

ANNUAL REPORT



2026

**Building Local Power
Fighting Corporate Control**

Letter from the Co-Directors

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The signs are everywhere:

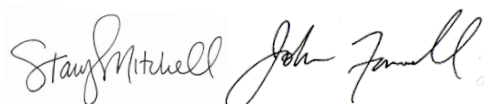
- 33 states, plus the District of Columbia, securing a guilty verdict against Live Nation/Ticketmaster for operating an illegal monopoly even after the Trump administration tried to accept a weak settlement.
- The surge in Tribal Internet networks, which have doubled since our last count in 2020.
- Activists from coast to coast blocking extractive AI data centers, while cities and states put moratoriums in place to ensure these facilities are in the best interest of the communities where they locate, not just the billionaires poised to profit.
- New Haven, Conn., following Boulder, Colo.'s lead in finding new ways to fund local clean energy, while Maryland establishes a dedicated funding source for composting, compost use, and wasted food prevention across the state.

These are more than isolated victories. They are signs of a larger shift: communities are challenging concentrated corporate control and asserting their power to shape the essential systems they depend on. We now have an opportunity to turn this momentum into lasting, structural change.

From algorithmic pricing to government surveillance to AI data centers, there's a growing sentiment that modern technology is too often working against us rather than for us — extracting wealth, concentrating power, and making life more expensive. Our work advancing distributed energy ownership and community broadband provides a model for democratizing technologies to serve communities rather than distant shareholders. With two Amazon monopoly trials looming in the new year, and policymakers increasingly recognizing the need to move beyond incremental policy change toward structural reform, we have a moment to put local self-reliance at the center of the debate over how to restructure our economy and society so that everyone shares the benefits of human progress.

Your support is essential at this inflection point for the path our country takes. We've endured nearly 50 years of a failed ideology favoring bigness and absentee capital, and as we face the realities this has wrought, we have a rare chance to turn the page and establish a new framework that centers diversity, resilience, and community.

ILSR depends on individual donors for the flexible funding to meet this moment. We thank you for your contributions — for engaging deeply with our work, sharing it with others, and giving us the financial resources to continue shaping a future that puts people and community first.



Stacy Mitchell and John Farrell
Co-Directors

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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:
DeAnne Cuellar

We thank all our interns, fellows, and volunteers:
Jocelyn Bliton, Diana Harden, Solbee Kang, Jack Regan

Answering the Data Center Boom's Central Question

"This is a fight for agency in the face of out-of-control corporate power."

— *Building Local Power* host Danny Caine

Big Tech's speculative race for AI dominance is imposing enormous costs on communities, from strained water supplies and heavy air pollution to rising electric bills and a loss of local control — costs that are too often framed as inevitable. Backed by decades of work on monopoly power, environmental justice, digital equity, and local autonomy, we set out to challenge that narrative.

In *"The Data Centers Are Coming,"* a special six-part podcast series touching each of ILSR's core initiatives, we approached the data center boom and its backlash as part of something much bigger: a fundamental struggle over whether technology will serve communities or the other way around. *Building Local Power* host Danny Caine brings listeners directly to the front lines of the struggle, from "Data Center Alley" in Northern Virginia to the historically Black neighborhood of Boxtown in South Memphis. The series exposes how tech companies use secrecy, shell companies, and misleading promises of economic development to push massive facilities into communities. It unpacks how utilities profit from data center expansion while shifting the costs of new power plants and transmission infrastructure onto local households. Most importantly, it elevates the residents organizing to defend their homes, their health, and their collective right to self-determination.

We built on that reporting and ILSR's cross-sector research by developing a comprehensive **policy framework**, giving local and state advocates concrete ways to act. The framework outlines policies that would prohibit nondisclosure agreements, preserve local siting authority, require meaningful public review, enforce environmental protections, limit public subsidies, and ensure data centers pay the full cost of the infrastructure they demand. It also presents long-term structural changes: breaking up concentrated control of cloud computing and AI markets, restructuring monopoly electric utilities, and investing in distributed, small-scale alternatives.

The grassroots opposition to the data center boom reflects a deeply American tradition: motivated local communities taking on monopoly corporations. In the process, we're "rebuilding our citizen muscle," ILSR's Stacy Mitchell says in one of the season's final **episodes**. From frontline storytelling to practical policy guidance, our work is helping communities turn their opposition into lasting democratic power that forces technological progress to answer to the people and places it affects.



Outside Sirianni's Café where we met with Davis, W.Va., residents protesting data center encroachment. (Danny Caine)

Expanding the Audience and Appetite for Structural Change



ILSR's work has long involved helping people see how concentrated corporate power shapes their lives — and how they can build meaningful, locally rooted alternatives. This year, we developed a powerful new avenue for translating decades of research and policy analysis into compelling stories: short-form video. By connecting everyday experiences like grocery shopping and electric bills to the systems shaping them, our content generated more than 3.5 million

impressions and prompted thousands of comments across social media platforms.

As we challenged narratives of isolation and individualism, we heard from people finding language for patterns they had al-

ready sensed: "I was wondering why soda was expensive everywhere but Walmart [...] I had a feeling but couldn't point to it." "This is exactly the thing that happened to me!" Viewers moved from frustration to action: "Cancelled my Amazon immediately." "Searching local pet food stores and prices today." Others began recognizing seemingly isolated problems as structural: "So even though I'm boycotting Amazon, I'm still being affected by their unethical business practices?" Increasingly, viewers connected the dots across companies and industries. "It's Walmart & Pepsi all over again," one wrote. "Walmart started what Amazon finished in terms of killing local stores," another concluded. "It's going to take true community organizing to beat them back."

These responses demonstrate the importance of accessible storytelling. We're reaching people who are at the beginning stages of their changemaker journey and helping move them from skepticism, concern, and hopelessness toward seeing the bigger picture, collective agency, and action.

Building Local Power

In a moment when climate and digital equity commitments are as important as ever, local communities are rising to the challenge by establishing clean, affordable, and accountable systems that keep authority and economic benefits rooted in the places they serve.

All across the country, communities are building momentum by learning from proven successes and recognizing their collective power to shape their own futures. ILSR has helped transform this determination into sustainable local capacity by providing practical tools, hands-on training, peer support, and replicable models for community ownership.

SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

- We launched our **Local Composting Toolkit**, an interactive hub with more than 200 curated resources to advance local composting — for composters, farmers, local governments, and advocates. By including Spanish-language materials and a built-in translation feature, the toolkit makes practical guidance more accessible to more communities working to cut landfill pollution, create local jobs, and expand food security. The toolkit was visited more than 2,700 times in the first two weeks after its launch.
- We published a **first-of-its-kind Tribal Broadband Networks Census** and searchable map showing that the number of active networks has more than doubled since 2020. We also published a **detailed historical timeline and case studies** to give Tribal leaders and policymakers a stronger foundation for future planning and advocacy. With more than one-quarter of locations on Tribal lands still left unserved or underserved by large monopoly providers, we continued to support digital sovereignty through **Tribal Broadband Bootcamps**, equipping 200 participants across five multi-day events with the technical knowledge and peer relationships to build and operate their own networks.
- After five years of ILSR-led policy development and advocacy, Maryland established the state's first dedicated **organics diversion grant program**. Beginning in 2028, the program will receive \$250,000 annually to support wasted food prevention, on-farm composting, and compost use. Our involvement ensured that projects creating local jobs, serving over-burdened communities, and producing high-quality compost will be prioritized.
- We supported the revitalization of local economies by helping municipal governments and school districts redirect public dollars away from Amazon and toward locally accountable businesses that create local jobs and tax revenue. We published a **citizen's guide** providing residents with concrete tools to uncover local spending with Amazon and advocate for more transparent, competitive, and community-centered procurement policies, and promoted the guide with a **webinar** drawing nearly 400 registrants. We also provided practical support to grassroots leaders in more than 50 communities, including through the Amazon Action Exchange.
- Amid federal rollbacks and rising energy costs, we gave communities practical tools to shape cleaner, more affordable, and more democratic energy systems. We published the **Public Power Handbook** to provide step-by-step guidance for local campaigns seeking to take over investor-owned utilities, from building a winning coalition to anticipating and countering utility pushback. We also launched our **Local Energy Policy Toolkit**, which equips city leaders to fund equitable community energy projects, negotiate better utility agreements, and hold monopoly providers accountable.
- We provided community leaders with proven models for replacing extractive, centralized systems with local alternatives through reports like **Seeking the Commonwealth of Connection**, which documents how 19 small towns in Western Massachusetts overcame monopoly neglect by building municipal networks. The report not only offers practical lessons for implementation, but it also serves as a valuable tool for advocates by illustrating how the benefits of locally controlled networks extend beyond providing affordable, reliable Internet service — boosting the real estate market, giving local businesses the ability to process credit card transactions, and building a new revenue stream to fund public services.



John Farrell presents to a gathering of Nevada legislators on the benefits of distributed solar ownership. (Julia Hubbard)



HB 429/SB 599 was signed into law in April 2026. (Maryland GovPics, CC BY 4.0)

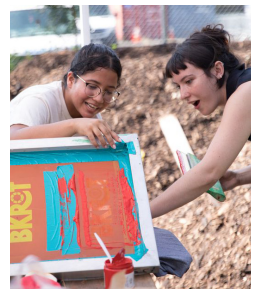
Fighting Corporate Control

As rising prices strain household budgets, the link between the cost-of-living crisis and the unchecked power of dominant corporations has become increasingly visible.

As ILSR's Ron Knox [wrote in *The Nation*](#), "The growing collective outcry against corporate control suggests there's something far larger going on: Americans, fed up with decades of declining fortunes, have found a common and culpable enemy in the powerful companies that control so much of our lives and politics." Through new research, legal action, public education, and legislative advocacy, we have helped turn that growing outcry into concrete challenges to monopoly power.

SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

- We [successfully challenged](#) the sealing of the Federal Trade Commission's antitrust complaint against PepsiCo, marking a major legal victory for transparency. The [previously redacted details](#) — which revealed how the company systematically violated the law by scheming with Walmart to drive up grocery prices and harm independent grocers — received national media coverage and prompted a [congressional inquiry](#), and our [videos](#) about the case were viewed more than 1.3 million times across social media platforms, helping to increase public understanding of how price discrimination can suppress competition and raise prices.
- To illuminate how corporate consolidation shapes food access, daily hardships, and long-term health inequities for millions of Americans living in food deserts, we created an [interactive map](#) showing food deserts alongside the locations of independent grocers, regional chains, and megachains. Since its publication, the map has been viewed by almost 40,000 users and was cited by Rep. Pramila Jayapal [in a congressional hearing](#). The map and [companion policy brief](#) helped reframe public understanding of food deserts as a product of predatory corporate monopolies and insufficient antitrust enforcement, rather than an inevitable feature of low-income communities.
- In response to growing national concern about skyrocketing electricity bills, we launched our [Utility Bill Calculator](#) to connect a tangible household expense to the real culprit: excessive utility profit rates. In [accompanying articles](#) and [podcast conversations](#), we explained how state regulators enable investor-owned monopoly utilities to overcharge customers and outlined [immediate steps](#) states can take to lower bills, translating hidden corporate extraction into a clear target for consumers, reporters, and advocates.
- As federal antitrust enforcement weakened, we helped states and cities advance policies to curb monopoly power, lower costs, and protect independent businesses. In New York, we advocated for state antitrust reforms and delivered a [policy agenda](#) to Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani's transition team outlining how New York City can tackle its affordability crisis by reclaiming control from distant corporations and rebuilding local self-reliance. In Rhode Island, we worked closely with the lieutenant governor to shape a [new law](#) barring grocery chains from using restrictive covenants that keep competitors out of former supermarket sites — a corporate tactic that contributes to higher grocery prices and food deserts. We engaged in additional advocacy efforts in Minnesota and Louisiana.
- We exposed how Amazon has used opaque pricing algorithms to capture a growing share of public purchasing — routinely overcharging for basic supplies, stifling competition, and siphoning money away from local economies. Our report, [Turning Public Money into Amazon's Profits](#), was [widely covered](#) by national and local media. The findings also sparked new policymaker scrutiny, including a [letter](#) from Sen. Elizabeth Warren pressing Amazon CEO Andy Jassy for answers.
- Recognizing that government contracting often favors large operations, we published [Keep Compost Local](#) to provide a roadmap for local officials to resist consolidation in the waste industry and instead partner with local community composters, advancing economic and environmental justice. Drawing on 17 case studies from across the country, the report includes detailed policy recommendations, analysis of economic and cross-sectoral benefits, and a 12-step action plan for municipalities and counties.
- As the FTC's antitrust lawsuit against Amazon approaches trial, we strengthened the public case for breaking Amazon's monopoly power. We hosted a [virtual panel](#) featuring antitrust enforcers, economists, and researchers on the fast-growing problem of algorithmic price manipulation across retail, groceries, and housing. And we brought the conversation to a broader audience with a [viral video](#) about Amazon's alleged price-fixing scheme, drawing over 1.7 million views and thousands of comments.



Clarissa Libertelli (right) gets a first look at compost merch hot off the press. (Neha Gautam)

In the Media

FY26 BY THE NUMBERS

ILSR was cited in **1525 stories** in **548 media outlets**.

ILSR's podcasts were streamed **78,812 times**.

ILSR published **14 commentaries** in news outlets.

ILSR social media impressions increased **17x** to more than **3.5 million**.

OUR IMPACT GOES BEYOND THE NUMBERS...

We gave voice and evidence to what so many are feeling — shopping with big businesses is a scam.

We used our storytelling to help make sense of the world unfolding around us and create a collective feeling of being in this fight together.

Despite the economy failing so many of our friends and neighbors, we put forward a vision of what's possible.

Our influence reached into the offices of elected officials who must rewrite the rules to put the interest of communities before billionaires.



Income & Expenses

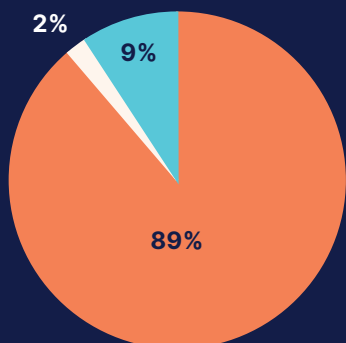
Fiscal Year 2026

July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026

We send our sincere gratitude to the individuals and foundations that have supported our work over the last 52 years.

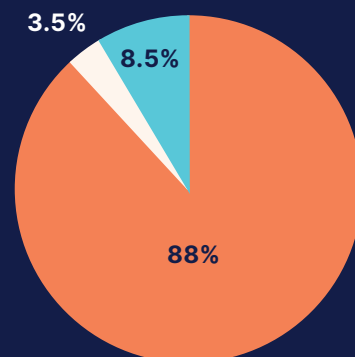
INCOME

- Grants
\$6,696,431
- Contracts, Honoraria, & Misc.
\$152,995
- Contributions
\$696,062



EXPENSES

- Program
\$6,650,172
- Fundraising
\$249,959
- Management & General
\$645,357



PLEASE SUPPORT ILSR BY DONATING TODAY! ILSR.ORG/DONATE

Looking Ahead

The year ahead presents extraordinary opportunities to reshape our economy and put communities first. Across our work, ILSR will continue advancing practical solutions that challenge concentrated corporate power and equip communities with the tools they need to thrive.

A defining focus will be the landmark antitrust case against Amazon. As the FTC and state attorneys general move toward trial, we will help shape public conversation through real-time analysis, resources for journalists and policymakers, and centering the voices of independent businesses most affected by Amazon's dominance. At the same time, we will advance structural remedies to curb Amazon's monopoly power and demonstrate that more competitive, community-centered systems are not only possible but better for consumers.

Beyond e-commerce, we will continue transforming the conversation around grocery retailing, prices, and access. Through research, mapping, and policy analyses that connect food access and affordability, racial and rural inequities, and market concentration, we will strengthen the case for structural antitrust reform that can create more resilient local food systems. And by deploying targeted technical assistance, we will help communities resist predatory dollar store expansion and develop locally owned grocery stores.

Building resilient local economies also requires amplifying community solutions and investing in local capacity.

In this vein, we will expand independent, solutions-focused journalism on broadband and technology through reporting, podcasts, and a new short-form multimedia series. At this pivotal moment for our digital future, this work will highlight successful local models and policies that expand competition and create affordable, reliable Internet access and digital equity.

In a recent survey of community composters, access to capital and affordable financing emerged as the sector's top challenges, with 68 groups alone identifying more than \$40 million in needed financing. In the coming year, we're excited to expand our Composting for Community Mini-Grant program into a national effort, helping local composting enterprises access the resources they need to build healthier soils and more circular economies.

None of this work happens without you. Your support makes it possible for ILSR to produce independent research, advance practical solutions, and support communities working to build more democratic, resilient local economies. Thank you for investing in this work and for helping make the year ahead one of meaningful progress.

And that's not all! Scan the QR code
to see what else we've been up to.



Cover photos: Top left: (From left) Ingrid Berhsin, John Farrell, and Katie Kienbaum pose with the Minnesota Solar Energy Industries Association's Melissa Hortman Lifetime Achievement Award, granted to John Farrell (Jeremy Kalin). Bottom left: Brenda Platt receives the US Composting Council's Jerome Goldstein Lifetime Achievement Award (Jordan Ashby). Bottom right: Jordan Pittman (right) works with students at a Digital Opportunity Lab in Brownsville, Texas (Asaiah K. Puente).

“Thank you for the work at ILSR. It’s such an inspiration. It’s so important. I cite ILSR work all the time. You guys are doing really important work, and Stacy is such a force of nature. I’m just so impressed by your organization.”

— Cory Doctorow, author, activist, journalist, and blogger



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 dismantle concentrated power and equip changemakers to build communities with locally accountable power. 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

◀ Kennedy Smith (left) discusses the history and future of main streets at the 2026 Main Street Now Conference. (Tom Gilbert/Rogue Monkey Media)

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