



AUSTRALIAN  
DEMOCRACY  
NETWORK

# Annual Report

2023-24



**We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise that this land always was and always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and sovereignty has never been ceded. We believe that the inclusion of First Nations perspectives, justice and reconciliation are central to any vision of rebuilding a healthy and vibrant democracy for Australia.**

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# Message from the Executive Director

In many ways this past year has been a very challenging one for democracy. Each month we hear that a new climate-heating record has been broken, while people around the world are suffering because of it, and fossil fuel lobbyists still stroll the halls of Parliament. A referendum to create a First Nations Voice to Parliament was lost, in part, due to a wave of disinformation that nobody was ready for. And even in this “year of elections”, we’re seeing democracies all around the world backsliding.

We’re driven to work in this space partly because democracy is such a hopeful form of political organisation. Baked into it are a whole range of assumptions about equality and the inherent value of each person, our ability to work together across differences to solve big problems, and crucially, to share power with each other. Our democracy as it stands does need to do better in so many ways, but that’s also one of the best features of a democratic system – it’s never done, it’s constantly being reinvented by the people it serves, and that means there’s something for all of us to do to improve it.

So, while we face challenges, we also feel a sense of hope and responsibility in tackling them together. Despair at the challenges our democracy is facing is a luxury change-makers can’t allow ourselves – in fact when times are difficult our work is even more important. Democracy is a system that’s designed to be powered by people – when it’s derailed by corruption, state capture<sup>1</sup>, regressive laws or failing systems, it’s only people working together that can fix it. That’s why we built the Australian Democracy Network – to bring together the people and organisations who care about democracy, so that together, we can make it work for all of us, the way it’s supposed to.

And that’s what we’re doing. I’m proud of the impact our small but mighty team has made this past year. In this report you can read about how our three alliance campaigns are making progress on our big goals to promote and protect a vibrant civil society and create a healthy, fair democracy where political power is exercised for the common good.

I’m also excited to share that our work building the capability of civil society to engage in democracy is growing, with our training offerings now covering government relations, countering disinformation and more.

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<sup>1</sup> State capture is “the exercise of power by private actors – through control over resources, threat of violence, or other forms of influence – to shape policies or implementation in service of their narrow interests,” (World Bank). For more information on the different ways in which state capture manifests in Australia’s democracy, have a read of *Confronting State Capture* at [australiandemocracy.org.au/statecapture](https://australiandemocracy.org.au/statecapture).



While we're focussed on impact in the world, we are also still building a very young organisation. Our Board has been helping guide us through our very first strategic planning process, and our second successful financial audit. Setting strong organisational culture and improving our internal processes and systems have been unseen but important steps in our development, making sure we've got the strong foundations we need to be advocates for democracy for years to come. As our staff team has grown, we're also looking to add breadth and depth to the skills and expertise in our boardroom.

At just over four years old, we punch above our weight, creating opportunities for collective impact with the 234 organisations and 14,000 people who work with us for democratic reforms.

So after another busy year, on behalf of the whole team at Australian Democracy Network, a huge thank you to all our friends, supporters and colleagues across civil society, the pro-democracy movement, and the broader community who do this work with us. And an especially huge thank you to our philanthropy partners who make it all possible.

We're looking forward to continuing to work with you in the coming year, as Australians engage in our democracy at the ballot box and beyond.

In partnership,

**Saffron Zomer**  
**Executive Director**

# About Australian Democracy Network

*Creating a healthy democracy that puts people and planet first*

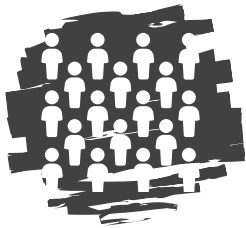
## Our Mission

Australian Democracy Network brings people and organisations together to campaign for the changes that make our democracy more fair, clean, transparent, accountable, accessible, and participatory. Together, we are creating a healthy Australian democracy which puts people and planet first.

## Our Role

Australian Democracy Network is a campaigning organisation focussed on strengthening democracy. The way we work is collaborative, because we believe it takes collective power to win systems change. To support collective campaigning, we function as a collaboration hub for organisations and individual participants who care about democracy and want to act to strengthen and protect it.

## Our Change Strategy



### 1. Build collective power

We bring people and organisations together in shared campaigns to build a stronger democracy.



### 2. Shift stories and culture

Our work helps set the democracy agenda and rebuild civic engagement and democratic culture.



### 3. Change the law

We campaign for systemic reforms that will make our democracy work better for everyone.

## Our Priorities

### Vibrant civil society and open civic space

*We promote and protect a vibrant civil society and open civic space as part of a healthy democracy.*

Impact goals | By 2028, we have:



1. Grown a movement of people and organisations working together to build a flourishing democracy.



2. Protected and strengthened the role of public interest advocacy in Australian democracy.



3. Ensured that our right to protest is protected by law and publicly recognised as a legitimate mode of civic engagement.

### Fair democratic systems that work for all of us

*We are creating a fairer democracy where political power is exercised for the common good, not for the powerful few.*

Impact goals | By 2028, we have reduced the problem of state capture by winning substantial legislative reform in at least one of these areas:



1. Reducing the influence of big money in Australian politics.



2. Making political lobbying transparent.



3. Reducing the ability of disinformation campaigns to derail democratic outcomes.

Additionally, we will continue to **monitor the state of Australian democracy** and respond to emerging gaps and risks.

# Our People

## Our Staff



**Saffron Zomer**  
Executive Director &  
Board Member



**Prema Menon**  
General Manager



**Bethany Koch**  
Fundraising & Development  
Coordinator



**Hassan Nasir  
Mirbahar**  
Campaign Manager & Strategist



**Ray Yoshida**  
Democracy Campaigner



**Anastasia Radievska**  
Protest Rights Campaigner



**Isabella Morand**  
Engagement Coordinator



**Ophelia Davenport**  
Digital Organiser

## Board Members



**Elizabeth Jennings**  
Treasurer & Board Member



**Brendan Sydes**  
Secretary & Board Member



**Tim Watts**  
Board Member



**Upeka Kumarasinghe**  
Board Member



HIGHLIGHTS IN

FY  
24

234   
Partner organisations

 699  
Volunteer submissions to government committees

  
21  
Events

Community emails @ MPs  
769

4,082   
Petition signers

8   
Community MP meetings

Staff lobbying meetings  
98 

# Key campaign updates

## Building the Democracy Movement

### Mobilising Democracy Activists

Engaging in democracy is not just about turning up to vote once every three years (although the sausage is a good perk). To build a fairer democracy, we also need to rebuild the community's engagement with the system that governs our lives. In the face of cultural apathy and an aggressive media landscape, the Australian Democracy Network's community of individual supporters is part of a growing collective of people stepping up and speaking out for a system that works better for people and the planet.

Our community now numbers over 14,000 people from every corner of the country. In the last 12 months this group of democracy advocates have written submissions, signed petitions, emailed and met with their political representatives, attended events, read reports, written to media outlets, shared on social media, and so much more. Together, we've put issues like lobbying reform and election funding on the political agenda when it would otherwise be easy for a busy first-term government to ignore them.

Our people are a key part of our ability to make an impact – they show that the broader community cares deeply about the issues that Australian Democracy Network is working on and are willing to speak up and act to push politicians to do the right thing. As a democracy organisation, it's also integral to the way we want to operate – we believe in collective power and will continue to bring people together and empower them to be part of something bigger than themselves.

All of us share a vision for a vibrant democracy, and a commitment to the collective work of advocacy and action to realise that vision. We want to take this opportunity to celebrate our community and all the work they do for our shared future.

“ I finished work as a full-time Company Director seven years ago and was thinking about what to do next. I heard Cathy McGowan use that quote “democracy is not a spectator sport” – so I decided to dedicate my spare time and remaining years of usefulness to rebuilding and safeguarding Australia's democracy. It's one of the best things I have ever done!

Graeme, Melbourne, ADN Volunteer



## Connecting the Democracy Sector

Across the world we are seeing a renaissance of a more connected and responsive pro-democracy movement, and it is exciting to be a part of this global effort as well as the emerging sector in Australia.

In the last 12 months, we've been honoured to be part of the global Open Government Partnership, travelling to Estonia to share our experiences and learn from democracy defenders from all around the world. We have also participated with our Australian Open Government colleagues in shaping the next round of government commitments.

Civil society worldwide is grappling with the challenges democracy is facing, and specifically the problem of state capture and its effect on policy outcomes. Thus Australian Democracy Network was invited to the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance conference in Cape Town, South Africa to share our work on addressing state capture with public health and community advocates from around the world. The time spent

with international colleagues deepened our understanding of the many ways that state capture undermines democracy and impacts people in every nation.

For many years, Australian civil society has recognised the need to strengthen our democratic foundations – our work in the public interest relies on them, after all. However, the organisations who specifically work on democratic reforms are currently few in number. With increasing threats to Australia’s democracy, we are keen to identify and help grow not only the number of organisations working on democratic reforms, but to build more opportunities for collaboration and to increase the number of democracy funders.

In May 2024, we partnered with Mannifera to bring 60 leaders and funders from across the Australian democracy and fair economy sectors to build relationships, map the state of Australian democracy, understand each other’s approaches to change, identify emergent threats, and prioritise strategic opportunities for collaboration. We thank Mannifera for the opportunity to play a convening role, and for showing leadership in incubating this emerging sector.

We anticipate that this will be the first of many convenings of the Australian pro-democracy movement.





## Building Civil Society Capability

In September 2023, along with our partners at the Centre for Australian Progress, we delivered the second annual *Government Relations Masterclass*.

The Masterclass is designed to build skills and knowledge in political engagement for advocates working to win policy change for the public good. The unique training program features two days of practice ‘pitching’ to representatives at Australian Parliament House.

This past year we supported two cohorts of twenty-five changemakers to complete the Masterclass, including one group from the climate and nature movements, and one representing a broader set of campaigns including health, youth and First Nations justice issues.

This training is part of our commitment to building the democratic muscle of civil society. By sharing skills and networks to collectively develop more impactful advocacy campaigns, the whole sector can benefit. More skilled and confident political advocacy means more wins on the issues that matter to all of us, and importantly, a more vibrant and representative public square.

“

*The Government Relations Masterclass was by far and away the most effective, insightful and well-run professional development training I have had in my career. The coaches and lead trainers were incredible, the cohort inspiring and the content has given me new enthusiasm and confidence in engaging with decision-makers. I cannot recommend it enough.*

”

**James Sherley, Jubilee Australia**

# Stronger Charities Alliance

## *Promoting and protecting charity advocacy*

by Hassan Nasir Mirbahar, Alliance Coordinator

Charity isn't just about helping people in need – it's also about trying to address the root causes of societal problems. This includes advocating for the policy interventions best placed to solve the issues charities work on. Whether it relates to protecting the environment, eliminating poverty, advancing First Nations justice, or any other issue our communities are facing, advocacy is a core part of charities' work.

Historically, advocacy has come under attack from governments who feel threatened by public discourse on an issue or oppose certain policy solutions. While the current federal government has expressed a wish to empower and collaborate with charities, formal protections around charitable advocacy remain weak.

Through our [Voices for Change survey](https://www.strongercharities.org.au/our-work/voices-for-change-survey/),<sup>2</sup> charities told us that even supportive policymakers and regulators do not fully understand and appreciate charities' advocacy role. This year was proof of how essential our voice is in this space, when both a parliamentary committee report and a crossbench bill suggested reforms to electoral legislation that would have negatively impacted charities' ability to participate in elections. Hence, Australian Democracy Network has taken on the role of vigilantly monitoring and responding to emerging risks to charity advocacy.

While this reactive work is important, it is crucial that we pass legislative protections so that future governments cannot undermine the right and ability of charities to advocate. Through our convening of the Stronger Charities Alliance, we have had an impactful year in both responding to threats and in future-proofing charitable advocacy:

- **We acted to protect the future of charities' advocacy role** by drafting and proposing the Charities Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. The bill 1) establishes legal clarity around the benefit to our democracy and society from charitable advocacy; 2) clarifies and strengthens charities' right to publicly engage in government policy discussions without fear of losing funding or favour with the government of the day; and 3) creates a merit-based appointment process for choosing the Commissioner of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). We presented the bill to the Charities Minister, the Shadow Charities Minister and several other parliamentarians for urgent consideration by the parliament.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.strongercharities.org.au/our-work/voices-for-change-survey/>

- **We worked at both state and federal levels to promote and protect the charity sector's participation in elections.** Charities are already regulated by the ACNC to ensure that they are non-partisan and not operating outside their charitable purpose in elections. So any additional red tape needs to be proportional to the risks election laws are trying to address. We engaged deeply with the federal review of the 2022 election, resulting in the parliamentary committee adopting the Alliance's recommendations that charities be treated differently to political parties, with different spending disclosure thresholds and no cap on donations.

We are continuing to advocate across the federal parliament to ensure that eventual legislation reflects these recommendations. Australian Democracy Network also worked with the Alliance to develop the report Regulating Charities in Australian Elections,<sup>3</sup> a comprehensive and first-of-its-kind analysis of how charities are treated in electoral laws across the country, along with detailed recommendations for reform.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.strongercharities.org.au/2024/07/03/report-regulating-charities-mr/>



- **We took every opportunity to stand up for charitable advocacy.** When the government initiated reviews into philanthropy and the charitable sector (the Productivity Commission’s Philanthropy Inquiry and the Department of Social Services’ Blueprint Expert Reference Group), we made submissions and spoke at the reviews to advocate for reforms that would support and enable charitable advocacy. In line with our recommendations, the Commission has recommended simplifying the deductible gift recipient (DGR) system and diversifying the list of organisations eligible to receive the status. Importantly, they have recommended bringing advocacy organisations within the remit of the DGR system. This is an important step towards strengthening our sector’s ability to advocate for the public good.

Charities play such a critical role in the lifeblood of our democracy. The 140 members of the Stronger Charities Alliance have now been working together to protect advocacy for seven years, and it’s a mighty example of collective power in action – if all the laws that Stronger Charities Alliance have amended or defeated against tremendous political odds were law today, we wouldn’t recognise our own public square. With your support, the Australian Democracy Network will continue to protect and promote voices for change.



*The Australian Democracy Network’s ability to bring together so many diverse voices makes us all more powerful. Australian Democracy Network adds vital capacity to civil society so we can collectively take on the biggest challenges facing our democracy.*



*Alice Dury, Acting Legal Director, Human Rights Law Centre*

**Australian Democracy Network** is the founder and convener of the Stronger Charities Alliance – a national collaboration of over 140 charities, which was formed in 2017 in response to a number of bills which would have silenced charities on issues of national importance. Formerly known as Hands Off Our Charities, the alliance has a vision of a thriving not-for-profit sector, where charities are empowered to advocate for lasting change for our communities. Australian Democracy Network funds the coordinator role and supports the steering committee to develop and execute campaign strategy.



# #OurDemocracy

*Making our democracy work for all of us, not just the powerful few*

By Ray Yoshida, Democracy Campaigner

Corporate influence is undermining our democracy. Currently, there are too many ways that big business, with their deep pockets, can influence the policy agenda. Our democracy can and should work better for people and the planet – and to work towards this vision, we need to get big money out of politics.

The #OurDemocracy campaign is working towards a comprehensive suite of reforms<sup>4</sup> to stamp out corruption, end cash for access and level the playing field in our political system. Since establishing the National Anti-Corruption Commission, the Albanese government has shown little appetite for further action on improving integrity in politics.

In the last 12 months our primary focus has been on pushing for greater regulation of lobbying, and engaging with the parliament, media and civil society stakeholders on reforms to our electoral laws.

With your support:

- **We called for greater transparency on political donations.** The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters tabled its report on the 2022 federal election last November, which included recommendations for greater donation and spending transparency, as well as caps on electoral spending and laws governing truth in political advertising. We engaged with the committee, and while these are promising commitments, getting the details right is crucial to make sure any reforms to our electoral laws leave our democracy fairer. The Albanese government has long promised to respond to the committee's report with draft reforms, however, we are yet to see this materialise. We'll be assessing any proposed changes by how well they meet the following principles:
  - Reforms should reduce corporate influence on our democracy;
  - Reforms should protect the ability of civil society and community voices to be active in public debates around elections; and
  - Reforms should keep parliament open to new entrants and ensure people have a meaningful choice at the ballot box.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ourdemocracy.com.au/the-framework/>



“

*I have recently retired after a 40 year career in education including 18 years as a primary school principal. I am also a grandparent, so I have been focused on the needs of young people both professionally and personally for many years. I am passionate about ensuring we do all we can to protect and strengthen our democracy and minimise the impact of climate change, so that decisions made in government are informed by the needs of the people, rather than the lobbyists and industries with the deepest pockets.*

”

*Monica, Mornington Peninsula, ADN Volunteer*

- **We got lobbying reform on the agenda** through working with Crossbench parliamentarians. We advised on and endorsed Dr. Monique Ryan’s Bill to stop the revolving door and make lobbying more transparent. This is a huge step forward in showcasing a best-practice model supported by an evidence base of why lobbying reform is needed. Then, when Senator David Pocock managed to secure a parliamentary inquiry into the issue, we engaged by hosting a civil society briefing, writing joint submissions, and supporting our community to make 349 of their own submissions. Unfortunately, the recommendations, while positive, need to go further. We’re calling for an overhaul of our broken lobbying system, and will continue to build momentum to win these much-needed reforms in the next term of Parliament.
- **We exposed the amount of dark money influencing politicians.** When we crunched the numbers on the annual AEC donations data disclosure day, we found that dark money (income with no declared source) made up 23% of the major parties’ donations last financial year. This analysis helped shape coverage of the event and demonstrate public pressure to improve donations transparency. Real-time disclosure of donations, rather than a difficult-to-navigate, once yearly data dump, is a much needed reform – in a fair democracy, we should know who is funding politicians and especially their campaigns for re-election.
- **We engaged with other opportunities for reform,** including submitting a joint submission with SACOSS to the South Australian Government’s proposal to ban political donations, and providing analysis and commentary on the donation disclosures for the Voice Referendum, which was reported in the media.

For the remainder of this term of parliament and in the lead up to the next election we’ll continue to advocate for fair and balanced reform to our electoral laws and for proper regulation of political lobbying.

**The #OurDemocracy campaign** is a nationwide movement of people and organisations who want a healthy Australian democracy that works for us, not just for the powerful few. Australian Democracy Network is a co-founder and the current convenor of this national campaign endorsed by over 60 civil society organisations. Australian Democracy Network funds the coordinator role and works with the steering committee to develop and execute campaign strategy.



## Protest Rights

### *Protect the Right to Protest*

By Anastasia Radievska, Protest Rights Campaigner

A fundamental cornerstone of any democracy is its peoples' ability to dissent to government decisions. Yet, in the last two decades, governments in Australia have passed 49 laws constraining the right to protest<sup>5</sup>. This restriction of protest rights has come as a response to increasing community mobilisation in the face of the climate crisis, increasing militarisation, and struggles for Indigenous sovereignty. Corporate interests, most prominently fossil fuel companies, have driven a government-media consensus around the need to eliminate protest that impacts their interests. This has manifested in a bipartisan crackdown on protest,

<sup>5</sup> "Protest in Peril", *Human Rights Law Centre 2024* [hrlc.org.au/reports-news-commentary/protest-peril](https://hrlc.org.au/reports-news-commentary/protest-peril)

narrowing the political pathway for people to prevent bad laws. The resulting legislative and policing environment around protest has made it more likely that protesters will be arrested, severely penalised and subjected to police violence.

Protest rights will only be protected in an enduring way if we cultivate a culture that values protest as a crucial part of civic life. Because of your support, this year Australian Democracy Network was able to hire a full-time protest rights campaigner to coordinate engagement from communities and civil society around the need to protect protest rights and to put pressure on power-holders to wind back anti-protest legislation, desist introducing new restrictions on protest and commit to upholding the right to protest.

“ *It only takes one person to take a stand to allow others to find their voice and join in the fight for social justice, equity and change.* ”

*Janet, Raworth, ADN Volunteer*

This year we partnered with the Human Rights Law Centre to launch the Declaration of our Right to Protest – a set of minimum standards governments and institutions must respect in their approach to protest. Over 140 community organisations have endorsed the Declaration and we have been working with this alliance on responding to threats to the right to protest and promoting a healthy protest culture. This year with your support we:

- **Successfully advocated for the NSW government to make the legislative review of the 2022 anti-protest laws open for public consultation**, marking the first time the NSW community has been able to have a say on anti-protest laws in the State. Together with a coalition, we mobilised 10 organisations, 2 local councils and over 300 members of the community to make a submission. In total, over 500 community submissions were made to the review which will influence the recommendations expected in October 2024.
- **Mobilised Declaration endorsers to put pressure on power-holders to protect the right to protest in key moments of contestation.** When the WA police ordered the ABC to hand over footage of activists' preparation for a peaceful protest, we mobilised 40 community groups who called on the ABC to resist this assault on press freedom. When universities began to restrict student protests, we produced an open letter to fourteen Vice Chancellors calling on them to respect political freedoms, resulting in most universities avoiding the use of police to disband student encampments. And when

the Victorian Police were pressuring the government to require a permit system for protest, our advocacy to the Attorney General around the need to respect disruptive protest was followed by the Premier rejecting the idea of making protests contingent on permits.

- **Presented the Declaration of our Right to Protest to the Federal Government and engaged MPs in Queensland, NSW and Victoria** around the legislative changes needed to legally enshrine the Declaration principles. The Declaration was launched at the Federal level by Independent Senator David Pocock at an event at Parliament House attended by several Senators and MPs. We also met with parliamentarians to advocate for the protection of protest rights in a Federal Human Rights Act.

Protest is the safeguard upon which protecting our other democratic rights depends. Now is the time to resist the creeping normality of repressed protest rights so that future generations will be able to fully participate in a vibrant democracy.

**Australian Democracy Network is building a national coalition** of grassroots and civil society groups who want to protect protest. With over 140 organisations signing onto the Declaration of our Rights to Protest, our newly funded Protest Rights Campaigner works with core partners like Amnesty International and the Human Rights Law Centre to develop and execute campaign strategy.

“

*I am a Union Organiser and community advocate who wants a healthy democracy where everyday people like you and I have equal access to our elected representatives, and our voices are heard and acted on. I don't want vested corporate interests to have more of a say than everyday people. We need to clean up politics and shine a light in the dark corners to ensure that our local democracy is transparent and working for everyday people. Currently, vested corporate interests have too much control and that needs to change. Our democracy needs to be healthy and transparent, and the only way we are going to get this is community organising and people power.*

”

**Danielle, North Ipswich, ADN Volunteer**



# Financial & Operational Overview

By Prema Menon, General Manager & Elizabeth Jennings, Treasurer

As we approach our fifth year in operation, we have prioritised consolidating our growth so that we can be around for the long term.

**Revenue** for the year was \$1.17 million. The majority of this revenue (56%) was from donations and the remainder from grants. Revenue streams experienced modest growth and the implementation of a new fundraising platform enabled us to launch several successful appeals, each surpassing expectations. These efforts increased our donations and expanded our donor base and engagement. We are deeply grateful for the support of our long-term supporters and partners, whose contributions enable us to continue our work.

**Expenditure** for the year was \$1.09 million with staffing the largest item at \$0.83 million. Expenditure continues to be managed with a focus on operational efficiency and maintaining our ability to focus on core functions while navigating a shifting fundraising environment.

Overall, we ended the year with a slight surplus of \$0.08 million, which represents a growth rate that is similar to sector standards.

In terms of our balance sheet, we ended the year with cash and investments of \$0.62 million, some of which is required to meet staff entitlements and outstanding expenses.

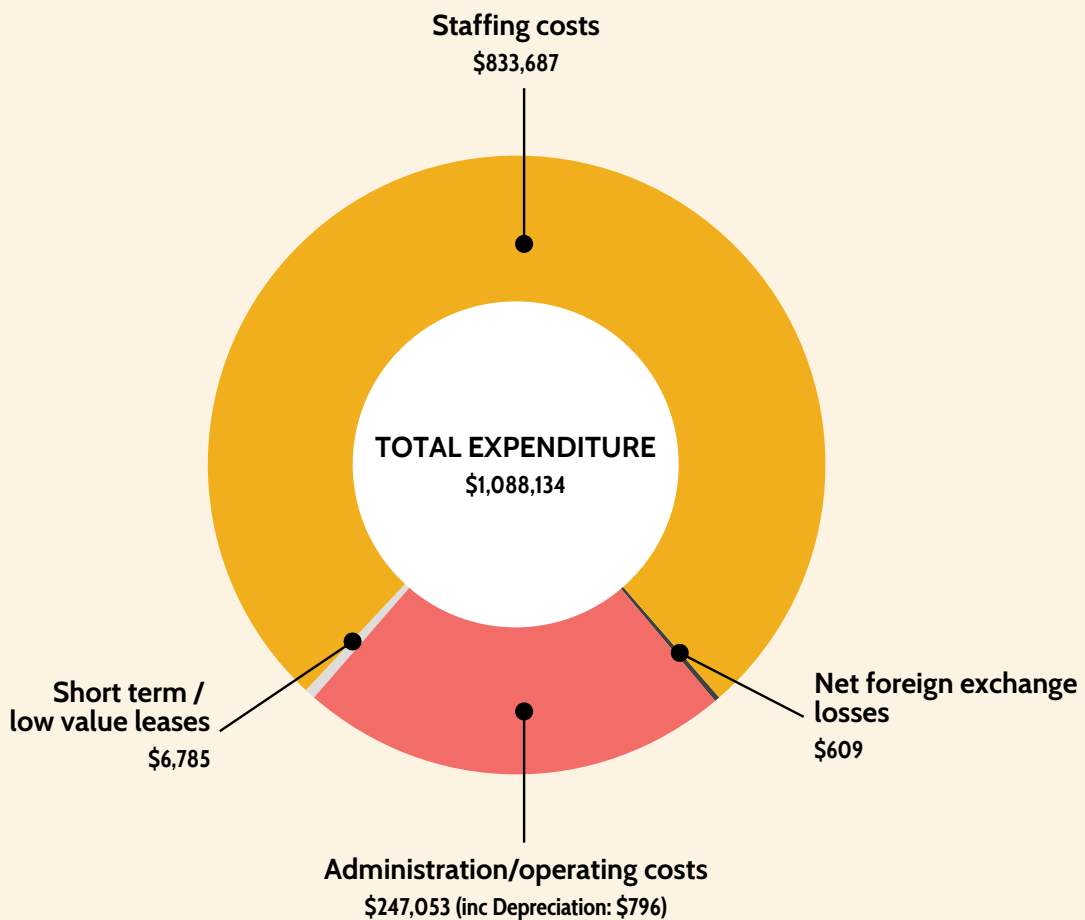
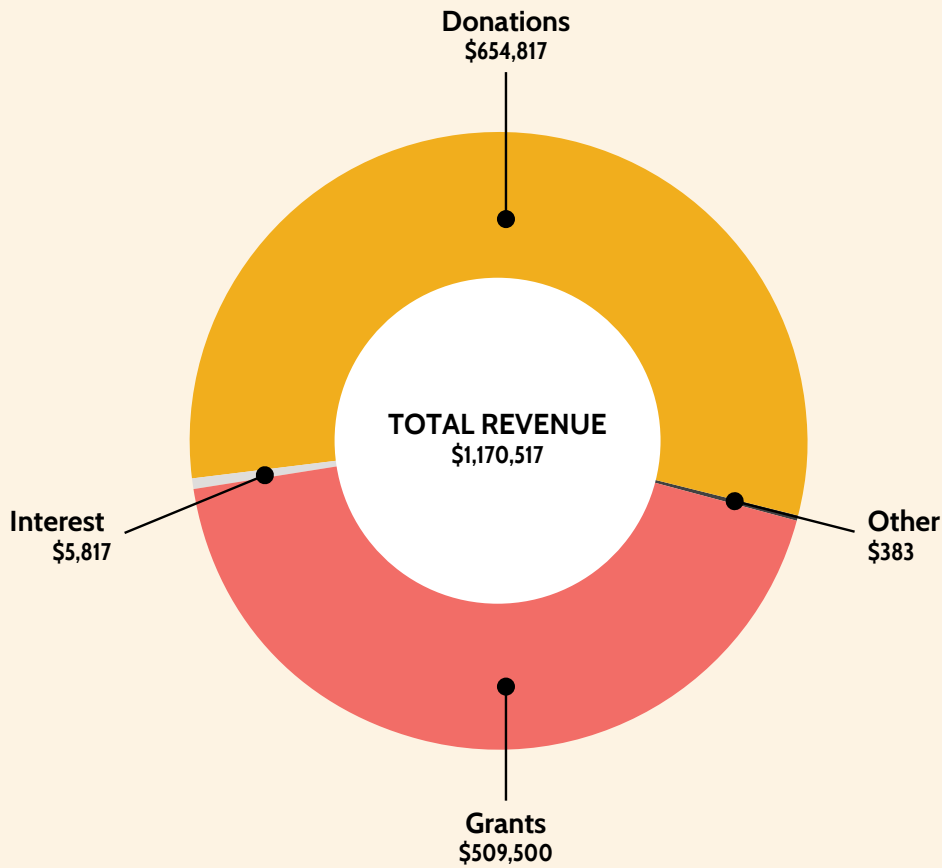
The remainder is our cash reserve which we use to manage cash flow due to the fluctuations in the receipt of our revenue. While this operational buffer is common for an organisation of our age, we are hopeful to increase our buffer over the next year.

We ended the year with a solid foundation marked by increased revenues and controlled expenditures, positioning us well for future growth and sustainability.

Looking ahead to 2025, we anticipate continued revenue growth and further refinement of our fundraising strategies. We aim to expand our programs, leveraging our financial stability to make a greater impact.

Please note a more detailed financial report can be found at [australiandemocracy.org.au/annual-report](https://australiandemocracy.org.au/annual-report).





# Thanks for working with us for a fair democracy

There are so many people and organisations who support the Australian Democracy Network's efforts to strengthen democracy. People contribute to our work through donations, volunteering, expertise, introductions, campaign collaborations and shared projects. These generous gifts are greater than the sum of their parts, and we wanted to take a moment to thank and acknowledge some of the people and organisations who fuelled our shared efforts this financial year.

## Civil Society Partners

The challenges we take on, no single organisation can solve alone. That's why we work in alliances and partnerships. The members of all of our alliances contribute in different ways to our shared work. From endorsing policy positions, right through to dedicating staff resources, in-kind contributions and co-contributions to tactics. We also partner with other civil society organisations to deliver impactful training, research and capacity building.

You can see all the different organisations who contribute to our alliance campaigns below:

- **Stronger Charities Alliance Members:**  
[strongercharities.org.au/about-us/](https://strongercharities.org.au/about-us/)
- **#OurDemocracy Endorsers:**  
[ourdemocracy.com.au/framework-endorsements/](https://ourdemocracy.com.au/framework-endorsements/)
- **#ProtectProtest Declaration Endorsers:**  
[australiandemocracy.org.au/protest-rights-declaration](https://australiandemocracy.org.au/protest-rights-declaration)



*So often the impacts of harmful policies or opportunities for reform extend beyond one issue area or constituency group. Working with the skilled staff at the Australian Democracy Network in our campaign for a safer federal parliament means that we can combine powers to secure reforms that benefit women as well as democracy for all.*



**Renee Carr, Executive Director, Fair Agenda**

## Core Partners

We want to especially mention those organisations who we work very closely with. The organisations listed below help steer the direction of our campaigns and partner with us to deliver critical work. They are our colleagues, our friends and we're made better by our partnership.



We would also like to pay a special mention to the Australian Conservation Foundation, who helped create the Australian Democracy Network. Over the past few years they have provided auspicing support, office space and the time and expertise of their staff to enable Australian Democracy Network to become an established organisation. Movement leaders like the Australian Conservation Foundation provide unseen support to countless organisations. We couldn't thank you all enough.

## In-Kind Support & Strategic Advice

As a small team, we rely on expertise from lawyers, researchers and consultants who can offer pro-bono or discounted advice and services. These dedicated professionals have helped us write legislation, develop fundraising strategies, and given us legal advice. While they could charge much more for their services, their in-kind donations have come from a place of deep commitment and passion for safeguarding democracy. We would like to acknowledge:



## Philanthropy Partners

We would like to thank the following trusts, foundations and donors who have supported us.



Angus & Fiona McLeay

Ann Miller

Bruce & Ann McGregor

Clack-McLure Fund

Clive Street

Crisp Nominees

Darrell Wade

Fairer Futures

Grace Foundation

Josette Wunder

Keir Foundation

Madden Sainsbury Foundation

Meta Lazarus Fund

Stephen Pfeiffer

The WeirAnderson Foundation

Above are just some of the fellow travellers who generously support our work. We would also like to thank those who donate anonymously, along with the 300+ community donors who support our twice-yearly appeals. Whether you can give a lot or a little, each dollar helps us to strengthen democracy. Our deep gratitude to you.

“ It is strategic for The Myer Foundation to invest in improving democracy, as all the other important work we fund relies on democracy working well. We’ve proudly funded the Australian Democracy Network from its earliest days, and have been impressed with the impact they’ve had in such a short time. I highly recommend backing this formidable, emerging organisation of change-makers. ”

**Leonard Vary, The Myer Foundation**

# What's next?

It's been a big year and there is lots for us to all be proud of. But democracy in Australia remains fragile and requires all of us to nurture and safeguard it. So, what's next?

Looking ahead to an election year, we are expecting recent trends towards the spread of misinformation will continue to be a threat. We'll be prioritising **countering disinformation** through exposing its authorship and equipping civil society with the tools they need to monitor, assess and respond to disinformation. We'll work hard to **elevate integrity issues** to the prominence they need in the election debate, and securing commitments from candidates on integrity and democracy reforms.

It's likely that long overdue **changes to election laws** will finally be tabled in parliament, and we'll advocate to make sure any new laws reduce corporate influence, protect community voices and ensure that new candidates can fairly contest in elections.

A fair and functioning democracy is much more than election time though, and we'll also continue to build the public and political appetite for **more transparent and accountable lobbying** so that we know who is influencing policy makers; make the case for **safeguarding charity advocacy** through the introduction of new legislative protections; and develop a new stream of work dedicated to **changing the narrative around protest**, including culturally embracing protest as a positive, legitimate and protected cornerstone of our democracy.

None of this is work we can do alone, so we'll also continue our commitment to **connecting and building the pro-democracy movement in Australia**. Our vital work would also not be possible without the partnership of our generous donors. We genuinely thank you for your commitment to strengthening democracy and **ask that you partner with us again in the coming year**. There's much to do, and in a thriving democracy real change is something we can only achieve together.



#### Australian Democracy Network Annual Report 2023–24

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**Design:** Sharon France, Looking Glass Press.

**Cover image:** Children outside parliament house. Photo credit: Tali Drohan, 2024

**P3:** Saffron Zomer, Executive Director, Australian Democracy Network, introducing Charities Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 to media and parliamentarians. Photo credit: Tali Drohan, 2024

**P9:** Civil society leaders coming together at the Mannifera Muster to work on strengthening democracy. Photo credit: Steven Rummukainen, 2024

**P10:** Democracy donors and civil society leaders describing their vision for democracy at the Mannifera Muster. Photo credit: Steven Rummukainen, 2024

**P11:** One of the cohorts of advocates who participated in the training out the front of Australian Parliament House. Photo credit: Phong Trinh, 2023

**P13:** The Hon. Kate Chaney MP speaking at a Stronger Charities Alliance press conference introducing Charities Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 to media and parliamentarians. Photo credit: Tali Drohan, 2024

**P16:** ADN Volunteer Monica walking with her granddaughter in nature. Photo credit: supplied.

**P18:** Celebrating the National Day of Protest Rights: Hassan Nasir Mirbahar from ADN, Peter Murphy from First Mardi Gras, Aunty Matilda House from the original Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Jay Moran, Sara Abdelmawgoud and Tahlia Nesfield from Amnesty International Australia and Anastasia Radievska from ADN. Photo credit: Cat Sparks, 2024

**P21:** "Black Lives Matter" protest. Photo credit: Mitchell Luo, Unsplash, 2020

**P28:** Climate protest. Photo credit: Kate Ausburn, Unsplash, 2020

**Australian Democracy Network annual reports  
and full financial information  
can be found at [australiandemocracy.org.au/annual-report](http://australiandemocracy.org.au/annual-report)**



**Australian Democracy Network is a registered charity with the  
Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.**

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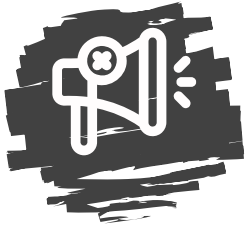
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# Thank you

With your support...



**We launched a national collaboration to protect protest**

**We put lobbying reform on the agenda**



**We convened the democracy sector together to begin building the pro-democracy movement in Australia**

**We built the capability of civil society to better engage with government**



**We launched a bill to future-proof charity advocacy**

**... and so much more!**



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