



GrassRoots Organizing Western Wisconsin

**Building power
together to create
the change we need.**



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OUR MISSION

To build power together to create the change we need for everyone in our communities to make ends meet, live with dignity, and have a voice in shaping the decisions that impact us.

OUR PLATFORM

Democracy

We support building a political system that is fair, accessible, and responsive to all of us.



- Fair representation
- Access to Office
- Right Freedom to Vote
- Local Control
- Truth and Transparency

Economic Justice

We support building a robust economy where everyone's basic human needs are met regardless of our immigration status.



- Workers' Rights
- Corporate Regulation
- Local Business Development
- Food & Farming
- Housing
- Public Education
- Health Care
- Childcare
- Mental Healthcare

Environmental Justice

We support all people having equal access to a healthy, safe and sustainable environment.



- Land Use
- Clean Water
- Climate Action

A Letter from Jenelle

Dear leaders,

What a pleasure it is to pause and take stock of what we are building together in Western WI. Only 5 years ago, 7 neighbors sat around a farm table and decided to found GROWW. They set out to use the power we have right here in our community to create the change we need so that we can all thrive: no matter the color of our skin, how much money we have or whether we live in town or the country. And look at what a handful of ordinary people can set in motion.

In 2024, we engaged 5,000 of our neighbors. We trained over 150 leaders in skills we need to act powerfully in the public arena. We drove record turnout to public hearings and helped pass the first ordinance to protect a Pierce County town from the harmful impacts of agribusiness. In Dunn County, we won a zoning amendment in front of the county board, enabling the construction of housing our communities so desperately need. And, we helped elect 6 candidates to local county, town and school boards who will champion GROWW's platform into the future. Seeing beyond an entrenched political binary, we seek to better understand our common needs so we can thrive together.

Now, we are setting the stage for our organization to become far more powerful and fully accountable to our people in 2025. At GROWW Fest 2024, after learning more about the monied special interests that are systematically causing harm in our communities, we committed to build the power we need for our communities by becoming a member organization. Over 100 people have already committed to be founding members and our goal is to strengthen our organisation with 400 more by GROWW Fest 2025.

GROWW belongs to our members. With membership now in place, we will convene our first ever GROWW Leadership Team which will be formed by our top grassroots leaders from all our campaigns. Together with our organizers, this body will negotiate and make determinations for the strategic direction of our organization.

Whether you are a funder, a donor, a leader stepping courageously into the public arena or both, I hope you feel proud as you read this report. We are doing the work of building a world that works for us, regular people who love the beautiful, complex and unique individuals and beings that make up our community and our environment.

I am deeply grateful to be on this journey to a brighter future with you,



Jenelle Ludwig Krause
Executive Director





GROWW Fest 2024

Housing Justice: Dunn County Needs Safe, Affordable Homes

Housing is more than four walls and a roof; it is the foundation of a stable life. Access to safe, quality, and affordable housing intersects with every aspect of our well-being: our financial stability, mental health, education, food security, belonging, and dignity.

We do not have the housing we need in Dunn County. People of all ages, races, and incomes feel the impacts. Across the county, a handful of people are getting rich as many ordinary people and our neighbors struggle to make ends meet.

In 2024, we set out to get to the full picture on housing in Dunn County. We began with a 4 month listening campaign to uncover the most pressing housing issues, identify leaders, and advance a narrative that change is possible. Using deep canvassing and listening sessions, our members had face-to-face conversations with hundreds of folks, which revealed shared challenges: rising rents, deteriorating living conditions, and life decisions delayed due to housing insecurity.

Our work culminated with a victory in July: the passage of an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) zoning amendment giving local homeowners the freedom to build more small homes and “mother-in-law cottages.” Through our outreach and relationship-building, we helped shift a nearly evenly divided Dunn County Board to unanimous support.

Building on this momentum, our leaders have begun laying the foundation for a tenant protection campaign in 2025. Our core team conducted research meetings with key stakeholders such as city officials, landlords, and university administrators. Looking ahead, we will expand housing justice organizing across our region, building a network of grassroots leaders committed to ensuring that everyone in our region has access to safe, affordable housing and the opportunity to thrive.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- In just 4 months, we grew our Housing Team from 5 leaders to a base of 48 community members.
- We trained 15 Leaders in Deep Canvassing for our door-knocking team. Together, they had 135 conversations about housing in Dunn County on people’s door steps.
- In total, we engaged 365 of our neighbors during our community-wide listening campaign through door knocking, listening sessions, digital outreach, campus tabling, and one-to-one meetings.
- PASSED: Dunn County Zoning Amendment freeing local homeowners to independently build more of the 1 and 2 bedroom housing we need.



Housing Justice team at GROWW Fest

"Housing is an issue that's been on my mind for quite a long time. When I was a student at Stout I heard horror stories about houses literally falling apart [...] collapsed stairwells, security deposits stolen[...]My bathroom was full of black mold, and our furnace went out in the middle of a polar vortex. I cannot tell you how frustrating and scary it was[...] I've often thought to myself, "How am I ever going to build a life or start a family someday when I can barely afford housing in this town?"

Organizing community members through our Housing team has been proof that we have the agency and the power to achieve housing Justice when we work together -

especially telling our stories and winning the unanimous ADU decision in front of the City Council. There is a future where everybody has an accessible place we can live that's healthy and safe. And I'm excited to be a part of it, and I've never been more optimistic about the future of our community."

-Cody G.

All in Favor: Building Power in Our Local Governments



All in Favor Team at GROWW Fest

Our local boards and councils are populated with elected officials who can be the most responsive to our communities and the problems we're all facing. Our work in All in Favor is to build our power and further our GROWW Platform across our local governments by endorsing and electing candidates aligned with our values and vision.

The Spring 2024 election endorsement and campaigning process was our first, purposeful experiment. We identified, endorsed, and supported 10 candidates for County, Town, and School Boards across 4 counties who already had a connection to GROWW and our issue platform. All candidates completed a questionnaire which helped determine their alignment with our communities' values, and took part in a candidate interview.

During the campaign season we held 5 community events, made 1800 phone calls, knocked on 800 doors and spoke directly with more than 400 people. When the dust settled after election day, 6 of our endorsed candidates won their seats, 4 did not. Those 4 candidates were all seeking election or re-election to the Polk County Board of Supervisors. We learned of a strong opposition group in Polk County who understands how to wield their power to get what they want.

Now, our team is more active than ever. We are taking the lessons from Spring 2024 to make bigger waves in 2025.

We've held house meetings in each of our counties. We've met with more community stakeholders. We've begun recruiting candidates. We have even launched 4 County Teams (Polk, Pierce, Saint Croix, and Dunn Counties). Starting with 46 people who packed the Woodville Lion's Den in November, we're strategizing to win.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 endorsed candidates in the Spring 2024 elections
- 6 Candidates elected in our first round, 2 of whom were then able to help support and pass our Accessory Dwelling Unit efforts in Dunn County.
- 45 team leader 1-1 meetings with key community stakeholders over the summer and fall.
- More than 80 people attended All in Favor House Meetings in the fall to prepare for Spring 2025.
- 37 members committed to join 2025 County Teams to expand and sharpen our work.

What's YOUR "Self Interest"?

In organizing, our "self-interest" is our personal why. Why are YOU being called to work with others for change? For all of us, it may be different: to be a steward of the land you love, to protect your children's school, or maybe just to feel heard in your community for the first time. The magic comes when we tap into how your self-interest intersects with others. That's when we can create shared space to work, take risks, and make real change together, the way we do on all our organizing campaigns.



Celebrating election victories

"Three years ago, I felt lost and hopeless. Since then, I've been introduced to GROWW and have had the opportunity to learn new leadership skills, meet some incredible people, and wrestle with my self-interest in all of this. This year, on November 16th, I walked into a public meeting in the small town of Woodville with 46 individuals from Western Wisconsin. In the past, this sort of event would have given me anxiety, but as I sat down in my chair and removed my coat, I looked around the room and realized that I knew almost half of the people there. And that was all thanks to this work - through intentional conversations around a shared goal, all of these amazing people carved out time to listen, share, and strategize. Through all that, we laughed! I've found joyful purpose in this big, beautiful world together with our GROWW team. THAT is community."

- Jenna B.

People Protecting Pierce: Pushing Back on Corporate Agribusiness in Western Wisconsin

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)

There are facilities where animals are kept and raised in confinement instead in pastures, fields, or on range lands. In Wisconsin, a CAFO is generally a livestock operation with 1,000 or more "animal units" - based on the weight of the animals. The problem is, the concentrated design of CAFOs to maximize companies' profits, poses many risks to communities' health and resources.

Communities of all sizes across the country have seen the effects of corporate greed in recent decades. We deserve better. Every day, small businesses are shut down and replaced by corporate competitors. Main Streets get hollowed out and the American Dream seems further and further out of reach for millions of us. In rural western Wisconsin, our communities have felt these same pains and more as we contend with corporate agribusiness's impacts as they contribute to shuttering generational small family farms, tearing up roads, and contaminating and mismanaging our water and resources.

In 2023, neighbors in and around the Town of Salem in Pierce County started to organize with GROWW in response to a proposed expansion to an already massive corporate operation. Ridge Breeze Dairy announced plans to expand from 1,700 to 6,500 cows, which would make it the largest factory farm in western Wisconsin, producing 80 million gallons of untreated manure yearly.

Since then, the People Protecting Pierce team has been organizing across Pierce County to fight back against the expansion of corporate agribusiness. We are focusing our efforts on passing Operations Ordinances in towns. These operations ordinances have been passed previously in other towns and counties in western and northern Wisconsin. Operations Ordinances require industrial livestock operations to apply for a permit and provide plans on

"July 11, 2024 DNR Hearing was extraordinary! The crowd included a mix of farmers and small business owners; gun rights advocates and environmentalists; young and old [...] People who ordinarily would not travel in each other's social circles. All of us focused, on a collective need for protecting our air, land, water and rural way of life. "I am in the right place," I thought to myself. "Here we are all equal. Here we all have a voice and treat each other with dignity."

-Wendy D.



Residents pack DNR public hearing to oppose proposed CAFO expansion

how they intend to address concerns that are currently unregulated by state and county governments: from road damage, to water and air pollution, to fire plans, and more.

Between public meetings, 1-1 conversations, media hits, petitions, and more, the People Protecting Pierce team has connected with thousands of people who share our vision for a better tomorrow, where our small farms are thriving, our main streets are bustling, and our rural communities are protected.

In 2025, we are going to make sure more towns in Pierce County and beyond adopt Operations Ordinances to put up a wall of protection across western Wisconsin.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Over 800 people across the state demanded that Governor Evers veto Assembly Bill 957, which threatened local control over CAFOs. On March 29, Governor Evers heard our voices and vetoed the bill.
- **PASSED:** Pierce County's first Operations Ordinance to protect our water, roads, and small farmers from industrial agribusiness. The Town Board of Maiden Rock voted unanimously on December 9 with nearly 100 people in attendance.
- **BUILDING MOMENTUM:** The Town of Rock Elm has also set up a 7-person study committee to study Operations Ordinances, while multiple other Pierce County towns explore options for 2025.
- In July, over 440 people joined the DNR public hearing for Ridge Breeze Dairy's proposed expansion. Together, we pushed the DNR to pause the expansion plans until Ridge Breeze can show they have signed agreements with landowners for spreading.

Bridge the Divide: Final Five Voting for WI Voters

For the last two years, Bridge the Divide team leaders have set out to build relationships, promote civic engagement and organize western Wisconsin residents to demand that legislators pass Final Five Voting (FFV). We need a Wisconsin state government that can prioritize action, compromise and representing Wisconsin people more than partisanship and divisiveness. FFV could be one of our best tools to make that vision a reality.

In an election year like 2024, it's easy to see just how extreme the division in our country has become. Family members and neighbors have been cutting each other off due to political differences and disagreements, ruining our relationships and our communities. Meanwhile, issues that matter to all of us go unaddressed by our elected leaders due to that same division, leaving us without adequate representation. Issues like the cost of living crisis, affordable housing, corporate greed, and immigration all have tangible impacts on the lives of millions of Americans, but gridlock has gotten in the way of practical solutions. That's why our Bridge the Divide team was formed in 2022 - to make sure our representatives address the issues that affect us.

FFV is the combination of a top-five primary and an instant-runoff general election. In the primary, all candidates running appear on one primary ballot, doing away with our current party primaries. In this primary election, you vote for one candidate. The top five vote-getters then advance to the general election, where voters have the opportunity to rank them from favorite (1st) to least favorite (5th). This gives the average voter more choice in the general election, where instead of just voting for one Republican or

"I was born and raised in River Falls, with my three sisters. Our parents, though, are both immigrants. As children in Europe, they both lived through World War II -my dad in the Netherlands when it was invaded by the Nazis and my mom as a young child from Germany. Hearing about their traumatic experiences, I learned that we have a power as people, and it's in our relationships and in our trust of the people around us. **We can stand stronger together, even as we disagree. That's what working with the Final Five Voting team means to me. We all deserve to be heard and represented, and we all need to be heard and represented if we're to live in peace together."**

-Linda V.

one Democrat, they will instead have the opportunity to rank multiple candidates from both parties and independent candidates in order of preference.

We know FFV works and gives us better representation and in the last legislative session, 22 cosponsors in the state legislature agreed. Across party lines, cosponsors fought for FFV in legislative hearings and we joined them in the state capitol to make sure our voices were heard. Party bosses and corporate interests fought back by pushing for a constitutional amendment that would ban FFV, but we made sure they didn't win. It's clear, though, that we will need to build a lot more power to keep them from controlling our democracy in the future.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- 22 cosponsors of the Final Five Voting bill in the state legislature (11 Democrats and 11 Republicans) including 3 cosponsors in our 7-county area
- Participated in 4 different hearings in front of the state legislature in late 2023 and early 2024
- 10 house parties hosted by GROWW members with over 100 attendees learning about Final Five Voting
- Over 1,100 community members and local clerks engaged at community events, conferences, and booth fairs to discuss Final Five Voting



BTD Leaders join those of 4 other Wisconsin groups advocating Final Five Voting in Baraboo, WI.

NEW: Student Leaders Build GROWW University Chapter

This year, GROWW launched its first college chapter at UW-Stout, thanks to the leadership of one of our youngest leaders, Ingmar Amberson.

In 2023, Ingmar attended Grassroots School, where he was introduced to foundational organizing skills. Later that year, he joined the team developing GROWW's "Values, Vision, and Platform." By 2024, Ingmar was part of the core group driving the housing justice campaign in Dunn County, where he knocked on more doors than any other canvasser.

This summer, fueled by this personal experience, self-interest, and growing commitment to organize, Ingmar took responsibility for starting a student chapter of GROWW at UW-Stout in Menomonie, WI. GROWW was not focusing on the unique challenges facing college students, and Ingmar saw an opportunity to build power with his peers.

Through one-on-one meetings, Ingmar recruited "founding members" until he had enough students to meet the college's requirements for establishing a new organization. He also collaborated with campus staff and student government to draft and approve the chapter's constitution.

Now, the chapter's student members are tabling at the student center, sparking conversations about housing issues like landlord practices, rental conditions, security deposits, and maintenance delays. They are also stepping into leadership roles, participating in research meetings with city staff to gather information with the Housing Justice campaign.

Looking Ahead

GROWW will host its annual Grassroots School on the UW-Stout campus this year, aiming to inspire and recruit more young leaders. This marks an exciting step in growing our base of young people and expanding our impact across western Wisconsin.



Organizer John Calabrese and Leader Ingmar Amberson knock doors together for Dunn County Candidates.

Building Solidarity in Divided Times

We have seen that when we are united, we can win. In Wisconsin, ordinary people respect each other and want to stand with our neighbors: for our values, hopes, and future here.

But we live in a “purple” state. Organized corporate industry groups and the politicians they fund inundate our communities with messages pitting us against each other based on where we’re from, what we look like, or how we’ve voted. While they drain our communities of our money, talent and resources, they tell us our neighbors are to blame for the problems we’re left with. But we know better.

In 2024, we counteracted our oppositions’ lies. We worked with state and national partners to call in our entire staff team, all our board members, and key leaders across each of our campaigns to think about and hone our messages. We know our members and our organizers on the ground are the most trusted messengers we have in our communities.

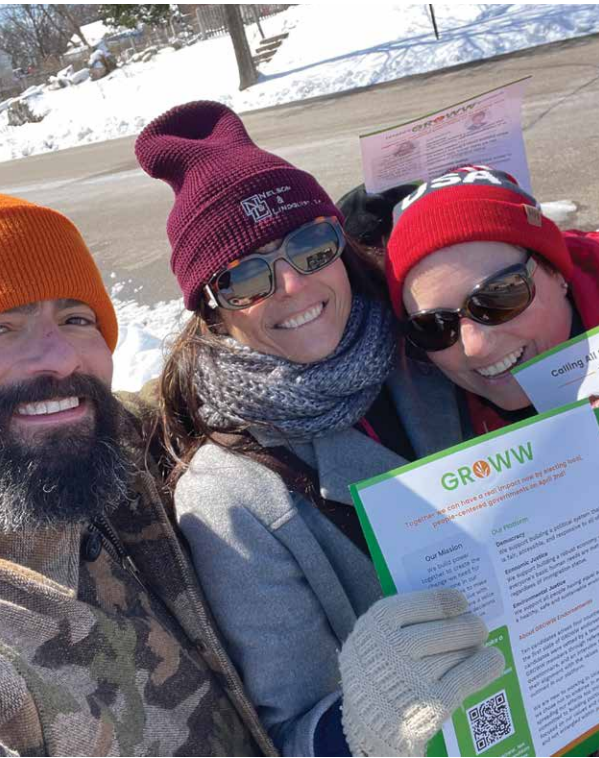
To win on our campaigns and further our Platform, we need messages that give us the courage to see our neighbors as potential allies. No matter what we look like, how much we make, or how we’ve voted. We’ll continue to nurture our skills to be a part of a values-driven and action oriented coalition across Wisconsin.

“There’ve been so many meaningful moments this year. Attending Grassroots school last January and getting to collaborate with four profoundly intelligent women in a group where we learned so much. Ages spanning from 36 to 82 years old, it was building power...Then working with our PPP team to develop a game plan for fighting against corporate injustices in my own neighborhood. We planned, executed and (I would say) succeeded. Hundreds of people coming together. Just wow.”

-Sam B.

Grassroots School 2024





Knocking Doors in Dunn County

Nonpartisan Electoral Work

Leading up the November election, GROWW led in two key ways:

1) A democracy defense effort, Joyous and Safe Elections which brought together 13 leaders from Western WI, 5 of us from GROWW and others from other organizations or individuals such as a county clerk. The goal of our efforts was to ensure that the elections went as smoothly as possible. Our collective efforts included spreading a message of trust in election systems and election workers, recruiting faith leaders to be election observers, providing a deescalation training, observing the certification process, reporting back to the WI Democracy Defense Coalition and hosting a Big Tent Meeting featuring two local clerks who explained their processes to ensure safe and secure elections.

These efforts are typically concentrated on the bigger cities in WI but because of threats, we expected the need for these efforts in our part of the state as well.

2) A Vote No campaign to combat the constitutional amendment that was on our ballot and was designed to further disenfranchise voters. This campaign held a Big Tent Meeting for our leaders, diving into how race and class has systematically been used in our country since the declaration of independence to divide us. We organized 900 handwritten postcards to persuadables in our region. We also used social and print media to share this message with our community. Unfortunately, the constitutional amendment passed and we expect another constitution amendment on the April ballot to put voter ID into the state constitution.

In the August election, we also had a harmful constitutional amendment on our ballots which would have reduced the authority of the governor to allocate federal funding. We distributed 200 yard signs, wrote 265 postcards, organized through our campaign. Fortunately, these two constitutional amendments failed.

Training and Investing in Our Leaders

In 2024, GROWW hosted its second annual Grassroots School, a 2.5-day training that brought together 32 grassroots leaders from across western Wisconsin to explore organizing and leadership. Designed to be an immersive and transformative experience, Grassroots School equips participants with the tools and confidence to step into leadership roles, build relationships, and reimagine possibilities for their communities.

Grassroots School is more than a workshop; it's a space where individuals discover their potential, align with others, and begin to see themselves as agents of change. As one participant shared, "This workshop helped me build confidence and competence in becoming a leader. I would highly recommend it to anyone looking to create the world they want to live in."

At GROWW, we have a saying that, "the campaign is the curriculum", meaning participation is the engine of leadership development. As our leaders organize, they step outside their comfort zones by knocking on a stranger's door, testifying at a public meeting, or sitting across the table from the mayor. To support this growth, we offer trainings and workshops throughout the year, equipping our leaders with skills like deep canvassing, one-to-one meetings, issue cutting, strategic communications, and conducting effective research meetings. Our trainings take what leaders learn in the field and put it into practice right away, seeing the results in real time.

Grassroots School 2024 Facilitators



Key Challenges

Impact of National Elections

- **Local organizing sidelined:** The presidential election dominated attention, creating hesitancy among grassroots leaders and difficulties in energizing people about smaller, local races.
- **Political climate:** Fear and anxiety around national politics hindered relationship-building efforts.

Housing Policy Gridlock

- **Exclusion of impacted voices:** People directly affected by the housing crisis are typically absent from decision-making, replaced by housing-secure individuals and token efforts like surveys or forums.

Attacks on Final Five Voting (FFV) and Electoral Reforms

- **National setbacks:** Well-funded bipartisan opposition has led to setbacks for FFV initiatives, including repeal votes in Alaska and failed referendums in other states.
- **Mixed outcomes:** While Wisconsin saw local legislative wins, the national trend is concerning.

Opposition Groups and Misinformation

- **Well-funded opposition:** Groups like “Keep Polk County Rural” used fear-based messaging to secure narrow wins in local elections.

All in Favor Strategy Session



Key Learnings

Our Organizing MUST Center our People's Everyday Lives

- Our organizing is most impactful when it focuses on urgent, deeply felt issues like housing affordability or safety, which require little persuasion and resonate personally with people.

Leadership Rolls Develop Our Base & Our Leaders

- Our base building thrives when more of our people are engaged in meaningful roles from the start. Propositioning our leaders into opportunities for them to take responsibility, contribute, and feel the power of collective action is vital to our movement.

Visibility Builds Our Strength and Unity

- We must resist the urge to hide. Strategic public, united actions have proven more effective than attempting to operate under the radar. Events that bring together diverse voices create the most momentum for change.

In Changemaking, We Need Patience and Persistence

- Transformational changes, like advancing democracy and reforming electoral systems, take time but are achievable through sustained relationship-building and organizing.

When Needed, Be Ready to Aim Higher

- Local action is essential but insufficient alone. To win on our issues, advocating at state and national levels will be critical to counteract policies favoring corporate interests over our communities.

Leveraging Shared Goals Across Our Region

- Aligning goals across counties and levels of government will strengthen our collective impact and build a robust support network among leaders and communities.

The Importance of Scale

- To meet ambitious goals, there's a clear need for greater capacity, including more volunteers and organizers focused on building year-round relationships. More people are needed to sustain and expand organizing efforts, from phone banks to door knocking to 1:1s

The Power of 1-1 Conversations

- Building relationships through personal conversations is crucial but challenging. Effective 1-1s require patience, persistence, and a supportive team for debriefing and growth.

2024 GROWW Board

"It was five years ago that I, along with 6 of my neighbors, conceived of the organization that has now become GROWW and GROWW Education. Thanks to many hours of committed work and strong bonds of trust between board members and our super qualified staff, who keep striving to learn the best way to build people power in Western Wisconsin, our organization has evolved organically. I am confident that we are now poised to face the head winds of the next five years with greater power than ever, as we act in solidarity to create a community in which everyone can make ends meet, live with dignity and have a voice in shaping the decisions that impact us."

- Juliet Tomkins, Board Chair



Juliet Tomkins, Chair



Phil Verges, Vice Chair



Alexi Brooks, Treasurer



Bob Maline



Lisa Mueller



Maureen Ash



Douglas Kane



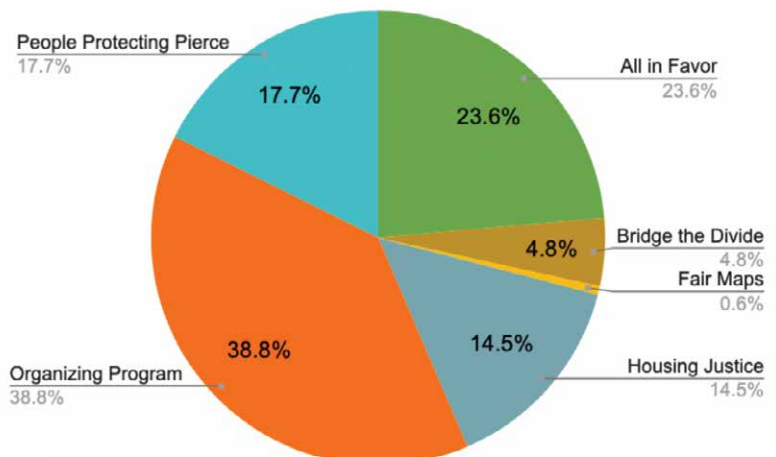
Jenna Bjork



Kate Felton

Financial Reporting

GROWW and GROWW Education Expenditures by Campaign



2024 GROWW Education Board



Juliet Tomkins, Chair



**Prescott Bergh,
Vice Chair**



**Grace Coggio,
Treasurer**

Staff



**Jenelle Ludwig Krause,
Executive Director**



**Bill Hogseth,
Organizing Director**



**Danny Akenson,
Field Organizer**



**John Calabrese,
Field Organizer**

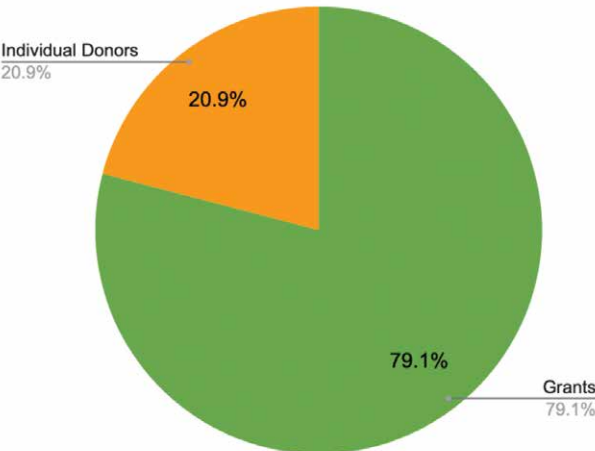


**Reba Krueger,
Communications
Manager**

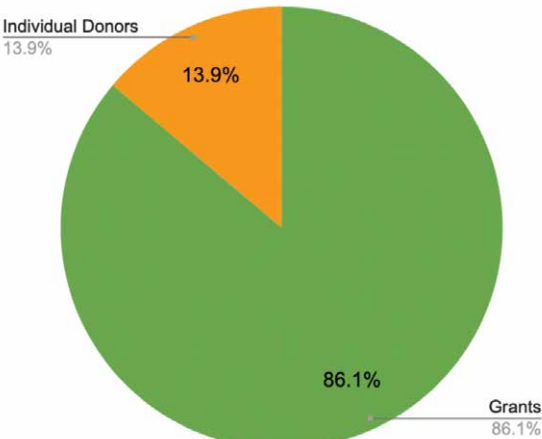


**Karen Zacharias,
Operations Manager**

GROWW Revenue



GROWW Education Revenue



GROWW Institutional Donors

Clean and Prosperous America

Healthy Democracy Fund, a fund of Tides Foundation.

GROWW Education

Movement Voter Project

Piper Fund, a Proteus Fund initiative

Pro-Democracy Campaign

Pro-Democracy Campaign's We Choose Us Project

Sixteen Thirty Fund

State Power Action Fund and We Make the Future Action

WI Rural Coalition

Working Families Organization

Individual Contributors

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Cohen, Elena
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Cukier, Jody
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