



2023 ANNUAL REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Dear Supporter,

The Illinois Environmental Council (IEC) and the Illinois Environmental Council Education Fund (IECEF) celebrated another year of progress toward our goal of building power for people and the environment in Illinois.

Back in 1975, partner organizations and individuals in Illinois' environmental and conservation sectors formed IEC to ensure the community's collective voice was elevated in the state legislature. Forty-eight years later, we are delivering on that early vision, leading an Illinois environmental community more powerful than ever in our state's history.

In 2023, we embarked on a new chapter in our organizational history. [Our new five-year strategic plan](#) and updated mission and vision statements focus on how we carry out our founders' grounding vision with modern strategies to accomplish today's environmental priorities. Our ongoing commitment to our environmental justice principles and allyship policy platform is woven throughout.

Today, our organizations are strong, vibrant, and fiscally sound, and we have 115 affiliate organization members from across the state. In short, IEC remains well-positioned to tackle the climate crisis as we protect Illinois' communities and environment through education and advocacy.

In our 48th year, IEC employed 23 full-time staff and operated on a \$3.1 million budget. As in recent years, it was one of continued growth for our organizations. We expanded into a brand-new Chicago office space with ample room for our staff and affiliates to fully utilize. Additionally, we formally added two new programs to our body of work—equitable transportation and zero waste—reflecting new staff capacity and initiatives we have increasingly worked on over recent years. Excitingly, we expanded the scope of a legacy program area, agriculture, to address issues regarding sustainable livestock production.

IEC and IECEF delivered an unprecedented number of opportunities for our supporters to engage with our priorities. We held over 40 events with over 1,800 total participants across the state. We provided concerned Illinoisans with over 40 opportunities to take action to protect our environment. A staggering 10,000 individual actions were taken to protect our air, land and water.

The growth of our grassroots education and advocacy power directly translates to state, city, and federal results. IEC engaged our relationships in the governor's administration to help secure three key gubernatorial vetoes of legislation that would have taken Illinois' environmental protection

policies backward. These vetoes included proposals that would have made transmission and renewable energy more expensive, giving Ameren a monopoly; granted an extreme increase in public-private partnerships that would make pollution-intensive projects like the I-55 expansion more prevalent; and removed our 35-year-old new nuclear reactor moratorium without any necessary environmental protections. We also worked with the Illinois General Assembly to pass legislation banning the sale of foam foodware by state agencies, expanding resources supporting the state's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, and preventing counties from enacting preemptive local ordinances that outright ban local wind and solar projects. We worked with the Illinois Secretary of State's Office to bring to life a [long-awaited state license plate](#) initiative that funds pollinator protections after years of state inaction. For a full rundown of our legislative progress in 2023, you can [visit our Legislative Report here](#).

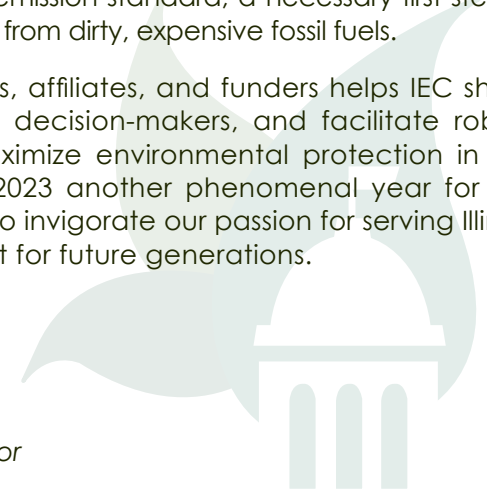
In Chicago, we won a huge victory in [re-establishing the city's Department of Environment](#) (DOE) after ten years without one. IEC was at the center of the fight, and we couldn't be prouder to have delivered on this turning point for our movement in Chicago. The DOE will help us carry out some of our most critical city-level initiatives, such as electrifying Chicago's homes and buildings, replacing toxic lead pipes across the city, passing a cumulative impacts ordinance, and equitably facing the climate crisis that is already impacting the city's most vulnerable communities. In fact, the DOE has been a key partner already by introducing the Clean and Affordable Buildings Ordinance, which would require newly constructed buildings to comply with an emission standard, a necessary first step in the equitable transition away from dirty, expensive fossil fuels.

The support of our members, affiliates, and funders helps IEC share resources, create informed decision-makers, and facilitate robust policy development to maximize environmental protection in our state. That support made 2023 another phenomenal year for IEC and IECEF, and it continues to invigorate our passion for serving Illinois and our shared environment for future generations.

In community,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jen Walling". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jen Walling, *Executive Director*



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HIGHLIGHTS

STATE

Although the legislature passed a handful of shortsighted bills on even shorter notice during the final days of session, IEC's state legislative team flexed our power during the veto session to set the stage for future climate action and environmental protection. Additionally, during the spring session we played a key role in securing historic wind and solar siting regulations, increased resources for the state's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, and steps forward to reduce the state's contributions to our plastic pollution crisis. For a full rundown of IEC's 2023 legislative progress, visit our [Legislative Report](#).

Visit our [2023 Legislative Scorecard](#) to learn more about how IEC has evaluated the General Assembly's environmental voting record.

- **Governor Pritzker's Veto Pen**

In the waning days of the regular legislative session, the General Assembly rashly passed three pieces of legislation that would have jeopardized progress on some of our state's environmental policies. With our partners, we rallied around Governor Pritzker, making clear the stakes of the legislature's failure to protect our communities and environment. He sided with communities, issuing three vetoes. These vetoes included a proposal that would make transmission and renewable energy more expensive, giving Ameren a monopoly; an extreme increase in public-private partnerships that would make pollution-intensive projects like the I-55 expansion more prevalent; and a removal of our 35-year-old new nuclear reactor moratorium without any necessary environmental protections.

- **Clean Energy Projects Protected Statewide**

Gov. JB Pritzker signed legislation protecting Illinois-based clean energy projects from a growing number of local bans. HB4412 prevents counties from enacting preemptive local ordinances that outright ban local wind and solar projects that would hinder the state's new climate goals set forth in the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA). The legislation we championed not only prevents future bans but now takes precedence over current bans, clearing the way for rapid clean energy development across the state, helping Illinois meet its climate goals, and allowing communities to address potential capacity shortfalls.

- **Agencies Stepping Up to Reduce State's Plastic Footprint**

IEC has worked on Illinois' waste reduction policy for decades. In 2023, we took another step forward, this time compelling state agencies and universities to phase out the use of single-use plastic polystyrene foam foodware in state facilities. Passing SB58 means that no state agency may purchase polystyrene foam foodware after January 1, 2025, and no vendor with a state contract may distribute any foam products to customers after January 1, 2026.

- **Healthier Soils and Waters for Illinois**

While farmers should have a vested interest in protecting our land and water resources for future generations, the state itself has traditionally not invested in the types of scalable conservation programs we need to reduce nutrient pollution and retain soil. IEC fought for the passage of SB1701 to shift that thinking, investing \$18 million into the Partners for Conservation Fund for in-field conservation practices, soil assessment, and support for Soil & Water Conservation Districts. With this new law on the books, we plan to build on this base in the coming years and steeply ramp funding to ensure our land and water resources are protected for all Illinoisans.



CHICAGO

- **A New Department of Environment for Chicagoans**

At long last, after ten years without one, Chicago is set to officially re-establish its Department of Environment (DOE). This effort was a top priority for our city programs team and one of the most instrumental turning points that we have been a part of since launching IEC's city-focused program. With the passage of the 2024 Chicago Budget, the City Council voted to allocate \$1.8 million to re-establish the department. This victory cannot be overstated. There is still work to be done; specifically, this new iteration of the Department of Environment lacks the enforcement power of the previous DOE. As shown through a report by our affiliate Neighbors for Environmental Justice, enforcement rates have plummeted since environmental enforcement transferred from the Department of Environment to the Department of Public Health. IEC will continue to advocate for a sufficiently resourced Department of Environment with the authority to equitably tackle the city's sustainability and environmental justice issues.

For a full breakdown of the Mayor's first proposed budget, visit our Chicago Budget Report.

- **Chicago Has New Leadership and New Opportunities**

In July, newly elected Mayor Brandon Johnson released the 2023 Chicago Mayor Transition Report, highlighting the Mayor's values and priorities within his first 100 days through the end of his term. Luckily, the report, in many ways, mirrors IEC's 2023 Chicago Environmental Mayor Report, which outlines key environmental issues and policy solutions.

Moreover, the Mayor's top priorities largely align with those we expressed to him and his team prior to taking office: re-establish the Department of Environment, make Chicago's buildings electric and efficient, address cumulative environmental impacts, expedite Lead Service Line Replacement, and revitalize the CTA system. Additionally, the report includes most of the recommendations IEC and our partners put forth. This is thanks to the hard work of the 400 Chicagoans who were appointed to help draft the Mayoral Report, including representatives from many of IEC's affiliate members and IEC's very own City Programs Director Iyana Simba and Climate Policy Director Dany Robles.

For IEC's analysis of Mayor Johnson's transition report, visit our 2023 Chicago Mayoral Transition Report Analysis. To see our outline of key areas of opportunity for the city's mayor to be a true environmental champion, visit our 2023 Chicago Environmental Mayor Report.

A cornerstone of IEC's work, IEC's Scorecards play a key role in evaluating the environmental voting record of legislative branch decision-makers and measuring the progress we've made in building power for people and the environment. View the 2023 Chicago City Council Environmental Scorecard here.



- **A Future with Clean and Affordable Buildings**

Gas appliances pollute indoor air quality with benzene, a chemical that causes cancer. Burning methane gas also produces dangerous pollutants like carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and fine particulate matter that increase the risk of childhood asthma. According to a recent peer-reviewed [analysis](#), one in five Illinois cases of childhood asthma are attributable to cooking with gas. And, with nearly one in five Chicagoans behind on their gas bills amidst increasing gas rates, we worked with partners, Mayor Johnson, and Committee of Environmental Protection

and Energy Chair Ald. Maria Hadden to [introduce](#) the Clean and Affordable Buildings Ordinance (CABO).

A key first step in the necessary transition away from dirty, expensive fossil fuels, the ordinance sets an indoor emissions standard that would effectively eliminate the use of fossil fuels in newly constructed buildings in Chicago. IEC will continue to invest in this campaign, making it a new top priority of the city program.



BEST OF IEC

• Taking Up Space in Chicago

Continuing our story of exponential growth over the last ten years, in 2023, we expanded into a brand-new Chicago office space, with ample room for our staff and affiliates to fully utilize. Our staff is proud of this new space where we now routinely host large, collaborative coalition planning events, social gatherings, and team-building opportunities. Our flagship location in Springfield will always be the physical cornerstone of our operations, but investing in a practical, versatile space in Chicago makes our work more possible statewide.

• Out of Office

Part of IEC's role in building an Illinois climate majority is empowering legislators with the knowledge they need to be effective advocates for our environment. With that goal, we have developed a legislator tour program that connects lawmakers with experiences that demonstrate the real-world impacts of their votes in the legislature. On these tours, we take legislators out of their office buildings and into the natural areas we need their help to protect. For example, we bring them to farms in their districts or to conservation areas where they get a first-hand look at the importance of conservation practices, soil health, and nutrient pollution reduction. We all have a lot of fun along the way.

These tours have always been an important part of IEC's conservation work. As our other programs have grown, we've added waste and energy tours because of the impact we've seen from these experiences. In 2023, we conducted 20 tours with legislators across the state on a variety of topics. Check out our [blog post recapping](#) another excellent year of legislative tours.

• Honk if You Love Pollinators

Illinois is known as the Prairie State, but less than .1% of Illinois' native prairie habitat still exists. IEC has been committed to protecting and promoting native ecosystems in Illinois for decades; in 2016, IEC worked to pass a bill that gave Illinoisans an opportunity to support the monarch population while also celebrating the beauty of our state insect. This bill greenlit a monarch license plate decal in Illinois, which would generate revenue to cultivate and develop pollinator habitats throughout the state. In 2023, after significant grassroots efforts during which over 2,000 Illinoisans signed up to receive their own license plates, and because of IEC's persistent outreach, the Illinois Secretary

of State's office finally unveiled the long-awaited monarch license plate decal. This has been an environmental effort years in the works, so join us in looking back at all the work that got us to where we are now and visit our [blog post recapping](#) the effort.

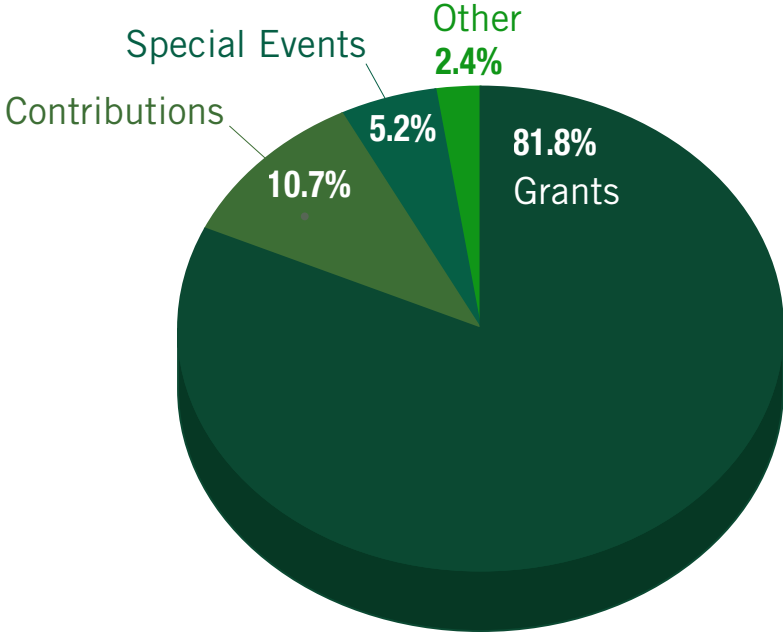
• Yielding Results Through the Natural Areas Stewardship Act

In 2017, as stewardship needs in Illinois began to outpace existing capacity, IEC and the Prairie State Conservation Coalition (PSCC) sought a solution. Our goal was to secure funding for the critical stewardship work required to protect the state's natural areas. In passing the Natural Area Stewardship Act (NASA), the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) gained the authority to distribute grants from the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund to Conservation Land Trusts for managing Illinois Nature Preserves and Registered Land and Water Reserves.

By 2021, the program launched, awarding \$456,000 to eight grantees in its first year and \$500,000 to ten grantees this year. However, the funds only covered about half of the state's stewardship needs, with requests far exceeding available resources. Despite nearly \$1 million being awarded in two years, Illinois still faces a significant shortfall in funding for conservation efforts. Our future work includes advocating to increase these resources so they are available to those with big goals and stewardship needs. To learn more about the impact NASA is having today, check out our [blog post](#).

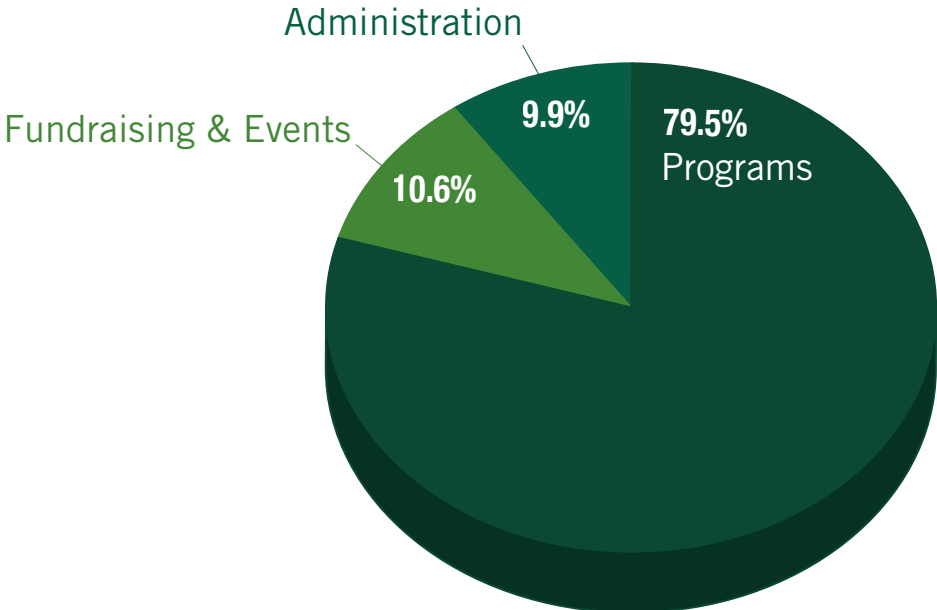


IEC AUDITED FINANCIALS



IEC INCOME

- **Grants** - \$1,102,000
- **Contributions** - \$143,566
- **Special Events** - \$69,883
- **Other** - \$32,046

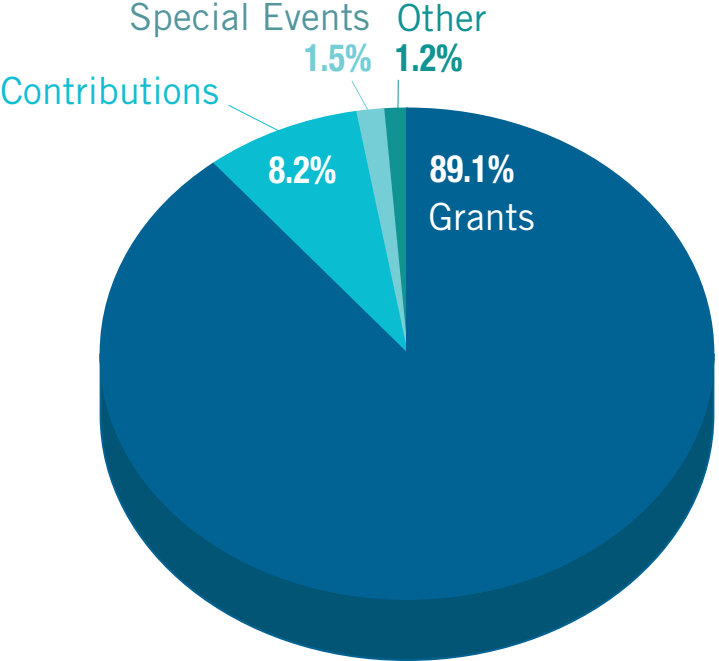


IEC EXPENSES

- **Programs** - \$1,044,891
- **Fundraising & Events** - \$139,302
- **Administration** - \$129,969

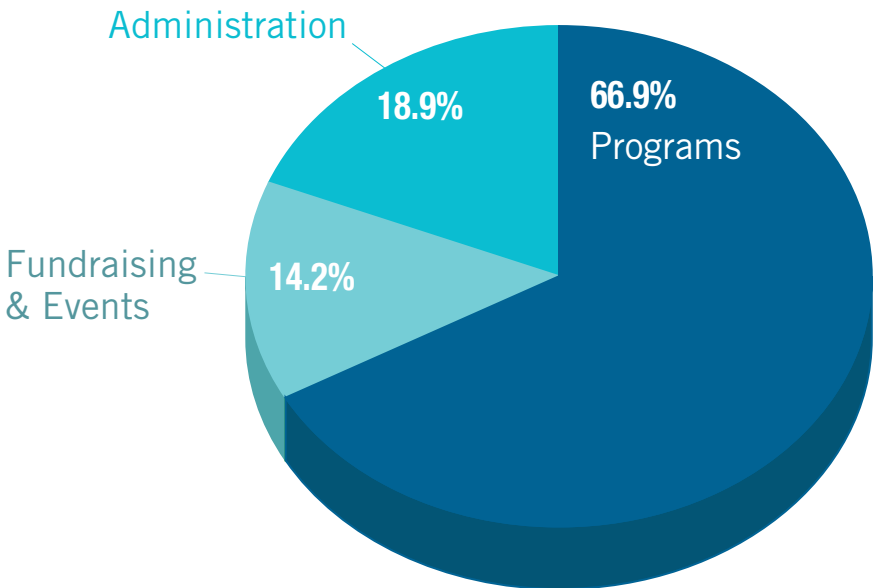


IECEF AUDITED FINANCIALS



IECEF INCOME

- **Grants** - \$2,999,697
- **Contributions** - \$276,655
- **Special Events** - \$49,313
- **Other** - \$41,433



IECEF EXPENSES

- **Programs** - \$1,342,337
- **Fundraising & Events** - \$284,035
- **Administration** - \$378,961



DONOR & FOUNDATION RECOGNITION

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Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Crown Family Philanthropies
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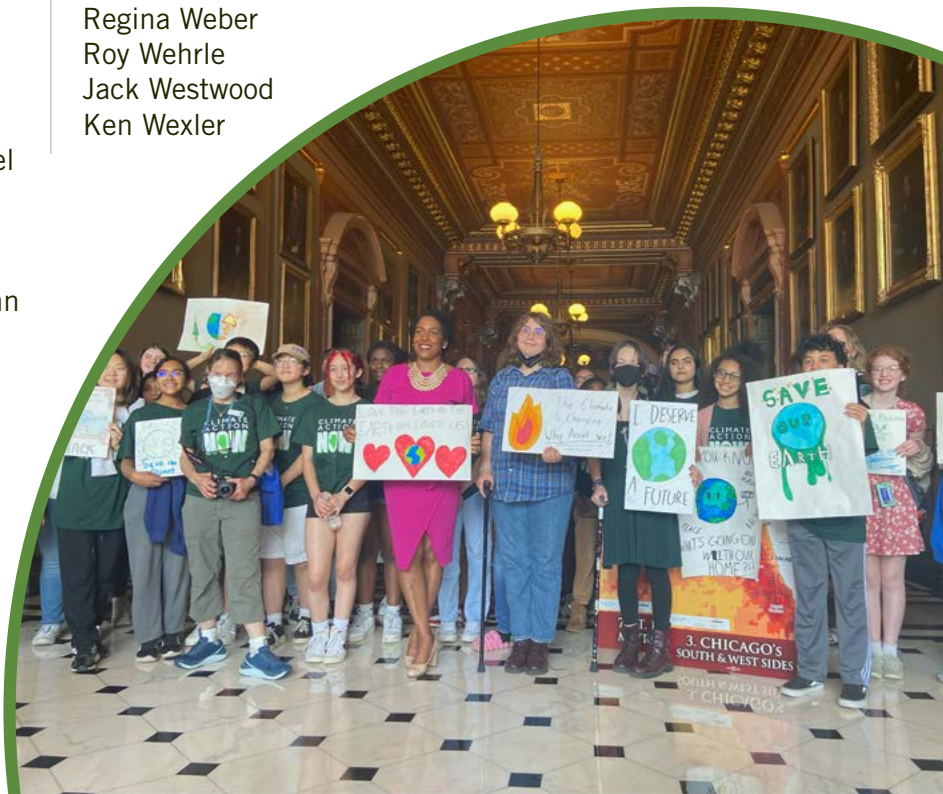
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