

2019  
ANNUAL REPORT

# FIGHTING CORPORATE CONTROL & BUILDING LOCAL POWER



# Letter from the Co-Directors

Dear friends,

It's been quite a year for ILSR and for our work building local power to fight corporate control and create thriving, equitable, and sustainable communities.

As you'll see in this report, ILSR has been playing a critical leadership role in expanding public understanding of the threat of monopolies, building support for checking corporate power, and advancing a vision of a reinvigorated antitrust and regulatory framework that can meet these challenges.

At the state and local level, we're working alongside advocates and policymakers to create a more equitable, accountable, and environmentally sound economy – from community broadband to local solar, neighborhood composting to independent businesses, and much more.

In addition to the many policy victories and accomplishments we've had this year, we also celebrated our 45th birthday! For nearly half a century, ILSR has been forging lasting relationships with local and national partners. We are grateful for these relationships and the powerful collaborations they enable.

**We're also deeply grateful for the many people like you who have supported our efforts.** We hope to grow this support as we head into 2020. This past year was a breakout year for the visibility of ILSR's vision, research, and working models, both in the media and among policymakers. We have a strong plan to increase that reach in the coming year – but we need your help to make it happen.

Thank you for your support, and warm wishes for a joyful new year.

Sincerely,



Stacy Mitchell and John Farrell  
Co-Directors

Cover Images Credits • Top: Kenneth Moss, worker at our Baltimore Compost Collective, speaks at anti-incinerator rally. Credit: United Workers. Left: Christopher Mitchell getting an achievement award from the Blandin Foundation. Center: Ashley Richards, Dir. of Urban Ag. in Philadelphia introducing their new Community Compost Network. Right: ILSR's Katie Kienbaum and Michelle Andrews.

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Virginia Streeter  
*Research Associate, Composting for Community Initiative*

Shaoul Sussman  
*Legal Fellow, Independent Business Initiative*

## WE SEND OUR SINCERE APPRECIATION TO OUR TERRIFIC COLLEAGUE WHO LEFT THIS YEAR:

Marie Donahue

## WE THANK ALL OUR INTERNS AND VOLUNTEERS:

Alden Aaberg • Hannah Bonestroo • Kailey Favaro • Michael Glassman  
Deborah Kapiloff • Breshay Moore • Awantika Pal • Jacq Streur  
Sidi Traore • Hannah Trostle • Ali Urevig • Sayidali Moalim

## AND A BIG THANK-YOU TO OUR SUPERB ACCOUNTING TEAM:

Mary Cleary • Roni McKenna • Fiona Robinson

# In the Media

ILSR was cited in **1,210** stories in more than **875** media outlets in 2019



*"The new maps [of rural broadband] will be steps forward, agreed Chris Mitchell [of] the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. 'But it doesn't necessarily help us to solve the overall problem of how are we going to get this high quality service to everyone,' he added."* — NPR's Marketplace



*"Walmart owns 50% or more of grocery sales in 203 U.S. markets, per an analysis by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a nonprofit research and advocacy group that opposes concentrated economic power. In 38 of those markets, Walmart has 70% or more of the grocery sales...The bottom line: No grocer in U.S. history has ever been so dominant."* — Axios



*"[John] Farrell opposes the U.S. system's reliance on tax credits as the major incentive for investing in zero-carbon energy, as it implicitly benefits the wealthy -- those with a large tax base from which to deduct investments. 'It leads to inefficiency and complex business models,' Farrell said. 'You have middlemen participating largely to absorb the tax credit rather than to develop renewable energy.'" — CNN*

ILSR published **28** commentaries in media outlets in 2019.

## The Washington Post

*"The Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a nonprofit advocacy group, argued in a December report exploring the effect of dollar stores in Tulsa that 'there's growing evidence that these stores are not merely a byproduct of economic distress. They're a cause of it.'" — The Washington Post*

ILSR's podcasts were streamed more than **84,000** times in 2019.

## foodtank

*"If every school, correctional facility, and university had composting systems on-site, we wouldn't need a 50-acre site to work on food waste diversion. Smaller sites are faster to build and lower in cost, and the result would go back to local soils,' Brenda Platt said."* — Food Tank

## The Atlantic

*"Warren's rhetorical embrace of small business has been emphatic,' argues Stacy Mitchell. She's 'reviving what once was a core tenet of her party: In a democracy, a primary purpose for government is to disperse economic power.'" — The Atlantic*

ILSR had **63** prominent broadcast media hits in 2019.



In a CNN documentary titled "The Age of Amazon," ILSR's Stacy Mitchell offered crucial perspective on Amazon's monopoly power and control over the digital infrastructure of the economy.



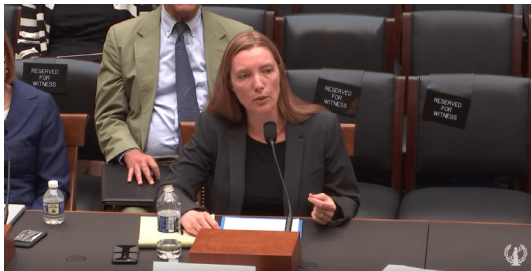
Netflix's Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj used ILSR's broadband maps to explain how monopoly Internet Service Providers are keeping millions of Americans from quality Internet access — and how municipal broadband can help solve the digital divide.



On CNBC, Neil Seldman explained how the recycling crisis provides an opportunity for U.S. cities to create sustainable waste systems, save money, and take back power from monopoly waste management companies.



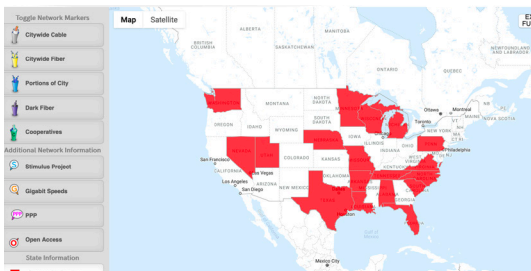
# Fighting Corporate Control



ILSR's Stacy Mitchell made the case to Congress that they should take action to limit Amazon's control of the economy.

## Breaking Amazon's Stranglehold

ILSR's groundbreaking analysis of Amazon's structural power has **galvanized policymakers, shaped hundreds of media stories, and inspired a wide range of organizations** to align around the goal of breaking up and restructuring the tech giant and advancing an anti-monopoly agenda more broadly. In July, ILSR's Co-Director Stacy Mitchell **testified before the House Judiciary Committee** at a hearing on Big Tech. She highlighted our research on independent businesses and how Amazon's dominance is undermining competition and harming communities. Her testimony was cited by several members of Congress as they posed sharp questions to Amazon's counsel.



ILSR's Community Networks Map is tracking hundreds of communities that have invested in broadband and the state laws that prevent these innovative approaches.

## Fighting for Local Authority on Broadband

ILSR has mobilized alongside local advocates to stop efforts by telecom lobbyists to enact laws that impede community broadband. Having played defense for many years, **we believe that we may be on the cusp of reversing preemption in several states**. In Arkansas, for example, the Republican Women's Caucus moved to restore local Internet choice to all cities. We supported the effort by interviewing the lead bill sponsor, giving her a bigger platform to be heard. In collaboration with partners on the ground, **ILSR is currently ramping up a campaign to undo state preemption of community broadband in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Tennessee**.



ILSR's Community Power Toolkit helps cities take charge of their clean energy future and enables citizens to take action.

## Ensuring Monopoly Utilities Are Accountable

ILSR has been challenging the power of monopoly utilities with the **goal of restoring local authority and advancing energy democracy**. In one successful fight, Minnesota regulators sided with ILSR in a 5-0 vote to reject Xcel Energy's request to acquire a fracked natural gas power plant. We opposed the acquisition because it guaranteed immediate profits for shareholders by shifting financial risk to customers and undermined the state's clean energy goals. **We're building support across the country for community choice**, including public takeovers of utilities, to ensure that people and the planet receive as much attention as profits.



ILSR is helping cities regain control and take back the economic opportunity from their waste streams. Credit: Flickr - denverjeffrey(CC BY-ND 2.0)

## Fighting Big Waste and Getting to Zero Waste

ILSR has been instrumental in **exposing how concentrated corporate control of the waste sector is restricting the growth of recycling, composting, and the movement toward a zero waste economy**. Our research showed how "big waste" pushed cities to adopt single-stream (mixed recycling) collection, with disastrous results for recycling, and why letting "big soda" control municipal recycling programs is a bad idea. **We assisted numerous citizen groups fighting to close down garbage incinerators** and published *Waste Incineration: A Dirty Secret in How States Define Renewable Energy*, which showed how improper subsidies to incinerators are undermining local recycling and composting programs, and placing them in direct competition with wind and solar energy.

# Building Local Power

## Breaking the Dollar Chains and Growing Local Grocery Stores

ILSR released a report on the two dominant **dollar store chains and how their rapid growth is exacerbating poverty and inequality**, including undermining local grocers and access to fresh food. The report went viral – over 125,000 readers on our site and follow-up coverage in dozens of media outlets, including NBC Nightly News and a front-page feature in *The Washington Post*. The report, which included policy recommendations, **has inspired leaders in nearly a dozen cities, including Birmingham, Ala., and Oklahoma City, to enact or propose limits on chain dollar stores** and establish programs to support the creation of new local grocery stores.



Tulsa City Councilor Vanessa Hall-Harper protested against dollar stores and then used ILSR's resources to limit their spread. Photo Credit: Vice News, 2018

## Advancing Composting to Protect the Climate and Build Equity

ILSR has been creating a national movement to address food waste, healthy soil, and climate protection at the local level. In Baltimore, Md., **we have launched replicable projects such as the Baltimore Compost Collective in low-income, under-served neighborhoods** and are building out more locations. **We brought together 140+ community composters and advocates from 23 states** for our sold-out 6th National Cultivating Community Composting Forum. We support this network with guides (e.g., *Community Composting Done Right*), webinars (including our popular *Compost Climate Connections* series), hands-on training, and our *Composting for Community Map*.



Our 6th National Cultivating Community Composting Forum in New York City was inspiring. See you in Cleveland in 2020!

## Building Equity With Community Broadband

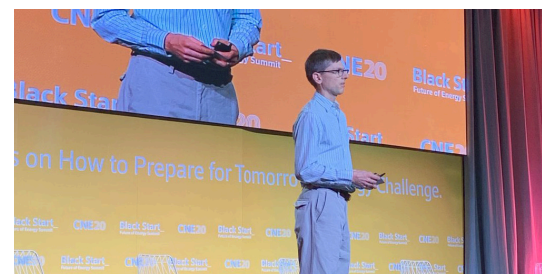
Our work to bring accountable, high-speed broadband to both rural areas and low-income neighborhoods continues to grow. **We did a "road show" in North Carolina**, holding a series of community meetings in Albemarle, Fuquay-Varina, and Jacksonville to educate local leaders and residents about the need to overturn a state law that prevents communities from improving Internet access through public initiatives. We also developed **new materials to highlight strong digital equity programs that benefit low-income people**. For example, municipal networks in Fort Collins, Colo., and Hillsboro, Ore. launched with special tiers that offer full gigabit capacity to low-income families at greatly reduced rates.



ILSR's Christopher Mitchell presenting on how to bring community broadband to North Carolina's communities.

## Expanding Energy Democracy and Community Power

ILSR's burgeoning resources to advance local energy democracy included a new series of podcasts, ***Voices for 100%*, with interviews of more than a dozen city leaders including the mayors of Columbia, S.C.; Norman, Okla.; Burlington, Vt.; and Grand Marais, Minn., on how their cities are moving toward 100 percent clean energy.** Additionally, we launched **a new, interactive version of our Community Power Toolkit** with examples of over 20 tested tools used by cities and towns across the country to increase local clean energy, reduce energy use, and fight climate change.



John Farrell offering a vision for localized renewable energy in Puerto Rico in response to a colonial past and Hurricane Maria.



# Praise

"Folks like @NextCentCit and @ilsr do heroic work to help communities across the country get access to the necessary resources to build community broadband networks."

🐦 @GBrinks, Garrett Brinker, Chief of Staff at Neighborly

"This @onthemedia segment with @stacyfmitchell on Amazon and the evolution of antitrust policy is the best thing I've heard all weekend."

🐦 @nickfountain, Nick Fountain, producer at NPR's Planet Money

"Now this is a Report [Is Bigger Best in Renewable Energy?] - highly recommend that you take advantage of the download as you'll most likely be using it as an ongoing resource. Thank you @ILSR @johnffarrell"

🐦 @LocalEnergyio, Local Clean Energy Advocate

"Thanks @ilsr @stacyfmitchell for your unwavering support for local businesses, and for the things that make our neighborhoods into real communities."

🐦 @brandlander, Brad Lander, NYC Council member

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# Podcast Spotlight



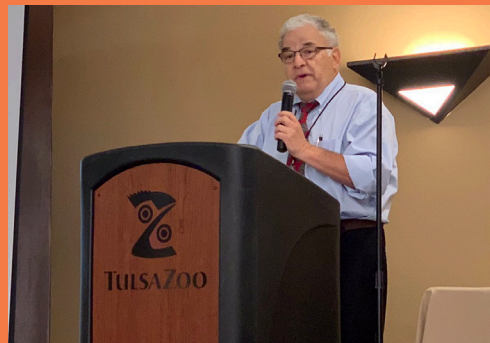
## Building Local Power

Our flagship podcast, Building Local Power, features conversations that you won't hear anywhere else. Tune in for thought-provoking discussions of economic power and democracy as well as new ideas on how communities can take charge of their economic futures.

**2019 Special Guests:** Susan Crawford, Denise Fairchild, Blair Levin, Gigi Sohn, Vanessa Hall-Harper, Jeremy Schroeder, Matt Stoller, David Pomerantz, Maurice BP-Weeks, Leah Douglas, Alan Hipólito, Kimber Lanning, Marcel Castro Sitiriche

**Five Star Review:** "These guys shed light on issues that others don't, present real solutions to otherwise daunting problems...and feature informed and engaging guests. Keep it coming, friends!"

## LISTEN TO OUR PODCASTS: ILSR.ORG/PODCASTS



"...it was really helpful to have you [Neil Seldman] there to get us out of some of the too-traveled conversation paths that each of us has. You work within such a vast network and you lay it all out with so much clarity." – Margo Becker, Ulster County Environmental Management Commission

◀ ILSR co-founder Neil Seldman gives the keynote speech at the Oklahoma Recycling Association.



"Thank you so much for creating a platform for community composters to make relationships that affect real environmental, social, and even legislative change." – Vanessa Ventola, NYC Compost Project hosted by Queens Botanical Garden, New York

◀ Brenda Platt talking about composting with Takoma Park Radio



"ILSR's Energy Democracy work was crucial for me to get up to speed... Four years later, it continues to be a go-to source for staying apprised of key issues related to local clean energy." — Subin DeVar, Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC helped launch People Powered Solar, the only rooftop solar cooperative model)

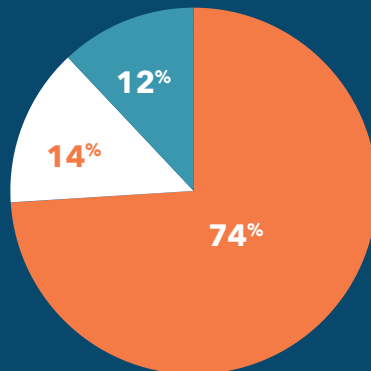
◀ John Farrell recording a Local Energy Rules podcast episode with Jocelyn Travis, Sierra Club.

# Income & Expenses

Fiscal Year 2019  
July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019

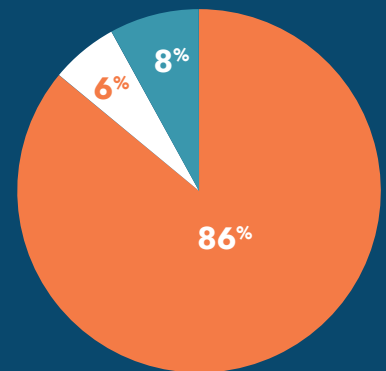
## INCOME

■ Grants	\$1,054,853
■ Contracts, Honoraria, & Misc	\$190,807
■ Contributions	\$164,700



## EXPENSES

■ Program	\$1,382,877
■ Fundraising	\$91,813
■ Management & General	\$121,099



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We send our sincere gratitude to the individuals and foundations that have supported our work over the last 45 years.

“Thanks for all you do to make this world more sane.”  
— Mary

“I appreciate the even-handed information gathering and reporting. Thank you!”  
— Wendy

“Thanks for your huge range of excellent work!”  
— Alissa

“I love the ILSR. It was very helpful during my time on the Santa Monica, CA City Council and I remain in admiration today. I refer the ILSR to others seeking to empower their local communities.” — Michael

“Thankful for your expertise and diligent research and how that empowers me and my community and communities like mine.”  
— Derek

**SUPPORT ILSR! [ILSR.ORG/DONATE](https://ilsr.org/donate)**



“None of this could have happened without ILSR’s research and advocacy. [ILSR’s] work was huge for us.”

— Yuval Yossefy, a data and policy specialist in the Office of the Mayor, Birmingham, Ala.,  
writing about the dollar store ordinance the city passed to help fight food deserts and promote local grocers.

“ILSR is the backbone of the community composting movement!”

– Nat Stein, Soil Cycle, Colorado Springs, Colo.



## About ILSR



The Institute for Local Self-Reliance challenges concentrated economic and political power, and instead champions an ecologically sound approach in which ownership is broadly distributed, institutions are humanly scaled, and decision-making is accountable to communities. We believe that economic systems should embody democratic values, and that democracy can thrive only when economic power is widely dispersed. We believe that communities are healthiest when they possess the authority, capacity, and responsibility to chart their own course. We call this vision local self-reliance.

- ◀ Trainees and trainers at ILSR’s community composting workshop at the Baltimore Compost Collective site at the Filbert Street Community Garden.

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