

BSN



ANNUAL REPORT



A LETTER

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Stand Up Nashville came into 2025 recognizing the sobering duality of the moment. We held immense gratitude for the progress we made and the magnitude of our 2024 wins. All while being fully aware of the heaviness, uncertainty, and challenges being ushered in by the harmful political climate and greed-driven decisions. We strategized and strengthened how to make space for more community members to tap in, stand up, lead, and resist in their own unique ways across our base building, coalitions, policy, and public education. As we advocated for shifting power to the people, we witnessed our work being powered by the people. Supporters on the sidelines were welcomed as new volunteers, and existing volunteers became faithful base members and reliable leaders.

This report shares stories of some of the people who powered our 2025. From light bulb moments to leading events, we highlight people who are deeply committed to making a difference through our mission, and revisit moments that made us laugh, reflect, and take action across our programming and organizing efforts. We also welcomed new opportunities to show up in places where the people are. Whether they were familiar with SUN or not, we let them know that our mission includes them.

“Let this be your reminder of why you are in community with us”

Our work continued despite the dangerous and destructive executive orders and the upheaval of decency and decorum. Fear struck as funding was stripped from non-profit organizations, diversity, equity, and inclusion were blacklisted, and immigrants and citizens were violently kidnapped from Nashville neighborhoods



by ICE. Attacks on education incessantly undermine critical thinking, inclusive environments, and initiatives purposed to meet students and families where they are. Our nation's armed forces were dispatched to cities led by Black mayors in the name of political posturing. SNAP benefits were cut as the holiday season approached. Yet, we continued to demand dignity and transparency for all.

Let this be your reminder of why you are in community with us, and the impact it has on our neighbors, communities, and our future. Every strategy and mobilization effort is purposed to ensure working-class people, Black people, and communities of color are not left on mute as billionaires dance to the financial beat of Music City. Nashville can and should be a city for people at every point of the socioeconomic spectrum. And we're doing our part to make it an attainable reality.

As we embark on 2026 and beyond, I must express my appreciation to the SUN staff, our donors, volunteers, supporters, program participants, and community partners. Our impact continues to grow because of your contributions. Thank you for your investment of time, money, expertise, willingness to learn, action, and energy to make Nashville the best it can be for all who call it home — no matter how long they've lived here.

Together, we're moving forward and standing up for the everyday people who power Nashville.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. O. Kelly".

J. Odessa Kelly
Executive Director

MISSION & VISION



MISSION

To mobilize and empower our communities to stand up and take action. **Together, we will create lasting change** for the racial and economic good of all Nashvillians.

VISION

To make Nashville **an inspiring voice of the nation** and position us as the best city to live, work, and grow in — creating **a true reflection of America's diverse communities** and a model of embodied justice and equality.

TEAM



Odessa Kelly
Executive Director



**Michael "MCK"
Callahan-Kapoor**
Deputy Director



Nate Carter
Director of Workforce
& Employment



**Maryam
Abolfazil**
Organizing Director



Tereva Parham
Consultant
Communications
Director



KeVanity Brown
Operations Coordinator



**Quiteka "Tek"
Moten**
Leadership Coordinator



Cade Wooten
Organizer



Isaac Swafford
Strategic Researcher



Lindsey Harris
Administrative Advising



Imagine New
Bookkeeping



Andi Dunn
Graphic Designer



Sky Stahlmann
Content Creator



Shance Ware
Videographer



CAMPAIGNS

SHIFT NASHVILLE

In 2024, SUN worked alongside the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition and The Equity Alliance to form a coalition: SHIFT Nashville. Together, we supported the November 2024 transit referendum, which offered the people of Nashville an unprecedented opportunity to define who we are. Transit was the vehicle to drive change towards other crucial areas for community members, and the voters agreed by passing the referendum with a near two-thirds majority.

In our 2025 series, [The Axle: Propelling Nashville Forward](#), we explored the opportunities, possibilities, and potential barriers of the Choose How You Move transit plan. The 6-part series explored the SHIFT Nashville campaign pillars:

FREEDOM MOVES

We all need clean and affordable ways to get around, and a reliable transit infrastructure to secure it. From transit hubs to connecting marginalized neighborhoods, unionization for public transit workers to safer streets with fewer pedestrian deaths and injuries, to electric buses, zero-emissions, and expansion of the “zero fare” program — there’s too much to achieve for us to stall out now.

JOYFUL ABODES

Our homes should be safe and affordable for us, regardless of income level and stage of life. One way to achieve it is to use public land to build permanently affordable housing with strong tenant protections. The data proves our communities thrive when childcare, grocery stores, cultural spaces, and transit are connected. Whether renting or buying, the housing development process must center on people and communities.

EVERYONE EATS

The opportunity to create good jobs that support families, fair contracting, and investment in small businesses is available — Metro government must seize it. Community workforce training, capital and support services to help local businesses disrupt gentrification, and ending the sales tax on groceries are all ways to contribute to a serious reduction in poverty, crime, and stress while addressing the affordability crisis.

STRONG NASHVILLE

Climate change is real, and so is the need for our city to protect residents and help them bounce back after extreme weather events. Infrastructure investments are essential for improving community health, energy efficiency, and climate resilience. We need proactive tools and resources, including community trainings, emergency teams, and community resource centers that will serve as emergency shelters.

WE DECIDE

Too many decisions are made in secrecy away from the public, but hand in hand with state overreach, special interest groups, and greedy developers. United, we can create simple funding processes that uplift transparency, host more public forums and town halls for community input, and fight against state interference laws that strip our decision-making power. Local government has the power to do what is best for residents — and we won’t let them forget.

The Axle presented the possibilities of Choose How You Move beyond reducing traffic and adding bus routes. Residents received the facts and broader perspectives. Readers buckled into the reality that Nashville can be livable for working-class and low-income residents.

CAMPAIGNS



SOCIAL HOUSING

Affordable housing. Attainable housing. Social housing.

Affordable housing is housing that costs no more than 30% of a household's gross income. Specifically, for households earning less than or equal to 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI), the standard is that housing costs, including utilities, are no more than 30% of their annual income.

Attainable housing is housing that fits middle-income households that are more affordable than market-rate homes, but are not subsidized by the government.

Social housing is housing that is publicly or community-owned and not subject to the profit-seeking pressures of the speculative housing market. It remains affordable for generations and engages in a concept known as "mixity", which involves a mix of people from diverse income levels, races, ethnicities, and communities.

Regardless of what you call it, we want housing that we — and our neighbors can access and afford based on our income! Nashville's leaders have too often had solutions that were too slow, too marginal, and too little. That's why it's time for social housing, a model sweeping the country that proposes the radical idea that housing's purpose should be to actually house people, not make the uber wealthy, wealthier.



CHOOSE HOW YOU MOVE

BEEP! BEEP! DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THESE GREEN LIGHTS FOR TRANSIT?

- WeGo has more frequent, reliable service running, including expanded routes and weekend service for riders with disabilities.
- CHYM implemented an Advisory Committee on Transportation to help guide decisions and spread the word.

PUBLIC FUNDS FOR PUBLIC TRANSIT.

- The half-cent sales tax that started in February is already funding improvements.
- A \$59 million budget was approved in March to start 11 foundational CHYM transportation projects.
- An additional \$104 million in capital spending rolled out to fund even more CHYM projects across Davidson County.

CAMPAIGNS



SOCIAL HOUSING (cont.)

Policies for the social housing model have passed in Atlanta, Georgia, Montgomery County, Maryland, San Francisco, California, and Seattle, Washington. *Nashville can and should be next.* Our work in this area helped secure social housing's place in Metro's Unified Housing Strategy, which will influence the city's housing priorities for the next 10 years. This is a crucial step in holding our local government accountable to alternative, community-controlled housing models.

During budget season, we advocated for \$50 million in municipal bonds to fund the Housing Production Fund. Members of our base spoke up during public comments and met individually with council members. Through this, we discovered three councilmembers were interested in working on demonstration projects — community-led projects that show proof of concept — on public land in their districts, which had been marked in the Unified Housing Strategy as potential parcels.

Kudos to The Nashville People's Budget, another community organization that simultaneously pushed for \$100K for a social housing study and received it! Joining forces, we worked in a coalition to send a letter to Mayor Freddie O'Connell with our requests for what to include in the study.

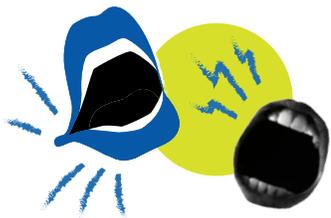
Our Housing for People NOT Profit event explained social housing to excited community members, and those who are hesitant about what to make of housing solutions. The robust discussion and full room were prime indicators that this is an important topic and we're headed in the right direction.

FLASHBACK TO 2024:

PowerSwitch Action invited SUN staff on its trip to Vienna, Austria, and Berlin, Germany.

Travelers joined 30+ housing organizers and elected leaders from the U.S. to explore and experience social housing in other countries. There are numerous ways that countries engage in social housing; the key is that it can be done well.





ORGANIZING

POWER TO THE PEOPLE & POWERED BY THE PEOPLE

Thanks to the incredible mobilization of our organizing team, our base grew from 779 people to 1,340 people — **that's almost a 90% increase!** Their determination raised attendance and engagement for our Monthly Meetings, trainings, and community events.

We represented at The Equity Alliance's Black on Buchanan: A Juneteenth Celebration, and participated in our first Nashville Pride Parade and Festival by walking in the parade and tabling at the festival while wearing special edition SUN Pride shirts. These two summer events connected us with over 200 people who expressed their personal challenges with living in Nashville and trying to make ends meet. Team members also tabled at the Tell A Friend Adult Field Day.



ORGANIZING (cont.)

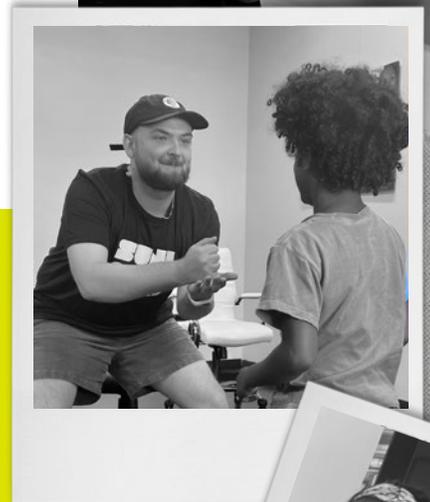
MONTHLY MEETINGS

Levelling up, we implemented Monthly Meetings as a structured program this year. The consistent gatherings welcomed base members and people from the broader community to learn about and engage with us.

Our popular education games were a huge hit! We received plenty of positive feedback that confirmed they were great tools for educating participants on issues like social housing, transportation, and the budget, while helping them cultivate civic acumen. Plus, they were a lot of fun.

VIRTUAL STORYTELLER TRAININGS

We hosted a series of Wednesday night virtual trainings to teach our base members how to advocate for their communities at public meetings during public comment periods, and in direct conversation with council members. Held from March to May, the 90-minute sessions covered how to make public comment, Metro Council positions and procedures, how to speak one-on-one with a lawmaker, how to be an effective storyteller and make a lasting impact, and Nashville's protest history. **The successful series had 80 participants** who put their skills to use at the Public Lands campaign event and during the Housing For People NOT Profit event. This led to the launch of our SUNshine Squad, a group of Nashvillians serious about holding public decision makers accountable.



SUNSHINE SQUAD

The SUNshine Squad is a network of base members who build their civic muscles and develop leadership skills. **We have 33 active members** who track and attend important Metro Council, Boards, and Commissions meetings, speak at public hearings, and lean into areas of responsibility.

- **More than 20 SUNshine Squad members gave public comments at Metro Council meetings, including 10 at the budget hearing.**
- **5 SUNshine Squad members held individual meetings with their council members during budget season, in addition to SUN staff hosting 23 meetings.**
- **4 SUNshine Squad members facilitated groups or volunteered in other ways at the Housing for People NOT Profit event.**

PEOPLE



SHANI GLAPION

SUNshine Squad member Shani Glapion was new to learning about the city's budget process, but that didn't stop her from using what she'd recently learned from SUN to speak up during the budget public comment period. Later, when competing in a popular education game at a Monthly Meeting, she knew all of the answers because she'd actively attended the Metro Council meeting. She shines whenever she's around, and we can always count on her critical thinking for valuable analysis and inquiry.



TAYLOR JOHN

Taylor John's determination, positive attitude, and endless enthusiasm are sure to make Nashville a better city. Her SUN journey began with a desire to get more involved in civic life. She first attended our Storytelling for Public Comment, later joined the SUNshine Squad, and has spoken up during public comment at Metro Council meetings. Along the way, she organized her first meeting with her council member and facilitated a working group during the Housing for People NOT Profit event. From almost zero civic involvement to leading and speaking at many events, Taylor has had a major year with SUN.

MAKIA MILLER

Makia Miller is a very committed and consistent member of our base. We appreciate her speech before Metro Council in favor of SHIFT Nashville, "My name is Makia Miller, and I'm involved with the SHIFT Nashville Coalition because the work we're doing aligns with the vision and change I want and expect to see happen in Nashville. Being a native, I'm passionate about my community and city. I'm done sitting back and complaining, yet doing little to nothing. I'm using this platform to raise my voice and advocate for public land being used for permanently affordable, accessible housing, and permanent pay wages that reflect the economic climate we live in. Using the public land we have here for the public good is imperative so that we can ensure working-class people and families are able to live in comfortable abundance in the neighborhoods we call home."



PEOPLE



JOSE VILLEDA

Jose Villeda has grown a lot since connecting with SUN. He jumped into the Wednesday night training sessions, developed his storytelling skills, joined the SUNshine Squad, and participated in the Metro budget public comment period.

In his words, "Living in Antioch, I've noticed that housing is a huge challenge, especially for working-class people who make this city run. SUN is an organization that looks out for everyone in the city by emphasizing communities like mine. I've gotten to learn a lot about affordable housing through SUN and participating in council meetings."



RITA ROBINSON

Rita Robinson's superpowers are her authenticity and the light she effortlessly carries. We look forward to listening to her personal stories because she uniquely weaves them into the valuable work we do.

LASHANDA HUMPHREY

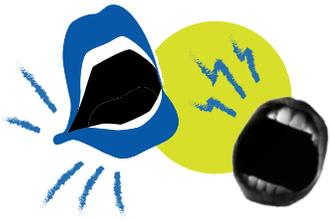
LaShanda Humphrey was an active volunteer who accepted the challenge to use her voice, presence, and power for more with SUN. This year opened the door for her to lean into her leadership identity. She started with our Wednesday night storytelling and public comment trainings to develop her personal story. Next, she joined the SUNshine Squad to put what she'd learned through the storytelling trainings into action. Always present with her warm smile, she has spoken up for Eviction Right to Counsel as part of our five budget asks at the budget public hearing for the budget, and attended the Community Advisory Committee meeting of the Community Benefits Agreement with Nashville Soccer Holdings. Finishing the year on a high note, she completed 44 hours of coursework, attended sessions, and graduated as part of the BCLI 2025 cohort.



SKY STAHLMANN

SUNshine Squad member Sky Stahlmann boldly spoke during the budget season public comment period. Later in the year, she graduated from the BCLI 2025 cohort. Although nicknamed "the baby of the cohort" due to her age, she often shared insightful words and fresh perspectives. We appreciate her passion for SUN and quick skills in capturing BCLI footage.





RESEARCH

DIGGING INTO THE DATA

We formed a Community Research Team to provide leaders in our member base the opportunity to research topics and information to support our campaigns and programs. Maggie House and Courtney Stetler are all-around amazing researchers whose valuable contributions have truly fueled SUN's progress.



PEOPLE

Maggie House was instrumental in creating a database of affordable housing developments in the city and designing a map of public land parcels that were included in Metro's Unified Housing Strategy. The research data will be used in SUN's efforts to challenge neighborhoods to envision better housing options. **Maggie's contributions are essential** to the foundation of future policy and safe, affordable homes in Nashville.



Courtney Stetler played a significant role in compiling research on transit center plans for Choose How You Move and **gathering an unbelievable amount of Metro planning documents**. Because of her involvement, we've charted the road ahead for our SHIFT Nashville campaign.

WORKFORCE

**GOOD PEOPLE.
GOOD JOBS. BETTER CITY.**

From large corporations to small businesses, to non-profit organizations and entrepreneurs, and from Ph.Ds to HVAC certificates — a thriving workforce should have high-quality, safe jobs for everyone. That's why we partner and advocate for workers to be seen, heard, trained, and well-compensated. As a result, they're able to secure good jobs, build a life they can be proud of, and contribute to our neighborhoods and communities in meaningful ways.

SUN's First Source Hiring Program partnered with the Nashville Soccer Club on 15 job fairs for direct hiring of security, guest experience, and housekeeping positions. Across 2025, our hiring events, networking opportunities, and community engagement demonstrated that workforce development investments are a win-win. We're proud to have helped recruit 400 applications for two Music City Construction Careers program cohorts and engage more than 2,000 individuals.

In addition to the metrics, the stories of impact are amazing. The heartfelt testimonies from people who've experienced our mission through First Source Hiring and Music City Construction Careers are rewards alone.



WORKFORCE

GOOD PEOPLE.
GOOD JOBS. BETTER CITY

PEOPLE



MARIO MCKISSACK

Mario McKissack was searching for a serious career change when he learned about Stand Up Nashville. Our commitment to connecting people with genuine job opportunities captured his attention. He started with the three-week Music City Construction Careers program and kept going until eventually landing a job with a union electrical company. Now Mario has solid work, good money, and real stability. He applauds SUN's work and knows firsthand that it's the real deal. He shared with a smile, "This job is the one. I'm retiring from here."

BRITTANY MURRAY

Brittany Murray was beyond tired of scraping by on minimum wage and working two or three jobs at a time. Desiring more for herself and motivated to show her children that hard work and determination will lead to a better life, she worked with SUN to secure a career. When asked if she would drive a public transportation bus for WeGo, she answered without hesitation, "I will." Since completing the transit company's bus driver training program, she has been navigating the bustling streets of Nashville as a WeGo bus driver. No longer juggling multiple jobs, Brittany is earning a livable wage, providing for her family, and demonstrating the power of perseverance and community partnerships.



PHILLIP WHITAKER

Phillip Whitaker is living the change. After witnessing a friend's life transform for the better as a result of Music City Construction Careers, he decided to bet on himself — and SUN. Once he honed the necessary skillset, he was connected with the Bricklayers Union. He appreciates the steady work, less stress, and the freedom to look forward and build a better future.

LEADERSHIP

LEARNING IN
AND LEVELING UP



We welcomed Quiteka “Teka” Moten as Leadership Coordinator to direct the build-out of our leadership programs and pattern our holistic approach. Most notably, she dynamically led the Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute 2025 cohort.

“[We are] moving participants beyond mere attendance...”

Teka described the cohort members' intensive BCLI journey as “moving participants beyond mere attendance and into the foundational inner work and systemic knowledge necessary to be effective leaders.” Adding, “graduating Fellows emerged renovated, equipped with the skills, tools, and networking abilities required to transition from critique into civic creation.”



BCLI will host two cohorts in 2026.

Interested in BCLI in 2026? Add your name to the interest list.



PEOPLE

Among this year's 12 rising community changemakers and advocates are Rico Howard and Manaen Hall. They exemplify the spirit of civic leadership by translating professional and personal passion into consistent, impactful civic action.



RICO HOWARD

Rico Howard embodies dedication by helping people achieve homeownership, and his compassion and sincerity don't stop there. He consistently arrived early to BCLI 2025 sessions and assisted with setup. Known to his cohort as "Reliable Rico," his valued leadership is already making an impact. He actively participates in numerous Metro Nashville board meetings and SUNshine Squad activities, serving as a proactive ambassador who validates the program's real-world application.



MANAEN HALL

Manaen Hall is all in when it comes to his support of Stand Up Nashville and making Nashville better for everyone. The longtime member of the SUNshine Shine Squad is well-informed about local politics and is a respected thought partner. He brings an awe-inspiring level of expertise when heavily advocating for renters facing affordable housing challenges. Manaen's deep knowledge of planning and zoning contributed to robust BCLI discussions by providing credible, specialized content and turning theoretical training into highly informed community advocacy.





DONATE TO

SUN

Our mission is direct and our vision is clear. This is evidenced by the embodiment of our message and methods by our volunteers, supporters, member base, program participants, and donors. People are powering our work, as we **shift power back to the People.**

We invite you to get involved, take action, and stand up with us. From recurring double-digit monthly donations to million-dollar grants, **we need your honest investments to seed this necessary work.** The programmatic updates and personal accounts tell the story that SUN is on the right side of the fight for economic stability and advancement for working-class people, Black people, and communities of color in Nashville. We can't do it alone, and we don't want to.

Please donate today.



Stand with
Stand Up Nashville

MEDIA HITS

January 2, 2025 | WPLN | By Cynthia Abrams

Nearly two years in, early skeptics help steer East Bank and stadium projects forward

Mar 8, 2025 | Axios | By Delano Massey

Tennessee again targeted for voter suppression, local leaders warn

March 25, 2025 | WPLN | By Cynthia Abrams

As West Tennessee community pressures Ford for promises, lawmakers curb 'community benefits agreements'

May 13, 2025 | News Channel 5 | By Ben Hall

What is considered 'affordable' housing in Nashville? Advocates blast 'ridiculous' federal formula

June 4, 2025 | Nashville Banner | By Stephen Elliott

Nashville Residents, Organizations Press Metro Council for Budget Changes
Housing, employee pay, youth safety top of mind at annual public hearing

June 6, 2025 | Nashville Banner | By Stephen Elliott

Metro Councilmembers Pitch 'Wish List' Items for Nashville Budget
Representatives discuss tax rate, employee pay as spending debate continues

June 6, 2025 | WPLN | By Cynthia Abrams

Affordable housing, employee pay and youth safety:
Nashvillians push to be included in a revised city budget

June 16, 2025 | WPLN | By Cynthia Abrams

Checking in on 'community benefits agreements' in
Tennessee — and the new law curbing them

