

WOMEN UNITE! 2023 IMPACT REPORT



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WHAT DO WE DO WHEN THE WORLD IS ON FIRE?

Welp, here we are. We just wrapped yet another unprecedented year and are longing, nay pleading for precedented times. By now, you've read the headlines and you've seen the social media posts. You've watched the clips and you've heard the cries. There is so much going on that's demanding our time and attention. If you're anything like me, it's easy to feel angry, overwhelmed, and hopeless. So, what do you do when everything is terrible? Well, here at Women Unite! (WU!) we do the best thing we know how to do—we show up.

As Palestinian-American activist and poet Hala Alyan wrote:

“All relentless entities depend enormously on a few things: your fatigue, your hopelessness, your turning away.”

We will not turn away. We refuse to turn away. Because we cannot afford to turn away.

We cannot turn away from climate change, capitalism, the maternal mortality rate, gun violence, continued attacks on bodily autonomy, and the list of awfulness goes on and on ... We cannot turn away because our community needs us. Our families need us. We need us.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank each of you for turning up instead of turning away—for forging connection and demonstrating collective impact. This report is a testament to the united efforts, resilience, and accomplishments of our community over the past year. The pages that follow capture the stories, initiatives, and transformative journeys that define our shared commitment to fostering positive change throughout Chicago.

From educational endeavors to community outreach, your support has made a tangible difference in the lives of countless individuals. Together, we have created a space where aspirations flourish and barriers crumble.

This end-of-year report is more than a collection of statistics and figures, although you will certainly find those, too. Indeed, this report is a chronicle of the impact we've made in this place we call home. It is a celebration of the strength that comes from unity and the unwavering belief that every person deserves the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for being part of our community and thank you for your dedication to WU!

With hope and gratitude,



Liz Jansen, Co-Founder and Executive Director

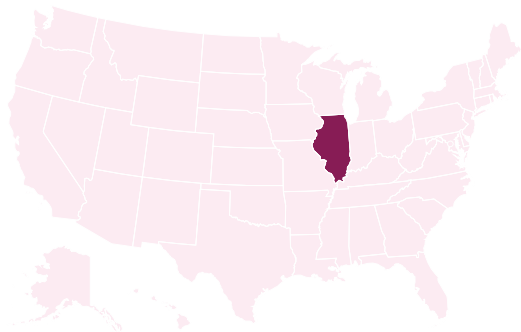
GROWTH OVER THE PAST YEAR

At a time when many organizations are shrinking, we're grateful that we've been able to expand our reach this year. Below is a snapshot of our growth.

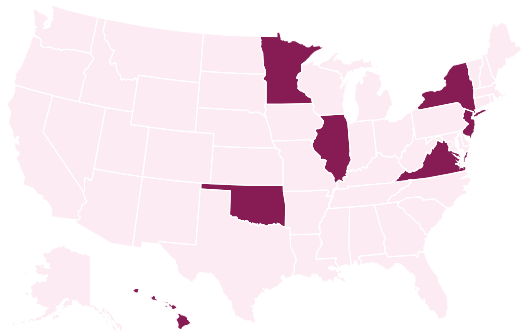
STAFF AND CONTRACTORS

We started from the bottom now we're here! In 2019, we launched with just one contractor in the city of Chicago. Since then, we've expanded to 18 contractors in seven different states. We're proud of the niche we've been able to provide professional freelancers. WU! offers the freedom and flexibility that contractors know and love with the resources, support, and collaboration of an organization.

WU! launched in 2019 with one contractor in Chicago.



We've expanded to 18 contractors in seven states!



Our average hourly contractor rate is \$40.98, which is more than double the livable wage for an adult with no children and 9% more than a livable wage for a working adult with one child living in Cook County. We believe budgets are value statements and are committed to compensating our team with life-sustaining wages.



In addition to a robust benefits package for our full-time employees that includes health insurance, six months of paid parental leave, a 3% retirement match and a \$300/month stipend for childcare costs, we also offer benefits to our hourly contractors.

Starting in 2024, offering a \$300/month child care stipend for contractors who work 60 hours/month or more. We are also pleased to announce that contractors will receive 4 hours of paid time off for every 40 hours worked, up to 24 hours in a calendar year. These expanded benefits are part of our continued pledge to prioritize people over profit.

*Glasmeier, Amy K. *Living Wage Calculator*. 2024. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. <https://livingwage.mit.edu>.

Our latest cohort of **partnerships** started in July 2023 and we're about halfway through. So far, we've donated nearly \$10,000 to our three partners. WU! provided 450 hours of free services, such as donor communications, design, and grant writing. Learn more about each of our partners below.



THE ALLIANCE OF FILIPINOS FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT (AFIRE) CHICAGO

AFIRE Chicago works to build the capacity of Filipinx/a/os to organize towards progressive change. AFIRE creates programs that are grounded in popular education and address issues through an intersectional lens to deepen collective understanding of the unique experiences of the Filipinx/a/o community.

We helped them expand their grants program by streamlining the process and identifying prospective funders. We also developed a comprehensive fundraising and communications strategy for the year ahead, as well as started the rebranding process, including a logo refresh.



THE EVOLVED NETWORK (TEN)

TEN provides experiential programming through culinary arts and gardening, equipping youth in systemically oppressed communities with transformative healing, skills, and support needed to evolve into masters of their unique gifts.

We worked with TEN to help launch a monthly donor campaign; facilitate board management and development; and expand their grants program. We also created a major gifts strategy and provided training on how to leverage positive press and existing high-net worth connections.

“WU! provides support through a compassionate framework that amplifies both their professionalism and friendliness. AFIRE appreciates that they see and respect the values and principles we bring to our work as an advocacy group run by organizers of color. We would recommend them to anyone seeking organizational transformation.”

— Marilou Mariko, development and strategic communications manager for AFIRE

“When I heard TEN was selected for the partnership with WU!, I was excited because I had heard great things, but also knew talking the talk is different from walking the walk,” says Sebastian White, founder and executive director of TEN. “They have truly walked with us and we are better now because of their involvement in our work. TEN is honored, fortunate, and proud to be connected to and in partnership with WU!”



UJIMAA MEDICS (UM)

UM is a Black health collective that spreads emergency and community care response skills in order to build resilient, self-determined, and well Black communities. For Black residents of Chicago’s South and West sides, inadequate access to care, particularly in emergencies, is both a cause and a compounding factor of health challenges. Since 2014, UM has reached approximately 3,000 people in Chicagoland and around the country with skills development related to gunshot first aid, asthma, protest defense, community safety, and other health and safety topics important for Black survival.

WU! worked with their team to start the process of updating their brand, design merchandise, and refresh their logo. We’re excited to see the next evolution of their identity.

“I really appreciate how available WU! is for fielding questions about our communications and funding issues. They’ve also been great at learning about our needs, and then working to match with their skills and capacity.”

— Martine Caverl, executive director of Ujima Medics



“WU! has far exceeded both our lived experience and expectations. They’re detailed, connected, passionate, supportive, and interestingly always know when to show up when you need a boost, have doubts, and/or are overwhelmed with the hardships that are inherent in the non-profit experience.”

— Sebastian White, founder and executive director of The Evolved Network

EVENTS

At WU!, we love to gather for a good cause. After all, all work and no play is no fun!

SPRING

In March, we helped the Love Package Project pack bags for 65 parents. Items packed included diapers, baby hygiene products, infant feeding tools, and body affirming items that support parents through the immediate postpartum period and beyond.



SUMMER

In June, we hosted our fifth annual Plantasia Plant Sale Fundraiser at The Native in Logan Square. Thanks to plant donations from the good folks at Flowers for Dreams and NPK Associates, we were able to raise more than \$1,700 for our partners.

We also celebrated the second year of #WUCrewSummer with events at The Moonlighter, Scofflaw, and Outside Voices during the month of July. In August, we hosted a party at Nobody's Darling where a portion of sales from their delicious Spice Note cocktails supported WU!.



At the end of the month, we held a wrap party with our board members and friends at Avondale Bowl where we celebrated yet another successful season. #WUCrewSummer and all the best parts of Summertime Chi: good food, good drinks, and, best of all, good people.

And speaking of people, we work with some of the best! While our executive director, Liz, was on a personal visit to New York City in June, she met up with one of our contractors, Catherine, who is based in New Jersey. The pair met up for breakfast at Balthazar in SoHo, but sadly did not run into any celebrities (although they did get the famous bread basket and it was SO worth it)! In July, another one of our contractors, Madison, visited Chicago from Oklahoma City. Their families had dinner together and their kids enjoyed a fun afternoon at Indian Boundary Park.





FALL

As an organization that's always been remote (even before the COVID pandemic) and has historically attracted professional independent contractors who have chosen the #FreelanceLife over traditional 9-to-5s, we started hosting optional coworking sessions this summer as a way to build community and connection, as well as explore new coffee shops across Chicago and support local businesses.

In August, we hosted our first coworking session at Guild Row in Chicago's Avondale neighborhood. In September, we met at Two Hearted Queen in Boystown. October's session was held at Colectivo Coffee in Logan Square, and we rounded out the year in November at Khepri Cafe in Albany Park (above). We look forward to keeping the vibes going in 2024.



WINTER

For our holiday party this year, WU! staff, board members, and local contractors went to Depy Zeppo, a woman-owned art studio in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. We participated in a clay workshop and made holiday ornaments that were inspired by floral and fauna. The owner, Despina, treated us to tasty homemade Greek food while we chatted about astrology and more. Afterward, we kept the party going at Skylark, a beloved Pilsen dive bar.

In December, Liz and board member Emily Barish attended Chicago United Solidarity Project's (CUSP) annual fundraiser at Avondale Bowl where there was a live raffle and bingo (below). Together, they raised just over \$6,000. Other fun client events this year included the Albany Park Theater Project show, *Port of Entry*, an immersive theater experience incorporating real-life stories of immigrants and refugees; The Evolved Network's Eat & Evolve gala at Eden; and Flowers for Dreams' inaugural spaghetti dinner.



CAPACITY-BUILDING RESOURCES

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Whether you are a small organization wearing many hats or a growing nonprofit with staff members dedicated to storytelling, it is crucial to share your why, your how, and your impact with your audience. This guide will help you on your path to sharing stories that resonate.



WU! Capacity Building 101: Marketing & Communications



In 2023, we also launched our capacity-building toolkit. This collection includes resources focused on individual giving, grants, stewardship, marketing and communications, and events. We put these together because we believe in the power of knowledge and resource sharing.

These tools, which are available for free on our [website](#), are an attempt to share some of what we've learned over the past few years. We hope these resources help organizations build their capacity, not just for raising money, but for building community, cultivating hope, and making our world a more just, more compassionate place.

BOARD MEMBERS

In March, we welcomed two new board members, Sophia Madana and Lauren Nelson. Sophia is a content strategist for Salesforce and Lauren is a project manager with @properties Christie's

International Real Estate. Both women bring an incredible network and array of experiences that will certainly help grow our community.



"I'm a supervoter who's passionate about fighting voter suppression and intimidation, and creating a more inclusive election process," says Lauren. "Access to voting in this country is not equal, and as a result, our government does not represent everyone."



Sophia is excited about Gen Z becoming eligible to vote. "This generation has seen some sh*t and won't stand for the inequities and a rigged system we've upheld for far too long," she says.

CASE STUDIES

FREE ROOT OPERATION

Started in 2015 Eva Maria Lewis, Free Root Operation (FRO) is a grassroots organization created to intercept poverty-induced gun violence. WU! began providing grant writing and other communication support to FRO in July 2021. Since then, FRO has been awarded a Chicago Foundation for Women grant, funding from the Polk Bros. Foundation, a Crossroads Fund grant, and the Gucci Changemakers Award.

Beyond the institutional funding, partnership with WU! has led to some organic, unexpected wins. Over \$50,000 of support came in after a tweet Eva Maria sent on Juneteenth was boosted by WU!.



“I like what WU! stands for. I like that it’s women-driven and in tune with the community. They are inviting us to have hard conversations as community leaders. I’m committed to being in community with WU! They understand where I’m coming from. They got me.”

— Eva Maria Lewis, Free Root Operation

EVANSTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Helping Evanston thrive now and forever as a vibrant, just, and equitable community, the Evanston Community Foundation (ECF) builds, connects, and distributes resources and knowledge through local organizations for the common good.

WU! began working with ECF in 2022 to provide capacity-building trainings for nonprofits in their network and within the larger Evanston community. Since then, Liz has started leading their Building the Future program, which is a two-year program wherein organizations work in a cohort. Each organization is tasked with raising money via major gifts, which are gifts of \$1,000 or more. Every gift they earn is matched up to \$25,000.

So far three of the five groups in the current cohort have started their major gift campaigns, taking what they’ve learned to raise a combined \$40,000.

“WU!’s partnership expanded our work in elevating underrepresented voices and providing emerging organizations equitable access to free resources. With WU!’s expertise, we provided valuable community groups and organizations with the tools they need to confidently navigate the entire fundraising process.”

— Karli Butler, director of community leadership at Evanston Community Foundation

DISABILITY LEAD

Founded in 2015, Disability Lead is a network of people with disabilities committed to creating better, equitable, and more inclusive communities. From 2022 to 2023, WU! has helped Disability Lead secure \$895,000 in grant funding, including the resources needed to expand their services to Pittsburgh.



“I realized that having outside support and focus on grant writing would be really helpful so this critical funding source didn’t get lost in the everyday shuffle. And it’s been really great because WU! has connected us to opportunities I’m not sure we would’ve found on our own.”

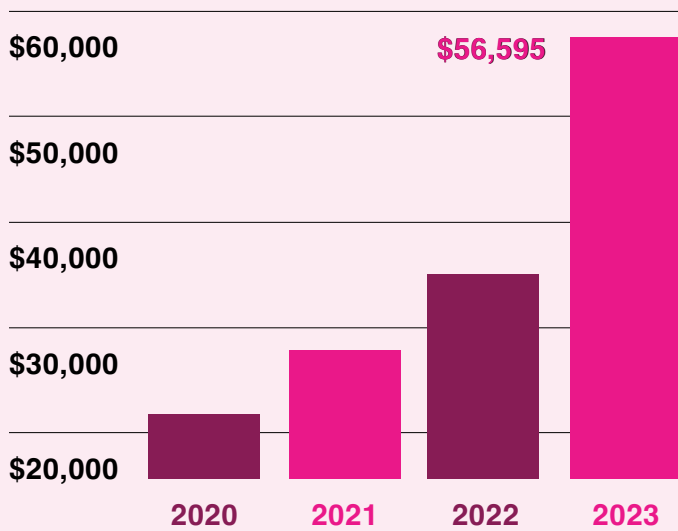
— Anne Renna, development manager for Disability Lead



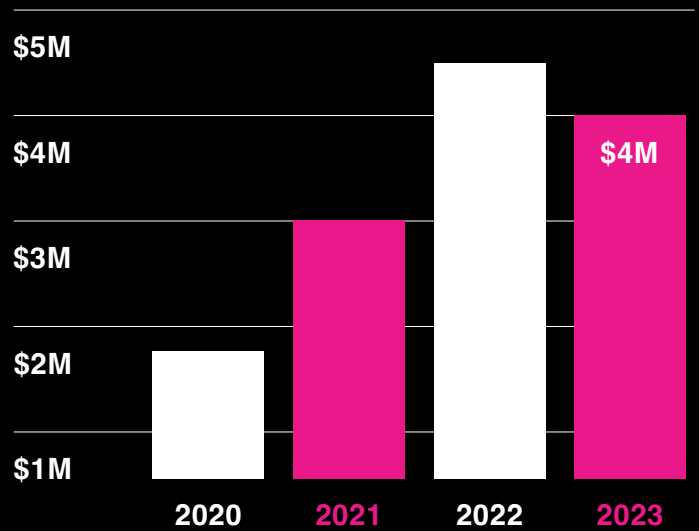
2023 BY THE NUMBERS

WU! continued to grow its impact for its partners and clients. From direct cash contributions to dollars raised, together we helped build the capacity of grassroots organizations across Chicago.

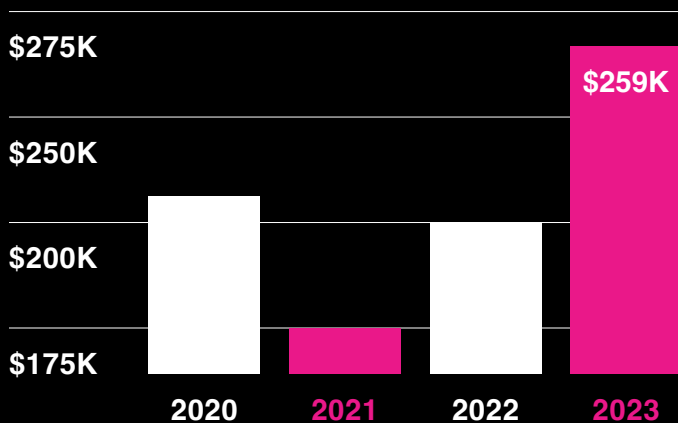
DIRECT CASH CONTRIBUTIONS



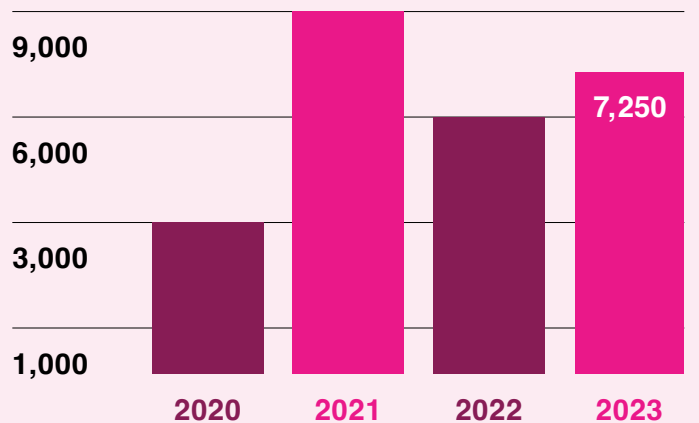
GRANTS AWARDED



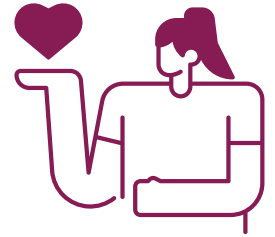
DOLLARS FUNDRAISED VIA APPEALS



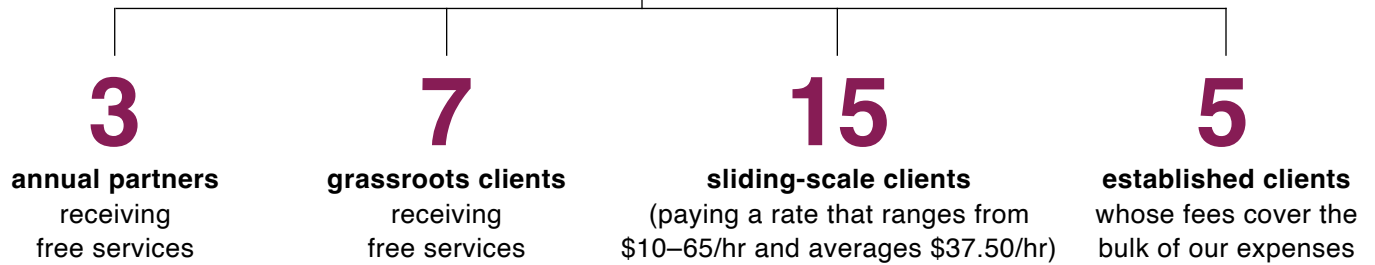
FREE AND SLIDING SCALE HOURS PROVIDED



MAPPING THE MODEL



Currently, WU! is working with 30 organizations



\$300,000
approximate cost for one year of free and sliding-scale services

90%
of our costs are covered through client fees

10%
is fund-raised

86%
program costs, including livable wages and comprehensive benefits for staff and contractors

6.5%
operations and administrative costs

7.5%
nonprofit donations

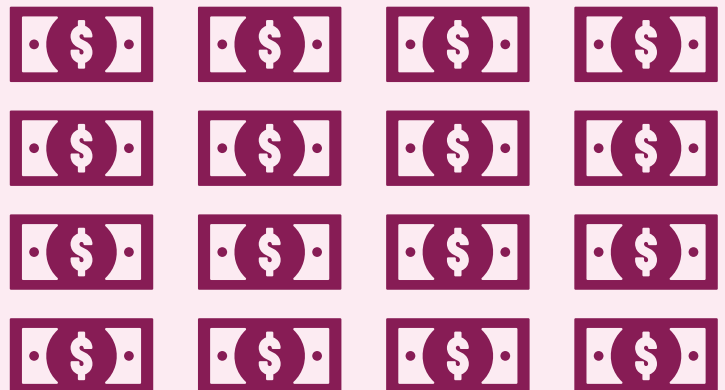
Appeals

Monthly Donors

Events



WU! is a multiplier, which means your dollars go a long way!



For every \$1 donated, \$16 are raised for our partners, clients, and local grassroots organizations



END-OF-YEAR FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

Thanks to 44 incredibly generous donors, we raised \$7,500 in just over a month through our Community. Connection. Collective Impact. campaign.

This campaign further drove home the point that there's no such thing as a big gift or a small gift, there's just the willingness to give. Each contribution was more than a dollar amount—it was an investment in hope, empowerment, and collective impact, a commitment to the heart and soul of our communities.

WHERE WE'RE GOING

We're continuing to expand our sliding scale services by keeping up the relationships we've cultivated with our partners. For example, we helped Sista Afya Community Care raise nearly \$80,000 via appeals and events from 2021–22. This past year, we were able to secure \$664,000 in grant funding for them. But that's not all.

In 2023, we secured \$50,000 in grant funding for Gyrls in the H.O.O.D., rebuilt their website, and donated \$16,500 toward this mission of providing young Black women with the tools and resources they need to make decisions that work for them.

We also continued our work with Healing to Action (HTA), which is dedicated to ending gender-based violence by building the leadership and collective power of the communities most impacted—immigrant, Black and brown, low-wage, low-income, disability, and LGBTQ survivors.

In 2022, HTA was able to bring on a development associate thanks to the resources we helped generate (nearly \$50,000 in annual funding from 2021–23 and \$722,000 in grant funding from 2020–22). They now use us primarily for graphic design support and most recently we helped design graphics for their 2023 end of year donor campaign. This is a great example of what we aspire to do—partner with groups and collaborate with them to the point where they can outgrow us.

Our sixth partner cohort will start in 2024 and applications will go live in February. Our board will select three partners for us to support in April.





YAY! MERCH RETURNS IN 2024!

After a two year hiatus, our online store is back! Check out our website and get yourself some WU! gear. We've got totes, koozies, fanny packs, and t-shirts and sweatshirts for the whole family. The best part? 20% of all sales will directly fund our work!

Place your order today at womenunitechicago.org/shop!



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Angel Buchanan

(she/her/hers)
Board President

Emily Lusk Battle

(she/her/hers)
Board Secretary

Jasmine Watkins

(she/her/hers)
Board Treasurer

Ally Burns

(she/her/hers)
Co-Founder and
Board Member

Jameelah Adas

(she/her/hers)
Board Secretary

Emily Barish

(she/her/hers)
Board Member

Beth Duffy

(she/her/hers)
Board Member

**Sterling Haukom
Anderson**

(she/her/hers)
Co-Founder and
Board Member

Sophia Madana

(she/her/hers)
Board Member

Catie Mouton

(she/her/hers or
they/them/their)
Board Member

Lauren Nelson

(she/her/hers)
Board Member

Kiran Pinto

(she/her/they)
Board Member

Andreanna Triliegi

(she/her/hers)
Co-Founder and
Board Member



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