



ANNUAL REPORT 20 24



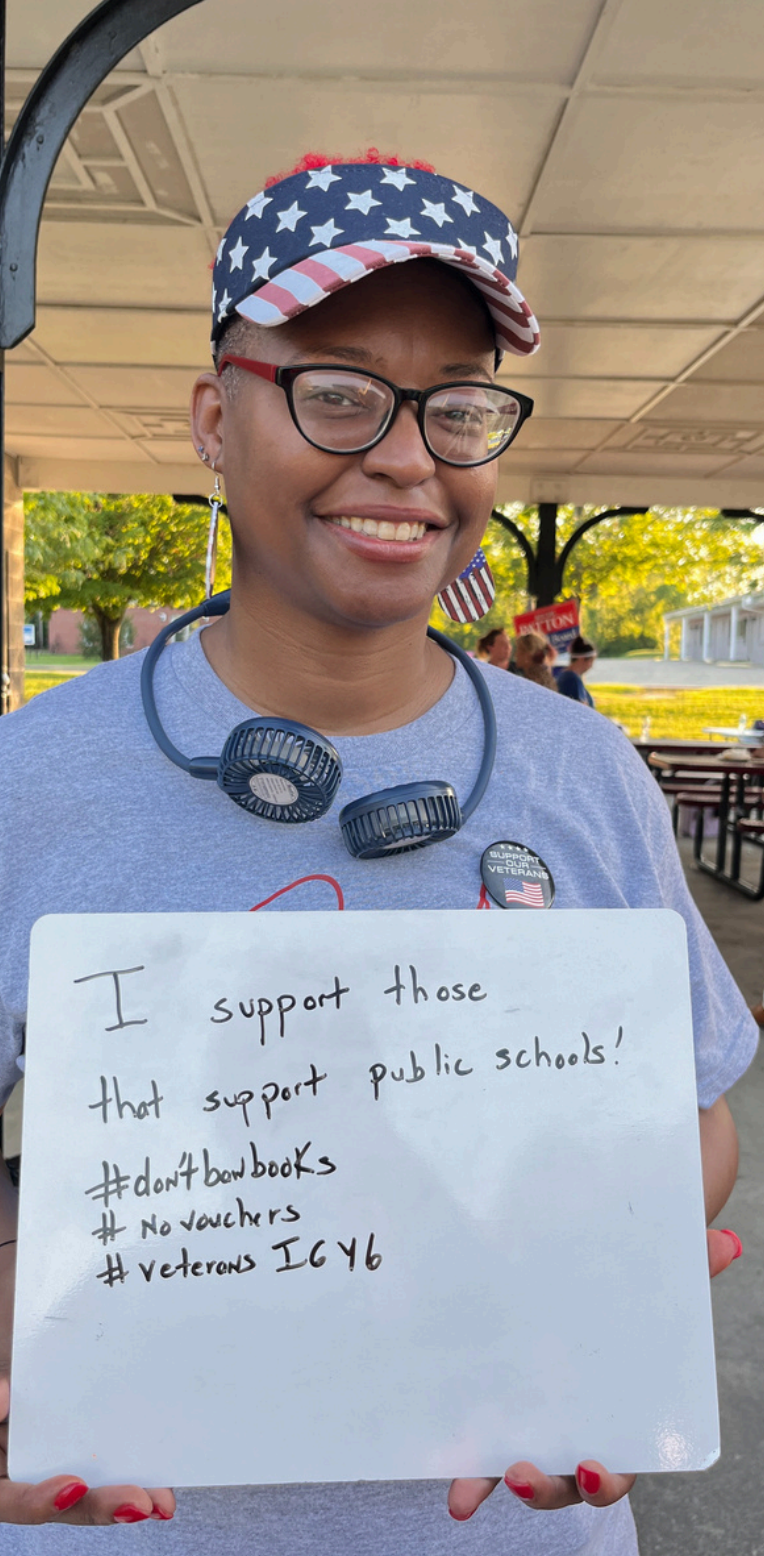


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mission and Values	3
From the Executive Director	4
Strategic Plan Development	5
Public Education	9
Community-Driven Development	11
Housing Justice	12
Chapter Highlights	13
Member Trainings	15
Internal Developments	16
Financials	17
Leaders, Partners, Staff	18

In 2024, SOCM continued its mission of empowering Tennessee communities through grassroots organizing, policy advocacy, and community-driven initiatives. Through strategic campaigns in public education, housing justice, and environmental protection, SOCM members achieved significant victories that strengthened the voices of Tennesseans in their fight for a more just and equitable state.

MISSION AND VALUES

Mission

SOCM is a 52-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,

2024 has been yet another year full of very real, urgent, and important issues to tackle in our towns, our state, our country, and the world. It's tempting to feel like we should "have something to say" and "be doing something" about all of it.

We—movements of people generally in favor of democracy and society that lifts up everyone—need more people who are aware of the big picture but engaged deeply and strategically in the particulars. Effective solidarity does not mean we have to be on the front lines of every legitimate and important issue. Quite the opposite. Effective solidarity means we each have to be really wise about where and how we commit our time. As a member-led organization, the same also applies to SOCM. Of the thousand and one legitimate and important ways we could be organizing for our communities, what avenues can we commit to?

Since our founding in 1972, we have been committed (in all our imperfect messiness) to a shared process for determining what we tackle together. From our local chapters to our statewide committees, we listen to each other, cut clear issues together based on what we hear, analyze power, then run campaigns to win meaningful change in our communities while building the capacity of everyday people to do it all over again. This year, after many months of listening and discussion, we cast an ambitious vision for where we want to be as an organization five years from now and the steps we need to take to get there. Like any plan, our 2025-2030 Strategic Plan will shift and change based on what happens tomorrow and the next day and the day after that. But the process of coming together to set some tangible markers for how we want to grow, what we want to accomplish, and how we want to partner with other organizations is vital.

Now more than ever, it's on all of us to resist the pull towards frantic Lone Ranger activism and become a committed member of a committee or team that is doing focused work with other people in our community. SOCM is one thread in a tapestry of many organizations across Tennessee who are fighting tooth and nail for a future where all people can thrive.

We don't get far if we think we have to drink from the proverbial fire hose to make a difference. We do this thing by sharing the load and being focused, accountable, and committed to our small part. We do this by encouraging each other. We do this by grounding in love and grace in the midst of uncertainty. We do this by trusting that our small part will, as writer Brian Doyle says, "shiver people far beyond your ken".

If we look around to our neighbors, there's a lot to be hopeful about. You matter. Your time matters. Your mental and emotional health matters. You are needed.

Gratitude and solidarity,
Austin Sauerbrei, Executive Director



STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

In 2021, the SOCM board determined that a short term (2-3 year) plan was needed to reestablish organizational stability as the organization emerged from COVID, re-staffing and other organizational challenges. Since 2021, SOCM has regained a high degree of financial stability, made major strides in member recruitment and development, begun to address challenges in organizational infrastructure, and has bolstered local and cross chapter issue campaigns.

In 2023, the SOCM Board determined that the organization was on solid enough footing to begin work on a long-range strategic plan. Over 18 months, the staff and board went through a process of soliciting member input, synthesizing comments, and developing a set of goals for where they want to be by 2030.

Strategic planning provides a roadmap for the day-to-day work of staff, board and members. While plans will shift and change based on many unknown factors, it is vital to set a vision for where members want to be. This plan will help guide SOCM's collective work and will be refined and shaped by members over the course of the next five years. The plan includes two main sections: Strategic Issue Campaigns and Organization Building. The full strategic plan can be found at bit.ly/socm5yearplan.

Part 1: Strategic Issues Campaigns

As members continue to run local campaigns around the critical issues facing their communities, it's important to consider how to leverage the power of SOCM's statewide membership! There are hundreds (if not thousands) of issues to focus on in local communities. As members decide on local priorities within their chapters, the board should be strategic and consider which issues are both deeply felt in members' own backyards and will help shift the balance of power at the state level. This means running campaigns that have local targets and goals but also have the potential to build towards statewide targets and goals. Over the past few years, three core campaign areas have emerged at the intersection of local work and statewide impact: Public Education, Community-Driven Development, and Housing Justice.

Part 2: Organization Building

While the Strategic Issue Campaigns section outlines what members hope to achieve together in the next five years, this section focuses on how SOCM will get there. There is a lot of behind-the-scenes work that goes into building and sustaining SOCM's shared efforts. This section outlines some key goals that will help grow SOCM's capacity between now and 2030.



Throughout the formation of this plan, there were a couple recurring questions that provided the Board with direction and grounding:

How do we stay rooted in local work in a way that helps us build power towards our collective statewide vision?

SOCM's theory of change is grounded in collective thinking and action focused on the material issues that impact ourselves and our neighbors. This means we always have a firm foot in local level work. However, in every community, there are hundreds if not thousands of worthwhile issues we could focus on.

Part of the function of this strategic plan is to establish some framing that can help us focus in on local priorities that also strengthen our ability to impact the larger multi-county and statewide vision outlined in our mission statement. We have to get specific and strategic about which campaigns we take on.

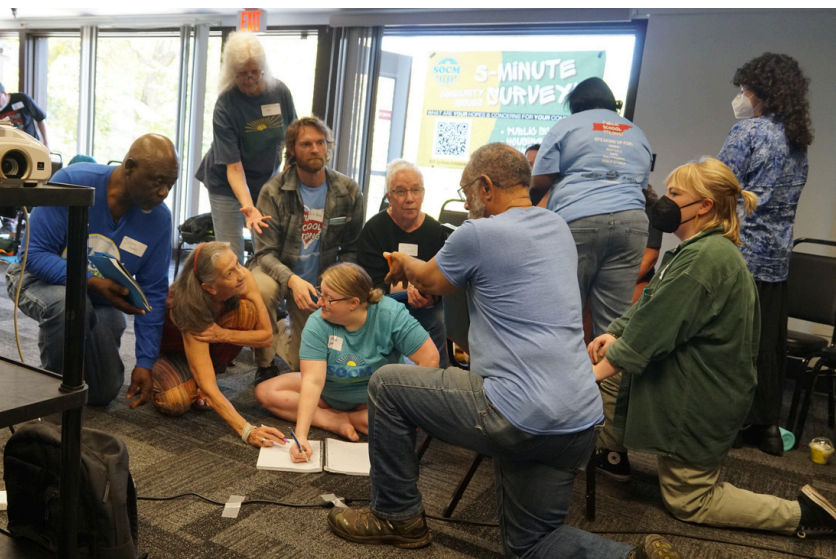
Who is Our Base and Why?

SOCM cannot be everything to everyone. As we think about our goals and our capacity, we also have to get specific about who in our communities we need to intentionally reach out to, build with, and work alongside to win what we say we want to win. At our staff and board retreat, we reiterated that SOCM's primary focus is building multi-racial, working class power with people in rural and suburban counties. We also noted that we need to build meaningful coalition with black- and brown-led organizations whose goals and strategies align with our own. How we do this needs to be an ongoing point of reflection within our chapters, campaign committees, and board.

The Process

SOCM leaders and staff were very diligent in the strategic planning process, offering multiple opportunities for member input and review, such as:

- **Member Engagement:** Members from across the state contributed feedback through a survey, workshops at Annual Meetings, and strategic chapter meetings, ensuring the plan reflects the needs of Tennessee communities.
- **Two-Day Leadership Retreat:** SOCM Board Members, Staff, and Resource Project Board members gathered at Henry Horton State Park to finalize the strategic plan.
- **Implementation Roadmap:** The plan outlines a timeline for achieving key goals, with benchmarks for accountability.



Public Education

While Tennessee's governor and many in the state legislature continue attempts to dismantle and defund K-12 public schools, members know that the overwhelming majority of everyday people want safe, honest, and fully-funded public schools that serve all students. In 2023, in collaboration with *Tennessee For All* coalition partners, SOCM launched the *Public School Strong Tennessee* campaign. Through this campaign, PSS is building a base of active parents, educators, students, and community members who are engaging with their local school boards around local issues and coordinating on state level campaigns.

Restorative
Accountability

Whole-Child
Learning

Fully-Resourced
Classrooms

Short-term goals (1-2 years)

- Stop Governor Lee's voucher expansion bill (again)
- Pass positive legislation focused on reducing reliance on standardized testing and channeling more funding to early childhood literacy

Mid-term goals (2-5 years)

- DEFENSE: Stop any efforts to privatize or divert funds from public schools
- DEFENSE: Roll back unrealistic, punitive accountability measures that harm teachers and students (i.e. third grade retention, A-F school grading)
- OFFENSE: Close corporate tax loopholes to secure universal pre-k for all 4 year-olds in TN
- OFFENSE: Fight for reforms to high stakes standardized testing requirements that harm educators and students

Community-Driven Development

The profit motive of extractive industries seeking to develop in rural communities often comes into direct conflict with the needs of the community and the environment. As new development permits are filed everyday in rural communities, members feel that it is vital to work towards local and state level policy that puts more decision-making power back into the hands of the people. They want development that is driven by the needs of communities, not just the almighty dollar. SOCM's newest chapter encompassing Grundy, Marion, and Franklin counties has led the way for this campaign over the past two years.

Short-term goals (1-2 years)

- STOP the Jumpoff quarry development in Marion County
- Challenge all new quarry permits as they arise
- Develop a "watch dog" team who can monitor development permits as they are filed and determine which ones we should organize around
- Develop a state-level policy platform focused on improving the permitting process

Mid-term goals (2-5 years)

- Gain a more responsive county government by flipping key commission seats
- Implement the County Powers Act in all three counties
- PASS state-level policy to help regulate unchecked extractive development
- Develop a community-informed platform for the tri-county region focused on a vision for positive development that includes specific policy recommendations

Housing Justice

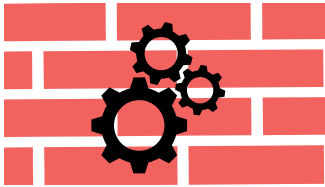
Since 2020, SOCM's Knoxville Chapter has run campaigns focused on educating tenants about their rights, conducting eviction court watch programs, and working to secure legal counsel for tenants facing eviction. In 2024, members were instrumental in working with city agencies, Legal Aid of East Tennessee, and partners at the University of Tennessee Law School to establish Knoxville's Eviction Prevention Program. As they continue to work towards expanding this program in Knoxville, they plan to replicate this campaign in other counties, and build a statewide housing policy platform with other frontline organizations through the new *Housing For All Tennessee* Coalition.

Short-term goals (1-2 years)

- Formalize evaluation process for expanding tenant access to counsel project with UT Knoxville and city partners
- Develop a platform of state-level housing policy goals with Housing for All TN coalition partners
- Double SOCM's base of active members engaged in this campaign
- Establish a community informed "Housing Bill of Rights" for Knox County that serves as a north star and can inform subsequent base-building and campaign goals

Mid-term goals (2-5 years)

- Win permanent and fully resourced Right to Counsel program in Knox County
- Begin Right to Counsel campaigns in two additional counties
- Pass state level policy that will strengthen tenant rights



INFRASTRUCTURE

SOCM's ability to build people-power and achieve campaign goals is grounded in the membership. There is a lot that goes into keeping a member-led organization running smoothly. Keeping members informed, facilitating democratic decision-making, developing effective strategy, and carrying out campaigns requires an IMMENSE amount of structure and coordination involving staff, board, and member leaders. Below are a few goals that we have set to help us build this infrastructure over the next five years.



Develop an administrative and financial toolkit to ensure long-term organizational continuity



Reactivate a statewide fundraising committee



Expand and retain a strong staff team to meet the needs of a growing membership



Update our bylaws to reflect current organization



Form at least three new chapters in strategic locations that will help strengthen SOCM's base-building and campaign goals



FUNDRAISING

SOCM's grassroots model is built upon collective participation and shared responsibility at all levels, including fundraising. Over the years, SOCM has built and maintained a solid grassroots fundraising program that supports our budget needs each year. But as our chapters and campaigns expand, so will our budget and income needs. We will continue to solicit members and donors in person, by phone, through mail, and online, and will seek foundation grants as they fit with our values and priorities. In addition to our regular annual fundraising efforts, SOCM will develop a three-year fundraising campaign that will support SOCM's work during the five-year strategic plan and beyond. Below are a few specific fundraising strategies we will use to grow our grassroots donor base.



Hold regular fundraising workshops for members



Develop a culture of "making the ask" for member recruitment and donations



Focus on increasing monthly donations



Make SOCM'S budget more transparent to membership



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & RECRUITMENT

While experience may be the best teacher, there are experiences we can (and must) share if we are to be effective. Everyone has the capacity to organize with their neighbors, but this is a skill that is developed through training, practice, study, and a willingness to learn from and with others. SOCM's greatest strength is our membership, and we must continue to keep the goal of identifying and developing new leaders front and center. Below are a few ways we will build on our existing practices over the next five years.



Every new member will be provided with a clear understanding of SOCM's structure, Mission, Vision, Values, and Theory of Change



Hold annual strategic planning meetings within each chapter and committee at the beginning of each year



Develop an annual Leadership Development agenda and calendar



Every chapter and committee will put into practice a "ladder of engagement" to onboard new and prospective members

To read the full strategic plan, go to bit.ly/socm5yearplan



PUBLIC EDUCATION

SOCM's Public School Strong (PSS) campaign led the charge against Governor Bill Lee's school voucher expansion plan. The campaign mobilized thousands of educators, parents, and allies across the state, securing key legislative wins and blocking harmful privatization efforts.

Over the course of the year, the Public School Strong movement took hold in new areas, added more members, and incorporated additional local partners. They held town halls in an effort to stop Governor Lee's school voucher bill and gain support for a public education system in Tennessee that serves all children. Thanks to PSS efforts, the voucher bill was defeated during the regular legislative session.

Key Achievements:

- Over 70 local school boards and governments passed resolutions opposing vouchers.
- PSS members and supporters had 24 meetings with state legislators, and logged 2,800 calls and sent over 4,200 emails to state legislators.
- The PSS movement hosted dozens of direct actions in the lead-up to the voucher vote.
- Public School Strong members coordinated a "State of Our Schools Week of Action" in February. PSS teams in Davidson, Knox, Rutherford, and McMinn Counties held rallies and press events to call attention to the voucher scam. PSS partners in Chattanooga published an op-ed in the *Chattanooga*.
- PSS efforts garnered extensive media coverage across the state and nationally in outlets such as *The Washington Post*.

- Over 240 members attended SOCM's "Day on the Hill" in Nashville, bringing a united voice to legislators and rallying against privatization efforts.
 - Members in East Tennessee participated in "Showing Up Together for Our Small Town Schools: East TN Gathering & Workshop" to gain a shared understanding of what they want for public schools, and to learn how to communicate that positive vision with their neighbors.
 - PSS organized statewide "September Surge" actions at school board meetings across 11 counties to demand honest, safe, equitable, and fully-funded public schools.
 - Members and SOCM staff attended in-person and virtual national PSS conferences in order to learn from campaigns in other states and share lessons learned and tactics from defeating the voucher bill in Tennessee.
 - The Knox County Education Coalition used information gathered from five community listening sessions in the fall to compile a list of community-informed budget recommendations, which they then advocated for at school board meetings.
 - SOCM hosted a statewide Public School Strong TN celebration and strategy session for PSS members in June.
 - Participated in a two-day *Tennessee For All* Coalition Planning Retreat, which resulted in Public School Strong being one of three "pillar" issues for the others; The other two being good union jobs, and corporate accountability.
- After defeating vouchers, Public School Strong TN members laid out a long-term vision for public education which includes fully-resourced classrooms, restorative accountability, and funding for whole child learning.





COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

SOCM members identified Community-Driven Development as a statewide issue to focus on in the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. While the South Cumberland Plateau was the focal point of that work in the past, some of the other issues that members were engaged with are rooted in the desire for local communities to have more determination in how development occurs in their communities.

Key Achievements:

- The Plateau and Valley Chapter, covering Marion, Grundy and Franklin Counties, became the newest SOCM chapter.
- Members stopped an illegal quarry proposal in Clouse Hill, setting a legal precedent for future community-led environmental protection.
- In Grundy County, SOCM successfully used the County Powers Act to prevent a quarry development, safeguarding local water sources and preventing habitat destruction.

- Raised over \$19k for legal expenses to fight a proposed quarry in the Jump Off community
- SOCM supported *Tennessee for All* coalition partners in rural Haywood County as they fought for a community benefits agreement with Ford's Blue Oval development.

SOCM will continue to organize local residents to monitor new development permits and challenge those that they view as harmful, advocate for more community-based decision-making processes, and develop a state-level policy platform focused on improving the permitting process.





HOUSING JUSTICE

SOCM's Housing for All Campaign made significant strides in tenant rights, eviction prevention, and equitable housing policy through grassroots advocacy, coalition building, and legal support initiatives.

Key Achievements:

- Co-founded the *Housing for All Tennessee* coalition of local organizations working on housing justice.
- The Knoxville Chapter played a leading role in securing expanded legal counsel for tenants facing eviction. Hundreds of clients were helped by the Legal Aid of East Tennessee's Eviction Prevention Office, which broke ground in 2024 thanks in large part to years of advocacy from SOCM.
- SOCM co-hosted the second annual "Housing and Homelessness Day on the Hill" in February. Members got the chance to meet with elected officials and build momentum towards securing solutions for homelessness, alternatives to criminalization, affordable housing and tenants' rights.

SOCM will continue pushing for statewide Right to Counsel legislation, increased affordable housing protections, and expanded eviction prevention programs.



CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Knoxville Chapter

- Co-hosted the “We Dwell Together” Parade and Pageant with Cattywampus Puppet Council.
- Authored the “Knox County Tenant Maintenance and Repair Guide”
- Honored by Legal Aid of East Tennessee with the Pro Bono Community Partner of the Year award for helping to create the Eviction Prevention Office, which helped hundreds of families avoid eviction.
- Laid the groundwork for establishing a Housing Bill of Rights.
- Participated in the evaluation of the expanded counsel program to fight for a strong, permanent program.
- Worked with the Appalachian Justice Research Center (AJRC) to gather data for the continuation of funding for the expanded counsel program.

Rutherford County Chapter

- Successfully opposed a charter school expansion, preventing millions in public school funds from being diverted to private institutions.
- Partnered with SafeRCS (a local parent group) to advocate for fully funded, equitable public schools.
- Participated in multiple community events to continue to build their base.

Plateau and Valley Chapter

- Played a leading role in stopping an illegal quarry project, setting a precedent for community-driven environmental protection.
- Continued efforts to monitor new industrial permits and prevent harmful developments.
- Developed a permit-tracking system to monitor new extractive industry projects and mobilize opposition.
- Hosted public meetings to educate residents on environmental policies and their impact.
- Turned out hundreds of residents to local county commission meetings to voice their concerns.





Cumberland County Chapter

- Expanded composting initiatives, partnering with local coffee shops to divert waste from landfills. Collected over a ton of coffee grounds.
- Advocated for renewable energy projects like the Gaynor Solar Array, despite challenges from regulatory bodies.

Roaring River Chapter

- Organized a successful Earth Day celebration, featuring environmental education, electric vehicle demonstrations, and conservation discussions.
- Held community meetings focused on public school funding and environmental advocacy.

McMinn County Neighbors Chapter

- Members were very involved in the Public School Strong campaign, locally and statewide, hosting several community meetings and workshops, and participating in the PSS Week of Action and September Surge.

Maury County Chapter

- Focused on housing justice and community organizing, particularly around the impact of out-of-town property investors, and partnered with Tennessee for Safe Homes to canvass renters.
- Organized a candidate forum and voter registration drives to increase civic engagement.
- Participated in several community events to continue to build their base.

Other Local Work

- Members in Montgomery County were very active in the Public School Strong campaign, and were instrumental in holding the local board of education accountable to its constituents.
- Members in Blount County had a strong Public School Strong campaign and hosted multiple community meetings to educate their neighbors about the threat of school vouchers.
- Members in Campbell and Claiborne Counties in East Tennessee continued to advocate for environmental protections and reclamation of land previously used for resource extraction.



MEMBER TRAININGS

SOCM invested heavily in leadership development and training in 2024, ensuring that members had the tools and knowledge needed to drive change in their communities.

Key Trainings and Workshops:

- Fundamentals of Organizing Book Club: Members participated in a statewide study group focused on organizing fundamentals, helping to develop grassroots leadership.
- Permit Investigation 101 Workshop: The Plateau & Valley Chapter hosted a workshop to educate members on tracking and challenging extractive industry permits, equipping them with the knowledge to fight corporate environmental threats.
- Community Advocacy and Public Education Training: Held in partnership with Tennessee For All, this training taught members how to engage school boards, advocate for policy changes, and organize community events.
- Eviction Prevention and Tenant Rights Training: SOCM members participated in legal training sessions with Legal Aid of East Tennessee, learning how to support tenants in navigating the eviction process.
- Strategic Messaging and Storytelling Workshop: In collaboration with the League of Women Voters, SOCM trained members on how to effectively communicate campaign messages and engage the media.

SOCM aims to expand leadership development programs, launching a mentorship program for new organizers and increasing access to digital advocacy tools.



INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

1

New Chapter Added—Plateau & Valley—In
Franklin, Marion, and Grundy Counties

50+

Press Mentions in 2024

1,229

New Email Subscribers Added in 2024

\$204K

Raised from Grassroots
Fundraising Efforts in 2024

155

Members Added in 2024

27

New Major Donors Added in 2024

7

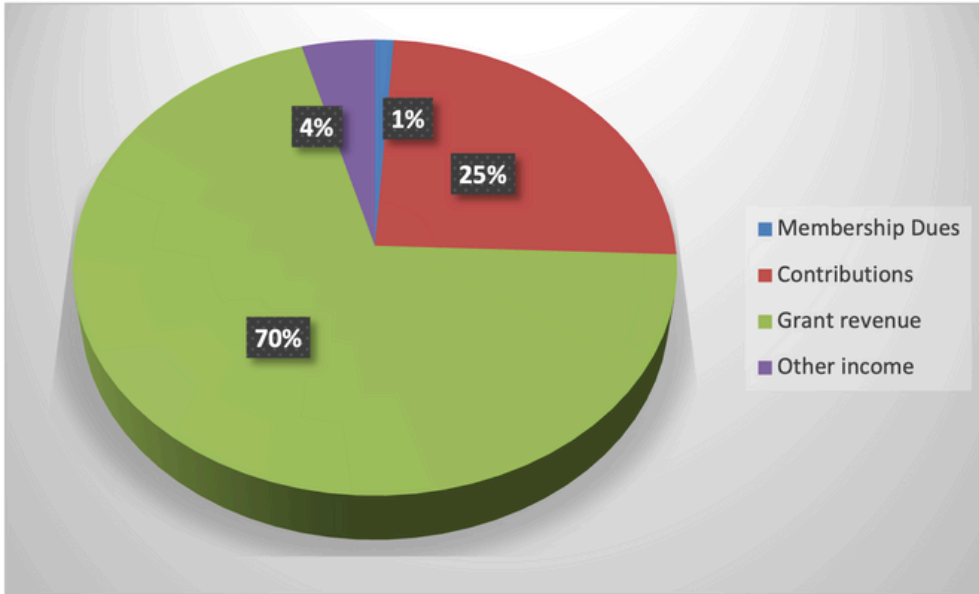
New Foundations that Funded
Our Work in 2024

1

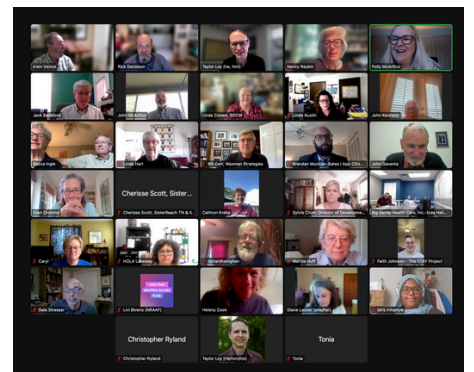
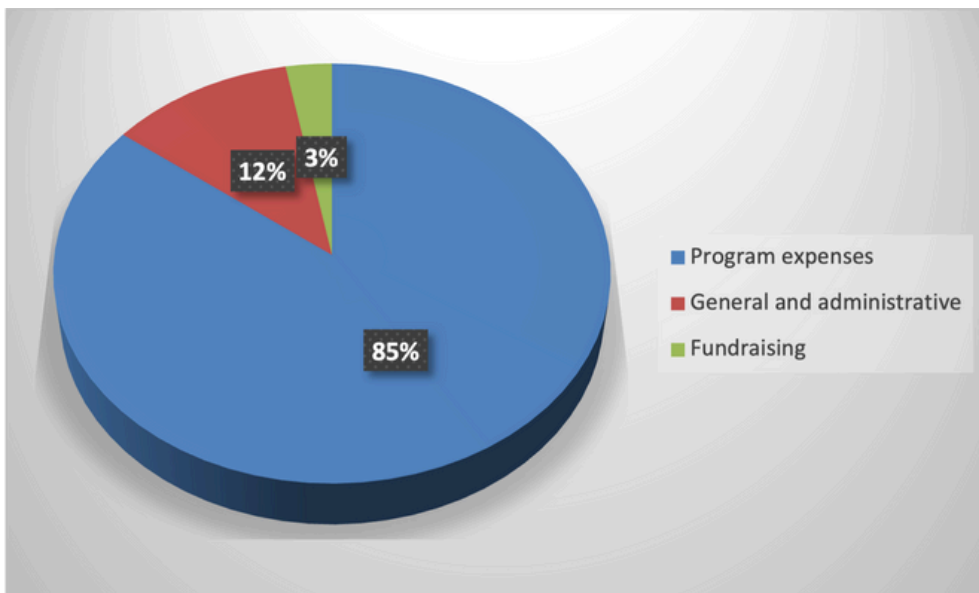
New Staff Member Added—Middle
Tennessee Organizer Theeda Murphy

FINANCIALS

2024 Income \$712,074



2024 Expenses \$556,109



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
Toni Clifford, Jackson 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
Rosa Ponce, At-Large Delegate
Rick Roach, At-Large Delegate
Joy Warren, At-Large Delegate

SOCM Resource Project Board Members

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

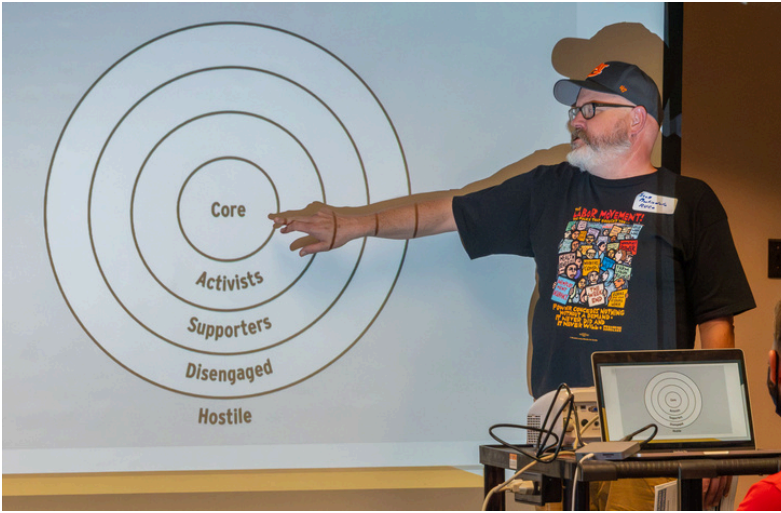
Partners & Coalitions

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

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
Casey Self, Communications Consultant
Katja Kreiger, Public Education Research Fellow
Brandee Dillingham, Housing Legal Fellow
Hannah Boshnag, Knoxville Chapter Intern





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