



Historical Chronology

From Their Roots You Will Know Them

40 Years of Powerful Organizing

1984-2024

Prelude: The Context for Creation of Citizen Action

1971: PROGRESSIVE FUNDRAISING CANVASSING Invented

- Produces large memberships available to influence elections & legislation
- Funds Organizing Groups

1978: (National) CITIZEN/LABOR ENERGY COALITION FOUNDED.

- Developing large-scale Progressive Fundraising Canvasses
- Builds labor/community coalition in Wisconsin and other states.
- Limited by narrow issues focus: energy costs and union jobs.

1978-9 Response to Rising Conservative Backlash Politics

- Progressive Groups Still Splintered by Crack up of Left in late 1960s-early 1970s.
- Remedy Led by Heather Booth and other Foundational leaders grounded in labor organizing theory of Andre Gorz (modernized)
<https://jacobin.com/2023/07/andre-gorz-great-resignation-post-work-socialism-farewell-to-the-working-class>
 - Actually improve people's lives with immediate advances
 - Winning these improvements through direct action, organized people
 - Raising vision, not seeking mere reform but structural transformation, shifts in power from economic and political elite to organized people, democratic control.
 - Midwest Academy, founded by Heather Booth (1973), a strategic planning center training organizers in this framework and in basic skill. On organizing, social/historical context, strategy, training the people who would recreate community organizing in the Citizen Action model.

- Part of the drive was to heal the rift between labor and social movements, after trial and error, finding a pathway in rising energy prices and jobs in energy sector. Issue cut as both consumer, environmental and labor.
- Leading organizers are determined to build a national group with independent state affiliates which can contest for power.
- Brings together seasoned organizers in progressive movements of the era. Most of the main organizers behind it came out of the New Left movements of the 1960s.
 - Community organizing
 - Anti-war
 - Civil Rights
 - Women's rights
 - Student organizing
 - Consumer rights
 - Environment

1979: (National) CITIZEN ACTION Founded,

- Spearheaded by (National) Citizen/Labor Energy Coalition
- Audacious goal of contesting for state and national power, where economic and social structures were created and developed.
- Innovation of broad multi issue organizing
- Revolutionary idea to combine organizing and elections
- Plans to build state organizations with large memberships using Progressive Fundraising Canvass model.
- The new state groups based on new organizations already created and experimented with in five states.
- In the next four years creates Citizen Action groups in California, Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, Missouri, New York, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

1982: WISCONSIN CITIZEN/LABOR ENERGY COALITION votes to build a Citizen Action for Badger State

- WI CLEC built a good deal of community power to pass major legislation, but there was a desire to build something even more impactful.
- Strategy Memo by top Machinist leader in Wisconsin, Dick Presser, proposes creation of a Citizen Action Group for Wisconsin, grounded in the emerging theory of building power through community organizing. [Presser influenced by IAM National Prez. William W. Winpisinger, who was a democratic socialist leader. He was the great progressive manufacturing union leader of this era, in the tradition of Walther Reuther]
 - Political strategy to win a labor consensus and support.
 - Unify labor from divisions with progressive organizations and movements to work in common cause.
- Spearheaded by 3 of the most powerful unions of the era
 - International Association of Machinists (IAM)

- UAW
- AFSCME

I Founding ERA (1983-1993)

Overview: When Citizen Action of Wisconsin began operations in early 1984 under the name Wisconsin Action Coalition, it joined a growing network of state organizing groups affiliated with National Citizen Action. Board President Dick Presser was a driving force, in partnership with two strong Executive Directors, Dan Kaemmerer and then Jeff Eagan. Tammy O'Dell also briefly served as Executive Director.

December 28, 1983: WISCONSIN ACTION COALITION/WISCONSIN ACTION EDUCATION FUND, established.

- Becomes affiliate of (National) Citizen Action organizing network.
- Creates regional coalition and member steering committees to drive local organizing
 - Milwaukee
 - Madison
 - Racine
 - Kenosha
 - Eau Claire
- Builds large scale door and phone fundraising canvases to build statewide membership.

1980s: Early Programs

- Issue Campaigns
 - Lobby Days at Capitol
 - In coalition with AFL-CIO, Senior Groups
 - Lobby Day draws 1300 in 1987
 - Health Care Reform
 - Universal Federal Health Care Reform
 - State Hospital Deregulation (Repeal of Hospital Rate Setting)
 - Medicaid Expansion
 - Home Care in Medicaid
 - Nursing Home Reform
 - Deindustrialization/Economic Justice
 - Economic Democracy Act to limit corporate power
 - Plant Closure prevention legislation
 - Ending Public Financing of Corporate Outsourcing
 - Organizing the Unemployed
 - Aid for laid off industrial workers
 - Fighting deindustrialization
 - Raising the Minimum Wage
 - National Guaranteed Income
 - Energy Prices and Jobs
 - Disinvestment from South Africa
 - Home Foreclosures

- Toxic Waste
- Consumer Advocacy/Tort Reform
- Economic Development/Corporate Subsidy Reform
- Forcing Banks to Lend in Marginalized Communities
- Elections
 - Focus on electing progressives to state and local office
 - Candidate recruitment & training
- Fundraising Tactics
 - Fundraising Field and Phone Canvass
 - Bingo Nights
 - Ad Books
 - Labor Union affiliation dues

1986: Takes politics by storm in dramatic U.S. Senate race

- Endorses union leader Ed Garvey against right wing incumbent Bob Kasten who defeated environmental champion Gaylord Nelson
- Runs first paid canvass operation to reach Wisconsin voters statewide on a mass scale
- False ads airing the weekend before election narrowly defeat Garvey

1986-1989: Faces Legal Attacks from GOP in retaliation for Senate campaign

- Complaints Filed by by Senator Kasten and Republican Senate Campaign Committee
- Time and legal expenses drain the organization, force it to fight for survival

1987: (National) CITIZEN ACTION Network Becomes an Electoral Force

- Citizen Action state group canvasses produce massive voter contact
- Convention in Chicago draws 7 Democratic Presidential Candidates to Speak.

1990: Name changed to WISCONSIN CITIZEN ACTION

1991-1995: Fighting for universal national healthcare

- Supports Single Payer in George W. Bush Years.
- 1991-92: Builds public support for health care reform to set agenda for 1992 Presidential election
- 1993-1994: With a Democratic president, builds grassroots support for Clinton universal health care plan

Middle Era (1994-2009)

Overview: The pioneering leadership of Dick Presser, and Executive Directors Dan Kaemmerer, Tammy O'Dell in the early years and Jeff Eagan for nearly a decade, gave way to new leadership. The tradition of board leadership from formable and progressive labor leaders continued, with Bruce Colburn, David Newby, Jim Cavanaugh, Sheila Cochran, and Guy Costelo. The organization evolved its model and built to higher levels of influence under the direction of Executive Directors Larry Marx, Bob Hudek, and later Linda Honold.

1994: Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH) Disclosure Law

- A growth hormone given to cows, developed by agrochemical company Monsanto to make them produce more milk.
- Citizen Action door canvass made it a huge public issue, overwhelming public response and backlash.
- Grocery stores started spontaneously posting NO BGH signs
- Citizen Action organizing and lobbying caused passage of a labeling and disclosure law.
- The market for the hormone dried up because consumers only bought BGH Free milk.

1996-98: First in the Nation City Ordinance on Lead Paint Disclosure, Remediation in Milwaukee.

1995-1999: Exon Crandon Mine Campaign at headwaters of Wolf River, passage of Mining Moratorium.

1997: (National Citizen Action) closes, leaving state groups without a national federation.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/30/us/link-to-teamsters-inquiry-forces-a-liberal-group-to-close-its-national-office.html>

1997: Campaign Finance Citizen Right to Know Law.

1999: Wisconsin Citizen Action and coalition partners launch new national federation, USAction.

2002: CITIZEN ACTION co-leads passage of historic SeniorCare with senior groups.

- Laid groundwork for later passage of Medicare Part D
- Gives Wisconsin a more affordable prescription drug program than the rest of the country
- Wisconsin remains to this day the only state permitted to have such a program.

2004: WISCONSIN CITIZEN ACTION changes name to CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN.

2007: CITIZEN ACTION plays central role in State Senate passage of HEALTHY WISCONSIN

- Causes 4 month state budget impasse when Assembly and Governor oppose
- The only fully funded single payer health plan ever to pass any American legislative chamber
- Remains a high watermark in the legislative history of Medicare for All

2008: Files Compliant with Judicial Commission on Willie-Horton Style Smears by Supreme Court Candidate Michael Gableman

2008: Debut of Famous Citizen Action got healthcare? Cow

Modern Era (2009-Present)

Overview: Citizen Action's model changed dramatically in 2009, when the Financial Crisis sparked by the greed of the big banks and their political enablers, made the canvass financially unsustainable.

In the modern era Citizen Action developed innovative new organizing models, such as the organizing co-op, and innovative new uses of news coverage and social media to augment its organizing.

The era also brought another changing of the guard in leadership. Two strong board presidents, Wisconsin AFL-CIO President Stephanie Bloomingdale, and Attorney Mark Thomsen, have provided firm stewardship for over a decade. Robert Kraig, hired in 2009 during the worst part of the financial crisis, is now Citizen Action's longest serving Executive Director.

2009-2011: HEALTHCARE FOR AMERICA NOW Created

- Largest grassroots lobbying campaign in American history
- Spearheads public support for Affordable Care Act.
- CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN becomes Wisconsin anchor group, builds large coalition.
- Matches TEA PARTY blow for blow in successful effort to pass and defend the AFFORDABLE CARE ACT.

2009: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN merges with GOOD JOBS & LIVABLE NEIGHBORHOODS

- Pam Fendt, the Founding Director Good Jobs & Livable Neighborhoods, worked as Economic Justice Director after the merger, followed by an influential career with the Laborers' International Union Local 113, as President of the Milwaukee Area Labor Council.
- Adds accountable economic development to Citizen Action's issue areas
- Brings membership in Powerswitch Action, another powerful national organizing network.

2010-2011: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN High Speed Train Campaign

- Worked with Governor Doyle on High Speed Train, new manufacturing plant in Milwaukee African American community
- After the election of Scott Walker, led a protest campaign against his planned cancellation of the project.

2011: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN begins producing weekly BATTLEGROUND WISCONSIN PODCAST during the Act 10 worker protests.

2011-2018: Accountable Economic Development Campaign

- Led fight to expose unaccountable corporate subsidies by Walker's Privatized economic development agency, WEDC
- Led campaign to expose outsourcing paid for with state dollars
- Led organizing exposing Scott Walker and Donald Trump's FoxConn project as the greatest economic boondoggle in Wisconsin history

2011-2018: Resistance to Scott Walker Policies

- Act 10
- Voting Rights
- Medicaid Expansion
- ACA Sabotage

2014-20 Lead Plaintiff in Federal Lawsuit to Overturn Walker Voter Suppression Laws

- Overturned early voting and residency restrictions
- Re-enfranchised thousands Black and Brown voters barred by Photo ID law

2015: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN invents Organizing Co-op Model, launches regional membership drives.

2015-16: Merger of National Organizing Networks

- CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN joins effort to create stronger national organizing network
- Merger Creates PEOPLE'S ACTION.
- CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN plays a leading role in PEOPLE'S ACTION's development and growth.

2016-17: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN leads Wisconsin fight to prevent repeal of ACA.

2018: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN spearheads creation of BADGERCARE PUBLIC OPTION BILL,

- Works with allies in State Legislators to draft
- Only comprehensive bill to lower health care costs & expand access since gerrymandering of the Legislature
- Candidates for Governor and State Legislature run on the bill, which combined with ACA repeal fight, makes health care a dominant issue in midterm elections

2018-2019: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN develops bold Climate change and equity agenda, works with Milwaukee elected leaders to establish a CITY-COUNTY Task FORCE.

2020: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN Launches cutting edge Deep Canvas Model, which brings deeper organizing to electoral politics.

2023: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN spearheads passage of bold Climate & Economic Equity Plan at Milwaukee Public Schools.

2023: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN organizing co-op leaders pass climate and equity planning process in the City of WAUSAU.

2023: CITIZEN ACTION OF WISCONSIN leaders and members plays leading role in passage of historic MILWAUKEE CLIMATE AND ECONOMIC EQUITY PLAN.

Other Milestones

- **Longest Standing Current Citizen Action Board Members**
 - **Martha Love (1986)**
 - **Bruce Colburn (1990) (Board President 1994-99; Board of Directors 2008-2024)**
- **Executive Directors**
 - **Dan Kaemmerer (1983-85)**
 - **Tammi O'Dell (1985)**
 - **Jeff Eagan (1985-1993)**
 - **Larry Marx (1993-4)**
 - **Bob Hudek/Larry Marx (1994-2005)**
 - **Bob Hudek (2005-7)**
 - **Linda Honald (2007-2009)**
 - **Robert Kraig (2009-Present)**
- **C4 Board Presidents**
 - **Founding President Dick Presser, International Association of Machinists (1983-1994)**
 - **Bruce Colburn (1994-1999)**
 - **Jim Cavanaugh (1999-2004)**
 - **Sheila Cochran (2004-2007)**
 - **Guy Costello (2008-2010)**
 - **Jim Canvannah (2011-2012)**
 - **Mark Thomsen (2012-Present)**
- **C3 Board Presidents**
 - **David Newby (1980's-2008)**
 - **Stephanie Bloomingdale (2009-Present)**