In 2021, Wisconsin Voices created the Summer of Civic Action regrants opportunity for organizations and “Rising Leaders” to engage and support residents in communities whose challenges have not been addressed by our democratic system.

Summer Civic Action projects strengthened connections between community residents, helped them learn about issues and increased local civic participation. Projects included engagement activities—community cleanups, a tech equity lobby day and deep canvassing—as well as education activities such as virtual community forums and podcasts. Through everyday civic action these projects educated, empowered and elevated the voices of residents in the City of Milwaukee and around the state.

Rising Leaders Partnership grants were awarded to new partners of Wisconsin Voices—individual or organizational leaders—that are using innovative strategies and growing their skill set to increase civic engagement in under-served communities.

This summer we awarded short term regrants (up to $15,000) to nine organizations and three Rising Leaders through our inaugural Rising Leaders Partnership.

**Citizen Action of Wisconsin Education Fund** developed new leaders in Milwaukee’s north side Century City neighborhoods and supported them as they worked toward addressing racial economic inequalities through a just climate transition. Citizen Action successfully advocated for $1 million in new modular homes, $2 million in energy efficiency upgrades to existing homes, and $3 million in workforce development with priority being given to Black, Indigenous and People of Color living in the central city.

**EXPO (Ex-Prisoners Organizing)** launched its “Locked Up on the Outside” Campaign to bring awareness to the issues facing individuals living with extended supervision sentences. They hosted four community forums in Milwaukee, Eau Claire, Madison, and the Fox Valley to discuss how Wisconsinites can work together to help people with conviction records thrive and build safer, stronger and healthier communities. The campaign reached more than 3,000 Wisconsinites through forum participation, social media, in-person communication, emails, texts, and phone calls.

**The Dominican Center** canvassed 3,000 homes in the Amani neighborhood to inform and engage neighbors as part of their neighborhood safety civic action project. This project increased awareness about local safety issues, resources, services, the Amani Neighborhood Revitalization Plan.

**Nadiyah Johnson, CEO and Founder of the Milky Way Tech Hub,** advocated for better representation of Black information technology professionals and entrepreneurs in the Milwaukee tech space. Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers recognized her efforts by naming October Wisconsin Tech Month. She hosted 35 Wisconsin Tech Month awareness events with 500 people participating overall. She also organized a Tech Lobby Day to help others share their stories with elected officials.
Fathers Making Progress piloted a new community initiative, the Fatherhood Mobilization Project for young fathers and their families. The project provided residents with organizing and community engagement training. The Fathers held eight neighborhood events and two community service events — a neighborhood clean-up and a back to school backpack giveaway. Through community service, these projects increased neighborhood cohesiveness and civic pride.

Metcalfe Park Community Bridges collaborated with Imagine MKE to achieve higher levels of young adult engagement through art and civic education. Youth helped to design and paint three mutual aid storage sheds with images of historic community leaders such as Ralph Metcalfe. In the process, youth participants learned about the Civil Rights Movement and how civic action can lead to systemic change.

Keeping Milwaukee residents informed about community resources and how to access them is one of New State MKE’s goals. The organization engaged young adults and creative professionals to strengthen community ties in Milwaukee’s west side neighborhoods through a mental health panel discussion. Through this project, The New State MKE distributed 175 book bags to Milwaukee Public School students and developed a coalition supportive of programming to heal and support youth.

Vaun Mayes, Founder and Activist of Program the Parks MKE and ComForce MKE, relaunched his Activist & Advocacy Podcast with new studio equipment and streaming technology this summer. He hosted eight podcasts with youth leaders from the Sherman Park Youth Initiative. Topics ranged from youth violence, stollies, the John Lewis Voting Rights Act to redistricting and the People’s Maps Commission. Vaun’s summer podcasts attracted a sizable audience that included 11,801 views, 1,200 followers and 1,827 comments.
Milwaukee Turners relaunched the Vel Phillips Forum. The forum was renamed after Vel Phillips, a Civil Rights activist, who served as the first female alderperson and judge in Milwaukee, Wisc. and as Secretary of State of WI. The forum included live community forums that focused on equity-related issues of concern for members and the larger community. Podcasts averaged a virtual attendance across all platforms of more than 550 viewers and increased to 900 over five episodes.

Progress North spread out to interview industry leaders, local elected officials and survey community members and residents in five counties in Northwest Wisconsin. Interviews asked residents how their lives are impacted by needs of a caring economy and then shared these ideas back with community leaders through ongoing advocacy efforts. Through this project, Progress North collected 719 petition signatures and participated in 12 events.

Wisconsin Public Education Network developed equity resource guides and provided a six-part training to help educators and advocates promote and protect responsible discourse around equity-related topics, including racial bias, in classrooms and communities throughout the state. This project engaged nearly 500 parents, teachers and other community members, including 191 workshop participants.

LaShondra Scott, Executive Producer of The 411 Live with Neo Soul Productions, developed and produced a series of four educational programs about the impact of redistricting and voter suppression on communities of color. Shows were hosted by veteran TV news anchor Beverly Taylor. Guests included: Chris Walton, Chairman of the Democratic Party of Milwaukee County; David Daley, author of UnRigged; Timothy P. Schindler, Co-Executive Director and Jamie Crofts, Policy Director, of Wisconsin Voices, and Barbara R. Arnwine, President & Founder of the Transformative Justice Coalition.

Wisconsin Voices envisions a Wisconsin where every person has the means, motivation, and freedom to fully participate in a just democracy that provides opportunities for all people to thrive.

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