

MAPPING SUCCESS

2009/2010 ANNUAL REPORT



Women Employed

womenemployed.org



**A WOMAN WITH A
TWO-YEAR ASSOCIATE'S
DEGREE EARNS 28 PERCENT
MORE AND A WOMAN WITH
A BACHELOR'S DEGREE
EARNS 75 PERCENT MORE
THAN A WOMAN WITH ONLY
A HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION**

Dear Friend of Women Employed,

For nearly four decades, Women Employed has made it possible for millions of women to create their own maps to success. We've removed roadblocks to economic advancement by strengthening enforcement of equal opportunity requirements, expanding work-family benefits, opening educational opportunities, and promoting innovative strategies to meet women's real needs.

How does Women Employed tackle these big issues? We start by listening—to hourly workers in low-paying jobs, parents who work and go to college, mothers who need to care for sick children. We develop practical policy solutions and identify practices that work. We bring people and organizations together. And then we advocate with public officials and employers to get the job done.

To illustrate how Women Employed makes large-scale change, this annual report focuses on one key area of our work: increasing women's access to and success in education beyond high school. We're making it possible for more lower-income women to get the skills and credentials they need to advance to good jobs and create a more secure future. The map inside provides details about this road to opportunity we're building.

But the most important message we want to convey in this report is one of thanks. You—our donors, volunteers, partners—make our work possible. Especially in this time of high unemployment and rising poverty, there is still so much to do to achieve our vision of true equal opportunity and justice. We're very grateful for your commitment and generosity. With your help, we'll continue to make economic security a reality for more women and their families.



Anne Ladky
Executive Director



Deborah Thorne
Chair, Board of Directors

ROAD TO OPPORTUNITY



Paying for College

Many working women want to improve their lives through education, but simply cannot afford to go to school. Women Employed continues to be the **leading advocate in Illinois for financial aid to help low-income students achieve their dreams.** We worked with legislators and the Governor to maintain financial aid levels and make sure investments in aid continue to be a priority as solutions to Illinois' budget crisis were debated. Student Advocates for Success, our project to **mobilize students to advocate for crucial educational supports and services,** added hundreds of new members. Now students on 31 community college campuses are making their voices heard with policymakers.

Getting Ready for College-level Work

Many working adults come to community colleges seeking training for better jobs, but need help to improve their math and reading skills. To help them get on a path to advancement, Women Employed has spurred the creation of "bridge" programs that combine basic skills and career training. Today, colleges and community organizations in Illinois are conducting **nearly 25 bridge programs in high-growth fields** such as healthcare, manufacturing, and transportation/distribution. WE worked with state officials and educators to establish a funding stream for these programs, which are **opening opportunities to hundreds of individuals each year.**





Successful Start-up

Working adult students face obstacles even before they enter the classroom. Many are low-income, non-native English speakers, or the first in their families to attend college. Too often, they encounter confusing registration processes and don't receive good information about how specific courses relate to their career goals. Through our *Clear Connections Project*, we've **shared best practices and effective solutions to common barriers with all 48 Illinois community colleges**. We've provided tailored technical assistance to eight colleges, including sending "mystery students" to campuses to assess application and registration processes, reviewing websites and other information sources for ease of use, and advising college leaders on strategies for improvement.



Affordability—Crisis Ahead

The Illinois budget crisis is jeopardizing financial aid. Women Employed is **working with policymakers to address the crisis of college affordability**. We published a report to foster debate about "human capital" bonds as one strategy for making financial aid more predictable and **served on the legislature's Higher Education Finance Study Commission**, which convened key stakeholders to develop recommendations about higher education funding and affordability. We brought the needs of at-risk students to the attention of the Commission, whose recommendations will form the basis for legislation to be introduced in the coming session.

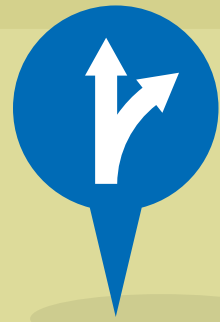
Choosing the Right Classes

Career information and planning plus effective advising are critical components that help low-income students choose the right career goals, overcome obstacles, and succeed in school. Women Employed **brought our innovative online career development program, Career Coach, to more community college campuses this year**. We trained 60 college outreach workers throughout the state to use *Career Coach* with prospective students making decisions about going to school. We helped develop a simple advising tool that prepares students to ask their advisors good questions about classes and careers. We provided professional development workshops to advisors at the City Colleges of Chicago to help them serve students more effectively.



Staying the Course

Far too many community college students struggle with academic and personal barriers and drop out, often before completing their first year. Early warning systems, more active engagement with advisors, and targeted supports can help them stay in school. As part of our *Clear Connections Project*, Women Employed identifies programs that have been successful in addressing barriers facing low-income adult students; we publish promising practices and disseminate them widely. Women Employed brought together the CCP member colleges—now 27—to share best practices and their experience in serving disadvantaged students. This collaboration is **bringing new ideas and energy to students who need support to stay in school and attain their goals.**



Kids on Board

Very low-income working parents in Illinois need help to pay for child care while they are in school or training. Women Employed has successfully advocated for a program that makes child care funds available for class and study hours, but the state's fiscal crisis threatened the program this year. WE joined with child care advocates to **persuade the Governor to maintain the program, which provides vital help to over 5,000 Illinois families.** WE published a brochure on the funding program and how to apply, and disseminated it to hundreds of child care centers, colleges, and family support programs throughout the state.



Destination: Good Jobs

To help low-income students reach their goals, the educational institutions that serve them—mostly community colleges—have to make student success their standard. Women Employed is **advocating for policy changes in Illinois that will create a true career pathway system from educational programs to good jobs.** We're promoting better student transitions from adult education to credit programs, a focus on outcomes rather than just enrollment, and use of solid data to measure success. Our goal is to ensure that all students, including adults with work and family responsibilities, have real opportunities to realize their dreams.





**SOLUTIONS
AHEAD**

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Women Employed continues to be a recognized leader and expert on women's economic advancement locally and nationally. WE championed efforts to make workplaces fairer, built public awareness and support for positive policy changes, and increased advocacy on behalf of low-paid working women and their families.



WE continued the fight to ensure that all Illinois workers have access to paid sick days to care for themselves and sick family members. We have **educated nearly a million Illinoisans about the need for paid sick days through our campaign website, media outreach, and organizing efforts statewide.** As the leader of the 68-member Illinois Paid Leave Coalition, we testified before the House Labor Committee in favor of the Illinois Healthy Workplace Act and made sure that legislators understood the human costs of denying people paid sick days.

WE **convened a meeting of national experts to examine the issues surrounding work scheduling in the low-wage labor market,** and researched practices that would reduce volatility and promote predictability for workers. We are **raising awareness about this little-known but widespread problem** that prevents low-paid workers from earning a regular or predictable paycheck and makes consistent childcare and enrollment in education impossible.

WE was a voice for work-family solutions that recognize the needs of low-paid front-line workers at an **invitation-only White House forum on workplace flexibility with President Obama and the First Lady.**

With national partners, WE **co-hosted a meeting with Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis,** where we discussed strategies to address discrimination and other violations of workplace protections, retirement security, and work-family issues. We're working with the Department of Labor to help them **revive enforcement of affirmative action rules and effectively strengthen workplace protections** for low-paid workers.

WE **provided Congressional staff with detailed recommendations on proposed provisions of the federal Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (SAFRA)** to ensure that it would effectively meet the needs of low-income students. We **successfully mobilized our Action Network to help ensure passage of this historic legislation,** which reformed student loans, increased Pell Grants and aid for needy students, and bolstered community colleges.

WE organized advocates to **provide Governor Quinn with recommendations for how to use stimulus funding to benefit Illinois' lower-income workers** and were invited to join the Governor's Interagency Jobs Workgroup.

WE launched Blackboard, an e-newsletter that shares education policy news, resources, and best practices with policymakers and practitioners nationwide.

Through LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube we're **spreading the word to thousands of potential new advocates and mobilizing support** for expanding educational opportunities and fair workplace practices.

The Department of Labor named our innovative online career development program, **Career Coach, one of the top career exploration tools.**

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE FOUNDATIONS, CORPORATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO CONTRIBUTE TO OUR EFFORTS. WE RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF EVERY CONTRIBUTION AND REGRET THAT WE CANNOT LIST THE MANY PEOPLE WHO DONATED LESS THAN \$100 BETWEEN JULY 1, 2009 AND JUNE 30, 2010. HEARTFELT THANKS TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS.

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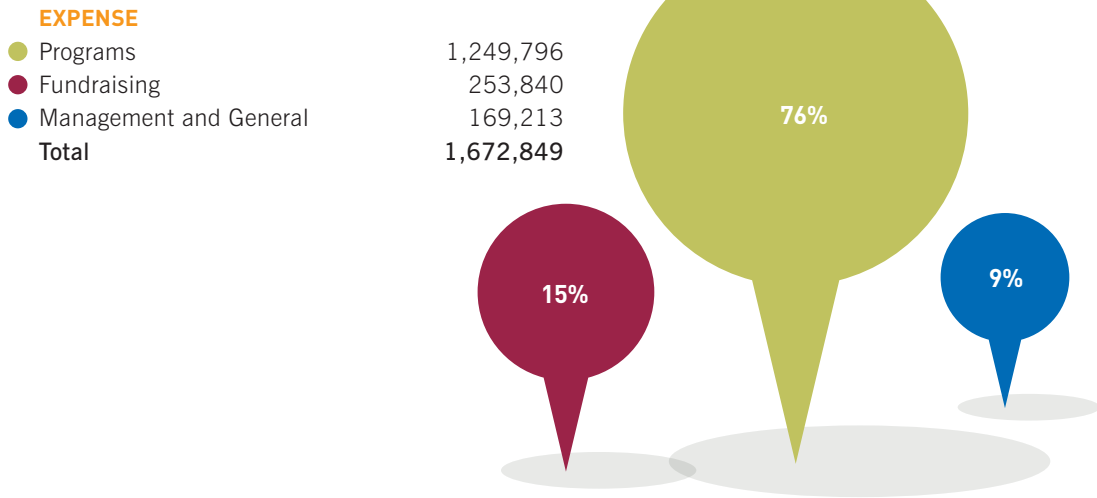
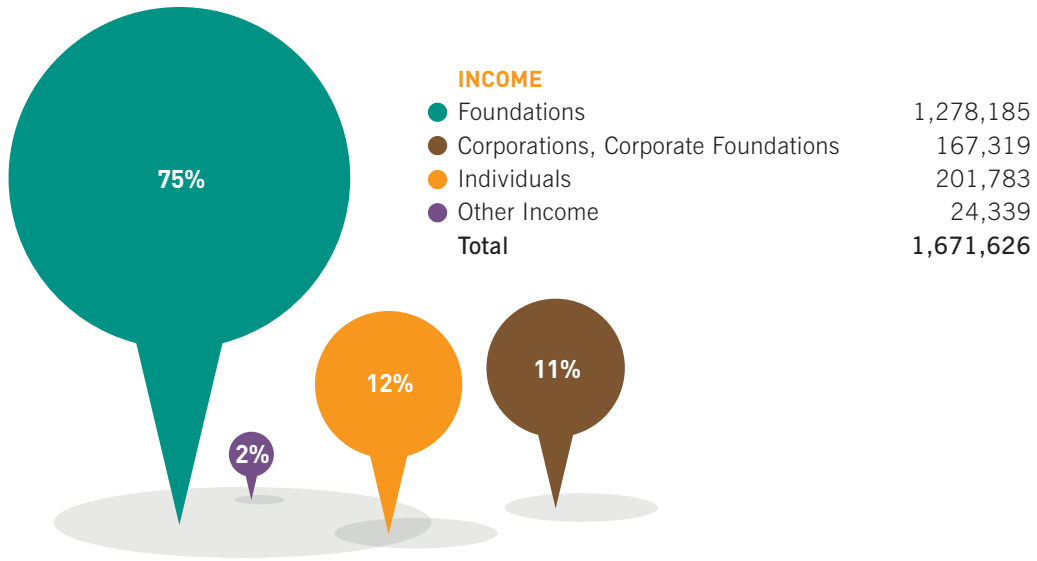
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