries to breach the pod door.

“It seems like the obvious long-term solution,” Steve Jurvetson told *Spiriterritory*, referring to AI guides.



We are clearly at a dangerous moment. Psychedelics have been normalized for medicalized use without a real understanding of their risks, especially their capacity to render people [vulnerable to influence](#) and [persuasion](#). At the same time, unregulated AI has been unleashed on the masses — persuasion machines that are leading to [an epidemic of ChatGPT-induced psychosis](#). These developments are converging in a context where few are inoculated against disinformation, as [critical thinking has been systematically undermined](#) through attacks on education and the humanities. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** In August 2025, a wrongful death lawsuit filed against OpenAI alleged that ChatGPT contributed to the suicide of a vulnerable teenager. The filing asserted that “[t]his tragedy was not a glitch or an unforeseen edge case — it was [the predictable result of deliberate design choices](#).” The abuse that occurred during MAPS’s Phase 2 clinical trial of MDMA similarly resulted from deliberate design choices.

Billionaires are now championing both psychedelics and AI not as tools for collective liberation, but as instruments for social engineering. In the same DLD Munich interview where Genevieve Jurvetson denied any financial stake in psychedelics, Steve Jurvetson speculated about using AI to shape public opinion. While stroking his chin, he reflected on the possibility of [“infiltrat\[ing\] Grok and ChatGPT”](#) to disseminate preferred narratives about the field.

This is not idle speculation, but a credible threat with material backing. Four months after the Jurvetsons’ DLD Munich interview, the feasibility of Steve Jurvetson’s speculation became clear when Grok was altered to promote a specific political agenda. In May 2025, the Trump administration controversially [admitted 59 white South African refugees](#) into the country after suspending resettlement of other refugees who had gone through years of vetting. Within a week, [Grok had been altered](#) to push the [Trump administration's unfounded claims](#) about a “white genocide” in South Africa.



Although Twitter/X distanced itself from this “white genocide” incident and claimed the alteration to Grok was unauthorized, the details of the incident align with Elon Musk’s expressed vision for Twitter/X and Grok. In June 2025, Musk announced plans to [retrain Grok to be “anti-woke”](#) and “[rewrite the entire corpus of human knowledge](#),” which [Gary Marcus](#) — an AI company founder and critic — has described as an attempt to align Grok with [Musk’s “own personal beliefs” and “make it conform” to his views](#).

Grok is a product of xAI — the parent company of Twitter/X — in which Steve Jurvetson’s Future Ventures is [directly invested](#). Through Steve Jurvetson’s personal ties to Musk and his firm’s financial stake in xAI, the material infrastructure exists for PSFC to deploy chatbots in service of their preferred psychedelic narratives. ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Leadership at one psychedelic startup has already admitted to deploying AI bots to create industry-friendly propaganda. Around the time of the FDA decision on MDMA-AT, Tactogen CEO Dr. Matthew Baggott admitted to Psymposia on a November 15, 2024 Zoom call that he was using a custom large language model (LLM) to manufacture discourse on Reddit as part of a low-cost PR strategy. Baggott claimed to have created multiple Reddit user accounts trained on his LLM to engage in discussions on psychedelic subreddits.

After Baggott inadvertently responded as one of these accounts from his personal account — u/MBaggott — the account’s bio was updated to read “[unfiltered alt for u/MBaggott](#).” When Baggott was asked about this account [spreading misinformation about Psymposia](#), he said “I figured this might happen” and offered to explain the account’s behavior.

When asked about his account echoing conspiratorial claims from podcaster Hamilton Morris, Baggott responded: “Exactly.” Baggott then asserted that he had trained his LLM on Morris’ content. When asked for further details, Baggott stated that he was bound by nondisclosure agreements.



➡ **UPDATE 10/19/2025, 7:45 PM EDT:** Baggott did not return Psymposia's request for comment before publication. In a subsequent statement to The Microdose, Baggott described his use of AI chatbots on Reddit as "a tiny experiment I ran." He characterized Psymposia's reporting on his use of AI to disseminate misinformation as "rehashing Biden-era disputes."

Since the FDA decision against Lykos, Morris has promoted false narratives that Psymposia is conducting a [harassment campaign against him](#) and that Psymposia's Dr. Devenot was "[lying](#)" to the FDA advisory committee, among other unsubstantiated claims.

Although [the editorial board of The American Journal of Bioethics reviewed Devenot's claims](#) and confirmed their validity, Morris has continued to promote these and other false narratives about Psymposia on major media platforms with millions of subscribers, including [The Danny Jones Podcast](#), [VICE News](#), and [Andrew Callaghan's 5CAST](#). At the end of a two-hour video titled "How a Paid 'Activist' Group Destroyed the Fight for Legal MDMA," Callaghan called on his viewers to take action against Psymposia: "Alright, so what are we gonna do about these people? What's the plan? How are we gonna take them down, Channel 5CAST viewers? What can the people of the world do, the 5CAST viewers, to destroy these bastards?"

The impact of psychedelics and AI will depend not on their inherent potential, but on who controls them, how they are used, and toward what ends. Right now, that future is being written by a small, unaccountable elite who are acting in their own interests.

As a consequence, the psychedelic revolution is being hijacked by the same forces that created the crises it claims to solve. True healing requires democratic access to these tools and recognition that individual pain stems from collective oppression.

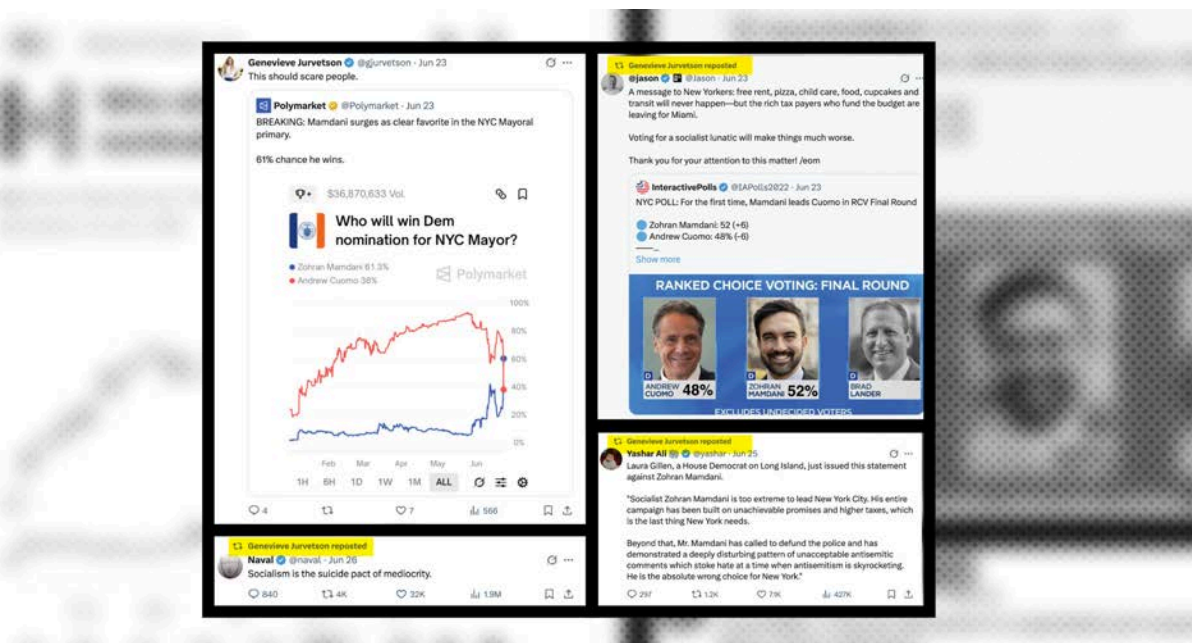
An alternative possibility for psychedelics lies in the framework of liberation psychology, which understands distress as a natural response to collective suffering rather than



individual pathology. Originally developed in Latin America, this paradigm centers collective action, mutual aid, and structural change as [essential components of healing](#).

On its current trajectory, psychedelic psychiatry reduces healing to inner transformations, negating the healing potential of organized resistance against the systems that generate collective suffering. This individualistic approach aligns with PSFC's commitment to [status quo philanthro-capitalism](#).

PSFC leadership have signaled opposition to the systemic changes that would prevent mass suffering. On Twitter/X, for instance, PSFC board member Genevieve Jurvetson reposted the claim that “socialism is the suicide pact of mediocrity” and shared statements that belittled New York City voters seeking relief for rent, food, and childcare. These positions reflect a worldview where material needs are not seen as rights, but as market opportunities. As Jurvetson stated on the PSFC Roadmap panel, “I’m someone who loves capitalism, for all of its flaws. And [if there is a for-profit solution, that's usually the best one](#).”



A collage of Twitter/X posts and reposts from Genevieve Jurvetson about the election of Zohran Mamdani and embrace of socialist policies. | Source: Genevieve Jurvetson's Twitter/X



The contradictions inherent to the psychedelic renaissance are encapsulated in Genevieve Jurvetson's X profile. Between announcements about her foundation's funding of Gül Dolen's psychedelic brain imaging research and a study on Heroic Hearts' psychedelic retreats, she endorses an essay that [rails against so-called "luxury beliefs,"](#) which include defunding the police, creating open borders, supporting trans rights, and recognizing Palestine.



A collage of Twitter/X posts from Genevieve Jurvetson endorsing an essay by Niall Ferguson about “luxury beliefs.” | Source: Genevieve Jurvetson’s Twitter/X

The juxtaposition of these posts presents a microcosm of a “psychedelic renaissance” that has been co-opted by far-right, reactionary forces. Although Genevieve Jurvetson’s position might seem contradictory for a movement driven by ideals of inclusion and interconnection, it represents a coherent ideology that treats social justice as a threat to established hierarchies. With such forces in control, psychedelics are being deployed not for collective liberation but as instruments of class warfare.



Another front of this [right-wing psychedelic](#) project is the medicalization of ibogaine, derived from *Tabernanthe iboga* — a plant [traditionally used in African Bwiti spiritual practices](#). Ibogaine has received political traction in Texas under the thought leadership of [Bryan Hubbard, CEO of Americans for Ibogaine](#), with podcaster Joe Rogan contributing to shifts in popular opinion.

As explored in a video essay by The Elephant Graveyard, *The Joe Rogan Experience* has long promoted guests who combine [reactionary views with enthusiasm for psychedelia](#). In January 2025, Hubbard advocated for the medical use of ibogaine on Rogan's podcast alongside Rick Perry, the former Texas Governor who had featured at PSFC's 2021 Summit. Perry opened the episode by [crediting former Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell and his brother, Morgan Luttrell \(R-TX\)](#) with opening his mind to the potentials of psychedelics. Having [met during Hubbard's failed bid to repurpose \\$42 million of Kentucky's opioid settlement funds for ibogaine](#) research, the pair teamed up to advance ibogaine research in Texas. Following their Rogan appearance, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed [Senate Bill 2308](#) in June 2025, which allocated \$50 million for ibogaine research. As quoted in *The Texas Tribune*, Hubbard attributed their victory to Perry's influence: "[None of this is possible without Perry....](#) He made it happen in Texas. That is a big deal and catches the attention of the nation." ➡

➡ **EXTRA CONTEXT:** Despite well-established cardiac risks, Colorado is currently [evaluating options for adding ibogaine to its Natural Medicine Program](#). According to August 2025 reporting by UC Berkeley's *The Microdose*, [PSFC has pledged \\$1.8 million to support Colorado's Natural Medicine program](#) "with the first installment of \$100,000 expected to arrive pending contract signing."

During a July 2025 interview, when asked about the risk of psychedelics greasing the far-right war machine, Hubbard [implies that the left poses the real political danger](#). Mirroring Genevieve Jurvetson's dismissal of "luxury beliefs," Hubbard suggests that leftists would exploit psychedelic suggestibility to indoctrinate people with the belief that basic needs are human rights:



“On the left side — you know, if the right wing has a grand war machine, in my opinion, the political left has a ‘beautiful’ subjugation machine that they like to deploy to create as many helpless and powerless people as they can, that rely upon the largess of the government that they control for everything related to their basic needs.”

The ease with which key figures in the psychedelic industry express reactionary views makes their consolidation of power within the field all the more dangerous.

With this amount of centralized power, the psychedelic industry could mislead the public to believe that victims of abusive therapists were actually seductive; that [whistleblowers are the shadowy enemy](#); that billionaires are looking out for your best interests.

The tactics of persuasion used by the psychedelic industry are part of a larger system of reality manipulation, convincing the public that [plastic can be sustainably recycled](#); that [children can be terrorists](#); that [leftists are the real threat to democracy](#). In the words of Malcolm X: “If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you [hating the people who are being oppressed](#), and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.”

In the psychedelic field, the implications are that our understanding of how psychedelics work — and what psychedelic therapy even is — has been artificially constrained by this small network of elites. By promoting limited narratives that serve their interests, this network has contributed to [“the temptation to prematurely close the psychedelic mind.”](#)

These reductive explanations systematically suppress genuine inquiry into psychedelic experience. When the public is fed simplistic narratives — such as the claim that psychedelics “reset the brain” — these clichés occupy the cognitive space where curiosity and creativity would otherwise be. Just as AI chatbots are designed to provide definitive responses, the psychedelic industry’s consensus messaging forecloses alternative modes of understanding these substances. This controlled narrative ensures that potential tools for



class consciousness and collective liberation become instruments of social control and individual pacification.

Although MAPS's supporters argue that legalizing the underground is necessary to address prohibition's harms, this presents a false choice between maintaining prohibition and legitimizing underground therapy. This reasoning sidesteps the crucial question of whether underground systems are actually safe or effective. To be clear, addressing prohibition's harms does not require embracing whatever practices exist in the shadows. With appropriate safeguards and drug education, decriminalization could address the harms of prohibition without institutionalizing the imbalances of power, risks of abuse, and lack of accountability that characterize many underground practices.

While we are not opposed to the medical use of psychedelics as one use case among many, this report has demonstrated that the status quo is not sustainable. Since these treatments are marketed to society's most vulnerable populations, [the standards should be high to get this right before it scales](#).

At a minimum, regulators should implement the recommendations outlined in a [2022 report by the Stanford-Lancet Commission](#) on the North American Opioid Crisis, which identified the systemic failures that enabled widespread harm. Although psychedelics and opioids have different risk profiles, they share what the report describes as a “dual nature,” presenting unique potentials for modern medicine while simultaneously carrying unique risks. As discussed in the Stanford-Lancet report, the opioid industry downplayed the unique risks of its products in its communications with medical providers, regulators, and politicians. It accomplished this by promoting industry-friendly thought leaders and astroturfed advocacy organizations like the American Pain Foundation, which received 88% of its annual budget from opioid manufacturers and medical device makers, and coordinated messaging with industry representatives.

To curb industry influence, the Stanford-Lancet report recommends restricting drug promotion and industry-funded education, ending regulatory “revolving doors” and



industry-run post-approval oversight, firewalling prescribing bodies from industry ties, unmasking astroturf groups, and reinstating limits on corporate political donations. Since astroturf groups regularly disseminate advocacy messages through the media, the report also highlights journalists' responsibility to identify pharmaceutical industry influence over the sources they quote and the information they report.

According to the report, astroturfed messaging can also “represent a form of fraud against investors (by conveying that a company's products are more popular with the public than they are in reality).” Although the report urges the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to require corporations to disclose any funding of advocacy groups, the SEC should also require intermediary organizations to disclose their own industry ties and investments when they fund industry-friendly advocacy groups.

Implementing the Stanford-Lancet Commission's recommendations would rein in PSFC's attempts to control the psychedelic industry. Since we have already seen what happens when a pharmaceutical treatment is unscrupulously promoted to the public in a manner that minimizes risks, regulators and researchers must protect against corporate capture to build a robust evidence base for the psychedelic field. This will ultimately require public funding of independent research and education about psychedelics that is not driven by industry interests.

Although the information vacuum around the rejection of Lykos' application allowed industry narratives to flourish, that stranglehold is beginning to falter. On September 5, 2025 — as we were finishing this report — the FDA unexpectedly [released the Complete Response Letter](#) detailing its reasons for rejecting Lykos' application. The previous reporting from Rachel Nuwer, Andrew Jacobs, and John Semley had omitted the most serious details from the letter — details that corroborated Psymposia's testimony to the FDA. According to the letter, the FDA had conducted independent investigations that revealed “several unreported adverse events for at least two sites,” and additional investigations were still ongoing. As a result of these discoveries, the FDA could not trust Lykos' safety data.



Lykos' own former Chief Medical Officer told *Psychedelic Alpha* that she was alarmed by these revelations, while another psychedelic researcher described these unreported adverse events as “a big deal.” It was clear to people familiar with the FDA process that Lykos' own failures were what led to the rejection of its application. One consultant concluded that “ultimately the question of their data reliability and reporting was the dealbreaker.”

In a statement, MAPS asserted that the FDA “moved the goalposts,” demanding “more information [after patients and researchers had already poured years of their lives](#) into this process.” The organization refuses to accept accountability for its failures and [continues to blame Psymposia](#) for injecting fear into the decision process.

“MAPS will keep driving forward...catalyzing humanitarian projects in high trauma/low resource areas of the world,” the organization trumpeted defiantly. “We will not stop.”

Until the public narrative about psychedelics is reconciled with the industry's true history, it will only be a matter of time before the flaws of this strategy become undeniable.

“The thing is everyone on earth has been dragged along on a ride in a submarine by the billionaires. They have been assured by experts that it's an unsafe craft, and the cracks are already starting to show, but their hubris makes them feel invincible.” – Bee Schlotz, teacher



The principal authors in 2021. From left: Brian Pace, Neşe Devenot, Russell Hausfeld, and Brian Normand.