



# ANNUAL REPORT



**2025**

**Building Local Power  
Fighting Corporate Control**

# Letter from the Co-Directors

Dear Friends and Supporters,

ILSR has long recognized that stripping communities of their capacity and concentrating power in distant boardrooms would inevitably destabilize democracy. Along the way, that consolidation has also produced strikingly poor decisions — leaving many places without grocery stores, pharmacies, or hospitals; allowing extractive models like data centers to carelessly deplete our resources; concentrating control of our media and public discourse in the hands of corporations happy to trade truth for merger approvals; making housing unaffordable; and stripping working people of agency, while turning local business owners and farmers into subjects of corporate gatekeepers who control their fate and skim their earnings.

None of this has happened by accident. These outcomes are the product of public policy choices engineered to make us more dependent on distant executives and less reliant on and connected to our neighbors.

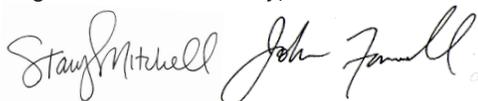
ILSR believes that democracy grows from the ground up, out of small, daily, face-to-face interactions. In a world that conditions us to turn inward and seek individual solutions to shared problems, the path forward lies in rediscovering the power of acting together. Across the country, people are gathering locally, not only to find respite, but to find action — to build alternatives, reclaim agency, and demand systems that decentralize power. These acts of mutual aid, solidarity, and imagination are the raw ingredients of democracy.

As we look ahead, we're working to connect these local struggles, build community power across multiple domains, and help spark a broader cultural shift. By growing our networks and strengthening their capacity to implement proven, sustainable, community-rooted solutions, we're seeking to foster the cultural and political conditions for deep transformation.

Your support is especially critical this year. As foundations respond to immediate crises, ILSR depends on individual donors for the flexible funding that allows us to take risks, seize opportunities, and lead boldly.

Thank you for your partnership — for sharing our work with others, for standing with us, and for walking this road with us. Together, we're building lasting strength, security, freedom, and hope.

In gratitude and solidarity,



Stacy Mitchell and John Farrell  
Co-Directors

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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Odile Zoungrana  
*Operations Associate*

The ILSR Staff Union is a member of OPEIU Local 12, AFL-CIO

We send our sincere appreciation to our terrific colleague who left this year:  
Cally Neeley

We thank all our interns, fellows, and volunteers: Jocelyn Bliton, Diana Harden,  
Kate Heinsch, Solbee Kang, Nick Karros, Prerana Narahari, Inseo Yang

## State Level Success

**“A fundamental shift has taken place: antitrust is no longer the exclusive domain of federal agencies or elite legal circles. It is becoming a live issue in statehouses, courtrooms, and communities across the country.” — ILSR Co-Director Stacy Mitchell in *ProMarket***

As federal antitrust enforcement slows under the Trump administration, states are taking the reins in the fight against monopolies. In January, ILSR hosted a [virtual event](#) with Attorneys General Keith Ellison (Minn.) and Kris Mayes (Ariz.), emphasizing states’ vital role in tackling corporate concentration. With this in mind, we published a new collection of state antitrust resources in April, including an [issue brief](#) and [summary fact sheet](#) detailing how states can use existing tools to safeguard communities from the worst monopoly abuses, with or without federal action. We also created an [interactive map and database](#), identifying the most significant opportunities for reform in each state, accompanied by specific, actionable policy solutions.

Along with these resources, we’ve worked directly with decision-makers, briefing state AG offices on key issues and collaborating with lawmakers on antimonopoly legislation expected to be introduced next year.

While states are seizing the opportunity to lead the antitrust revival, they also have a much broader toolbox for curbing corporate power and advancing local solutions. ILSR was instrumental in promoting this array of tools at every level during the year — from crafting specific policies to laying the groundwork for future progress.

We supported clean energy in Minnesota by publishing [a report](#) outlining barriers and best practices for rooftop solar permitting. We supported affordable connectivity advocates nationwide with [an explainer](#) on New York’s Affordable Broadband Act, creating an accessible blueprint for other states. We worked with a Maryland lawmaker to [introduce a bill](#) addressing the critical need for wasted food reduction and recovery programs. And in California, we contributed to a [landmark report](#) that is fueling local momentum to enact a suite of strong antitrust laws, bolstering the roles states can and should play in creating more resilient communities across the country.

## Building on David Morris’s Legacy

**“We have, in brief, built a society in which we’ve separated those who make the decisions from those who feel the impact of those decisions. And that is a prescription, not only for tyranny and widespread insecurity, but for very poor decision-making.” — ILSR Co-Founder David Morris at the 1995 International Forum on Globalization**

We were deeply saddened by the passing of ILSR Co-Founder David Morris in June. Throughout his career, David championed a simple but transformative idea: that communities should have the power to shape their own futures. His philosophy remains the foundation of our efforts to advance renewable energy, antimonopoly policy, and democratic ownership.

By emphasizing that worsening economic inequality and threats to democratic governance are not inevitable or random but rather the result of deliberate policy choices, David laid the foundation for ILSR’s focus on identifying long-term solutions rather than temporary fixes. Over the years, we have applied this framework to new challenges and industries, from antitrust reform to local composting. For example, our research has found that food deserts materialized when policymakers stopped enforcing price discrimination laws in the 1980s — a disastrous shift that prioritized corporate consolidation at the expense of communities and small businesses. As ILSR Co-Director Stacy Mitchell recently [wrote in \*The Atlantic\*](#), years of attempts to address food des-

erts through tax breaks and other supermarket subsidies have failed mainly because they missed that underlying cause — and addressing that cause is the only way to make lasting progress.

David was an early believer in the transformative potential of solar energy, accurately predicting the efficiency of rooftop solar [in a 1975 report](#) and understanding that solar in communities could build a political constituency to support clean energy. Today, we continue to build on these insights, pushing back against the utility industry’s propaganda by [promoting research](#) that



▲ David Morris in 1983. (Minnesota Star Tribune)

shows how rooftop solar makes electricity cheaper for everyone. It is this foundation that grounds our solutions addressing both urgent climate concerns and increasingly unaffordable utility bills, and ultimately serves as the launching point for all of our efforts centering community self-determination.

# Building Local Power

With federal priorities shifting, ILSR's support, training, and resources helped communities across the country expand local composting programs, develop municipal broadband networks, shape their own clean energy futures, and maintain vibrant independent businesses. Our work continues to demonstrate how local action can solve national problems, building community resilience from the ground up.

## SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

- As drastic cuts to federal funding and programming disrupted the broadband landscape, our **Building for Digital Equity event series** offered a port in the storm for advocates to exchange practical insights and strategies for continuing to expand affordable Internet access at the community level. We documented the **grassroots push-back** to the Digital Equity Act's unconstitutional cancellation and the **critical fallout** of that decision for communities across the country.
- Our new **Digital Opportunity Lab** offered hands-on, customizable programming to support digital equity coalitions and local community leaders in Texas. We also continued to foster digital sovereignty with new **Tribal Broadband Bootcamps** in Michigan, Washington, California, and New Mexico, reaching a total of 175 participants.
- Recognizing that wasted food is responsible for nearly 60 percent of methane emissions from landfills, we continued to develop and provide resources for local composters, governments, and others looking to implement distributed composting, including a **model municipal ordinance** on advancing community composting, a soil microscopy **mini-course**, and a **series of webinars** offering actionable strategies for reducing contamination. These practical tools support composting programs that deliver climate benefits while also boosting local economies and strengthening community ties.
- We continued to support local community leaders by compiling effective, actionable policy suggestions for municipal governments to **rein in dollar store expansion** and **encourage thriving independent businesses**.



▲ Participants at the March 2025 Tribal Broadband Bootcamp in Southern California get instructions on what's ahead for the day. (Christopher Mitchell)

- Amid declining federal support for environmental justice, racial equity, and local autonomy, we launched the second year of our **Composting for Community Mini-Grant Program**, through which we ultimately awarded a total of \$370,000 — more than double the amount of the previous year — to 37 composting projects led by or serving historically underserved communities.

- We helped communities maximize the economic and environmental benefits of locally owned clean energy with tools like our interactive **Community Power Map**, detailed policy analysis, and **virtual events** with grassroots leaders engaged in locally owned energy projects.
- We nurtured the movement ecosystem by strengthening existing networks and building new partnerships. Our Community Composter Coalition grew from 347 to 389 organizational members across 47 states. We also continued to activate the Small Business Rising coalition, with 40 partner organizations — representing more than 300,000 small businesses — taking 140 advocacy actions over the year.

## PODCAST HIGHLIGHT

"It's an exciting time, especially at the local level. If you look at what some of these cities are doing across the state, there is hope and there's reason to be excited."

— Ohio State Rep. Tristan Rader on the **Building Local Power** podcast's "The New Class" series, which featured emerging state and local changemakers elected in November 2024

# Fighting Corporate Control

As momentum builds in statehouses and communities alike, ILSR's research and resources are equipping local leaders to challenge corporate control and reclaim economic self-determination.

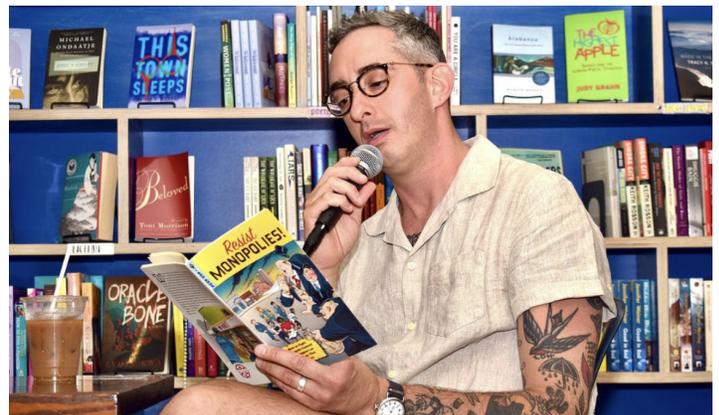
## SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

- By **detailing how** Robinson-Patman Act non-enforcement triggered food deserts and inflated grocery prices, we laid the groundwork for the Federal Trade Commission to bring its first price discrimination case in decades.
- We created a pair of **infographics** visualizing how just four corporations dominate the \$91 billion waste industry, extracting profit from communities, and illustrating a better alternative — local composting programs that reduce waste, create jobs, and build community wealth. Our work led to the creation of **a map** that documents corporate landfill ownership across the U.S.



- We **sounded the alarm** about the Trump administration's attempt to shift billions of dollars in broadband funding from local networks to Elon Musk's Starlink, providing extensive research and analysis while **calling on federal** officials to continue prioritizing fiber networks.
- We worked to expand and popularize the antimonopoly movement beyond federal agencies and niche legal circles, shifting the **media narrative** and engaging with local communities through a series of book talks for Ron Knox's **Resist Monopolies!**, a step-by-step guide to help ordinary citizens join the fight for a fairer economy.
- Our **2025 Community Power Scorecard** was a clear call to action, with just one state earning a grade above "C" in our annual evaluation of policies that hold utility monopolies accountable and support local clean energy action. Our detailed **methodology** highlighted clear opportunities for states to improve their scores by restraining corporate abuses of power and shifting toward a more equitable energy system.

- In a **five-part podcast series**, we investigated how monopolies exploit systemic racism, from Amazon's treatment of its unionized workers to the inherent inequities baked into the locations of Target stores and AI data centers.
- We organized a **virtual event** with renowned author, environmentalist, and activist, Bill McKibben, discussing how electric utilities use monopoly power to block climate progress, helping to show how antimonopoly work is critical to climate solutions and how advocates can fight back.
- ILSR Co-Director Stacy Mitchell **shared expert testimony** on predatory pricing at an FTC workshop in December. In June, she delivered a **keynote address** at a landmark conference on grocery prices and food access, as we continued shaping national narratives about corporate concentration.
- We helped ground antitrust policy in real-world impacts by facilitating **roundtable discussions** between FTC Commissioners Alvaro Bedoya and Rebecca Kelly Slaughter and multiple small business groups.



▲ Senior Researcher Ron Knox reads from his new *Resist Monopolies!* zine on tour at Bluestockings Cooperative in New York. (Nina Roberts)

## PODCAST HIGHLIGHT

"Antimonopoly is not this little narrow world of technical legislation and lawsuits at the AG's office. Anything that people do that puts weight on the scale on the opposite side of corporate power is antimonopoly."

— ILSR Senior Researcher & Policy Advocate Ron Knox on the **Building Local Power** podcast

# In the Media

**ILSR was cited in 1,127 stories in 784 media outlets in FY25.**



If your area doesn't currently offer composting, that doesn't mean it's the end of the road. [Brenda] Platt suggests reaching out to your local government officials about implementing a local composting program, or connecting with neighbors to plan a communal area where everyone can compost together.

"Community composting can build critical support for and participation in future citywide food scrap recovery programs," Platt says. In other words, local composting begets more local initiatives that make composting easier.

## The New York Times

The industry's concentration, economists have said, was allowed to happen largely by decades of weak enforcement of antitrust laws, particularly the Robinson-Patman Act of 1936, which forbids price discrimination that could wipe out competition in an industry.

"For the next almost 50 years, the Federal Trade Commission vigorously enforced the law," said Stacy Mitchell, an expert in monopolies and a co-executive director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a nonprofit group that provides technical support to communities for sustainable development. "For all those decades, the market structure was about half independent grocers and about half chains."

**ILSR's podcasts were streamed 66,836 times in FY25.**

## CNET

The discovery that some neighborhoods historically redlined by banks in Oakland, California, and Cleveland overlap with the same neighborhoods digitally redlined today indicates that these patterns of exclusion continually overlook communities of color.

"Probably the starkest example [of digital redlining] that I can think of is the Hope Village neighborhood in Detroit," Sean Gonsalves, a reporter at the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, told me. "This is a low-income neighborhood in Detroit, and in the height of the pandemic — this is an area that AT&T serves — there was a six-week internet outage."

Since the internet is not considered a utility akin to water and power, universal service is not required, and ISPs build networks in markets that yield the highest profits.

**ILSR published 14 commentaries in media outlets in FY25.**



Small stores like Wagon Wheel would benefit from an enforced ban on price discrimination. Shoppers would too. In states with alcohol-specific price discrimination laws on the books, prices at both chain stores and independent shops were both low and very nearly uniform, with only a marginal difference between chains and the mom-and-pops, a recent study found. Independent stores charge folks less when they aren't being bullied by their suppliers or forced out of business by rampant price discrimination, and prices are lower overall. Fairness, it turns out, benefits everyone.

*Ron Knox answers the question, "Can Fairness Fix the US Economy?"*

## THE HILL

Even before AI motivated the latest round of expansion, tech corporation data centers were reaping rich rewards from lobbying state and utility officials, with scarce economic benefits for their communities. A 2016 report found that 27 states provided economic incentives for data center development, despite the facilities purchasing little of their computer hardware locally and providing few jobs. Eight states further subsidized data centers by exempting their electricity purchases from sales taxes. On one megadeal in Ohio, an Amazon Web Services facility received \$93 million in subsidies for the promise to create 120 jobs, a cost of more than \$750,000 per job.

Sweetheart electricity deals for Big Tech expose the underlying problem — an entire system for delivering an essential public service monopolized by private, investor-owned corporations.

*John Farrell on the data center debate we need to have.*



More food deserts exist now than in 2010, in the depths of the Great Recession. That's because the proposed solutions misunderstand the origins of the problem.

Food deserts are not an inevitable consequence of poverty or low population density, and they didn't materialize around the country for no reason. Something happened. That something was a specific federal policy change in the 1980s. It was supposed to reward the biggest retail chains for their efficiency. Instead, it devastated poor and rural communities by pushing out grocery stores and inflating the cost of food.

*Stacy Mitchell explains the origins of food deserts in "The Great Grocery Squeeze."*

# Income & Expenses

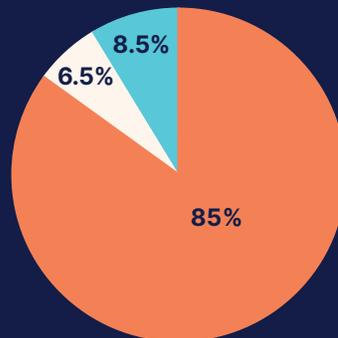
Fiscal Year 2025

July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025

We send our sincere gratitude to the individuals and foundations that have supported our work over the last 51 years.

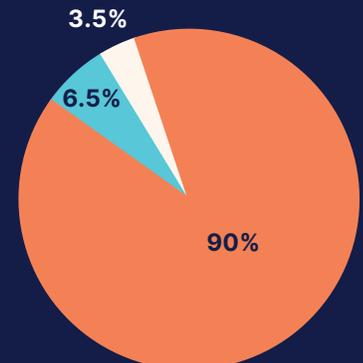
## INCOME

- Grants  
\$5,491,199
- Contracts, Honoraria, & Misc  
\$417,773
- Contributions  
\$552,760



## EXPENSES

- Program  
\$5,818,843
- Fundraising  
\$221,614
- Management & General  
\$421,275



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

## Looking Ahead

These unprecedented times call for a transformative approach that ILSR is uniquely positioned to execute based on our decades of experience in revealing systemic patterns, developing actionable solutions, and applying these solutions directly in and for the benefit of communities. Over the next year, we'll be driving deeper change through several key projects and partnerships that have the capacity to deliver meaningful outcomes and resonating impact.

- Leveraging our forthcoming report, which exposes Amazon's growing role in government procurement and its detrimental impact on local economies and workers, we will support our allies in developing campaigns to shift public sector purchasing away from Amazon and toward local suppliers, while countering Amazon's increasing market and political power.
- We're partnering with the Center for Biological Diversity to conduct a first-of-its-kind study that examines the cumulative impact of designing an electricity supply system that prioritizes local energy sources. We'll be evaluating this "local energy first" approach and its potential for improving affordability, grid reliability, and public health. The research will advance a vision for a community-centered and community-driven energy system.
- In collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund and others, we will ramp up our efforts to expand composting education and outreach to households, leveraging best practice models to increase awareness of local composting programs and the materials accepted in these programs. Together,

we'll increase collection rates and reduce waste, decrease contamination, and safeguard and revitalize communities through the benefits of local composting.

- In response to growing needs, our Community Broadband Networks initiative will be broadening its strategies to address digital equity. This will include working with local governments to improve access, navigability, and use of open data to advance Internet accessibility goals, and providing our expertise around the escalating issue of AI and data centers in relation to broadband.

Thank you for all you've done to help us get this far. Your support via donations, advocacy, and spreading the word about ILSR is more vital than ever as we work to play a bigger role and catalyze greater collective progress for a better world.



▲ Policy & Advocacy Specialist, Julia Spector, revels in the food forest while touring the Arizona Worm Farm.

## And that's not all...

Our annual report has an extended version available online! Dive deeper into the year that was and be the first to see what's next by visiting [ilsr.org/2025-annual-report](https://ilsr.org/2025-annual-report) and connecting with our resources and programs.



Composting for Community Initiative Director Brenda Platt (third from left) participates in the Montgomery County, Md., Composting Education Hub ribbon cutting. (Montgomery County, Md., CC BY-NC 2.0)



“With your incredible work and resources, we are able to guide Detroit’s policymakers into a true decentralized multi-scale composting city.. Thank you so much for all you continue to do to make our world a better place to live and thrive in.”

— KT Morelli, Breathe Free Detroit



## 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 and 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 outsized 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 [ilsr.org](https://ilsr.org)

From left, John Bailey, Katy Milani, Rina Desai, John Farrell, Brenda Platt, and Reggie Rucker take in San Antonio during a management retreat.

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