



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

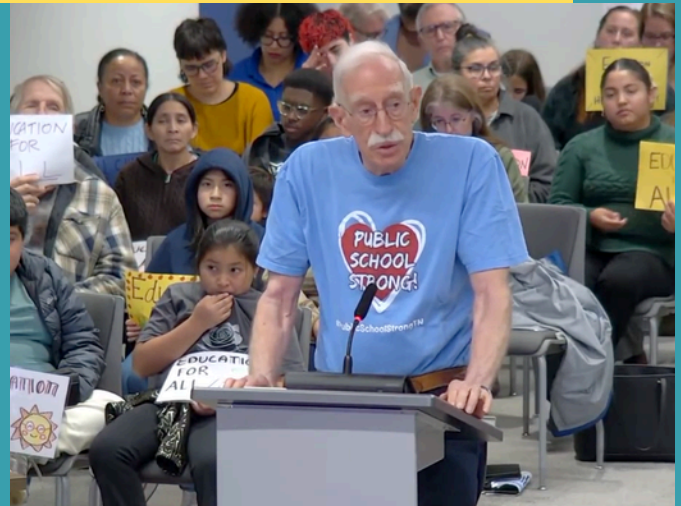




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In 2025, SOCM members across Tennessee continued turning local concerns into coordinated statewide action. Through grassroots organizing, leadership development, and strong partnerships, members defended public education, advanced housing justice, protected communities' rights to local self-determination, and strengthened the organization for the future.

From mobilizing thousands of Tennesseans to challenge harmful legislation, to launching new coalitions and community campaigns, SOCM members demonstrated the power of people working together to build a more just, equitable, and democratic Tennessee.

MISSION AND VALUES

Mission

SOCM is a 53-year-old, member-driven organization dedicated to empowering Tennesseans in their efforts to have a greater voice in determining their own future. We accomplish this by training local leaders and by developing and sustaining long-term, democratically run, and locally rooted membership organizations in communities throughout Tennessee. Together, SOCM members work towards a Tennessee where all people are treated with dignity, where our environment is preserved and protected, and where corporations and public officials are held accountable to the needs of the people.

Values

- We believe that extraordinary change is rooted in the power of ordinary people.
- We believe that progress in our communities should center on the common good and not on the profit of a few.
- We believe that decision-making power should not be dependent on social status or personal wealth.
- We believe that those who engage in enterprise, commerce, and industry should be accountable to the communities in which they operate, as should politicians and government officials.
- We believe that movement towards social, economic, and environmental justice must involve building solidarity across lines of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, income, and party politics.
- We believe in an approach to organizing grounded in listening to our neighbors, identifying deeply and widely felt issues, developing an analysis of power, and creating campaigns to address issues together.
- We believe that effective organizing is learned and refined through training, peer mentorship, experience, practice and reflection with our neighbors.
- We acknowledge our interdependence and interconnectedness and therefore take shared responsibility for inspiring growth and change for the common good.



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Members, friends, and supporters,

During the January 2025 special session of the Tennessee State Legislature, Governor Bill Lee's private school voucher scam passed through both the House and Senate, becoming the first adopted policy of 2025. Despite opposition from more than 100 local county commissions and school boards, the supermajority legislature steamrolled even the most modest of amendments that would have added basic protections for students.

This is all deeply infuriating. We should take time to sit with our feelings of anger and grief.

And still, despite many millions of dollars from out-of-state PACs, political bribes, and partisan pressure from the President of the United States himself, 45 Representatives and 13 Senators chose to have a backbone and stand with the people in their districts, including 21 Republican Representatives and seven Republican Senators who chose to buck the party line. This unprecedented bipartisan pushback happened because ordinary people like you spoke up with a disciplined, unified message across the state.

This is just one example of the work that you, our staff, and our neighbors have been doing together. Now we keep going.

We are living through a period of escalating attacks on basic dignity, freedom, and democracy driven by billionaires and the cynical politicians they paid for. In Tennessee, we continue to face an onslaught of out-of-touch policies targeting immigrants, ongoing efforts to dismantle our public education system, attempts to override local decision-making power, and unregulated tax handouts to large corporations, among other nonsense. What all these policies have in common is that they have emerged primarily from special-interest groups and lobbyists—not from everyday working families in Tennessee. We have an opportunity to build a politics grounded in people.

In the face of what often feels like an insurmountable power imbalance in our state capitol, we find hope in the practice of getting specific. By doing the day-to-day work of listening to our neighbors, identifying specific common-ground issues that affect our day-to-day lives, and then making clear plans to address them together, we are practicing and building public power. There are no shortcuts.

As we move into 2026, we will be placing renewed attention on developing a shared practice of listening and base-building in our local communities. This means exercising our organizing muscles through face-to-face conversations with our neighbors in a structured, focused, and deliberate manner. I look forward to continuing this work alongside you!

Gratitude and solidarity,
Austin Sauerbrei , Executive Director





PUBLIC EDUCATION

Defending public education remained a central priority for SOCM in 2025. Through Public School Strong, SOCM members worked with parents, students, educators, and community leaders across the state to protect and strengthen Tennessee’s public schools.

The year began with a special legislative session called by Tennessee Governor Bill Lee to pass a universal private school voucher program that we helped pause the previous year. Despite strong opposition from communities across Tennessee—including resolutions passed by more than one hundred local school boards and county commissions—the legislation narrowly passed.

“Private schools are exclusive by nature. They do not have to accept everybody that comes through their door whereas public schools accept everybody... It’s about the vision we have for our community. Do we want inclusive communities that educate all of our kids, or do we want to put our money towards exclusive institutions that are going to discriminate against the most vulnerable kids in our community?”

Dustin Park, Public School Strong parent leader, Blount County



While the outcome was disappointing, the organizing effort demonstrated the strength and reach of the movement defending public education. Thousands of Tennesseans contacted their legislators, attended town halls, and spoke out publicly about the importance of investing in public schools.

SOCM members also played an important role in a statewide coalition effort to oppose House Bill 793, which would have allowed school districts to deny K-12 public education to undocumented students. If passed, the law would be in contradiction to a 1982 U.S. Supreme Court Case—Plyler v. Doe—thus setting up a potential Supreme Court challenge that could affect all children across the country. Working alongside the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC), educators, faith leaders, and community partners, SOCM members helped generate widespread public opposition at both the state and local levels and slowed the bill’s progress. It did not pass in the 2025 legislative session.

Local organizing produced important victories as well. Public School Strong chapters hosted trainings, organized school board engagement, and built local networks of parents and educators advocating for strong public schools.

One of the most significant local wins occurred in Knox County, where SOCM members and coalition partners successfully urged the Knox County Board of Education to adopt a “Free Education for All Children” legislative priority. After weeks of organizing—including a community vigil, press conference, and extensive public outreach—it passed by a 6–3 vote, affirming that public schools must educate all children.

This victory demonstrated the power of community organizing and the importance of local leadership in protecting public education.

Highlights

- Facilitated thousands of constituent calls and emails to legislators
- Organized public opposition that kept harmful legislation like HB793 from passing
- Hosted local town halls, trainings, and school board engagement across Tennessee
- Launched new Public School Strong teams in several counties
- Organized community members in Knox County to advocate for the “Free Education for All Children” legislative priority





HOUSING JUSTICE

Housing justice became an increasingly important focus of SOCM's work in 2025.

Early in the year, SOCM helped launch Housing For All TN, a statewide coalition bringing together grassroots organizations, tenant advocates, and housing service providers. The coalition works to strengthen tenant protections and address policies that prevent local governments from responding to housing crises.

In February, SOCM members joined coalition partners for the Day on the Hill for Housing and Homelessness, bringing more than 120 Tennesseans to Nashville to meet with legislators and advocate for policies that support safe and affordable housing.

In Knoxville, SOCM members played a key role in eviction prevention efforts. Members responded to record-breaking eviction court dockets by attending court sessions, connecting tenants with resources, and drawing public attention to the growing housing crisis.

In April, SOCM members, in partnership with the Appalachian Justice Research Center (AJRC) at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, released a report, "Housing Stability and Tenant Representation in a Changing Knoxville." The report provided vital actionable data for policymakers, shed light on the impossible situations many tenants face when threatened with eviction, and provided recommendations for improvement.



“As rents and eviction rates continue to increase, we must acknowledge the depth of Knox County’s housing crisis. Losing stable housing can impact health, disrupt school for children, force working families into homelessness, and result in lifelong consequences. Knoxville and Knox County must take action to support families facing eviction, including by extending and expanding the support for Legal Aid of East Tennessee’s Eviction Prevention Office.”

Allie Cohn, SOCM Knoxville Chapter member and SOCM Board Secretary

Working with Legal Aid of East Tennessee and other partners, members supported the Eviction Prevention Program and advocated for local funding to sustain the program after federal pandemic relief funds expired.

Members also participated in a national policy “solutions sprint” focused on tenant screening protections. Through this initiative, local organizers worked alongside researchers, policymakers, and tenant advocates to develop strategies addressing the ways eviction records and tenant screening practices can create barriers to housing access.

These sessions helped members better understand the eviction landscape in Knox County and develop strategies to advocate for continued funding for the Eviction Prevention Program.

Community engagement remained a central part of the work. Members collaborated with local partners to host neighborhood events, resource fairs, and creative community gatherings that connected residents with information and support.

Together, these efforts are helping build a stronger statewide movement for housing justice.

Highlights

- Advocated for funding for the Eviction Prevention Program in Knox County
- Partnered with UT researchers on housing stability research
- Brought public attention to the housing crisis in Knox County and statewide
- Compiled vital data for decision- and policy-makers
- Conducted outreach in neighborhoods facing eviction pressures
- Connected local residents with resources and legal assistance





COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

SOCM members continued their long tradition of defending communities from harmful development and advocating for responsible, community-driven decision-making.

In the South Cumberland Plateau region, members of the Plateau & Valley Chapter continued their campaign opposing the proposed Jumpoff Quarry. Throughout the year, members attended public hearings, submitted comments on permit applications, and worked with local media to raise awareness about the environmental and community impacts of the project.

Even after state regulators approved a key permit, members remained committed to monitoring the project and advocating for community protections.

Members also pursued a legal strategy to challenge several permits connected to the project and secured grant funding to support ongoing organizing and outreach. Their efforts have helped ensure that community voices remain central to decisions about development in the region.

Later in the year, SOCM helped launch the LOCAL campaign—Let Our Communities Act Locally—to protect the right of municipalities to make decisions about landfill siting. The campaign brings together community groups, river conservancies, neighborhood organizations, waste management professionals, and local elected officials.



SOCM has long supported the Jackson Law, which allows municipalities to determine whether landfills can be located within their jurisdiction or near their borders. Through the LOCAL campaign, several communities adopted the Jackson Law in 2025, and others are actively exploring similar measures.

SOCM also supported organizing efforts connected to large-scale development projects, including the work of Blue Oval Good Neighbors, a coalition advocating for transparency, environmental protections, and meaningful community input around the Blue Oval City development in West Tennessee. By helping amplify local voices and connect communities with organizing tools and resources, we strengthened the ability of Tennesseans to advocate for development that benefits residents, protects natural resources, and reflects the priorities of the people who live there.

Members in Rutherford County continued their long-standing organizing around the Middle Point Landfill, advocating for stronger oversight, environmental protections, and community input regarding the landfill’s operations and future expansion.

Members worked with local residents and partner organizations to monitor regulatory developments, attend public meetings, and engage decision-makers about the impacts the landfill has on surrounding communities.

In McMinn County, members gathered input on what residents want to see on the site of the recently demolished North City School through one-on-one conversations, public meetings, and surveys.

These efforts demonstrate the importance of local democracy and the ability of communities to shape decisions that affect their environment and quality of life.

Highlights

- Attended public meetings, monitored regulatory developments, and engaged decision-makers on waste management, extractive mining, air quality, and land use concerns
- Helped connect residents with organizing tools to ensure local voices shape large-scale economic development decisions
- Conducted outreach through door-to-door canvassing, tabling, public meetings, and more to educate neighbors on local SOCM efforts and listen to community concerns



CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Knoxville Chapter

Knoxville members played a major role in housing justice organizing this year.

Members launched a tenant canvassing effort to connect with renters, distribute information about tenant rights and gather stories about housing conditions. They also attended eviction court regularly to try to provide education and aid to those facing eviction.

As a result of their research and canvassing, they made a concerted effort to focus on the Inskip neighborhood which has the highest eviction rates in Knox County. Residents there are not only concerned about housing security, but also a lack of sidewalks, speeding vehicles, and diminished access to community resources. To celebrate this diverse neighborhood and connect residents with resources, SOCM worked with the Cattywampus Puppet Council and Inskip Elementary to organize the “We Are Inskip” parade and community celebration.

Members also worked with the Appalachian Justice Research Center on a report that contained vital data and actionable recommendations for policymakers to use in developing new strategies for preventing displacement.

Plateau and Valley Chapter

Members of the Plateau & Valley Chapter continued organizing to protect their communities from environmentally harmful development, particularly through their work opposing the proposed Jumpoff Quarry project. They participated in public hearings, submitted comments on permit applications, and explored legal and advocacy strategies to defend local land and water resources. They also organized strategy meetings, community forums, and letter-writing campaigns to ensure that additional community concerns were heard by decision-makers.

The chapter also worked on its base building and outreach efforts. Members strengthened partnerships with regional institutions and conservation groups, building their base across Franklin, Grundy, and Marion counties. With the help of an intern, the chapter started to explore the possibility of a student chapter at Sewanee: The University of the South.

Montgomery County Chapter

SOCM celebrated the formation of a new chapter in Montgomery County in 2025. Originally organized through Public School Strong, the group grew from fewer than ten people into a strong organizing base of dozens of active members.

Members organized against charter school expansion and helped educate community members about how school boards and local government operate.



McMinn County Chapter

In 2025, SOCM members in McMinn County organized a series of neighborhood canvasses to build relationships with residents and raise awareness about local issues affecting public education and community well-being.

Members went door to door to talk with neighbors about the importance of strong public schools, gather community concerns, and invite people to get involved in local organizing efforts. Through these conversations, chapter members identified an important campaign—bringing new life to the historically under-resourced North City neighborhood by securing a community space on the site of the former elementary school. The city currently has no plans for the land.

Over the course of three weekends, they collected dozens of surveys, knocked on over 200 doors, had nearly 50 conversations at the doors, and held two community meetings in the neighborhood. The overwhelming response so far is that residents want some form of park or community space that will give families and youth a place to connect and play.

Roaring River Chapter

In 2025, the Roaring River Chapter continued building strong relationships among members while supporting SOCM's statewide campaigns.

Chapter members gathered regularly for meetings and community events, including an Earth Day Celebration and their annual potluck and pool party, which provided time for members to reconnect, welcome new participants, and recharge for organizing work ahead. Alongside these gatherings, members discussed housing justice issues and planned ways to support Public School Strong organizing in their communities.

Maury County Chapter

In 2025, the Maury County Chapter focused on building relationships and strengthening grassroots leadership in the region. Members conducted outreach in Maury and Bedford counties, supported statewide campaigns like Public School Strong, and held regular meetings to grow their organizing network and expand SOCM's presence in Middle Tennessee.

Other Local Work

Community partners in Sumner County worked closely with SOCM through the Sumner Advocates for Immigrant Dignity (SAID) coalition. This group organized community meetings, launched public education efforts around immigration enforcement policies, and advocated for transparency and accountability in local government decisions.

Sumner County members also have a strong Public School Strong team. Members organized community conversations, attended school board meetings, and engaged residents about policies affecting public education, including voucher expansion and threats to equitable school funding.

In addition to their organizing campaigns, members also addressed their neighbors' immediate needs by organizing a supply drive called "Stuff the Bus" which brought in much-needed school supplies, and a community pantry to provide essential food and other items to members of the local immigrant community negatively impacted by Federal ICE activities.

This year, we continued our partnership with Blue Oval Good Neighbors, a community coalition organizing to ensure that the massive Blue Oval City development in West Tennessee benefits local residents. Members supported coalition leaders in advocating for transparency, community input, and responsible development as public incentives and infrastructure investments moved forward. Through this partnership, we helped amplify rural voices and strengthen organizing for community-driven development in West Tennessee.



MEMBER TRAININGS

Developing strong leaders has always been central to SOCM’s mission. In 2025, we invested heavily in training opportunities that help members build the skills needed to organize effectively.

In July, 27 member leaders, staff, and partners gathered for a three-day “Training for Change” workshop focused on group dynamics and facilitation. Led by experienced trainers Katey Lauer and Brianna Gibson, the training explored how strong facilitation and intentional meeting design can strengthen grassroots campaigns and build collective leadership.

Participants practiced tools for agenda planning, shared decision-making, and guiding productive group discussions, while also reflecting on how organizers can create spaces where trust, participation, and collaboration can grow.

“The Training for Change experience was transformative in how I now approach working with a collection of people, and how I envision the possibilities of coordinating strategy and effort for collective impact amongst any people...This training was an opportunity to witness the loving justice that fuels us, while being supported by techniques and tools that will guide our passion to create together while ensuring we can communicate shifting priorities and strategies along the way.”

Chauncey O’Dell, SOCM Board President

SOCM members in Knoxville participated in a hands-on canvassing training focused on strengthening their ability to talk with neighbors about local issues and invite people into organizing efforts.

Participants practiced structured organizing conversations, role-played outreach scenarios, and then put their skills into action by canvassing neighborhoods in the Inskip Elementary voting precinct. The training helped members build confidence in initiating conversations with community members, identify potential new leaders, and gather insights about local concerns related to housing, transportation, and public education.

Several members participated in national advocacy trainings, including the Alliance for Appalachia “Our Land, Our Home” lobby trip to Washington, DC, where they met with members of Congress and learned about regional environmental justice issues. Members of Public School Strong participated in monthly opportunities to connect with other PSS members nationwide and share best practices.

We also launched a statewide book club to discuss “Fundamentals of Organizing” by George Goehl, which provided members with an opportunity to explore the principles and strategies of grassroots organizing.

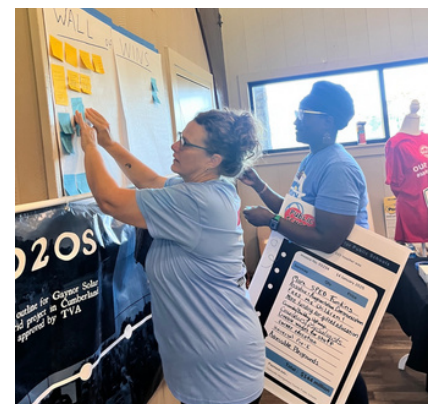
Through monthly discussions and shared readings, participants reflected on topics such as campaign strategy, leadership development, and community engagement.

Every October, SOCM members gather from across Tennessee for the SOCM Annual Meeting—a weekend of learning, strategy, and connection. At this year’s Annual Meeting, members participated in workshops, panels, and discussions focused on strengthening grassroots leadership and sharing lessons from local campaigns.

Workshops at the meeting covered topics including grassroots fundraising, campaign strategy, and movement history, alongside discussions about how SOCM’s values guide organizing in today’s political landscape. Members also heard from guest speaker Dr. Sekou Franklin, the Executive Director of the John Lewis Center for Social Justice at Fisk University, who connected the history of grassroots organizing in the South to the work SOCM members are doing today.

Across these trainings, SOCM members strengthened the skills that make grassroots organizing possible: listening to neighbors, building trust, facilitating meetings, and turning shared concerns into collective action.

By investing in leadership development and training, SOCM continues to grow a strong network of organizers ready to defend their communities and build a more just Tennessee.





INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

1

New Chapter Added in Montgomery County (SOCMoCo)

87

Tennessee Counties with SOCM Members

3

New Foundations that Funded Our Work in 2025

75

Press Mentions in 2025

211

New Members Added in 2025

20

New Major Donors Added in 2025

4,232

New Email Subscribers Added in 2025

2

New Staff Members Added

2025 was also a year of important internal growth for SOCM.

We welcomed two new staff members: Grassroots Fundraising Coordinator Geneva Clifton and Leadership Development Coordinator Cassie Watters. Their work is strengthening our ability to grow our membership base, develop new leaders, and sustain long-term organizing efforts.

The two got to work right away. Geneva put together a group of leaders for a SOCM Fundraising Team to support grassroots fundraising efforts, and Cassie launched a new Leadership Development Team to strengthen training opportunities across the organization.

The groups began planning future workshops, including Organizing 101 trainings, leadership development sessions, and ongoing political education opportunities designed to support SOCM members stepping into leadership roles within chapters and campaigns.

SOCM members also adopted a five-year strategic plan that will guide the organization’s work in the coming years. Developed over the course of a year and with member input from across the state, the plan outlines priorities for expanding organizing efforts, strengthening chapters, and building lasting people power.

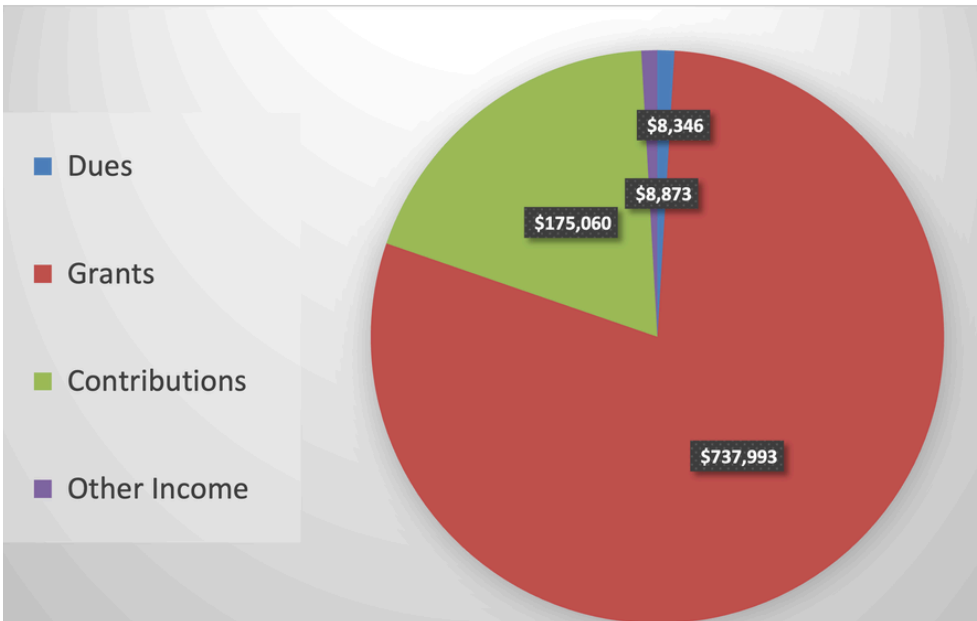
Membership continued to grow throughout the year, including the formation of a new chapter in Montgomery County, the addition of over 200 new members, and new Public School Strong teams in dozens of counties.

Together, these developments position SOCM to meet the challenges ahead and continue building a stronger movement for justice across Tennessee.

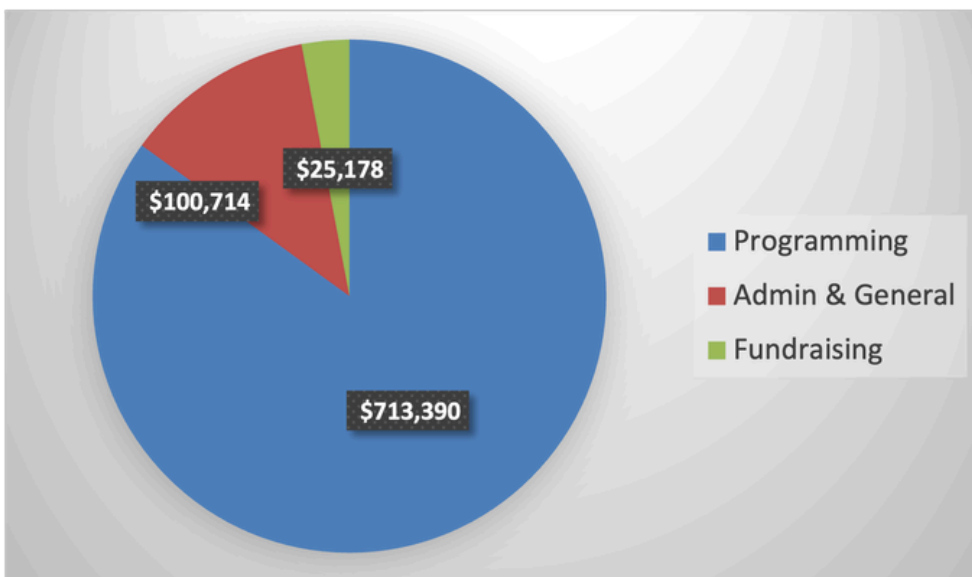


FINANCIALS

2025 Income \$930,273



2025 Expenses \$839,282



LEADERS, PARTNERS AND STAFF

SOCM Board Members

Chauncey O'Dell, President
 Erica Davis, Immediate Past President
 April Jarocki, Vice President
 Allie Cohn, Secretary
 Linda Brookhart, Treasurer
 John Massey, Cumberland Co. Chapter Rep
 Rosie Cross, Knoxville Chapter Rep
 Johnny Farris, Maury Co. Chapter Rep
 Ellen Kimball, McMinn Co. Neighbors Chapter Rep
 Shari Lydy, Plateau & Valley Chapter Rep
 Scott Martindale, Rutherford County Chapter Co-Rep
 Candida Layne, Rutherford County Chapter Co-Rep
 Rick Roach, At-Large Delegate
 Joy Warren, At-Large Delegate
 Rosa Ponce, At-Large Delegate/Montgomery County Chapter Rep

SOCM Resource Project

Board Members

Patricia Hawkins, President
 Jon Jonakin, Vice President
 Sarah Lawson, Secretary
 June Rostan, Treasurer
 Brian Paddock, Board Member

Partners & Coalitions

The Alliance for Appalachia
 Blue Oval Good Neighbors
 Cattywampus Puppet Council
 Clarksville-Montgomery Voter Alliance
 Community Shares
 HEAL Together Tennessee
 Housing for All Tennessee
 Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee
 Public School Strong
 Rutherford Forward
 Tennessee for All
 Tennessee for Safe Homes

Staff

Austin Sauerbrei, Executive Director
 Linda Cowan, Director of Finance, Development & Operations
 Liv Cook, Public Education Campaign Organizer
 Adam Hughes, East TN Community Organizer
 Theeda Murphy, Middle TN Community Organizer
 Geneva Clifton, Grassroots Fundraising Coordinator
 Cassie Watters, Leadership Development Coordinator
 Casey Self, Communications Consultant
 Stacy Elliott, Organizing Support Consultant
 Betsy Baker, Sewanee Campus Fellow
 Katja Kreiger, Pubic Education Research Fellow
 Stephanie Wilmore, Public School Strong Organizing Fellow



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