

# THE POWER OF



# DEAR FRIENDS

We are happy to be able to finally share our FY2025 Impact Report with you. Each year, we are reminded that our work is not just a moment in time, but a movement. It's an opportunity to act without permission, to believe in the impossible, and to use our power to inspire others through action. Since 1973, Women Employed (WE) has fought tirelessly for women's rights, paving the way for a more equitable world where women, families, and communities can thrive. **And although we are in a moment of great need—when our hard-won rights are under attack and our democratic structures are being dismantled—we are rolling up our sleeves, and using our power to fight back.**

**The Power of WE is stronger than ever** as we defend our rights, strengthen our resilience, and deliver results that will have lasting impact. Despite the risks, we remain steadfast in our pursuit of equity for all.

Over the past year, our work and our focus is a demonstration of how we use our power to fight for and create

pathways for people to access their **rights** and economic mobility, and of our steadfast **resilience** and commitment to achieving **results** for working women and families.

Each victory in this report tells a story of systems transformed, lives strengthened, and futures secured. And we do not plan on stopping. Our progress is proof that the Power of WE is resilient, effective, and relevant.

Though the challenges are daunting, the strength of this movement is the power of not just WE, but YOU. **And we are seeing in real time what happens when we activate the Power of WE. WE need you** to ensure when we come out on the other side of this moment, we persevered all that we could and are poised to build something better and stronger. Thank you for believing in the transformative power of this work. Together, we can continue building an unshakable future for generations to come.



*Lynn Watkins-Asiyanbi*

LYNN WATKINS-ASIYANBI,  
Board Chair



*Cherita Ellens*

CHERITA ELLENS,  
President and CEO



*Working with the Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (WE Hub) has shown me that women already have the vision—they just deserve an ecosystem that shows up alongside them. When we build accessible and culturally-rooted pathways to entrepreneurship, families grow, neighborhoods benefit, and women get to define success on their own terms. That's the Power of WE.*

**– Raven Hargest, WE Hub Manager and SLP Alum**



*The Pattis Family Foundation Summer Leadership Program (SLP) is one way WE doesn't just talk the talk but walks the walk. In managing the 2025 cohort of SLP, I saw firsthand what we can achieve when we harness the Power of WE. Summer Leaders bring their talents and valuable lived experiences to inform and shape this important work. In return, WE ensures they have the resources and opportunities to grow as professionals, community members, social justice advocates, and the next generation of change makers.*

**– Efrata Sasahulih, Program Manager and SLP Alum**

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• indicates staff members or Board Directors that are no longer serving.



# IMPACT AT A GLANCE

## CIVIC EDUCATION IN RESPONSE TO FEDERAL THREATS

Under this federal administration, we have witnessed alarming threats not just to our rights, but to our democratic institutions. To mobilize resistance, we've developed the *For the Common Good* campaign (which you can read more about in this report), educating people on the important work of government agencies and programs. Since launching, we have created more than a dozen videos on topics ranging from the Department of Labor, to the National Labor Relations Board, to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and more—that have been watched nearly **7,500 times**.



## A PAY TRANSPARENCY PARTNERSHIP WITH INFLUENCE

**155,000**  
VIDEO VIEWS

Illinois's new Salary Transparency law puts millions of Illinoisans one step closer to achieving fair and equitable pay. To help workers learn about their rights, we partnered with social media advocates and influencers Salary Transparent Street (STS). STS travels the country interviewing everyday people about their salaries to promote and encourage pay transparency. In 2025, they came to Chicago to talk to people on the street about the law and share WE resources. The video they created has been viewed more than **155,000 times!**



## HELPING BLACK AND LATINA/X WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ACCESS FUNDING FOR THEIR BUSINESSES

**\$8+ BILLION**  
IN FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES



Many of our Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (WE Hub) users experience challenges finding and securing funding for their businesses, so we developed and launched an **innovative Money Finder Tool** in August of 2024. The tool simplifies the process of finding grants, loans, and other funding sources, allowing users to filter for eligibility and alignment with their business needs. Since launching, **328 users** have accessed the Money Finder—most visiting multiple times—exposing them to more than \$8 billion in funding opportunities.

## FUNDING FUTURES TODAY FOR THE ADVOCATES OF TOMORROW

**TWO \$1,000** SCHOLARSHIPS



With our partners on the Equal Pay Chicago Coalition (EPCC), we opened applications for the inaugural Barb Yong Equal Pay Scholarship, which supports social justice-minded college students (full- or part-time, 2- or 4-year) from Chicago with a passion for issues like gender equity, racial justice, education access, and workers' rights. After receiving over 80 applications, we awarded **two \$1,000 scholarships**. Both students demonstrate a deep passion for promoting equal rights and ending discrimination, and we are happy to support their education!

## SO NICE, CRAIN'S NAMED US TWICE!

For the second year in a row, *Crain's Chicago Business* honored Women Employed as one of the **TOP 100 Best Places to Work** in Chicago in 2024—coming in at #44!! We have been recognized for our deep commitment to equity, which starts here in our own workplace. Our President and CEO, Cherita Ellens, was also recognized as one of **Crain's 2024 Notable Black Leaders!** Since joining WE in 2019, Cherita has worked tirelessly to ensure the organization is inclusive and reflective of all the women we serve.

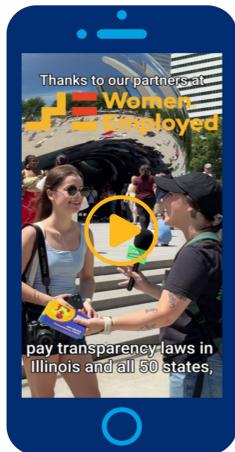


## AND THAT'S NOT ALL!

Keep reading to see more ways we're mobilizing The Power of WE and driving change, and to hear directly from WE staff about why this work matters!

# RIGHTS

Your rights are your power. At WE, we've used our power to fight for, win, and spread the word about new rights to ensure *everyone* has equitable opportunities to thrive—even in the face of threats and rollbacks. In this moment, with our federal rights at risk, we have worked to shore up protections in Illinois, ensuring our state remains a safe haven.



## SALARY TRANSPARENCY IS THE LAW

Just a few years after passing a No Salary History Law in Illinois, WE has continued advancing progress with a groundbreaking Salary Transparency Law, which went into effect on January 1, 2025. The law requires employers with 15 or more employees to include wage or salary range, along with information on benefits and other compensation, on any job, promotion, or transfer opportunity they post. To ensure Illinoisans are aware of this right, we launched a public education campaign, creating fact sheets, social media toolkits, postcards, emails, and digital ads. We also reached out to partners and community-based organizations. We even partnered with social media advocates and influencers Salary Transparency Street to spread the word (read more about that on page 5).

## HELPING ILLINOISANS ACCESS PAID TIME OFF

On the heels of passing paid time off laws in both Chicago and Illinois, we shared vital resources with people working both in Chicago and across Illinois to make sure they understand their rights. Our Illinois and Chicago paid leave websites ([paidleaveil.org](http://paidleaveil.org), and [paidleavechicago.org](http://paidleavechicago.org)) are chock full of fact sheets, articles, resources, and toolkits, and our digital ads in Chicago reached nearly **600,000 people**. Illinois and Chicago workers no longer have to choose between their paycheck and taking care of themselves and their families, and they have the knowledge they need to access those rights. Next up? Continuing our fight for paid family and medical leave to ensure people can take the time they need for the care we all deserve.

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*The Power of WE is in raising our voices about our experiences, presenting the facts, and working with policymakers and partners. It's knowing when to lead, how to collaborate, and how to work with policy experts and legislators to pass laws, improve policies, and make lasting change. When we do, we transform the lives of women in Illinois—and all across the country.*

- Sarah Labadie, Director of Advocacy and Policy

## RIGHTS = POWER

Unless you know your rights, you can't access your power. In the last few years, we've won a variety of new and improved laws for people across Illinois and Chicago to advance pay equity, paid time off, domestic worker rights, fair scheduling, and more! To learn more about these protections visit [womenemployed.org/kyr](http://womenemployed.org/kyr)!



## EDUCATING VOTERS ON THEIR RIGHTS

In the lead-up to the 2024 federal election—one of the most critical in our history for women and families—and with our voting rights at risk, it was imperative that everyone knew their rights and had the information they needed to cast their ballots. So WE developed a comprehensive Voter Mobilization Toolkit. With the information WE provided, hundreds of people—not just in Illinois, but all across the country—were able to check their voter registration status, find their polling locations, learn about deadlines, make plans to vote, and spread the word throughout their networks.



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*The rallying cry for WE's 2024 Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaign was, "Vote the change you want to see in the world." With our encouragement, people registered, activated, and voted because they understood that so much of what we've worked for over the past five decades was at risk. Motivated by the aftermath, we have applied the Power of WE to protect the futures of working women by marching in the streets, hosting community events, and mobilizing supporters to respond and resist. Together we will continue to take action to advance and protect our economic power.*

- Mary Kay Devine, Chief of Staff



## SHORING UP OUR RIGHTS IN ILLINOIS

The federal protections we have worked hard to enshrine are being abandoned or dismantled at an alarming rate. We are working with community partners, legislators, and state agencies to codify those protections in Illinois and ensure our state remains a beacon for working women. For instance, when it became clear that the federal administration would hamstring the enforcement power of the EEOC, we knew we had to decouple Illinois' pay data collection and reporting from federal requirements. We worked with the Illinois Department of Labor to pass a law ensuring we can still receive the data we need from Illinois' larger employers to identify and rectify wage gaps and pay discrimination.

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*Our work with the Equal Pay Chicago Coalition is essential because far too many workers still aren't aware of their rights in the workplace. We advance the Power of WE by recognizing that true pay equity can only be achieved when the most marginalized workers are no longer left behind. Salary transparency is a critical piece of that—everyone has the right to understand the compensation for a job upfront, fostering fairness, transparency, and accountability.*

- Starr De Los Santos, Associate Director of Coalitions

# RESILIENCE

**Power isn't about being rigid. It's about being solid. Knowing when to bend and when to pivot. The Power of WE is our capacity to make strategic shifts to meet the moment. To withstand adversity and recover strong. And while, in this moment, we are facing a siege, your support has allowed us to be resilient.**

## FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Well before the 2024 election, we were strategizing about potential outcomes and impacts, allowing us to respond quickly to the onslaught of attacks. In January, we launched *For the Common Good*, a campaign to provide our community with information, resources, and opportunities for action. We are monitoring federal threats and responding through education and awareness building, mobilization, advocacy, and action, all aimed at fighting for our rights. We're:

- Educating people using videos, blogs, emails, and social media about the important work of the federal agencies and programs at risk—like the U.S. Department of Labor, SNAP and WIC, the Federal Election Commission, the Department of Education, and more.
- Amplifying resources from partners to ensure people can protect themselves in the face of federal layoffs, attacks on free speech, ICE and National Guard deployments, and other alarming dangers.
- Advocating and mobilizing, with our partners and with YOU, to fight the attacks and ensure justice.



## MARCHING, RALLYING, AND MOBILIZING

When the chips are down, WE doesn't fold. We rise. This year, we've taken to the streets, joining our partners and community members (YOU!) at marches, rallies, and protests—from May Day, to Labor Day, to No Kings, and more. We've hosted postcard-writing parties, empowering WE supporters to write elected officials and demand better. We've joined amicus briefs and sign-on letters with local and national partners. We've mobilized supporters to call legislators, fill out witness slips, oppose nominees that will roll back our rights, demand access to education, and so much more. Through these actions, we've helped hundreds of YOU raise your voices and amplify your power.



*For more than 50 years, Women Employed has been fighting—and winning—battles that seemed insurmountable. Our tenacity, forged in fire, has prepared us to protect the rights of Illinois women, their families, and communities. Just after inauguration, we exercised the Power of WE by launching For the Common Good, our campaign to clarify what was at stake, and what we can do about it, together, to ensure we don't lose hard-fought progress, or our vision for a more equitable future.*

**- Sharmili Majmudar, Executive Vice President of Policy, Programs, and Research**



## MAKING COLLEGE ACCESSIBLE FOR EVERYONE

An educated community is resilient. Adequate and equitable public university funding—so every Illinois public university can serve their unique student population—is one key to making sure everyone can access the education they need to succeed. As a lead organization for the effort to establish an adequate and equitable funding formula for Illinois' public universities, we spent a year negotiating with universities, labor, and other stakeholders to create a bill universities can support. We held public listening sessions on university campuses across the state to increase awareness and build support. We held subject matter hearings in the Senate and House and secured dozens of sponsors. And we created a strong foundation for our work in 2026—which will hopefully result in passing this important legislation.



*The Power of WE is our commitment to seeing things through, even when the opposition is strong. In Illinois, the way public universities historically receive funding is opaque, and schools with the most underserved student populations aren't getting the resources they need to meet their needs. To address that challenge, we served on the Commission that created an adequate and equitable funding formula for Illinois' public universities, and we will keep pushing until it's law.*

**- Cherita Ellens, President and CEO**

## STRATEGIZING WITH NATIONAL PARTNERS

While WE's primary focus is Illinois, this moment requires us to think nationally. In FY2025, we leveraged our strong national partnerships to protect and advance our rights. In March of 2025, we attended the Equal Pay Today Summit in DC, collaborating with organizations and lawmakers on how to advance economic security for working families. In May, we joined national advocates and policymakers at the National Skills Coalition's Skills Summit, strategizing on how to equip working people to build their skills and remain resilient. We were also invited to be one of a small group of core partners in The 75 Million Project, a bold call to action to build a national women's policy agenda that reflects the needs and aspirations of the 75 million working women who drive our economy. The campaign launched publicly in June, with an open letter in the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*.



## BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ADVOCATES

Resilience requires laying the groundwork for a better future. The Pattis Family Foundation Summer Leadership Program, our paid summer internship, does just that—equipping the next generation of social justice leaders. Our Summer Leaders receive leadership training, complete front-line research, and gain awareness of the barriers low-paid workers experience. Our 2025 class got an inside look at what it means to demonstrate resolve in the face of stacked odds, and to build strategies that will lead to change. They worked on projects that included digital organizing, 'know your rights' outreach, and support for entrepreneurs through the WE Hub. They also learned professional skills from career exploration speakers, got behind the scenes of WE's work with current and former staff members, and walked away with tools they will use to make the world a better place.

# RESULTS

Thanks to the power of YOUR support, WE have been able to produce tangible, life-changing results for working women.

## BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR STRONG CAREERS

The Career Foundations Consortium continues to produce positive results and welcome new partners, including the Chicago Housing Authority Level Up Program, and domestic violence service providers, who participated in a WE-led pilot program to connect survivors with workforce development program providers. As we prepare to celebrate 10 years of Career Foundations next year, we are proud that more than 900 students completed the program in just the last fiscal year alone—proving that for many non-traditional learners, Career Foundations is a critical step on their career pathway.



Career Foundations Consortium meeting, June 2025

As we prepare to celebrate 10 years of Career Foundations next year, we are proud that more than 900 students completed the program in just the last fiscal year alone—proving that for many non-traditional learners, Career Foundations is a critical step on their career pathway.

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When talking about the Power of WE, it is important to recognize the barriers many adults face not just in advancing in their careers, but with their education. Through our work with Career Foundations, we are helping adult learners assess their skills and interests, explore career pathways, and craft a plan to enter certificate and degree programs that lead to family-supporting jobs. With the right foundation and access to job-ready programs, students feel more confident about reaching their goals.

- Tara Driver, Senior Career Pathways Manager

## ENSURING STUDENTS CAN ASPIRE TO HIGHER EDUCATION

To increase equity, access, and success in higher education, it's important to provide opportunities for colleges to learn from one another. Our ASPIRE (Accelerating Student Progress and Increasing Racial Equity) Project does just that. In FY2025, eight community colleges participated in activities dedicated to developmental education reform. WE hosted an Equity-Minded Leadership Academy, in partnership with the University of Southern California, and we worked with each campus as they implemented their Developmental Education Reform Act (DERA) plans—which include course, curriculum, and program changes; creating data dashboards to track student progress; implementing year-round professional development in racial equity and inclusion faculty; and hiring math and English specialists to implement successful summer bridge programming. The result? Each college was awarded multiple grants from the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) to work collaboratively with other regional community colleges, and more than half were featured in ICCB's statewide Developmental Education Reform Conference!

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When advocates, state agencies, and community partners work together, even the most challenging objectives become achievable. Through the years-long ASPIRE project, we've been utilizing the power of partnership with community colleges and key stakeholders to move the needle on closing the equity gap in college completion. Ensuring students persist through their college careers onward will have rippling impacts for their futures, their families, and their communities.

- Lauren Wheeler, ASPIRE Program Specialist

## ILLUMINATING CHALLENGES IN HEALTHCARE CAREERS

Over a year ago, WE set out to learn about the career pathways of entry-level, low-paid healthcare workers—who are predominantly Women of Color—to better understand the obstacles they face. Thanks to the generous support of JPMorganChase, and in collaboration with workforce development partners and training providers, we conducted comprehensive, mixed-methods research, including interviews and focus groups, a literature review, a landscape scan of healthcare training programs in Chicago, data analysis on career advancement, and case studies of training providers. WE recently released the results in a report called *Navigating the Maze*, which outlines the experiences of workers and provides recommendations for employers, education and training providers, and other stakeholders to address the barriers that thwart their goal of long-term economic mobility. Read more at [womenemployed.org/hccp](https://womenemployed.org/hccp)



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The Power of WE is building evidence-based solutions. Our research on healthcare career pathways revealed challenges many women have navigating a confusing system of credentials, job titles, and hiring processes. This is important since most existing research about healthcare careers does not center Women of Color in low-paid jobs. Without having evidence of workers' experiences, we cannot appropriately or effectively advocate for their needs and create better policies and programs to facilitate their advancement.

- Corinne Kodama, Senior Research Analyst



## BUILDING POWER FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

The Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (WE Hub) is demonstrating its power to help Black and Latina/x women entrepreneurs achieve their vision of success. More than 3 years since its launch, the WE Hub has helped over 800 women start and/or build businesses, hosted networking events for entrepreneurs, created workshops and programming with Chicago Housing Authority and Chase, and partnered with Google to educate women on how to use emerging technology with their businesses. Through our new Money Finder tool, the WE Hub is providing low-barrier access to updated funding opportunities, making the path towards entrepreneurship and financial freedom easier.

# Thank You

We are grateful for all our corporate partners, foundations, funders, and individual donors who made a gift between July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025. Due to space constraints, we are not able to list all of our generous supporters. Heartfelt thanks to all of you for fueling our work to build the economic power of women.

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**In Honor of Lynn Watkins-Asiyanbi**  
Tamara Pope  
Jeanne Gills  
Angela Whiteside-Smith

**In Honor of Meghan Shehorn**  
Pat & Mike Shehorn  
Casey Carey

**In Honor of Nakita Burrell**  
Angela Alexander  
David Granat  
James Fitzpatrick

**In Honor of Nancy Kreiter**  
Jane Seder \*  
Mary L. Pierson  
Shelley Gorson and Alan Salpeter  
Family Fund \*  
Lisa Rosenberg and Howard Balikov \*  
Toren Flink and Peter Kroll \*  
Alison and Neal Gordon \*  
Steve Meyer \*  
Beth and Lawrence Elman \*

**In Honor of The HOH Group, Inc.**  
Santiago Garcia

**In Memory of Joan Perkins**  
Vicki Curtis

**In Memory of Suzy Bangs**  
Janet Schumacher

## SECURING OUR POWER FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

One powerful action you can take to ensure a future of liberty, justice, and equity is to make a legacy gift to Women Employed. Estate planning is a powerful tool to direct your legacy and use your voice. By including Women Employed in your estate plans, you not only build the Power of WE; you extend that power into the future, making a difference for our daughters, our granddaughters, and those who come after.



It's a powerful way to fight injustice now—and far into the future—and ensure all women will have meaningful opportunities to achieve their aspirations for themselves and their families.

You can make your planned gift through wills, bequests, retirement accounts, or life insurance policies. When you inform us, we'll welcome you into our Generations Circle. As a bonus, many of these gifts provide tax benefits to you! It's just a matter of planning what, how, and when to give.

## THANKS TO ALL OUR GENEROUS GENERATIONS CIRCLE MEMBERS

Kathleen Almaney	Herbert A. Kirst+
Nancy D. Anderson+	Nancy and Rick Kreiter
Shauna Babcock	Anne Ladky and
Gabrielle Cummings	Karen Fishman ◊
Vicki Curtis	Lisa Pattis
Tina M. Erickson and	Joan Perkins+
Michael A. Krutsch	Priscilla Perry+
Judy Erwin	Janet and Philip Rotner
Mary Gardner	Janet Schumacher
Rebecca Girvin-Argon	Eric Stock
Alice Greenhouse	Debbie Thorne and
Erica Harris	Jerry Esrig
Jean Hoffenkamp+	Lisa Turley
Fern Josephs	Lynn Watkins-Asiyanbi

For more information, contact Anne Puotinen, Director of Development, at [apuotinen@womenemployed.org](mailto:apuotinen@womenemployed.org), or (773) 739-6165.

# THE WORKING LUNCH

Thanks to everyone who joined us in Centering Women's Voices at *The Working Lunch* on May 22, 2025. We heard powerful testimonials from **Vimla Homan** and **Bridget Booker**, who talked about their own experiences and why we all need paid leave. We honored **Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT)**, who is standing strong against the administration's assault on diversity, equity, and inclusion; as well as **Gail Eisenberg**, Head of Employment Practice at Loftus and Eisenberg; and **Isabel (Izzy) Dobbel**, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch of the Illinois House of Representatives. We also heard from keynote speaker **Andrea Zopp**, Managing Partner of Cleveland Avenue, who reminded us all of the power of Centering Women's Voices in this time.

### Champion Sponsor:



### Trailblazer Sponsors:



## THE TIME IS NOW 2025

For 24 hours on March 10 and 11, 2025, Women Employed held our first-ever dedicated day of giving, *The Time is Now*, to coincide with Women's History Month. Our conference room turned into campaign central, as the Power of WE fueled teams of volunteers and staff who reached out to their networks to ask for donations, and wrote thank you notes to donors. Between those who pledged to match gifts, and those who donated during the campaign, we smashed our goals, raising well over \$50,000 from 150 donors, all of which goes to supporting our mission. It was the Power of WE personified, and *The Time is Now* was such a success that we're hosting another one on March 3-4, 2026.

### Thanks to Our Lead Matchers:



Anonymous

Ora Kathleen-Flynn Family Foundation

### INVESTORS FOR CHANGE

With the generosity of our *Investors for Change*, who make unrestricted gifts of \$1,000 or more annually, Women Employed is able to pursue the best opportunities to improve workplace conditions and build pathways to higher education so more women can succeed economically.

### ANNE LADKY LEADERSHIP FUND ◊

Thank you to these donors who founded the fund in Anne Ladky's honor and to those who have designated the total or a portion of their gift to the fund. All donations support initiatives aimed at increasing WE's impact on the conditions facing women in low-paid occupations and building our movement by engaging next-generation leaders as activists for women's economic justice.

### NANCY B. KREITER ADVOCACY FUND\*

Special thanks to the donors of this fund that support Women Employed's work to strengthen federal equal opportunity policies.

### GENERATIONS CIRCLE

Thanks to our supporters who have included Women Employed in their estate plans, future generations of women will have meaningful opportunities to achieve their aspirations for themselves and their families.

### ELEVATE, MONTHLY GIVING ☆

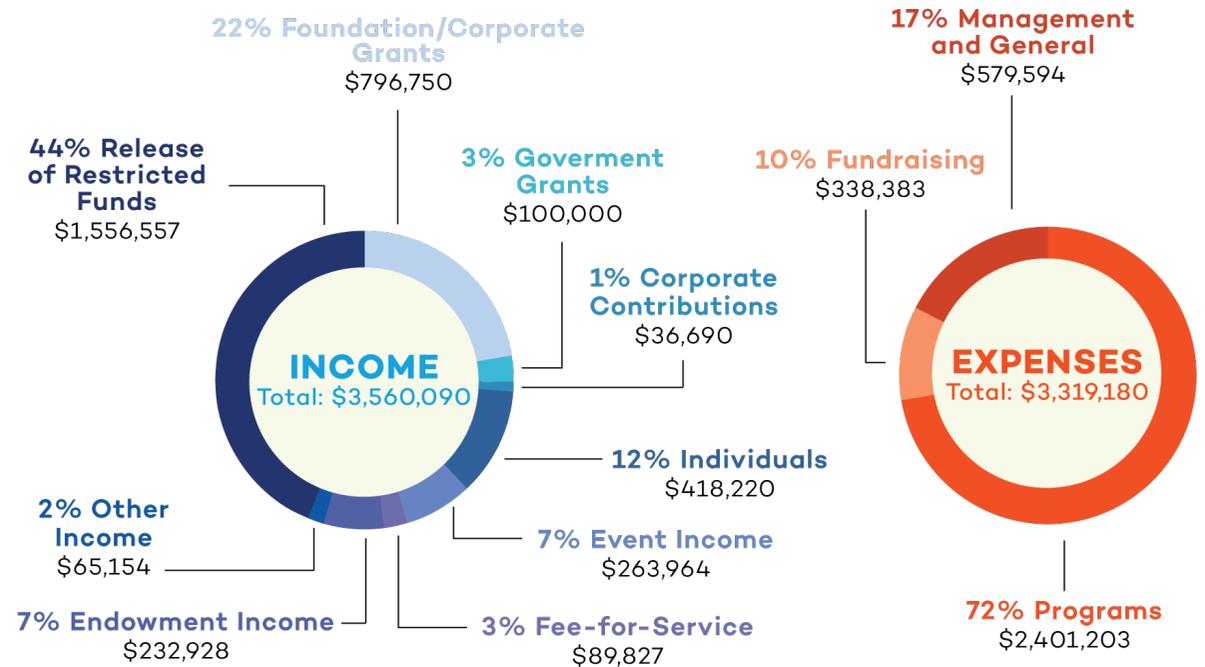
*Elevate*, our monthly giving community, is a passionate and determined group of monthly supporters on a mission to improve the economic status of women and remove barriers to equity. Make a monthly gift and join people just like you, giving anything they can to prove how unstoppable we are when we work together!

### DEDICATIONS

Honor a loved one with a gift in their name to Women Employed for a birthday, anniversary, or other special occasion. Donations in memory of a special person honor their life and continue their legacy. The tribute gifts noted are donations of \$150 and above.

For more information on these special giving opportunities, call Anne Puotinen at (773) 739-6165 or visit [womenemployed.org](http://womenemployed.org).

## FINANCIALS\*



\*Unaudited financials. Income reflects unrestricted dollars.



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