

WORKERS  
CONFLUENCE

# 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

[www.workersconfluence.org](http://www.workersconfluence.org)

Building a more inclusive, more powerful movement for worker justice



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# Letter from Executive Committee

**When future historians tell the story of 2024, struggle and division will characterize much of what is remembered.** The rightward lurch of our national government points to difficult days ahead for workers, immigrants, people of color, and so many others. But we at Workers Confluence also have much to look back on with pride, and the progress we have made in strengthening Minnesota's worker justice ecosystem is already facilitating a more powerful, more unified response to the rising threats our communities are facing.

This report tells the story of partnerships forged and strengthened, and of resources developed and rapidly deployed. It tells the story of challenges overcome through collaboration, solidarity, and constituent leadership. And it shines a light on the often-invisible connective tissue, the relationships and infrastructure, that characterize a strong movement ecosystem that can withstand changes in the political climate.

While our communities face tremendous uncertainty in the days and years to come, some things remain clear. Workers Confluence remains committed to advancing racial and economic justice. This commitment is rooted in the understanding that investing in organizing BIPOC workers is both morally right and strategically necessary to building a stronger labor movement and an economy that works for everyone. We are also more clear than ever on the importance of proactive campaigning – of more organizers connecting with more workers in more sectors and workplaces, more bold attempts to win positive changes for all workers, even when the path to victory is not completely certain. This is how we build worker power, bring more people into our movement, and develop the muscles of solidarity and resistance needed to reclaim our country from the oligarchs and their enablers.

**With this in mind, we will meet the challenges to come with courage and optimism.**



# Confluence Highlights

## \$395,000 in Grant Funds Distributed.

In 2024, we continued to prioritize general operations grants of \$50,000 to \$75,000 to 501c3 nonprofits in committed partnerships with labor unions while also budgeting for smaller catalyst grants to support emerging labor/community partnerships (list of funded partnerships in appendix).

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## A Deeper Bench of Consultant Support.

We continued to prioritize support beyond the grant dollars by adding more trusted consultants and more support offerings to the menu available to Confluence grantees and labor partners. Newly engaged consultants: Jasmine Graves (organizing skills and campaign strategy) and Gillian Hornberger (strategist specializing in the intersection of labor and environmental issues). We also increased our engagement of comprehensive campaigns and strategic research consultant Kyle Shafer, whose support has been critical to the success of the ROC/Unite Here partnership, in order to make Kyle's expertise available to our other partnerships.



## \$10,000 First Money In: Immigrant Worker Legal Defense Fund.

Workers Confluence gave a catalyst grant toward the launch of Unidos MN's Immigrant Worker Legal Defense Fund. As the political climate has become more threatening to immigrants as well as to workers standing up for their rights, support for immigrant workers who are at risk due to organizing in their workplaces is needed more than ever. This fund is housed at Unidos MN but is an ecosystem-wide resource; any union or worker center can refer a worker for assistance with legal fees they are facing as a result of being targeted due to their immigration status and/or organizing activities. Urgency of need and strategic impact of the case are both considered in determining distribution of funds.

# Confluence Highlights

## **New Funding Partner: Headwaters Foundation for Justice.**

Headwaters Foundation for Justice has been a valued thought partner since the earliest days of what has become Workers Confluence Fund, and in 2024 they also became a funding partner, committing \$40,000 over two years toward growing our organizational capacity. We are particularly honored that Headwaters, a community foundation which aggregates many small and medium donations to make its grants, has entrusted this funding to Workers Confluence as a means of forwarding the Headwaters mission to "amplify the power of community to advance equity and justice."

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## **Clearer, More Focused Grantmaking Guidelines.**

Through a series of conversations with grantees, labor partners, and other stakeholders in our worker justice ecosystem, we established 5 priorities for our grantmaking: cohort approach, fills a critical gap, rigor in basebuilding, consistent communication, and alignment between grantee and labor partner (complete guidelines in appendix).

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## **Keeping Racial Justice Centered.**

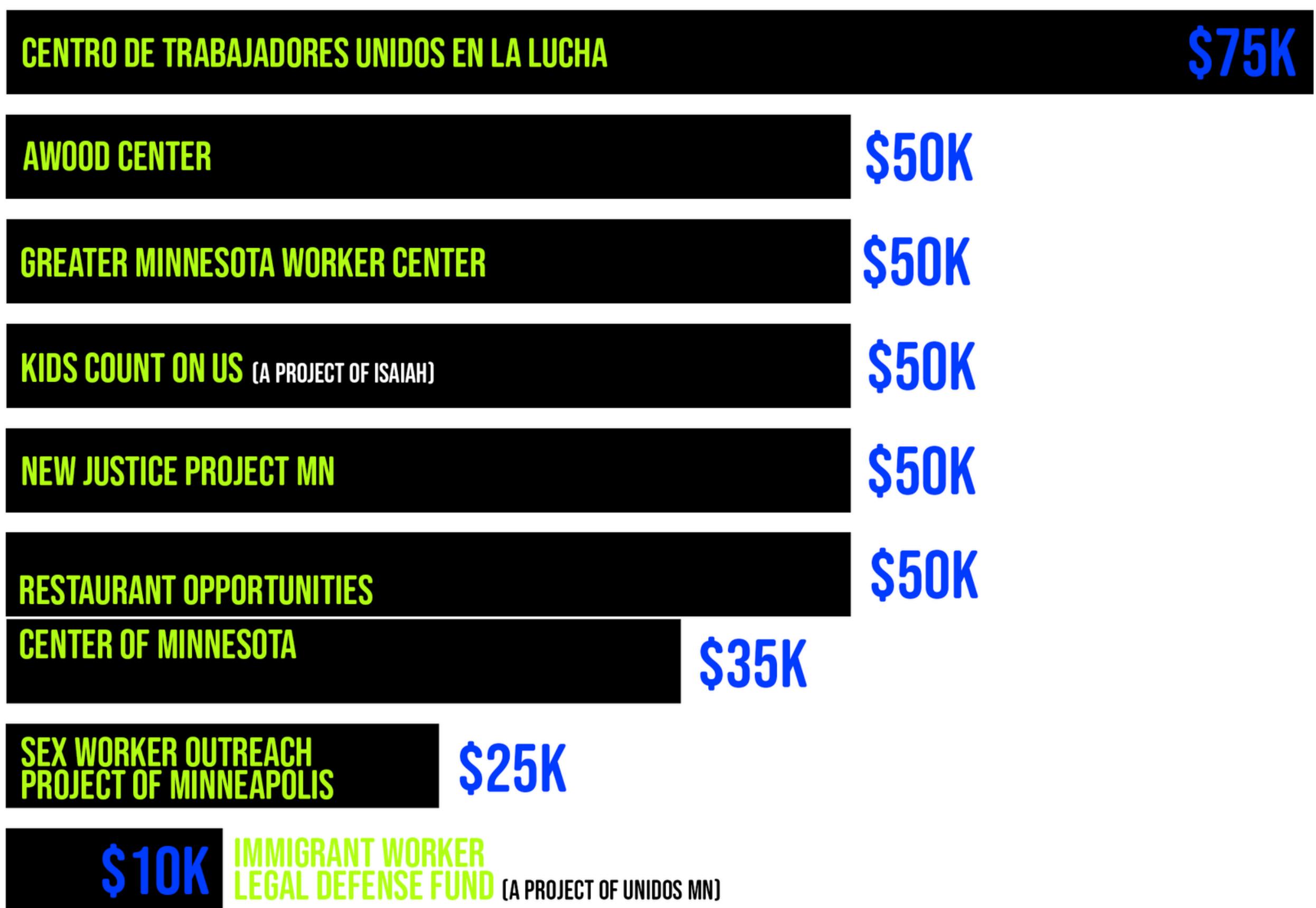
Through seeding support for a new multi-union Black Labor Table, through staging the inspiring and agitational United We Rise event (see Events section) and through a series of in-depth stakeholder discussions which produced a set of shared racial justice principles to guide our work (see Appendix), Workers Confluence has continued to create spaces for discussion, connection, and action to advance racial justice.

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## **New Grantee: Greater Minnesota Worker Center.**

GMWC has been sharing Know Your Rights information and developing worker leadership since 2013, focusing on the large community of East African immigrant workers in the meatpacking plants in the St. Cloud area. Through Confluence support, they are partnering with SEIU Local 284, the union for school support workers in St. Cloud, around the intersecting interests of workers who are also parents of public school students.

# Grants Distributed



# Technical Assistance Highlights

Workers Confluence takes a hands-on, highly customized approach to technical assistance that is made possible through the relationships our team has built with our grantees and labor stakeholders. Confluence is viewed as a trusted resource, facilitating a rare level of candor from grantees.

This positions us to craft effective interventions when the challenges often faced by grassroots organizations threaten to derail a funded project.

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## **Organizational Crisis Response.**

When their national parent org, ROC United, suddenly became insolvent. ROC MN Executive Director, Sheli Stein, turned immediately to Confluence for support. Non-urgent projects were shifted to the back burner as both Confluence staff met daily to strategize with Sheli, facilitated Take Action MN becoming ROC MN's fiscal host, and bundled \$35,000 in donations from labor to help ROC MN get on its feet as an independent organization.

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## **Strategy and leadership coaching during transition.**

When leadership transitions, community violence, and other challenges threatened New Justice Project's stability and effectiveness, Confluence partnered with Tending the Soil to support NJP on a comprehensive review of its programs, capacity, and commitments. The outcome: a clarifying of NJP's core commitments, a plan to grow capacity in key areas, and connecting NJP's leadership with ongoing executive coaching resources.

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## **Strategy and leadership coaching during transition.**

After Sex Worker Outreach Project of Minneapolis' partnership with Unite Here Local 17 ended, due in large part to structural issues of industry and independent contractor status, Confluence proactively engaged two national strategists to dig in with SWOP leadership on how to further organize with this highly marginalized group of workers. The outcome: SWOP's 2025 Confluence funding will be to partner with the National Employment Law Project to explore innovative power-building strategies for strippers that are aligned with the mainstream labor movement and lay the groundwork for potential joint campaigns in the future.

# Creating spaces that strengthen the ecosystem

In addition to resourcing union/community partnerships through grants and technical assistance, Workers Confluence is committed to nurturing an inclusive, deeply connected ecosystem of worker justice organizations in Minnesota.

**In 2024, we staged 8 events, bringing together unions, worker centers, and other community organizations, local and state policymakers, and national experts.**

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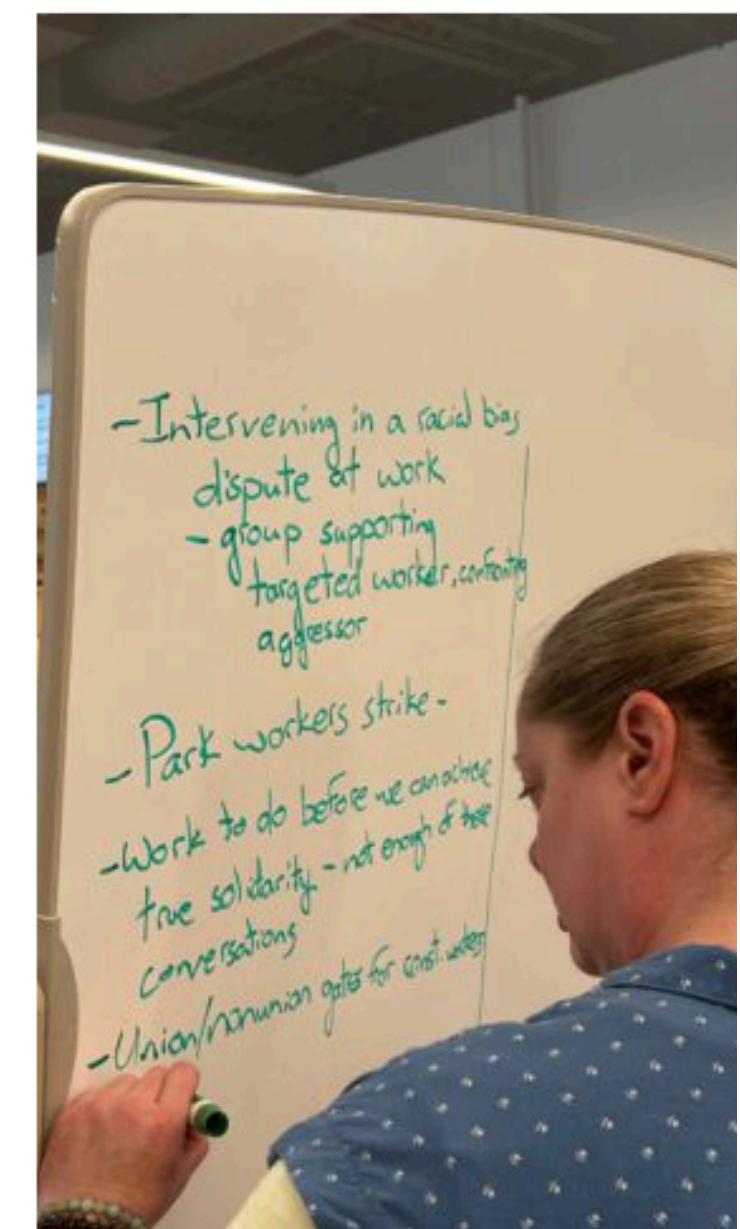
# Highlighted Events

## 9/28 | United We Rise. Divided We Fall. It Is Always Our Choice!

### **70+ attendees from 14 labor and community organizations**

Confluence partnered with the [Minnesota AFL-CIO](#) and their Racial and Economic Justice Committee to host labor history educator [Mark McDermott](#) for this exploration of the labor movement's checkered past and hopeful future with regard to racial equity.

Mark's message, which he backs up with many historical examples, is this: the labor movement has been at its most powerful when we prioritize inclusivity and cross-racial solidarity – and we are weakest when we accept the us-vs-them mindset the bosses use to divide workers based on race. For the final portion of the event, participants split into groups to make plans for how to apply what they'd learned to their campaigns and institutions. A follow up event in January 2025 continued the conversation.



# Highlighted Events

## 12/2 | Post Election Legal Briefing

### **20+ attendees from 10+ labor and community organizations**

The results of November's election raised many questions for Confluence grantees and their labor partners, some of whom were targeted with politically motivated Department of Labor inquiries during the first Trump administration.

To begin to address these questions, Confluence hosted this Zoom meeting featuring labor attorney Brendan Cummins, who specializes in supporting union/worker center partnerships. Merle Payne, co-director of CTUL, also spoke about leading the organization through a weaponized DOL inquiry in 2017. Cummins and Payne both emphasized that these inquiries are used to intimidate and drain resources from worker justice campaigns, and both urged the attendees to be clear and disciplined in their campaign communications to avoid providing openings for malicious misinterpretation.

## Other Events

**4/9** Listening Session with labor journalist Hamilton Nolan to reflect on the recent Week of Action

**6/20** Labor Reception: short program and facilitated networking for Confluence stakeholders and other union staff and activists

**7/16** Movement Fundraisers Coffee meetups: informal information sharing and peer coaching.

**9/25** Policy Strategy Session on intersections of worker justice and housing justice

**10/11** MCN Conference Panel: Power-Building Alignments. Presented with Tending the Soil, Unidos MN, CTUL, and Inquilinxs Unidxs.

**10/15** Movement Fundraisers Coffee meetups: informal information sharing and peer coaching.

**10/15** Post Election Fundraising Landscape Assessment

# Ecosystem Highlights

Confluence-supported organizations and partnerships built and exercised worker power in many groundbreaking ways in 2024. While these victories belong to the workers and organizers who made them possible, we are proud to have provided support for this work and excited to facilitate others in our ecosystem learning from these victories.

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## **Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha (CTUL)**

Supported non-union construction workers in recovering more than \$1 million in stolen wages in 2024. In 2024, CTUL and its labor partners also celebrated the first two developers, Hope Community and Alliance Housing, signing onto the Building Dignity and Respect Program. While both are relatively small nonprofit developers, their participation is valuable proof of concept for this worker-driven standard-setting and monitoring approach to raising labor standards. This has helped to bring two for-profit developers to the table in 2025 to seriously discuss joining BDR.

## **Restaurant Opportunities Center of Minnesota + Unite Here Local 17**

In the closing days of 2023, management at First Avenue Productions agreed to recognize the workers' petition to unionize. 2024 brought months of contract negotiations and a new phase in the partnership that laid the groundwork for this victory: Restaurant Opportunities Center of Minnesota and Unite Here Local 17. These partners have been applying the lessons learned through the First Avenue campaign, and mobilizing the workers who played leading roles in that campaign, to begin organizing more restaurants and venues in downtown Minneapolis and beyond. And in February 2025, after 13 months of negotiating, the 200+ workers across the seven entertainment venues owned by First Avenue Productions ratified their first union contract. This is the first ground-up unionization victory in the hospitality industry in decades and has organizers around the country rethinking what is possible.

# Ecosystem Highlights



## Kids Count on Us (a project of ISAIAH MN)

Kids Count on Us continued to bring its members' voices powerfully into public policy spaces in 2024. This includes informing the priorities and operational processes being established for the new Department of Children and Family Services they led the fight to create in 2023, and also an urgent campaign pushing back on proposed rule changes at the Department of Health and Human Services. The proposed rules would have severely disadvantaged small providers, in particular the immigrant providers offering culturally-specific childcare who make up a large portion of KCOU's base. By mobilizing their members across the state to speak on the harm that would be caused by applying rules tailored to large institutional settings to small, community-based providers, KCOU was able to stop adoption of the proposed rules and engage with HHS on a new rulemaking process grounded in the input of childcare center owners and teachers.

# Ecosystem Highlights

## Broad coalition of unions and community groups in Minneapolis and Saint Paul

In March 2024, a coalition of Twin Cities unions, worker centers, and community groups came together around the slogan What Could We Win Together? to stage a week of coordinated strikes, marches, and other events around shared demands for dignified work, good schools, fair housing, and a livable planet. Several Confluence stakeholders took part, notably CTUL, SEIU Local 26, SWOP, NJP, and LIUNA. CTUL's newly-formed Women in Construction committee led a powerful march and rally at Solholm properties to address the abuses of immigrant women in construction by Twin Cities developers and contractors . Several participating groups won significant related victories, all told millions of dollars of additional money in workers pockets, during the Week of Action or in the days immediately before. Critically, any relationships were formed or deepened between staff and membership of this diverse slice of power-building organizations. The table that formed to plan and execute the Week of Action has continued to meet in order to coordinate responses to 2025's unprecedented challenges. See: [Minnesota's Week of Action is a Bold Experiment in Social Movement Unionism](#) (In These Times 3/4/24).



# Appendix A - Grantmaking

## Guidelines

In order to effectively steward Confluence's resources and advance racial and economic equity, we the Workers Confluence steering committee do hereby adopt the following criteria to weigh in grantmaking decisions:

1. **Cohort approach.** From the beginning we have aimed to provide long-term funding to an interconnected group of grantees, in recognition that these relationships and campaigns take time to develop and bear fruit. We continue to see deep value in ongoing funding for the folks we have been building with since we started.
2. **Fills a critical gap.** The funded project should be explicitly designed to reach workers who are at the margins of the economy – due to race, gender, sector of employment, immigration status, or other factors – and bring them into the labor/worker justice movement.
3. **Rigor in basebuilding.** Confluence is focused on funding worker organizing. This means recruiting new workers, developing them, and keeping them engaged as a primary tool for making change. Policy advocacy without basebuilding and direct action-style campaigning does not fit our model.
4. **Consistent communication.** It can look many different ways, but regular, robust communication between partners is a key indicator of a healthy partnership. Active engagement with Confluence staff and with the broader ecosystem of Minnesota worker justice organizations will also be considered.
5. **Alignment between grantee and labor partner.** This could mean a fully integrated joint campaign, or a looser alignment in which the partners operate more independently but have a shared analysis of the sector. A union is the gold standard, but where winning a union is not currently feasible, the grantee's strategy should not be at odds with the future possibility of workers unionizing.

# Appendix B: Racial Justice Shared Principles

*We are building a multi-racial powerhouse to change the landscape for all workers.*

Workers Confluence supports strategic partnerships between unions and community organizations, including worker centers. We also engage with a broader set of stakeholders through meetings and events aimed at strengthening Minnesota's worker justice ecosystem.

This often means that participants are connecting across differences in race, ethnicity, and immigration status. Many represent organizations that have their own language, analysis, and priorities around racial justice. We use the following principles as a guide to moving through whatever tensions arise in ways that are respectful and generative.

In Workers Confluence spaces, advancing racial justice means:

- Understanding the intersections of race and the economy. We can't have racial justice without economic justice. We need truly equal opportunities for Black workers and other workers of color to earn family-sustaining wages, and we need a bigger slice of the pie for working people as a whole. Otherwise we're left fighting over crumbs.
- Realizing that racism weakens and limits our movement. Supporting Black and Brown workers organizing is not an add-on or a side project. It is necessary and central to building a more powerful labor movement.
- Centering others' humanity. We value learning each others' stories, and using each other's preferred language around race and other aspects of identity. I support you in succeeding on your terms, not just on mine.
- Acknowledging past and ongoing harms. Unions have a mixed track record when it comes to racial equity and inclusion of workers of color. We make space to sit with these uncomfortable truths, knowing that this is a necessary part of moving forward together effectively.

# Appendix B: Racial Justice Shared Principles

- Acknowledging past and ongoing harms. Unions have a mixed track record when it comes to racial equity and inclusion of workers of color. We make space to sit with these uncomfortable truths, knowing that this is a necessary part of moving forward together effectively.
- Striving to deepen partnerships and avoid transactional or tokenizing relationships. Confluence strives to nurture partnerships past platitudes and into the space of real change.
- Balancing rigor with flexibility. We can have high standards for our work together and also recognize that we are all learning as we go. When someone falls short, canceling isn't the answer; the point is to build together.
- Remaining open to feedback and continual improvement in how we carry out this work. Unlearning and dismantling white supremacy is an ongoing process, not a goal we will achieve and move on from.

Recognizing that we must move on many fronts simultaneously. What we achieve together in Workers Confluence spaces must not stay limited to these spaces. Instead, it should be a catalyst and motivator for the further work we each undertake to address racism at the individual, community, and institutional levels.



# Looking Forward

As we step into 2025, Workers Confluence stands ready to build on the foundation we've strengthened together. **The challenges before us are great, but so is the power we've built together.** We will deepen our commitment to racial and economic justice, strengthen the ties between unions and community organizations, and invest boldly in the organizers and campaigns shaping Minnesota's future.

With a deeper bench of partners, clearer grantmaking priorities, and renewed commitments to racial and economic justice, we are positioned not just to respond to the challenges ahead—but to define what comes next for worker power in our state.

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