



ILSR

INSTITUTE FOR
Local Self-Reliance

Annual Report 2021

Building Local Power
Fighting Corporate Control



Letter from the Co-Directors

Dear Friends,

While the worst of the pandemic is behind us, it's clear that the economic effects will reverberate for years to come. Many large corporations took advantage of the pandemic and increased their outsized sway over our economy and our democracy. This has exacerbated economic, racial, and geographic disparities, leaving many communities struggling on the margins.

We believe ILSR's work is more needed than ever before. We've seen a spike in demand for our research and assistance over the last few years, as local leaders, lawmakers, advocates, and citizens look for ways to combat corporate power and build thriving, equitable, and just communities.

This year our work has been critical to the growing momentum in Congress to rein in the Big Tech giants and reinvigorate our antitrust laws. We've also been pleased to see ILSR's priorities reflected in the new administration's enthusiastic support for breaking up concentrated corporate power through key appointments, executive orders, and other steps.

Meanwhile, across the country, ILSR is working alongside community leaders and using diverse collaborations to build local power and fight corporate control. We're advocating for thousands of small businesses driven to the brink of bankruptcy by Amazon's predatory policies. We're working to break the grip of the monopoly telecoms so people in rural and marginalized communities can access fast, affordable, and reliable local broadband. We're joining with clean energy advocates looking to embrace local solar power and challenge absurd utility monopolies granted over a century ago. And we're empowering local citizens across the country who see community composting and better recycling systems as part of the answer to a broken waste sector and an environment in crisis.

We send thanks to our foundation partners and to the many individuals who have supported our efforts and, with your help, we look forward to having an even greater impact in 2022!



Stacy Mitchell and John Farrell
Co-Directors

Cover Page Design: Clarissa Libertelli

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WE SEND OUR SINCERE APPRECIATION TO OUR TERRIFIC COLLEAGUES WHO LEFT THIS YEAR:

Michelle Andrews • Shaoul Sussman • H. Rose Trostle

WE THANK ALL OUR INTERNS AND VOLUNTEERS:

Ibrahim Ahmed • Jordan Ashby • Jade Boehmer • Aidan Checkett
Luke Gannon • Emma Gautier • Atlas (Chenxiao) Guo • Hannah Henderson-Charnow
Henry Holtgeerts • Abby Hornberger • Sophia Jones • Anael Kengne
Clarissa Libertelli • Aidan Malone • Solomon Neuwirth • Angel Ornelas
Shiva Patel • Ronaldo Reyes • Chloe Seldman • Aarushi Sen • Alondra Sierra
Sara Tohamy • Ethan Winter

AND A BIG THANK-YOU TO OUR SUPERB ACCOUNTING TEAM:

Studio501: Mary Cleary, Hope Ogunbamiyo, Tori Burggraff & Fiona Robinson

In the Media

ILSR was cited in **722 stories** in more than **475 media outlets** in 2021.

The Washington Post

“It’s a striking disparity: In this country, there is now dollar-store land and there is Whole Foods land,” said Stacy Mitchell.” — *Washington Post*

STRONG TOWNS

“Something that we throw away so often with so little regard is contributing to adverse health effects and is a waste of a really precious resource given the erosion of topsoil and climate change. Composting is really a win-win in all of those arenas.... When done at the community scale, it can also create wealth and circulate dollars in your community.” — *ILSR’s Sophia Hosain on the Strong Towns Podcast*

HighCountryNews

“Tribes do have an opportunity when it comes to solutions, said H. Rose Trostle (Cherokee Nation) [...] The goal is not to just address the digital divide through the report, they said, but to encourage development and enact tribal sovereignty.” — *High Country News*

ILSR published **30 commentaries** in media outlets in 2021.



“Sean Gonsalves... says allowing municipalities to operate their own broadband programs brings lower costs and improves the quality of available broadband overall. He argues that proposed restrictions, likely crafted by telecom company lobbyists, aren’t aiming to improve broadband.” — *NPR*

ILSR’s podcasts were **streamed more than 108,000 times** in 2021.

THE NEW YORKER

“As the invaluable Institute for Local Self-Reliance pointed out a full decade ago, ‘With new rules, we can unlock the potential of distributed generation and the potential of people to power the clean energy future.’” — *Bill McKibben, environmentalist, in the New Yorker*

The New York Times

“When the government moved in a robust way to keep everybody afloat, free-market ideologies died,” said Stacy Mitchell [...] “People now appreciate that the government can either make choices that centralize power and wealth or it can structure markets and industries in ways that deliver benefits more broadly.” — *New York Times*

ILSR had **22 prominent broadcast media hits** in 2021.



▲ “We’re seeing a rebirth of recycling in the United States... we don’t need Big Waste. Cities and small companies are doing this on their own.” — Neil Seldman on Newsy



▲ “[Facebook] said, ‘instead of competing against these companies on the merits in the marketplace, we’re just going to buy them.’ And it’s exactly the kind of thing that our antimonopoly laws are intended to prevent.” — Ron Knox on BBC World News



▲ “The new wave of federal investments offers an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen small businesses, spur a new wave of entrepreneurship, and help rebuild Main Street.” — Kennedy Smith at Route Fifty’s Future Cities Summit

Fighting Corporate Control

→ Local Food Delivery Services Provide Better Alternatives to the Big Apps

ILSR's Kennedy Smith wrote a much needed report, **Special Delivery**, profiling 20 local restaurant delivery services and explaining why these independent businesses and co-ops are superior to the big Wall Street-backed apps like DoorDash and Uber Eats, whose exorbitant fees and deceptive practices are killing restaurants and extracting wealth from Main Street. Media coverage of the report led several cities to seek ILSR's guidance on policies to limit and regulate the big apps.

→ Antitrust Action is Music to Our Ears

ILSR's Ron Knox published a **big cover story in the Washington Post Outlook** section on "How Washington got back into trustbusting." The timing, released as the House Judiciary Committee considered its Big Tech bills, was perfect to drive momentum in D.C. to reinvigorate antitrust policy and enforcement. Another **important article** in *WIRED* magazine was published about how concentration in the music industry has been disastrous for artists, concert venues, and independent record labels.

→ Exposing the Downsides of Industrial-Scale Food-Scrap Recovery

ILSR helped expose the unfortunate trend of **state policy privileging large industrial sites over local composters**. Large-scale, centralized food waste composting facilities are siphoning business and jobs out of local communities, exacerbating truck traffic, and shifting the market away from clean materials to projects that inadvertently lead to plastics contamination and the creation of poor-quality compost.

→ Stopping a Corporate Takeover of Recycling

ILSR has been at the forefront of policy debates giving manufacturers more authority over recovery and disposal of their own products, known as **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**. ILSR has educated networks of business and environmental justice organizations, calling out the dangers of poorly designed EPR proposals that turn over all authority for recycling to large corporations at the expense of local decision-making. In Washington and California, ILSR's position has been vindicated as legislatures have rejected EPR proposals advanced by "big waste" in favor of smarter improvements in recycling programs that provide more local benefits to communities.

Building Local Power

→ Small Businesses Fight for a Level Playing Field

ILSR launched **Small Business Rising**, a coalition of two-dozen small business groups representing more than 150,000 businesses urging elected leaders to break the power of monopolies. The launch attracted a feature story in the Wall Street Journal, and stories in *Bloomberg, Inc., Politico, The Hill*, and the *Associated Press*. By July, *The Hill* reported that Small Business Rising was "playing a pivotal role in high-profile debates over antitrust." The coalition co-hosted a lively Town Hall with Senator Amy Klobuchar, who noted, "Americans understand this idea that there's too much consolidation, and that concentrated markets have negative impacts" for small businesses, workers, and communities of color.

→ Driving Local Clean Energy to Deliver on our Climate Goals

ILSR continued to deliver much-needed, community-centered climate and clean energy tools for advocates and city leaders. Among the new resources are **report cards on local energy policy** and **distributed solar efforts**, a new dispersed solar forecasting model to influence utility resource planning regulatory dockets, and **dozens of podcast interviews** covering local climate initiatives and exposing how monopoly power in the utility sector hinders equitable clean energy deployment.

→ Cultivating Community-Engaged and On-Farm Composting

With the pandemic continuing to limit our ability to conduct in-person training events, ILSR expanded our virtual composting workshops, launched an online community composting certificate course, and produced a series of lesson plans and other educational resources that cities and neighborhoods can use to train their own constituents. Our **new on-farm composting webinar series** has reached more than 195 farmers in 35 states, plus Puerto Rico and 11 other countries. We continued to support community composting demonstration sites in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Nashville, and expanded our assistance to include Detroit, Chicago, and Cincinnati.



▲ Volunteers build a compost screener made, in part, from repurposed bicycle wheel rims at Hidden Harvest Farm, an event organized by ILSR and sponsored by the Baltimore Office of Sustainability. Photo Credit: Brenda Platt



▲ Congressman David Cicilline cites ILSR's work during the House Judiciary Committee's debate of legislation to rein in the power of Big Tech.

▲ Katy Milani speaks at a rally held outside an Amazon bookstore to launch *New Yorkers for a Fair Economy*, a coalition which aims to hold powerful corporations accountable for their abusive practices. Photo Credit: Alex Moore

Influencing Federal Policy to Help Local Initiatives

→ Protecting Communities' Freedom to Invest in Broadband Infrastructure

As part of the federal American Rescue Plan, telecom monopolies advising the Biden Administration on funding for broadband proposed regulations that would have severely limited community-level innovation, with particular harm to communities of color. ILSR **published an in-depth analysis** and activated a network of allies to draw attention to the shortcomings and engage the White House to improve the final rules. While less than perfect, the new programs incorporated ILSR's perspective and provided important flexibility to fund community-led broadband projects.

→ Shaping a National Anti-Monopoly Policy Agenda

ILSR's work was pivotal to securing the House Judiciary Committee's passage of several bills to break up and rein in the outsized power of "Big Tech." ILSR's work was cited by lead author Rep. David Cicilline during the debates, and Committee staff credited ILSR's mobilization of small businesses as essential in winning over key votes. ILSR's original **research on Amazon** was widely cited in the media and quoted extensively in the Committee's final report on its Big Tech investigation. Also on Capitol Hill, ILSR and our allies conducted educational efforts in Congress, organizing five Senate and House briefings on the impact of Big Tech, featuring frontline communities. In July, President Biden signed a sweeping Executive Order addressing consolidation throughout our economy. The order includes several provisions that reflect ILSR's priorities and research.

→ Enabling Communities to Get to Zero Waste

ILSR was a founding member of the U.S. Composting Infrastructure Coalition that helped develop **the COMPOST Act**. If passed, it will designate composting as a conservation practice and provide \$200 million per year to composting facilities and programs – with a portion of the funds earmarked for small-scale operators. Meanwhile, ILSR partnered with the National Recycling Coalition and Zero Waste USA to launch the Recycling Is Infrastructure Too campaign and co-author a comprehensive **Recycling Infrastructure Plan** outlining 50 initiatives and a \$16.3 billion budget to increase reuse, recycling, and composting.

→ Creating Jobs and Addressing Climate Change with Equitable Solar Energy

ILSR launched the federal **30 Million Solar Homes** campaign, which helped shift the national climate policy discourse to focus more on decentralized, local power as key to reducing emissions. ILSR created an economic analysis, a federal policy roadmap, and an implementation strategy for programs and policies that will rapidly expand solar energy deployment, create good jobs, and bring racial and economic equity to the energy sector. It's been an incredible partnership with Solar United Neighbors, Initiative for Energy Justice, and others.

Praise

“Read brilliant @stacyfmitchell - we can and must take on Bezos and Amazon”

— **Mary Beth Maxwell**, founder of *American Rights at Work*

“@ilsr is just one of the best #localbusiness advocacy entities out there.”

— **Miriam Ellis**, small business owner

“The @ilsr has published a blockbuster report on the ways that Amazon increasingly abuses its market power against both buyers and sellers on its platform - it’s a timely addition to the discourse on monopolism, monopsonism, competition and Big Tech.”

— **Cory Doctorow**, author and activist

“I have a deep respect for your insights, and your facts-first approach to local energy. I am always learning from you.”

— **Bill Nussey**, founder of the *Freeing Energy Project*

“Reading a robust set of policies that will strengthen local communities is a fantastic way to start anyone’s morning. Read @ilsr’s latest report! It is a #mustread.”

— **Daniel Hanley**, *Open Markets Institute*

“It’s usually the guys that solicit the least who work the hardest. ILSR has proved itself over and over and over again; so glad to make a small contribution. Keep up your wonderful work. You are moving the needle!”

— **Lauren Greenberger**, *Sugarloaf Citizens’ Association*

Podcast Spotlight



BUILDING LOCAL POWER

Our flagship podcast, *Building Local Power*, features conversations that you won’t hear anywhere else. Tune in for thought-provoking discussions of economic power and democracy as well as new ideas on how communities can take charge of their economic futures.

2021 SPECIAL GUESTS:

Christopher Ali (University of Virginia), Ilana Preuss (Recast City), Seth Berry (Maine State Representative), Amanda Cather (Million Acre Challenge), Solana Rice (Liberation in a Generation), Jeremie Greer (Liberation in a Generation), Jean Su (Center for Biological Diversity), Tom Gilbert (Black Dirt Farm), Lor Holmes (CERO Cooperative), Danny Caine (Raven Book Store), Natasha Amott (Whisk), Brad Lander (New York City Council), John Romankiewicz (Sierra Club), Alec MacGillis (Journalist and Author), Gena McKinley (City of Austin, Texas), Leslie Glustromv (Clean Energy Action), Gary Liss (Zero Waste USA), Bob Gedert (National Recycling Coalition), Chuck Marohn (Strong Towns), Chris Villarreal (Plugged In Strategies)

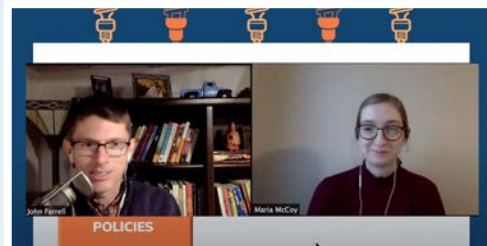


LISTENERS ARE SAYING:

“I just started listening to @ilsr podcasts & I’m hooked. Really insightful & accessible conversations about how concentration of corporate power / monopoly power is corrosive to democracy & justice. Did I mention they’re also interesting to listen to?”

— **Terri Gerstein**, *Economic Policy Institute*

LISTEN TO OUR PODCASTS: ILSR.ORG/PODCASTS



“Residents of Puerto Rico are ready for energy democracy. Specifically, a resilient, renewable electricity system with equitably shared benefits. Listen to @ILSR’s Local Energy Rules on Puerto Rican homes.” — **Mark Ruffalo**, actor and activist

◀ *John Farrell and Maria McCoy discuss ILSR’s Community Power Toolkit, featuring stories of how cities are taking charge of their energy future.*



“Where do I begin? This @ilsr discussion with @LiberationIn about the urgency of addressing racial injustice in #corporateconcentration and #monopolies is a must-listen and the report is a must-read. VERY relevant for the #climatejustice conversation.” — **Nicole Sitaraman**, *Sustainable Capital*

◀ *Linda Bilsens Brolis and Jess Del Fiocco are joined by Amanda Cather (Million Acre Challenge) for a Building Local Power podcast conversation.*

Income & Expenses

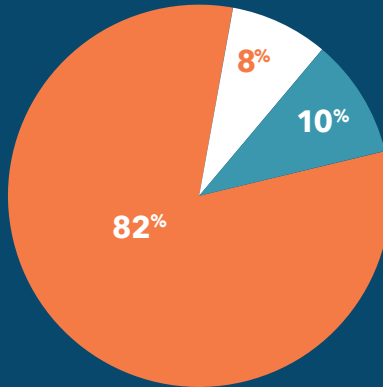
Fiscal Year 2021

July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021

We send our sincere gratitude to the individuals and foundations that have supported our work over the last 47 years.

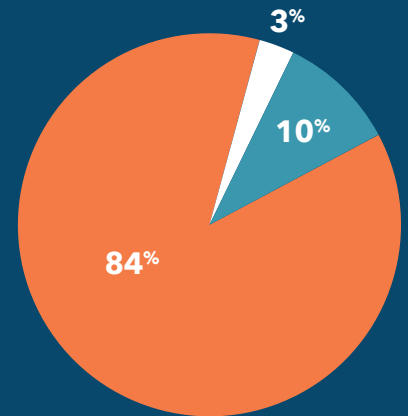
INCOME

- Grants
\$2,410,669
- Contracts, Honoraria,
& Misc
\$244,840
- Contributions
\$298,994



EXPENSES

- Program
\$2,571,868
- Fundraising
\$94,159
- Management
& General
\$288,486



SUPPORT ILSR! [ILSR.ORG/DONATE](https://www.ilsr.org/donate)



Impact Story: Local Self-Reliance In Action

ILSR's broadband team, in partnership with the Internet Society and the University of Washington, held **Tribal Wireless Bootcamp**. This 4-day in-person event offered subsidized training as part of a strategy to develop capacity and collaborative networks among several Native American Tribes. While experience varied—some attendees were already operating networks and others were new to it—everyone shared strategies, whether about software or how to organize people in historically marginalized communities. One session, for example, took lessons from the Bronx and applied them to tribal lands. With the success of this event, ILSR is refining the program and plans to do more “bootcamps” in the future.

ILSR also elevated existing broadband networks in Indian Country to national media prominence through our publication of the **first-ever list of all Indigenous broadband networks (40+)** and a **series of case studies** on individual networks.

◀ *Si Goforth (Althea) explains how to use mapping tools to plan a wireless network during a session at the Tribal Wireless Bootcamp. Photo Credit: Christopher Mitchell*

[WWW.ILSR.ORG](https://www.ilsr.org)



“Stacy Mitchell and ILSR provide the data to help strengthen our movement’s momentum, so the stories, struggles, and triumphs of our [local] businesses become part of the national conversation.”

— Monique DiGiorgio, Local First



About ILSR

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) is a national nonprofit research and educational organization founded in 1974. ILSR has a vision of thriving, diverse, equitable communities. To reach this vision, we build local power to fight corporate control. We believe that democracy can only thrive when economic and political power is widely dispersed. Whether it’s fighting back against the outsize power of monopolies like Amazon or advocating to keep local renewable energy in the community that produced it, ILSR advocates for solutions that harness the power of citizens and communities. Find out more at www.ilsr.org.

◀ In October, about half of our staff gathered in Minneapolis for a few days of strategic planning and some fun. It was the first time some of us had met each other in person. We look forward to getting our full staff together in 2022!

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