



ASIAN AMERICANS
ADVANCING
JUSTICE
ATLANTA

A New Era of

LEADERSHIP

2023

ANNUAL REPORT



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MISSION

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta began its journey in 2010, initially established as the Asian American Legal Advocacy Center (AALAC). This was a pioneering step, marking the formation of the first non-profit legal advocacy organization in the Southeast dedicated to the civil rights of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders (AANHPI), and Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) communities.

In 2014, in a significant evolutionary step, the organization joined the Asian Americans Advancing Justice affiliation. This affiliation marked a new era of enhanced reach and influence, amplifying its voice and capabilities in advocating for civil rights. Over the years, the organization has steadfastly committed itself to the protection and promotion of the rights and interests of these diverse communities, navigating through the complexities of legal, social, and policy challenges.

VISION

Looking ahead, Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta envisions a future where communities of color are fully empowered and active participants in the civic life of Georgia and beyond. The organization aspires to cultivate a social movement grounded in equity, where every individual, irrespective of their ethnic background, can access justice and exercise their rights freely.

The organization's role in this envisioned future is multifaceted. It aims to continue being a formidable advocate for justice, ensuring that laws and policies reflect the diversity and needs of the communities it represents. The pursuit of this vision involves a commitment to dismantling systemic barriers that hinder equity, such as voter suppression, language discrimination, and unequal access to legal resources.

In the coming years, Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta plans to expand its outreach and deepen its impact through strategic policy advocacy, community organizing, impact litigation, and provision of legal services. By doing so, it strives to build a society where communities of color can work together towards a shared goal of fairness, dignity, and self-determination for all. This vision is not just an aspiration but a commitment to a future where diversity is not just acknowledged but celebrated, where every voice is heard, and every right is protected. The organization stands resolute in its mission, ready to face new challenges and seize opportunities to advance justice for all.



Donations & Digital Booklet

1. Open the camera app.
2. Focus the camera on the QR code by tapping the code.
3. Follow the instructions on the screen to complete the action.



WELCOME Letter

Dear Friends, Supporters, and Community Members,

As I reflect on the journey of Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta through 2023, I am filled with a sense of profound gratitude and pride. This year marked a significant phase in our organization's history, one that brought both challenges and remarkable achievements.

We bade farewell to our former Executive Director, Phi Nguyen, and embarked on a new chapter with fresh perspectives and renewed vigor. My transition into the role of Executive Director was not just a personal milestone but a testament to the organization's enduring commitment to growth and adaptability.

This year, we witnessed the unwavering strength of our communities as we navigated complex legislative landscapes, fought for voting rights, and upheld the civil liberties of our AANHPI and AMEMSA communities. Our Policy Advocacy team's remarkable efforts in dissecting and responding to new legislation have been instrumental in safeguarding the rights we cherish. The Impact Litigation and Legal Services teams, too, have shown exceptional dedication in championing the cause of justice.

Looking ahead, our vision for 2024 is clear and ambitious. We aim to further strengthen our advocacy, deepen community engagement, and expand our reach to ensure that every voice in our diverse community is heard and valued. The path may be fraught with challenges, but our resolve to fight for justice and equality remains steadfast.

Thank you for your unwavering support and belief in our mission. Together, we will continue to strive for a future where equality and justice are not just ideals but realities for all.

Warm regards,

Murtaza Khwaja

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



WELCOME Letter

To Our Community,

As the Board Chair of Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta, it is my honor to extend my deepest gratitude to each one of you - our supporters, staff, volunteers, and community members.

Your commitment and contributions have been the cornerstone of our accomplishments in 2023. This year has been a testament to the power of collective action and the impact of steadfast dedication. The organization has achieved significant milestones in advocacy, legal support, and community empowerment, reflecting our shared vision of a just and equitable society.

Our successes are not just measured in the policies we influence or the cases we win but also in the lives we touch and the communities we uplift. The stories of individuals and families who have found hope and support through our services are the true indicators of our impact.

As we look forward to 2024, I am filled with optimism and confidence in our ability to face upcoming challenges. Our journey ahead is shaped by the contributions of each one of you, and for this, we are eternally grateful.

Thank you for standing with us, for sharing our vision, and for being an integral part of our mission. Together, we will continue to advocate for justice and equality, making a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve.

With heartfelt thanks,

Sonjai Kumar

BOARD CHAIR




BY THE Numbers

 **3,000** Calls
to Immigration Legal Hotline

 **200** Requests
for legal representation

9 Citizenship
Clinics **138**
with
Participants
providing resources,
assistance, and legal reviews



Consultations

80 for potential clients seeking
representation in USCIS filings

56 in removal proceedings or
seeking humanitarian benefits

28 with individuals
in detention centers

Applications

25 for asylum and
fear-based relief

13 DACA renewal
applications

12 for
citizenship

12 for adjustment of
status (green cards)


8 for survivors of
crime or abuse


 **95,000**
Doors knocked

 **686,000**
Calls made

 **648,000**
Texts sent

 **818** New Voter
registrations

 **8** Languages offered for
community engagement

 **16** Counties
engaged across
Georgia

 **\$270K**
regranted
to **18** partner
organizations

 **4** Landmark
Policy Reports

 **100** Interviews
with detained people at
Stewart and Folkston Centers

OUR WORK

2023



MAJOR EVENTS & LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

2023 heralded a pivotal moment for Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta with the departure of our respected Executive Director, Phi Nguyen, and the warm welcome of Murtaza Khwaja. Murtaza, with his deep roots in civil rights work and a track record of impactful leadership at CAIR Georgia, brought a fresh vision and dynamic approach to our organization's mission. This leadership transition was complemented by various organizational developments and strategic planning sessions, aligning our goals with the evolving needs of the communities we serve.



HELEN KIM, PHI NGUYEN & STEPHANIE CHO

2010 Founding Executive Director Helen Kim.

2014 Became part of the Asian Americans Advancing Justice affiliation.

2016 Stephanie Cho, Appointed as Executive Director.

2021 Phi Nguyen, Appointed as Executive Director

2023 Murtaza Khwaja, Appointed as Executive Director.





POLICY ADVOCACY

The Policy Advocacy team’s work in 2023 was marked by a proactive and strategic approach to legislation and community engagement. We focused on comprehensive policy analysis, direct lobbying efforts, and building coalitions to address a wide range of issues affecting our communities.

LEGISLATIVE TRACKING AND ADVOCACY

We monitored and engaged with numerous bills impacting the AANHPI and AMEMSA communities. This involved scrutinizing legislation for potential impacts, advocating for or against specific policies, and providing expert testimony in legislative committees.



INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDING

We continued to lead the Georgia Immigrant Rights Alliance (GIRA), a statewide policy table led by immigrant communities across Georgia, and regranting a total of \$270,000 to 18 partner organizations throughout 2023. Regranting funds to partner organizations is crucial as it empowers grassroots initiatives, fosters local community development, and ensures that diverse voices and perspectives are amplified, thereby promoting inclusivity and a more effective and responsive approach to addressing societal needs.



RESEARCH AND REPORTING

Our team produced several key reports, each serving as a cornerstone in understanding and addressing specific community issues:

“Expanding Mental Health Care Access for Immigrant Youth & Communities in Georgia” BY ANAR PARIKH

A deep dive into the mental health needs of immigrant communities and actionable recommendations for policy makers.



“Growing Asian-American Voter Power and Pushback” BY JENNIFER LEE

An insightful analysis of the changing landscape of Asian-American voter engagement in Georgia and the challenges posed by recent legislative changes.



“Modern-Day Alien Land Laws’ Resurgence throughout the South” BY THÔNG PHAN

A critical examination of the revival of discriminatory land laws and their impact on Asian-American communities.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & ORGANIZING

Our Civic Engagement and Organizing (CEO) department works to build sustainable, community centered movements that seek to shift power, behavior and culture through voter engagement, election protection, and community organizing. The CEO team had a landmark year in 2023, focusing on expansive voter engagement and community outreach.

VOTER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

We successfully executed a large-scale voter engagement campaign, significantly exceeding our targets in voter registration, door-knocking, and call/text banking. Our multilingual approach and in-language resources played a crucial role in reaching and mobilizing low propensity AAPI and Latinx voters across sixteen key counties.

RURAL EXPANSION PLAN

The pilot satellite office in Athens-Clarke county marked the beginning of our Rural Expansion Plan, aimed at extending our reach to rural areas with growing AAPI and Latinx populations. This initiative is set to scale up in 2024 with additional satellite offices, furthering our impact in underserved areas.

COMMUNITY POWER

Our mutual aid and grocery distribution efforts have significantly uplifted marginalized communities, including AAPI, Latinx, immigrants, and refugees, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives address the unique challenges these groups face, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and limited access to resources. By fostering a sense of solidarity and empowerment, our mutual aid programs help community members to collectively overcome these obstacles. A key component of our work is grocery distribution, crucial in a state like Georgia where access to nutritious food is uneven. This effort ensures that essential food supplies reach those in need, strengthening community resilience and interconnectedness. In 2023, our impact was substantial: over 790 families benefited from our free grocery market pop-ups. These events, tailored to AAPI and Latinx populations, are held in culturally familiar and accessible venues. Additionally, we've conducted 179 surveys at these events to better understand and serve community needs, reinforcing our commitment to effective, inclusive support.



LEGAL SERVICES

The Legal Services department provides comprehensive, high-quality immigration legal services to immigrant communities in Georgia. Our multilingual team assists low-income immigrants in obtaining lawful status, becoming citizens, and defending against deportation. The Legal Services department remained dedicated to offering comprehensive legal assistance to our communities in 2023, particularly in immigration-related matters.



DIRECT LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Our efforts were instrumental in helping numerous individuals and families navigate the complexities of the U.S. immigration system. Our dedicated, free Immigration Legal Hotline received almost 3,000 calls, and more than 200 individuals requested legal representation from our team this year.

Here are some highlights from our program in 2023:

80

Consultations

for potential clients seeking representation in filings with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

56

Consultations

for potential clients in removal proceedings or seeking humanitarian benefits with USCIS. 28 of these individuals were in immigration detention.

30+

Applications

for initial or renewal Employment Authorization Documents (work permits).

25

Applications

for asylum and fear-based relief filed or being prepared.

8

Applications

for survivors of crime or abuse filed or being prepared.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Regular Know Your Rights (KYR) workshops were conducted throughout the year, providing crucial information and resources to community members. With our partner organizations, Sur Legal and Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation, 3 KYR workshops were held, addressing crucial topics: rights when interacting with ICE, immigration relief and benefits, and housing and labor rights. Our workshops engaged 95 participants, and pre- and post-workshop surveys revealed a significant shift in participants' knowledge levels.



CITIZENSHIP APPLICATION CLINIC

Throughout the year, we organized 9 citizenship clinics, providing resources, N-400 application assistance, and legal reviews to 138 participants. This effort was made possible by extensive collaboration with our community partners such as, Gwinnett County Public Library, DeKalb County Public Library, Mayor's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs, and the Eritrean American Community Association. We are proud that 46 participants completed or were included on their naturalization applications as a result, with 5 individuals qualifying for the English language exemption and receiving services in the language that they preferred.

IMPACT LITIGATION

Our Impact Litigation team combines civil rights litigation with other strategies to expand legal protections for AANHPI and other marginalized communities and to advocate against unjust, oppressive laws and policies. This year, the Impact Litigation Department undertook significant legal battles to protect and advance the rights of marginalized communities.



VOTING RIGHTS LITIGATION

We continued our fight against restrictive voting laws, particularly challenging SB 202, which disproportionately impacts minority voters. Our legal efforts included filing lawsuits, seeking injunctions, and collaborating with broader coalitions to protect the voting rights of our communities.

END ICE DETENTION IN GEORGIA

We led a joint letter from AAPI-led civil rights orgs to DHS' then-Deputy Secretary John Tien asking to cease immigration detention at the Stewart Detention center and Folkston ICE Processing Center, following from a roundtable we convened with the former Deputy Secretary and several AAPI-led civil rights organizations focused mainly on the inhumane conditions in ICE detention. Our team was also granted stakeholder tours at Stewart and Folkston and interviews with more than 100 people detained there, and the information we gathered will support advocacy, including potential litigation, to close ICE detention centers.



LANGUAGE ACCESS IN DETENTION

In spring of 2021, Advancing Justice-Atlanta's litigation department partnered with the SPLC and other groups to create a working group to engage with the federal government to improve language access in immigration detention. Since then, our working group has grown into a nationwide coalition of national and regional legal organizations. The coalition is co-led by our litigation staff attorney, Laura Murchie.

CITIZENSHIP LITIGATION AND ADVOCACY

We are continuing to litigate race and gender discrimination challenges to the Guyer Rule of former derivative citizenship law 8 USC 1432(a)(3) in *Silva v. U.S. Attorney General*. The Guyer Rule prevented US citizen fathers, but not US citizen mothers, from passing their citizenship status to their foreign-born, nonmarital children, disproportionately impacting people of color. Although that law was repealed, it remains in effect for children of US citizens who had already turned 18 when the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 (CCA) took effect, excluding thousands.



REAL STORIES. Real Impact.

JESSIE'S PATH TO CITIZENSHIP: A JOURNEY OF DETERMINATION

Jessie's story is one of resilience and hope. Originally from China, she moved to the United States seeking a better life. Obtaining her green card in 2017 was a milestone, but the dream of becoming a U.S. citizen seemed distant due to the daunting legal complexities. Jessie, with limited English proficiency, faced challenges in understanding the intricacies of the naturalization process.

Our citizenship clinics provided Jessie with the support she needed. The clinics, designed to guide participants through every step of the naturalization process, were a beacon of hope for her. Our lawyers meticulously reviewed her application, ensuring every detail was correct. This one-on-one attention and care were pivotal in Jessie successfully navigating the system.

Her naturalization in 2023 marked not just a personal victory but a triumph for her family. We extended our support to her spouse and child, assisting them in their respective citizenship journeys. Jessie's gratitude reflects the profound impact of our work: "I finished the application without any cost and worries!" Her success is a testament to our commitment to empowering immigrants in their quest for citizenship.



JT'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM: OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

JT's narrative begins in Caracas, Venezuela, where he faced severe persecution by armed paramilitary groups. His decision to flee to the United States was a desperate attempt to escape threats and violence. However, upon arrival, JT's ordeal continued as he found himself in the confines of the Folkston Detention Center, grappling with isolation and despair.

When we first encountered JT during an intake session, his situation was dire. Separated from his family and struggling with the trauma of his journey, he felt a profound sense of hopelessness. Our team's intervention was crucial in navigating the complexities of his asylum case. We advocated fiercely for JT, highlighting the injustices he faced and the dangers of his return to Venezuela.

His release and subsequent reunion with his family in Chicago were moments of immense relief and joy. JT's overwhelming gratitude towards our team was heartwarming. He shared that during his detention, he felt dehumanized, like "an animal" and "a nobody," but our visit changed that perception, restoring his sense of humanity. His story is a powerful reminder of the critical need for legal support for asylum seekers and the life-changing impact such support can have.



MARLON'S QUEST FOR SAFETY: A FIGHT AGAINST PERSECUTION

Marlon's journey from Guatemala to the United States was fraught with danger and uncertainty. Fleeing his home country as a teenager due to attacks by local cartels for being bisexual, he sought safety in the U.S. but found himself ensnared in the immigration system, detained by ICE, and facing potential deportation.

Our legal team's intervention was a turning point for Marlon. We provided him with comprehensive legal support, translating key documents and gathering over 200 pages of evidence about the perilous situation for LGBTQ+ individuals in Guatemala. His case was a race against time, with only a week remaining before a crucial hearing to determine his fate.

The dismissal of Marlon's immigration proceedings and his release from detention were not just legal victories; they represented a larger triumph for human rights and dignity. Marlon's story illustrates the plight of LGBTQ+ immigrants and the imperative for specialized legal assistance to protect them from persecution and injustice.



MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES

2023 was also a year of remarkable achievements in Civic Engagement and Organizing. We set ambitious goals to mobilize and empower underrepresented voters in Georgia, focusing on the AAPI and Latinx communities, including by working in-language (Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Spanish, with additional translations into Hindi, Urdu, and Arabic for written materials) during all cycles of elections.



VOTER REGISTRATION AND ENGAGEMENT:

Our team knocked on an impressive **95,000 doors**.

We made a staggering **686,000 calls** and sent **648,000 texts** to voters.

We achieved **818 new voter registrations**.



RURAL EXPANSION PLAN:

The launch of our pilot satellite office in Athens-Clarke County marked a major step in our Rural Expansion Plan, broadening our reach and impact.

This initiative will continue to grow in 2024, with plans to establish **7 additional satellite offices** in rural areas.



ENGAGEMENT RESULTS:

Our comprehensive Get Out the Vote (GOTV) program saw unprecedented success.

The expansion of our outreach from **10 targeted counties in 2022**, to **16 total counties in 2023** demonstrates our growing influence and the effectiveness of our strategies in engaging and mobilizing voters.

IN THE FIELD

For Municipal Elections, we conducted election protection for the first day of early voting, last day of early voting, and Election day. We had approximately two dozen people participate in poll monitoring across 16 counties. We also operated a multilingual voter hotline available throughout our entire 8-week GOTV period, and offered voting rights attorneys on Election day to help troubleshoot any legal questions.

On the first and last day of early voting we were present at 25 polling locations across 6 counties (Gwinnett, Forsyth, DeKalb, Cobb, Fulton, Clayton) with primary focus in Gwinnett county.

On Election Day, we were present at 62 polling locations across all of our six counties in anticipation of reduced polling locations and long voting lines. Across the six counties we were present in, polling location frequency was cut by approximately 50% resulting in major delays to voters.

These accomplishments in civic engagement and organizing are not just numbers; they represent real people, real stories, and a tangible impact on the democratic process. By increasing voter participation and civic involvement in historically underrepresented communities, we are contributing to a more inclusive and representative democracy.



**A LOOK
AHEAD TO**

2024



EXPANSION PLAN

In 2023, our Civic Engagement and Organizing (CEO) team set a new standard in voter mobilization, exceeding our ambitious targets for in-language voter engagement. This strategic approach played a pivotal role in driving a record-breaking turnout among the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community during Georgia's municipal elections. We intend to build on this momentum, including through our continued growth into Georgia areas witnessing a significant increase in AAPI and Latinx populations.

In 2024, the stakes are higher, and our vision is broader. We're poised to launch the full scale of our Rural Expansion Plan. This ambitious endeavor will see the establishment of eight additional satellite offices in key outer suburban and rural areas. These new hubs will serve as vital centers for voter education, registration, and mobilization, especially geared towards the upcoming elections. Our strategy is clear: To bring a robust, comprehensive, and multilingual integrated voter engagement program to communities often forgotten in rural areas and to keep up with ongoing moving trends



INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDING

Last year, we hosted our first annual 2023 Youth Conference (formerly known as Organizer Academy), an event that provides participants with the opportunity to dive into nontraditional organizing. This program seeks to gather diverse participants, unlearn oppression, learn about collective liberation, and explore their respective roles in the organizing space through art, storytelling, writing, and academia. We will work to continue this effort and scale the number of diverse participants in 2024, and continue to empower the state's next generation of civic leaders.

Led by our Policy Department, we also continued the Georgia Leadership Lab (GLL) last year. GLL is a 7-month experience that offers local immigrant rights advocates a boost to be stronger, strategic, and more impactful through storytelling and transformative leadership. Through GLL, we will continue to change the story of immigrants in Georgia and the South by bringing immigrant voices directly to lawmakers and stakeholders in 2024. Our most recent cohort of 11 leaders focused on immigrant rights and advocacy completed the program this past July, and we look forward to welcoming a new cohort in the first quarter of this year.





VOTING SZN CAMPAIGN

In 2024, we are also set to unveil an unparalleled initiative in our organization’s history – the Voting SZN Campaign. This groundbreaking statewide communications and engagement campaign marks a first for us, focusing on mobilizing and amplifying Asian voices and communities like never before. Voting SZN is more than a campaign; it’s a movement. We aim to connect with diverse communities across Georgia, reaching into the vibrant halls of high schools, the bustling campuses of colleges and universities, and beyond. Our goal is ambitious yet vital: to significantly increase the number of consistent AAPI and Latinx young voters, aged 18-35, turning them into a powerful, engaged electoral force. This campaign will employ innovative strategies and tools to ensure that every young voice is not only heard but also empowered. Voting SZN is set to transform the landscape of voter engagement, creating a wave of informed, active, and passionate young voters ready to shape their future.



VOTING SZN

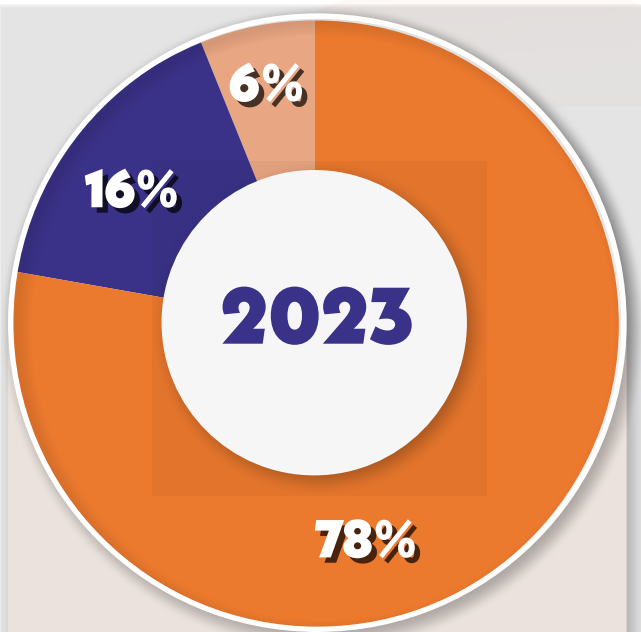
2023 DEVELOPMENT & BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Our courageous supporters help us to build a multiracial and representative democracy that fights to dismantle intersecting oppressive systems, expand immigrant education and inclusion in our electorate, and utilize community narratives to shift power.

Foundation grants and individual donor contributions are what make our work wholly possible. Bold and inspired supporters – large and small, local to national – are committed to expanding and protecting civil rights for immigrants at all levels. Through direct funding support, our funders and donors fuel our systems change work at the capital, pushing back against harmful legislation, and in the community, fighting for a more inclusive and just Georgia. Grants and donations directly support community engagement and organizing capacity building, election inclusion and protection, policy and advocacy and litigation against harmful legislation, and wide-ranging legal services for immigrants.

We are deeply grateful for our funders’ and donors’ resounding commitment and support. Structural change is realized over time, with significant and steady support behind the scenes and out in front – our funders’ and donors’ trust and generosity drive our ability to carry out both crucial elements year-round.

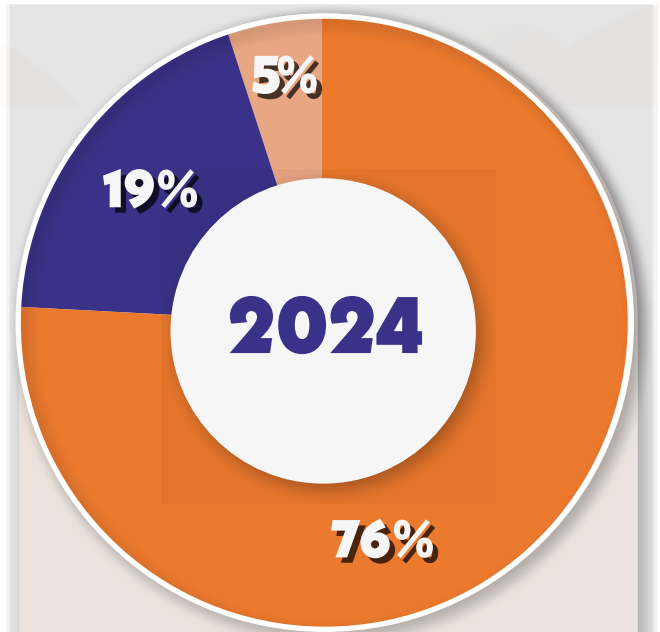
BUDGET BY THE NUMBERS



TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET:

\$7.51 Million

78% programs 16% administrative 6% fundraising



TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET:

\$8.44 Million

76% programs 19% administrative 5% fundraising



**Thank you for taking the time to connect
with our work through this report.**

If you have any interest in learning more or
engaging further, please reach out to us.

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