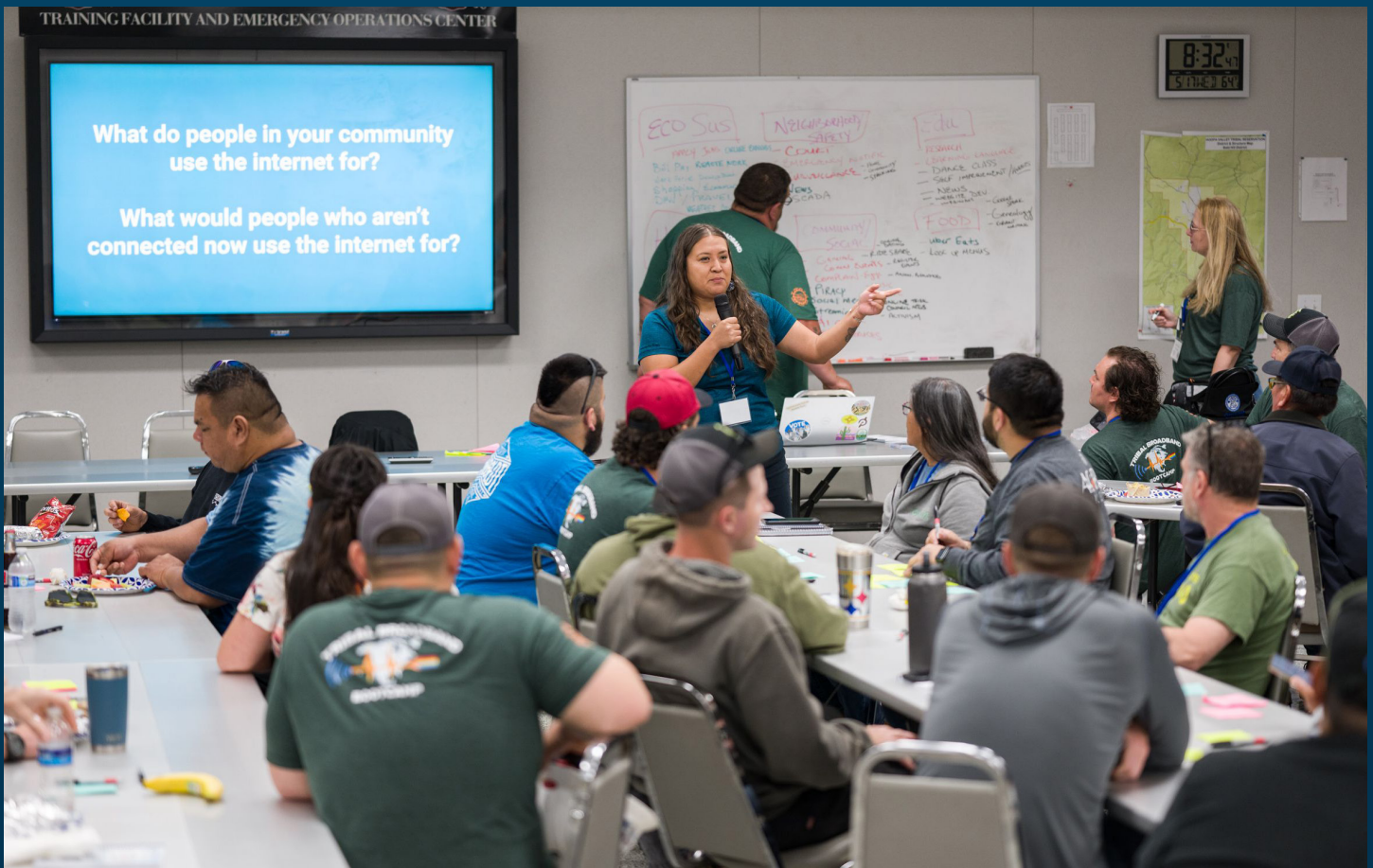


2023

# ANNUAL REPORT

Building Local Power  
Fighting Corporate Control



# Letter from the Co-Directors

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we write this letter, we are filled with an immense sense of pride and gratitude. Nearly a half-century has passed since we embarked on this remarkable journey -- on May 1, 1974 -- to build local power in communities. The path has been filled with challenges, victories, and, most importantly, the unwavering support of people like you. On this occasion, we reflect on the last 50 years and look forward to the next half-century with steadfast passion and purpose.

The successes of the past year come from decades of investing in the power and promise of local communities to solve local, national, and global problems. Amazon faces accountability in the courts over monopoly practices because ILSR documented how the company extorts sellers and abuses customers in its online marketplace. Hundreds of entrepreneurs provide community-scale composting, supported by ILSR trainings and documented on our national map. Dozens of tribes have built the capacity to bring affordable broadband to their communities through ILSR's Tribal Broadband Bootcamps. States like Minnesota, Maryland, and New Mexico have turned to community solar because powerful local advocates have tapped ILSR's library of success stories and model policies.

These accomplishments testify to the incredible dedication and resilience of our staff, the communities we serve, and you. Your belief in our mission, your financial generosity, and your commitment to building local power have laid the foundation for our success.

Facing a second half-century, we are more determined than ever. The challenges we face are complex, but together, we can build even stronger, more resilient communities. Thank you for being part of this incredible journey. We appreciate your companionship, encouragement, and support in the days, months, and years ahead.

In gratitude and solidarity,



Stacy Mitchell and John Farrell  
Co-Directors

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Reggie Rucker,  
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Kennedy Smith  
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Julia Spector  
*Research & Policy Associate, Composting  
for Community*

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

Andrew Frank

## WE THANK ALL OUR INTERNS, FELLOWS, AND VOLUNTEERS:

Manika Ajmani • Nicole Annunziata • Jordan Ashby • Alexia Briones • Priyanka Chaharia • Megan Matthews • Caroline Petterson

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

Studio501: Mary Cleary, Tori Burggraff & Allison Poullard

# Monopolies on the Defense

“As divided as Americans are politically, there’s re-markable agreement that too much of what passes as a legitimate business model is, in fact, fundamentally destructive and unfair.”  
— ILSR Co-Director Stacy Mitchell in *The New York Times*

ILSR did more than put two of America’s largest retail monopolies on notice this year. Our work was instrumental in putting them on the defense — both literally and figuratively — underscoring the momentum we are building to free communities and small businesses from the crushing influence of corporate retail giants.

The first came in March with the release of *The Dollar Store Invasion*, a detailed report examining how communities are pushing back against the infiltration of chain dollar stores and why federal action is necessary. From 2019 to the report’s release, more than 70 communities successfully blocked new dollar store openings, many using our earlier data and resources to argue for an economic development strategy that stops privileging predatory retailers. The report generated the attention of major press outlets including *The New York Times* and NBC Nightly News, as well as the highest levels of the federal government tasked with antitrust enforcement.

The next domino to fall came at the end of September when the Federal Trade Commission brought a landmark lawsuit against Amazon alleging the company leverages its control over the



Listen to the NPR segment featuring Amazon sellers who are part of ILSR’s Small Business Rising coalition. 

[BIT.LY/NPR-AMAZON-SELLERS](https://bit.ly/npr-amazon-sellers)

▲ ILSR’s Ron Knox discusses the dangers of Amazon’s monopoly power at the UNI Global Union and Progressive International-hosted “Summit to Make Amazon Pay.”

e-commerce market to exploit the small businesses forced to use its platform to get their products to consumers. The lawsuit is largely predicated on a decade of ILSR research, including our latest findings that Amazon no longer has to build warehousing and shipping costs into the price of its own products because it extracts enough revenue from sellers to cover 100% of the company’s total fulfillment expenses. Our influence was evident in both the lawsuit and the coverage that immediately followed its announcement as small business owners convened by ILSR for a press briefing were featured on Good Morning America, NPR’s Morning Edition, CBS Mornings, and other national outlets.

## Measuring What Matters

Management theorist Peter Drucker once famously said, “What gets measured gets managed.” The statement is both an encouragement and a warning to gather data on what matters — no more and no less — and it was a seminal year for ILSR in this regard.

In partnership with the Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative, ILSR measured the effect that robust broadband infrastructure would have in the rural south. In the case study of ten southern rural counties, we found that universal, affordable, broadband infrastructure would return \$43 million per year by increasing telehealth access and adoption across 10 counties in the Black Belt of Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. As part of the project, ILSR released [a savings and avoided cost calculator](#) that any advocate can use to measure the potential telehealth savings from expanded broadband infrastructure.

We published the first-ever **Community Composter Census** this year to track the nature of the sector, identify its key challenges, and demonstrate its benefits. The Census revealed that community composting operations — those that keep the food recovery and composting process, product, and benefits local — have more than doubled since 2016 and that these diverse operations are leading the industry in serving marginalized communities. They are also faster to launch, according to the Census, making them a key short-term solution to the climate crisis.

And, we overhauled our **Community Solar Tracker**, documenting the rise of locally owned, democratically controlled, clean energy production across the country. The tracker data illustrates a growing recognition of the value of community solar in states across the country that can help local advocates tip the scales toward universal adoption.



▲ Maria McCoy presents community solar tracking data to members of a Movement for Solar Capacity and Leadership peer-learning cohort.

Our collection and publication of data that are too often ignored is more than a presentation of numbers — they are the stories untold, the voices unheard, and the people uncounted. Our work continues to lift up these stories, voices, and people because they are essential to thriving communities, vibrant economies, and a healthy democracy.

# Building Local Power

In an era when political dysfunction is an accelerant to the rapidly increasing threats posed by the climate crisis, stubborn economic inequality, and a teetering democracy, the strength of local communities to right the ship has never been more necessary. Our work empowering communities with ground-breaking research, resources, and training continues to be rewarded with victories that are turning the tide to a more promising tomorrow.

Watch a clip of ILSR initiative directors sharing the challenges ahead as well as the sources of pride and optimism on this continued journey of progress.



BIT.LY/ILSR2023-HIGHLIGHTS

## SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

- Raising a record-breaking \$50,000 in scholarship funding through our partnership with the U.S. Composting Council's COMPOST2023 conference, our **7th National Cultivating Community Composting Forum & Field Day** brought increased racial, gender, and age diversity to the event in addition to increased participation by mission-driven community benefit operations.
- Responding to the growing demand from communities to be part of the climate solution, more than 560 people enrolled in our Community Composting 101 Online Certificate Course this calendar year alone, with more than half receiving a certificate of completion to date.



▲ Tribal Broadband Bootcamp attendee, Sarah Wilkinson, shows off her progress in connecting a network.



▲ Sophia Jones and Clarissa Libertelli (left) welcome attendees to the COMPOST2023 Field Day.

- We also provided tailored composting resources and support for communities, including the **City of Chicago's Community Composting Pilot**, Detroit's **People's Compost Initiative**, and the **Philadelphia Community Compost Network**.
- To help guide community decisions about reaching clean energy goals, we published a detailed study, **Advantage Local**, on the economic and social benefits of local ownership of renewable energy. We also supported a "bootcamp" that convened participants from 10 states interested in pursuing community-owned community solar.
- Through continuing partnerships, we facilitated four **Tribal Broadband Bootcamps** that helped people from Native Nations learn to build their own wireless and fiber optic networks, offering both training and startup network technology to meet Tribes' growing needs for better broadband.

- Recognizing the process of pushing local governments for needed investments can be intimidating, we collaborated with urban and rural community broadband proponents to build their confidence on the subject to work on long-term solutions.
- In partnership with the U.S. Economic Development Administration and Recast City, we led a training program and developed a set of detailed policy recommendations to help local lenders direct more capital to women- and BIPOC-owned small businesses.
- We filed comments to the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Treasury, and Department of Energy on several Inflation Reduction Act programs to support rules favoring cooperative ownership of clean energy projects and targeting low-income communities, rural communities, and communities of color.

## PODCAST HIGHLIGHT

"Somebody interviewed me once before and condescendingly called this fight that we're fighting here in Toledo a David versus Goliath, which is true, but I had to remind them that David won that battle. I don't know how long it'll take, but we plan to win."

— Dr. Donald Perryman, **Toledo Takes Dollar Stores to Church**, *Building Local Power*

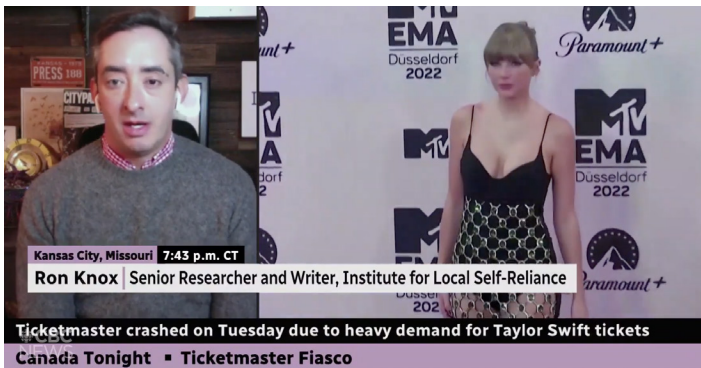


# Fighting Corporate Control

Cynics and political opportunists — or those simply too detached from the communities leading in solving the big problems of our time — will argue that corporate giants will magically save us all on their way to maximizing profits. We know that increasing corporate control in our economy and democracy is a major culprit in stalling progress, not advancing it, and our work continues to chart the path toward dismantling the power of corporate monopolists and returning that power to the people.

## SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

- In a joint petition, we asked the Federal Trade Commission to investigate abuses of monopoly electric utilities that inhibit clean, locally owned energy. As part of the effort, we compiled multiple areas of ILSR research to highlight the power utility monopolies have and answer the question **Why is Connecting Clean Energy to the Grid So Hard?**
- We advanced the narrative that concentrated corporate power is a cause of economic dysfunction with several reported pieces including an **op-ed in Slate** on the consequences of the Ticketmaster monopoly for artists and fans.



▲ Ron Knox during a televised interview on how the Taylor Swift tickets debacle is the result of Ticketmaster's dominance in the market.

- We helped launch a new series from the Roosevelt Institute with our report **Tax Dodging is a Monopoly Tactic**, exposing Amazon's strategy to dodge certain taxes that its competitors had to pay and outlining an anti-monopoly tax agenda.
- We argued for revived enforcement of the Robinson-Patman Act, connecting the corrupting influence of big retailers to higher grocery prices and spreading food deserts in one of *The New York Times*' most-read guest essays this year, **"The Real Reason Your Groceries Are Getting So Expensive."**
- Our annual **Scorecard** shows how more states could join the four currently receiving an "A" for policies supporting energy democracy as well as clean energy. Our annual **"States of Distributed Solar"** helps advocates picture alternatives to utility ownership of energy by showing the state leaders in rooftop and community solar power.



▲ Stacy Mitchell engages with Cory Doctorow during their keynote conversation at the American Booksellers Association's Winter Institute.

- To move away from reliance on the concentrated garbage and agriculture industries, we developed the **Healthy Soils and Compost Policy Guide** for policymakers and advocates to advance policies that build resilience and mitigate the effects of the climate crisis.
- We were part of a coalition that successfully **helped shape and pass a bill** Maryland Governor Wes Moore signed into law which more than doubles the area farmers can use to compost local food scraps.
- **Small Business Rising (SBR)**, an ILSR-led coalition that trains and organizes small business advocates for policies countering corporate power, grew to more than 40 organizations representing 300,000 small businesses.

## PODCAST HIGHLIGHT

"Our power system, from the grid down to the retail rates that we have, is not really designed to give people agency. It's designed to, as economically efficiently as possible, deliver electrons for people to buy, and to pad the profits of the monopoly providers."

— Sachu Constantine, **Don't Follow California's Lead on Rooftop Solar**, *Local Energy Rules*



# In the Media

ILSR was cited in 1,650 stories in more than 1,000 media outlets in 2023.



Chicago leaders saw bringing in Walmart and national chains as a way to boost the economy and provide access to fresh food in Chicago's predominantly Black South Side area. But this strategy was misplaced, said Stacy Mitchell, the co-executive director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.... She believes the city should have taken stronger efforts to support smaller grocers who have been squeezed by big chains. "Chicago city leaders bent over backwards to lure Walmart to the city," she said. "What they should have been doing was supporting the development of local businesses with a real commitment to the city and its residents."

## The Washington Post

Transforming your waste into organic fertilizer has a number of far-reaching benefits. Yes, the finished product is great for your houseplants or garden, but it also cuts methane emissions from food waste in landfills. Once it's in the ground, it stores carbon, prevents erosion, improves plants' ability to fight disease and reduces the need for chemical fertilizers. "Composting is a proven way to address problems like climate disruption," says Brenda Platt, director of Composting for Community, a project of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. "It's like magic. Of course, it's not magic; it's science."

ILSR's podcasts were streamed more than 139,000 times in 2023.

"A country with no farmers is no country at all. And this past year is the first time the United States has imported more food than it has exported. So once you have somebody controlling what you eat, you're in a pretty bad shape." – Shad Dasher, *A Country with No Farmers, Building Local Power*



▲ Stacy Mitchell responds to questions from NBC Nightly News on the impact chain dollar stores have on local communities.



"Dollar stores squeezing out grocery stores and leading to creation of food deserts, study finds" | NBC Nightly News: In March, advocacy group the Institute for Local Self-Reliance published a study on the impact of dollar stores on predominantly rural, low-income, Black, and Latino neighborhoods. Its findings: "When they come into a community, they tend to pull just enough of the sales away from that grocery store," said Stacy Mitchell.



Amazon is still their competitor, it can see what they sell, what's most profitable, it could sweep in, sell at a loss, squeeze out them and other rivals, and then start raising prices. Yesterday, a few sellers were brought together by an antimonopoly think tank [ILSR] and they described all of this. One of them was Nicholas Parks from Alabama... He mentioned that when you tally all the fees, about half of what he makes on the platform goes to Amazon.

ILSR had 27 prominent broadcast media mentions in 2023.

## The New York Times

These food giants are now the dominant buyers of crops and livestock. The lack of competition has contributed to the decline in farmers' share of the consumer grocery dollar, which has fallen by more than half since the 1980s. In the absence of rivals, food conglomerates have over time increasingly been able to raise prices and as a result have reported soaring profits over the past two years. Inflation gives them a cover story, but it's the lack of competition that allows them to get away with it. — Stacy Mitchell

ILSR published 14 commentaries in media outlets in 2023.

## THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

We don't have to accept catastrophic fires, political corruption, and monopoly power abuse as the price of electricity service. Another option is to shift grid management into public hands, like we do for roads. In Maine, the Pine Tree Power campaign has put an initiative on this fall's ballot to do just that, in response to the state's customers being stuck with the highest prices and worst customer service in the country, delivered by a foreign-owned utility conglomerate. Public-power campaigns in New York, Illinois, Texas, Colorado, and several other states have similarly challenged the right of for-profit companies to abuse their captive customers.

— John Farrell

# Income & Expenses

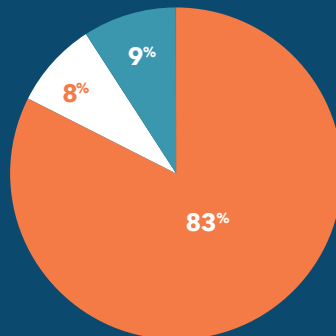
Fiscal Year 2023

July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023

We send our sincere gratitude to the individuals and foundations that have supported our work over the last 49 years.

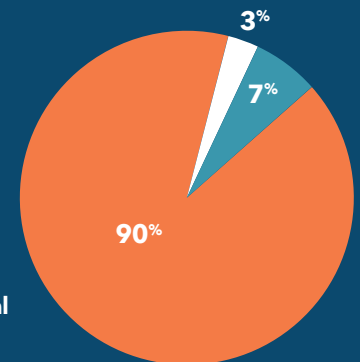
## INCOME

- Grants  
\$4,258,614
- Contracts, Honoraria, & Misc  
\$435,100
- Contributions  
\$471,466



## EXPENSES

- Program  
\$4,676,753
- Fundraising  
\$154,504
- Management & General  
\$333,923



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

## Looking Ahead to 2024

With the incredible help of our individual donors and foundation partners, ILSR is committed to reversing monopoly power and moving toward an economy in which power and opportunity are widely distributed. This is an opportune moment to move this work and build a more equitable America. Through research and narrative development, our work will expose how government policy centralizes wealth and control at the expense of people and communities. Through policy development and coalition-building, we will work to promote and implement policies that reverse concentration, strengthen communities, and foster an authentic, multi-racial democracy.

Our work pushing for revived enforcement of the Robinson-Patman Act and other antitrust laws with advocates will create a fairer playing field for small businesses that are the lifeblood of these communities.

A major ILSR project to facilitate better broadband access, grow digital equity, and train key stakeholders throughout the Appalachian region will connect a large segment of our population to the promise of America with greater access to jobs, education, healthcare, and community.

An upcoming resource, *Power Play*, will offer policy prescriptions for integrating a racial justice lens in the development of anti-monopoly policy, ensuring the communities most harmed by decades of policies that privilege giant corporations and concentrated industries are centered in the solutions.



▲ John Farrell (right) celebrates with fellow RE-AMP Network leaders on their collective work to drive solutions to the climate crisis.

With a new report documenting the cost of monopoly electric distribution to electricity consumers, clean energy enterprises, and democracy, we'll add to our toolkit that provides climate and clean energy advocates the data and language to confront for-profit and investor-owned utility power.

And we'll continue to grow and support our advocacy and technical networks: Small Business Rising, Athena, the Community Composter Coalition, and Tribal Broadband leaders.

Across all of our work, we'll advance new thinking about a post-neoliberal framework for governing the economy that includes aggressive anti-monopoly policies and public investment, as well as a strong commitment to local communities and small-scale enterprises.

## Celebrate 50 Years of Building Local Power and Fighting Corporate Control With Us All Year Long!

As we approach our 50th birthday on May 1, 2024, we have much in store you will not want to miss. We'll reflect on our past work and launch into the future with special storytelling projects, a new website, and so much more. Be sure to subscribe to our newsletters and follow us on social media for all the ways you can join in the fun!

Visit [feedlink.io/ilsr](https://feedlink.io/ilsr) to follow and subscribe to ILSR through your favorite platforms.



“Why are food prices up? Giant grocery chains have gotten bigger — and corporate price gouging is now routine. We must enforce antitrust laws like the Robinson-Patman Act to keep groceries accessible and affordable for all.”

— @SenWarren via Twitter/X, citing Stacy Mitchell's piece in the New York Times



## 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 outside 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](https://www.ilsr.org).

◀ ILSR staff get a lesson in community broadband networks from Sean Gonsalves (left).

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