



**WOMEN'S  
VOICES NOW**



# 2023 IMPACT REPORT

**“WOMEN ARE THE  
CATALYSTS AND  
THEIR VOICES ARE  
THE MEDIUM”**

**-Leslie J. Sacks (1952-2013),  
Founder of Women's Voices Now**



## **Table of Contents**

<b>LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>IMPACT AT A GLANCE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>OUR HISTORY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>OUR IMPACT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>WOMEN'S VOICES NOW FILM FESTIVAL</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>GIRLS' VOICES NOW</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>VOICES FOR CHANGE FILM COLLECTION</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>FINANCES</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>THANK YOUS</b>	<b>17</b>





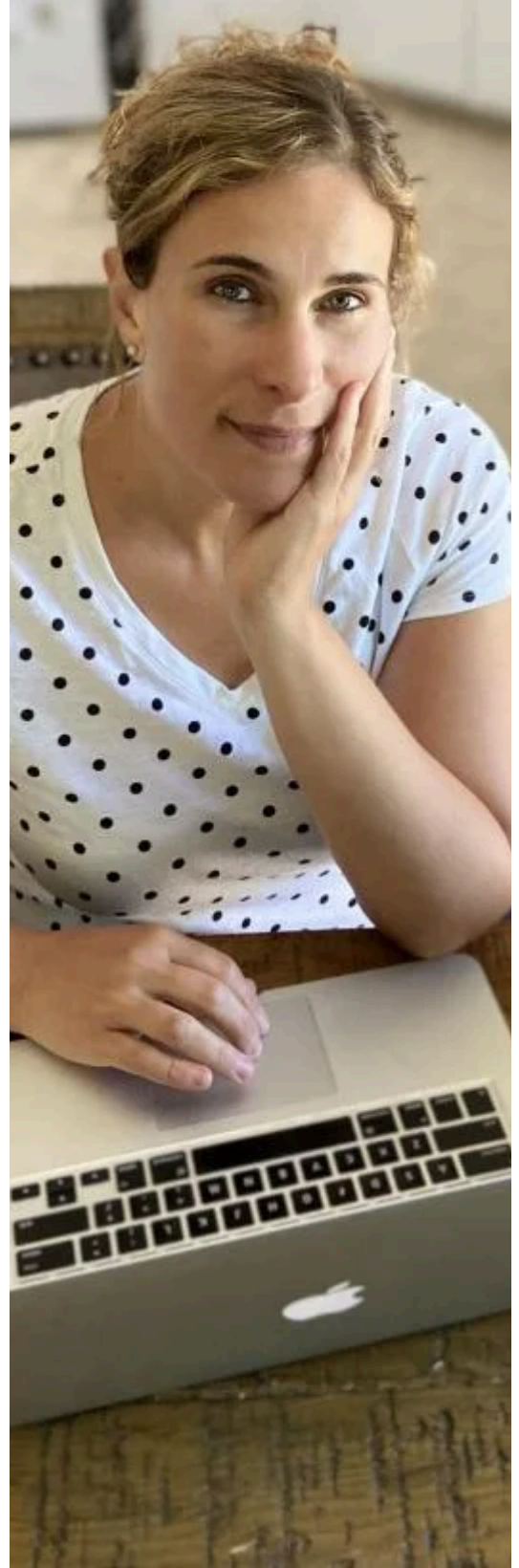
# A Letter From Our Executive Director

## DEAR WOMEN'S VOICES NOW COMMUNITY,

Reflecting on another year of operations, I am so grateful to be able to report our organization is strong, stable, and increasing in its reach and impact. In 2023, we had one of our busiest years ever and exceeded our achievements from 2022. Specifically, for the first time since 2015, we held an in-person film festival event at UCLA where we screened the Leslie J. Sacks Grand Prize winning documentary, "With This Breath I Fly," to an audience of nearly 200 individuals. This year also marked a decade since the passing of WVN Founder, Leslie J. Sacks, and so we were joined by his family and dear friends to bring him into the room with us and to celebrate his noble legacy.

Another incredible milestone we reached in 2023 was an increase in our YouTube following to 126,000+ subscribers, which allowed us to reach just under 2.2 million viewers by December 31, 2023. Women's Voices Now is present both on the ground in Los Angeles and online globally, inspiring and influencing individuals and communities to change their perceptions of the roles and rights of women. In the subsequent pages of this impact report you will find testimonies that show exactly what this means.

Our Girls' Voices Now program also made film festival history in 2023! Hija Callada (2022) was awarded both the Juror's Choice and Film Festival Grand Prize at the Reel Exposure International Teen Film and Photo Festival. We're very proud of this. As well, our 2023 cohort of 14 girls successfully completed the summer intensive filmmaking training and produced four brilliant films which are currently making their way through the film festival circuit and screening at public events both online and in person.

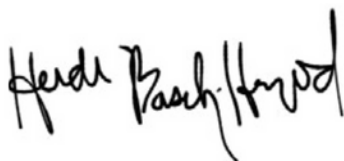


2023 was also a very eye-opening and distressing year for some of us working in the global women's rights landscape. The October 7 Hamas attack against Israel, during which sexual violence was systematically implemented, was followed by the denial of its occurrence by major, well-respected human rights institutions around the world. The message is clear: In a post #MeToo world, only some women are to be believed and only some women's bodies are afforded the right to justice as victims of rape. The repudiation of rape as a weapon of war, which began in the 1990s in response to its egregious use in the Balkans, and the progress we've made as a global society in condemning this form of violence against women just got canceled. As the Executive Director of Women's Voices Now, it is imperative to me that I closely examine our relationships with organizations and individuals who would perpetuate and celebrate such harm to women based on their ethnicity. Amplifying their voices does not and would not uphold the values of Women's Voices Now. For more of my reflections on this serious moment, I invite you to read [my op-ed that appeared in Newsweek](#) on November 30, 2023.

For your continued commitment to the stability and sustainability of Women's Voices Now, you have my deepest gratitude. There are many organizations and causes to support, especially these days. I remain convinced, however, that in order to make lasting change in the realm of gender equality that uplifts us all, the impact that Women's Voices Now makes through the power of film is absolutely necessary.

Empathy is a human quality that allows us to overcome the most ingrained harmful stereotypes and even hatred. We need this now more than ever.

WITH GRATITUDE,



HEIDI BASCH-HAROD  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
WOMEN'S VOICES NOW

“MAKING IT  
THROUGH THE  
CEILING TO THE  
OTHER SIDE WAS  
SIMPLY A MATTER  
OF RUNNING ON A  
PATH CREATED BY  
EVERY OTHER  
WOMAN'S  
FOOTPRINTS.”

- Shonda Rhimes





# Our Impact At A Glance

## OUR WOMEN'S VOICES NOW FILM FESTIVAL HAS:

RECEIVED  
**1,180**  
FILM  
SUBMISSIONS

FROM  
**88**  
COUNTRIES

AWARDED  
**130k**  
IN CASH PRIZES

GARNERED  
AUDIENCE FROM  
**195+**  
COUNTRIES

## GIRLS' VOICES NOW HAS:

SERVED  
**94 GIRLS**  
FROM UNDER-  
RESOURCED  
COMMUNITIES

PRODUCED  
**25**  
YOUTH-MADE  
SHORT FILMS

THAT HAVE BEEN  
SELECTED IN  
**140+**  
FILM FESTIVALS

SEEN  
BY OVER  
**1.8M**  
VIEWERS

## OUR VOICES FOR CHANGE FILM COLLECTION HAS:

**260**  
FILMS (IN 44  
DIFFERENT  
LANGUAGES)

SEEN BY  
**20M+**  
ONLINE  
VIEWERS

CO-FACILITATED  
**149**  
SCREENING  
EVENTS

WITH PARTNERS ON  
**6**  
CONTINENTS

## Our Mission

Women's Voices Now uses film to drive social change that advances women's and girls' rights globally.



# Our History

Women's Voices Now (WVN) is a Los Angeles based nonprofit organization using film to drive social change that advances girls' and women's rights globally. In 2010, Women's Voices Now founder Leslie Sacks recognized the urgency of advancing women's rights and launched one of the first online film festivals. Thirteen years later, we carry out our mission through our three core programs, which support, produce, and promote social-change films and those who are making them:

- **THE ANNUAL WOMEN'S VOICES NOW FILM FESTIVAL**

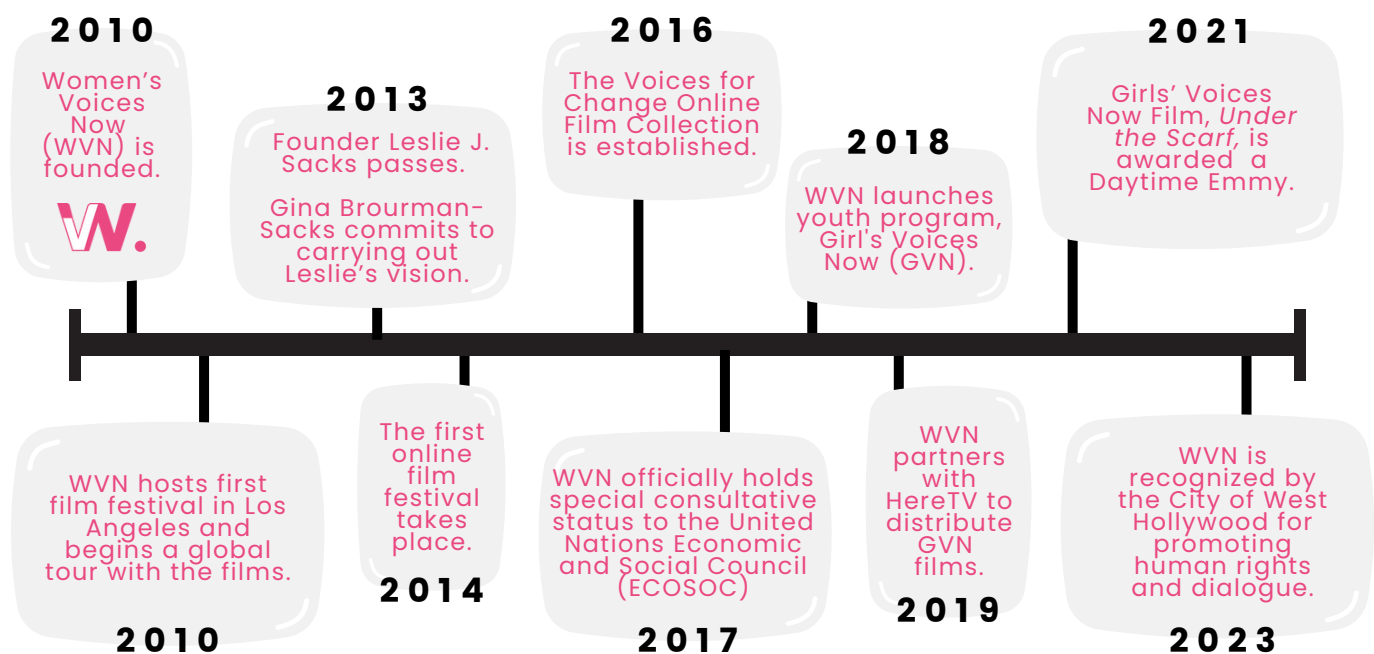
Our annual women's rights documentary film festival supports emerging documentary filmmakers by providing cash prizes, awards, visibility, and connections to film industry professionals.

- **GIRLS' VOICES NOW**

Our youth development program empowers girls 14-18 from under-resourced communities of Los Angeles to find, develop, and use their voices for social change through filmmaking.

- **VOICES FOR CHANGE**

Our free online collection features 300+ films in 44+ different languages about gender equality to raise awareness of the struggles and triumphs of women and girls around the globe, inviting audience members to contribute to social change. We partner with local organizations to co-facilitate in-person screening events and promote the films through online marketing campaigns.



# Our Impact

## WOMEN'S VOICES NOW FILM FESTIVAL

Our annual Women's Voices Now Film Festival is an international women's rights documentary film festival for emerging filmmakers.

It seeks to address the significant lack of representation of women in film, and the lack of access to essential funding for women in film. Women make up half of the population but comprise only 22% of directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top films (2023 Celluloid Ceiling Report). Stereotypes about women's skills and ambition and male-dominated networks remain a powerful barrier to entry.

Our independent film festival is designed to challenge gender-based stereotypes both on and off the screen. In the long term, our goal is to contribute to a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive film industry. We support emerging women filmmakers by:

- Providing a platform to tell essential, authentic, stories
- Supporting them with cash prizes and visibility
- Connecting them to other film industry professionals

Without limiting filmmakers to a specific theme, we seek films that address and shine light upon issues affecting women and/or girls through a social-change lens. This allows us to keep a "finger on the pulse" of timely women's rights issues around the world.

Filmmakers are invited to submit their films in the following categories: documentary short, documentary feature, creative documentary (short & feature), first-time filmmaker (short and feature), human rights documentary, and youth short documentary. In 2023, we awarded a total of \$13,000 in cash prizes across categories. We received submissions from August through December and celebrated the winners and the film festival in March during Women's History Month. All competing films were available, on demand, for the entire run of the festival.

The 2023 Women's Voices Now Film Festival included a Kick-Off event with a keynote address in the human rights space, an industry panel on funding and finding the right story to tell, a jury and filmmaker networking event, a live online awards ceremony, and an in-person screening event in Los Angeles of the Grand Prize winner.



### SINCE 2011 WE HAVE:

- Received 1,180 film submissions from 88 countries
- Awarded \$130,000 in cash prizes
- Gathered online audience members from 195+ countries

CHECK OUT  
OUR TRAILER  
FOR MORE  
INFORMATION  
ABOUT THE  
FESTIVAL!



**WATCH NOW**



# 2023 FILM FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS



2023 THEME: "HOLDING GROUND UNDER SIEGE"

**109**

SUBMISSIONS

**29**

COUNTRIES

**13k**

IN CASH PRIZES

AMONG THE FILMMAKERS WHO SUBMITTED FILMS:

**84%** WOMEN



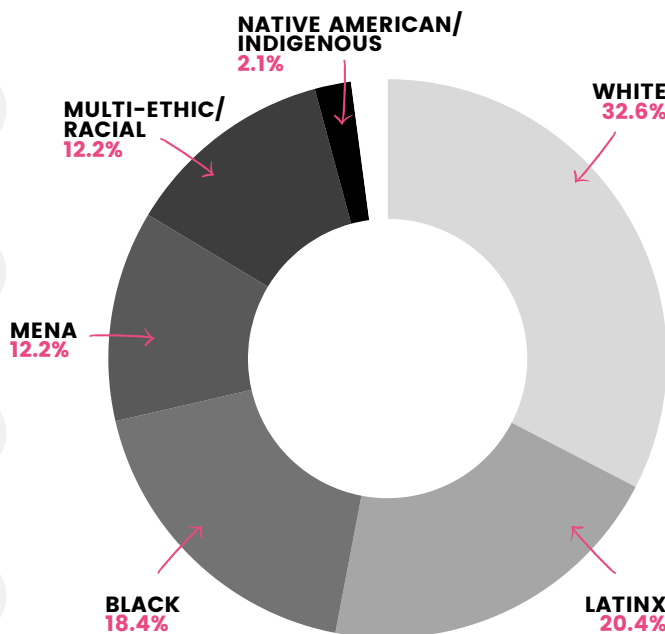
**49%** FIRST-TIME FILMMAKERS



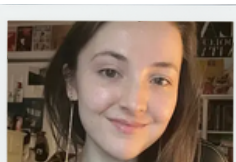
**27%** LGBTQ+



**22%** FIRST GENERATION

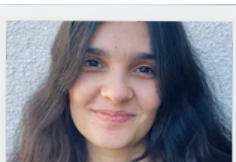


OUR 2023 JURY:



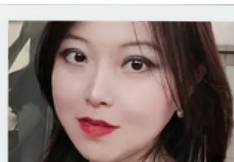
**AUSMA PALMER**

Youth Documentary



**MARTA PINTO**

Youth Documentary



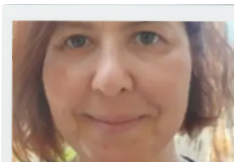
**SJOUKJE YAO WU**

Documentary Shorts



**KATIE CALLAHAN NAGINSKIY**

Documentary Shorts



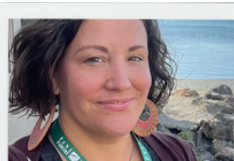
**VIVIENNE TAILOR**

Documentary Shorts



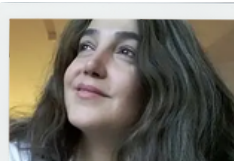
**AMARJIT DASS**

Documentary Feature



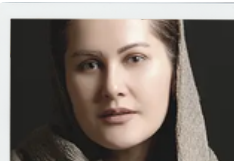
**ANNE PHILLIPS**

Documentary Feature



**SELMA NAYEBI**

Documentary Feature



**SAHRAA KARIMI**

Documentary Feature

## OUR 2023 WINNERS:



### ***With This Breath I Fly* (Afghanistan)**

By Samuel French (USA)  
& Clementine Malpas  
(UK)

Leslie J. Sacks Best  
Documentary Feature



### ***Among Us Women* (Ethiopia)**

By Sarah Noa Bozenhardt  
& Daniel Abate Tilahun

Best First Time  
Filmmaker, Documentary  
Feature



### ***Harvesting Our Tea* (Turkey)**

By Sheida Kiran (UK)

Best Documentary Short



### ***A Walk on My Own* (Senegal)**

By Ndèye Fatou Fall

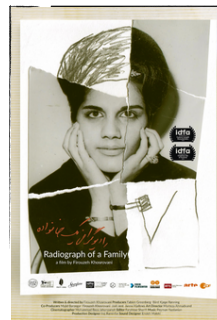
Best Youth Documentary



### ***The Neighborhood Storyteller* (Jordan)**

Alejandra Alcala  
(Mexico)

Lantos Foundation Best  
Human Rights  
Documentary



### ***Radiograph of a Family* (Iran)**

By Firoozeh Khosrovani

Honorable Mention



### ***A Very Happy Woman* (Georgia)**

Tamar Giligashvili

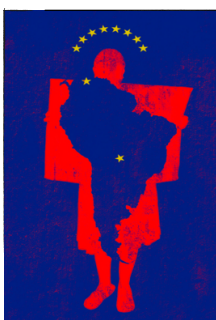
Best Creative  
Documentary



### ***No Such Right: The End of Roe in Appalachia* (USA)**

By Tate Greene, Rebekah  
McAuley, Sarah Sexton, &  
Deladis Haywood

Honorable Mention



### ***Hermanos, Here We Are* (Brazil)**

Jade Rainho

Best First-Time  
Filmmaker, Documentary  
Short



### ***My Sisters in the Stars: The Story of Lee Yong- soo* (Korea)**

By Ian Kim

Honorable Mention

## 2023 FILM FESTIVAL SPOTLIGHT:

In 2023 we hosted our first in-person public WVN Festival Screening since 2014. We hosted a screening of: *With This Breath I Fly*, our Leslie J. Sacks Grand Prize winner, which follows the story of two Afghan women, Gulnaz and Farida, imprisoned for "moral crimes" and their fight for freedom. Director Sam French joined us for a Q&A. The event gathered 270 audience members.

### WOMEN MAKING WAVES AWARD

The Women Making Waves Award recognizes women in the media industry who shift and challenge our perception of women in real life, paving the way for others to benefit in her footsteps, to the benefit of all. 2023 was the first year that we included our Women Making Waves Award Recipient in our film festival program.

This year's award went to Lilan Bowden. To receive the award, Lilan joined the Women's Voices Now Film Festival's virtual Award Ceremony live. "I'm humbled to receive the second Women Making Waves Award from Women's Voices Now. I have been very blessed to have many inspirational women role models in my life to learn how to step into my own power as an artist and a storyteller. It's my hope and aim to be a part of inspiring the next round of women storytellers to make waves of their own." She also participated in an exclusive Q&A session with our Executive Director, Heidi Basch-Harod, on the backlash against women's rights and what we can do about it through the power of film.



LILAN BOWDEN

Lilan is an actor/director most notable for her role as "Bex" on Disney Channel's Television Academy Honors and GLAAD award winning show *Andi Mack*. You can see her currently on Apple TV's *Shrinking*, or Netflix's series *Murderville*. Credits also include *I Think You Should Leave*, *It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia*, *Drunk History*, *Future Man*, *Parks and Recreation*, and many more.

She is a proud participant of the Disney/ABC Director's Program, and recently directed the Disney Channel show *Villains of Valley View*. Her directorial debut, *Becoming Eddie*, was an Official Selection at numerous film festivals, and is the inspiration for developing the TV series version in collaboration with Sony Pictures Entertainment.

She comes from an improv comedy background and performs often in Los Angeles. Since college she has kept an interest in community organizing and politics, and in her work, she is drawn to telling and amplifying stories that feature people from underrepresented backgrounds.



## TESTIMONIES:

"For me, it was an honor and an immense joy to participate in [the] Women's Voices Now Festival. Far beyond winning an award – which was just "the icing on the cake": ) – being able to learn about the existence of a festival focused on women and girls' rights around the world, that also encourages and invests in the growth of female directors, being able to watch so many films with so many different realities from all continents and to connect with a network of people who vibrate for the same purpose was profoundly transformative and inspiring. It was one of the most beautiful experiences I've ever had in my career as a documentary filmmaker."

–Jade Rainho, Director of *Hermanos, Here We Are*, winner of the 2023 Best First-Time Filmmaker, Documentary Short Award

"It's a great motivation to receive this award. As filmmakers in the documentary world, we are always in a financial struggle and it takes a lot of trust in ourselves to dive into our work. We have spent more than six years on the completion of *Among Us Women* and sometimes it's hard to keep going. Receiving this award can support us to think of new ideas and visions for future projects."

–Sarah Noa Bozenhardt, Best First Time Filmmaker, Documentary Feature, *Among Us Women*

**W. WOMEN'S VOICES NOW**  
PRESENTS



The 2023 **Women's Voices Now** FILM FESTIVAL

**HOLDING GROUND UNDER SIEGE**

**MARCH 2023**

*Around the world we see backlash against the progress made in the global women's rights movement. Women face new challenges precisely because of the advances made toward realizing their full human rights. Instead of pushing forward, is now a time to maintain our gains? Looking through the lenses of our filmmakers: where should we focus our efforts in the coming years?*

**FESTIVAL RUN: March 1-31**

[WOMENSVOICESNOW.ORG/FILMS-BY-WOMEN](https://WOMENSVOICESNOW.ORG/FILMS-BY-WOMEN)



# GIRLS' VOICES NOW

Our youth filmmaking program, Girls' Voices Now (GVN), empowers girls, ages 14-18, from under-resourced communities of Los Angeles to find, develop, and use their voices for social change through filmmaking. GVN addresses a critical need within these communities, empowering young girls through filmmaking as a means of personal, academic, and professional development. GVN is entirely free to participants, and to ensure that the program is truly inclusive for participants from low to extremely-low income households they each receive a \$500 stipend.

During the five-week summer training, 15-20 girls work in teams to create their first short documentary film, and learn how the medium of film can be used to affect social change. By combining technical and critical thinking skills with social-emotional learning, GVN equips them with the tools to navigate challenges, express themselves confidently, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. The curriculum spans a spectrum of skills crucial to filmmaking, ensuring participants gain proficiency in research methodologies, interviews, screenwriting, composition, photography, animation, video shooting, lighting, sound recording, and editing.

The Girls' Voices Now films are screened during the premiere screening event in Los Angeles, in youth film festivals around the country, and additional screenings organized by film focused non-profit, youth focused non-profit, or women's rights focused non-profits. We also support participants organizing additional screenings in their communities, and facilitate screening in middle and high schools locally. In addition, Girls' Voices Now films are distributed by our partner HereTV, as well as Channel Kindness (of Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation), Kanopy, and the United Nations' HeforShe Campaign.

Beyond the summer programming, GVN continues to provide personal and professional development through our year round programming and by integrating our GVN alumnae into our broader Women's Voices Now programming. Monthly gatherings are set up to host alumnae for workshops or discussions facilitated by an expert guest speaker on a range of topics. Our past program has included professional speakers on mental health, self-care and resilience, financial wellness, and reproductive and menstrual health. We also work with industry professionals to continue skill development on filmmaking related subjects.

SINCE 2018  
WE HAVE:

- Served **94 girls** from under-resourced communities
- Produced **25 youth-made short films** which have been selected and awarded in **140+ film festivals** and seen by **1.8 million viewers**
- Seen one of our youth-made films, *Under the Scarf*, win a **Daytime Emmy!**

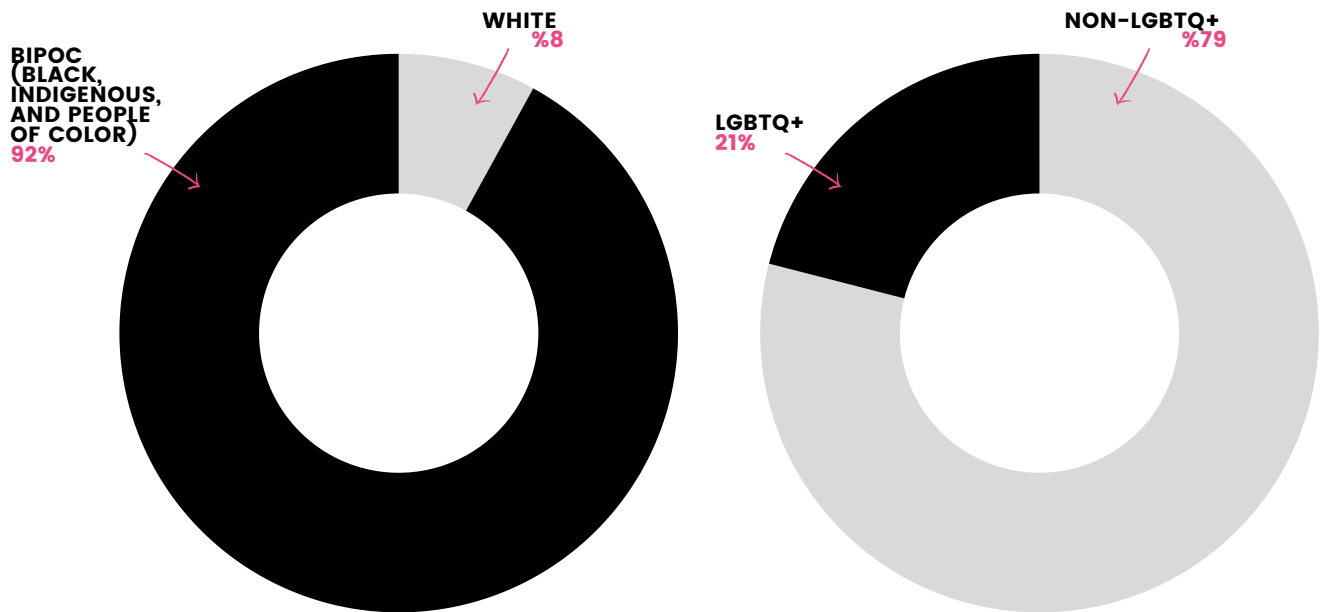
CHECK OUT  
OUR REEL FOR  
MORE  
INFORMATION  
ABOUT GIRLS'  
VOICES NOW



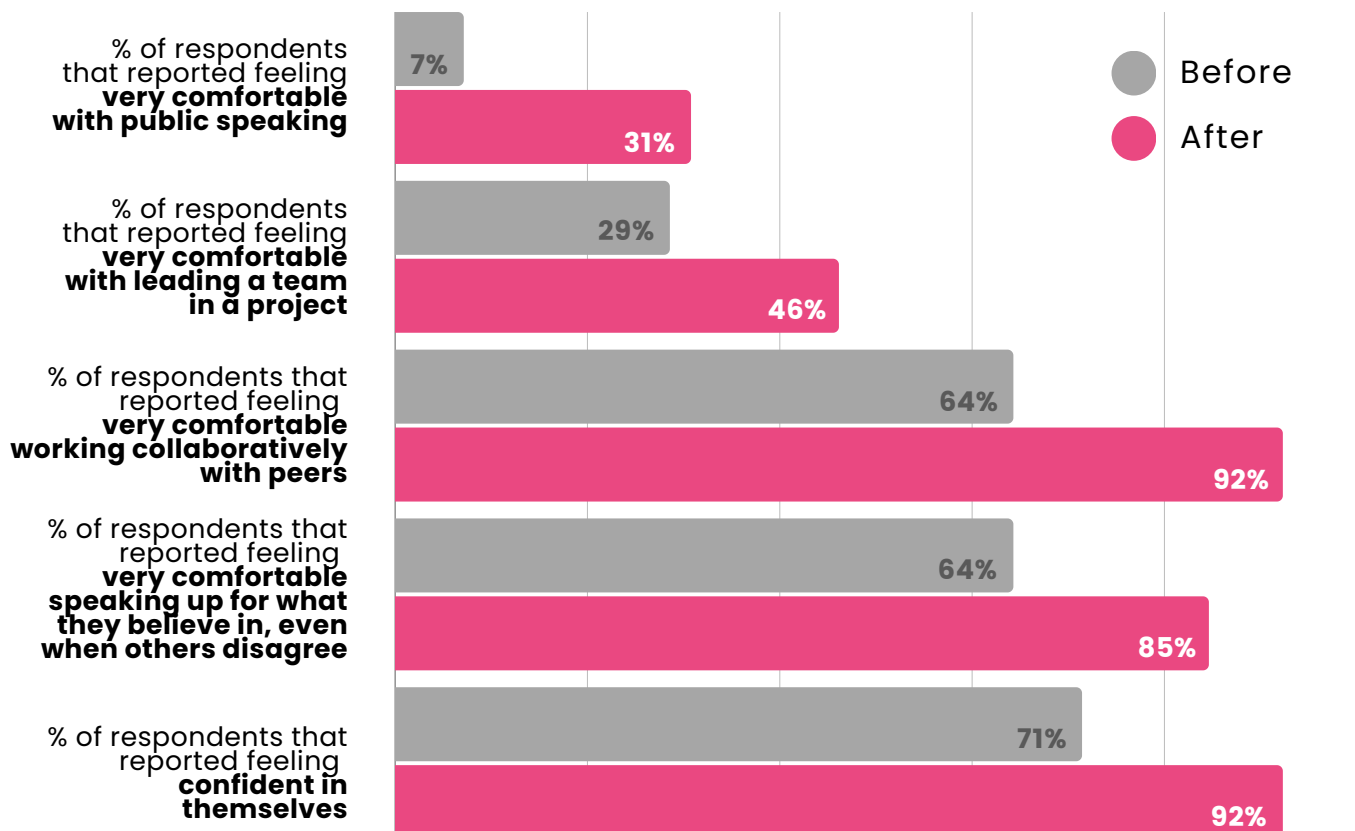
**WATCH NOW**

# 2023 PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS

AMONG THE 2023 SUMMER PARTICIPANTS:



By tracking changes in participants' perspectives on voicing opinions and their perceived ability to create change, we gauge the transformative impact of the program over time. A few findings from the 2023 cohort as a result of participating in Girls' Voices Now:





## 2023 SPOTLIGHT:

In 2023, *Hija Callada (The Silent Daughter)*, a film produced in the 2022 GVN program, was awarded both the Juror's Choice and Grand Prize Awards at Reel Exposure Teen Film and Photography Festival—an unprecedented occurrence! The film centers on three women from different generations who discuss generational trauma.

## TESTIMONIES:

“Over GVN, I have learned to become more confident in speaking up for what I want to do in a project and not be afraid of what the outcome may be.”

—Rebekah, GVN Alumna

“The program made me feel more confident in my voice and the stories I want to share with others. It also allowed me to actually follow through with my creations.”

—Leonora, GVN Alumna



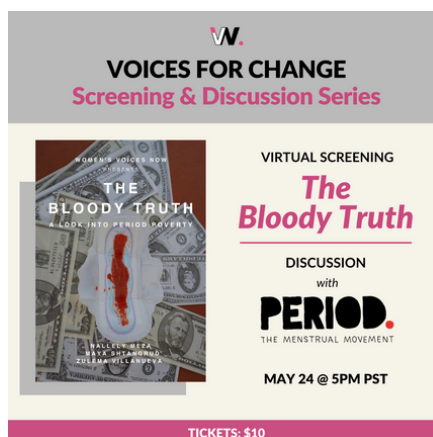
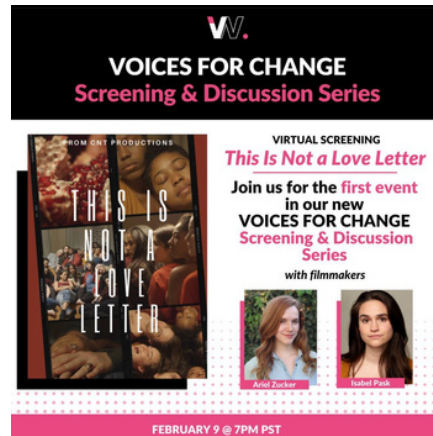
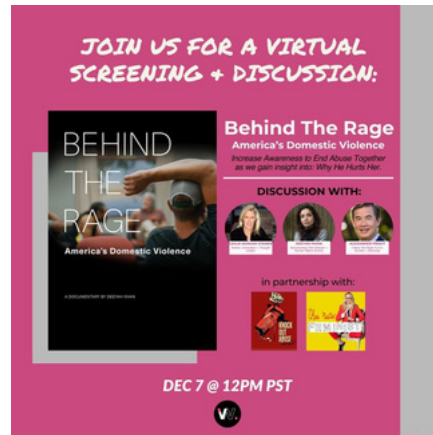
# VOICES FOR CHANGE FILM COLLECTION

Our free Film Collection, Voices for Change, raises awareness of the struggles and triumphs of women and girls around the globe. The collection provides a platform for authentic and diverse stories by women, about women, for all. Each film in the living, growing collection includes calls to action and additional educational resources for viewers.

We promote this content through a dual strategy that reaches online viewers through strategic marketing campaigns and in-person audiences by co-facilitating screening events across the globe. We encourage our audiences to follow our empathy-to-action model by organizing screening events in their own communities and facilitating conversations about the critical women's issues and social activism opportunities highlighted in our films. Our films are available to stream, for free, for individuals and organizations alike.

## 2023 SPOTLIGHT:

2023 was the first time that we had an advertising budget to promote our free library globally, which allowed us to increase our YouTube online viewership by 308% compared to 2022, to reach 2.4 million viewers and generate 26.5 million impressions across platforms.



## OUR FREE FILM COLLECTION:

- Includes **260** films from **67** countries in **44** different languages
- Has attracted **20M+** online viewers from **195** countries (over **2.2M** online viewers in 2023 alone!)

AS OF 2023,  
WE HAVE:

CO-FACILITATED  
**149**  
SCREENING EVENTS

WITH PARTNERS ON  
**6**  
CONTINENTS



## TESTIMONIES:

"Films speak a universal language that resonates with everyone's humanity, and more particularly for us as a development organization touches within us the hopes and convictions that led us to become development practitioners. Films celebrate women's courage and the power of testimony in changing harmful social norms. They are also a good way to bring about new debates, discussions, and cooperation for our common goal to achieve gender equality.

WVN has a rich and up to date collection of films that manage to address all topics relating to women's rights. I value the close relationship as well that our working group has developed with your organization. Heidi never fails to deliver and always sends us recommendations regarding topics that may be of interest to our particular working group!"

—Lou Granier, International Consultant, Gender Specialist, World Bank, Global Forum on Law, Justice and Development's FGM Legal Working Group

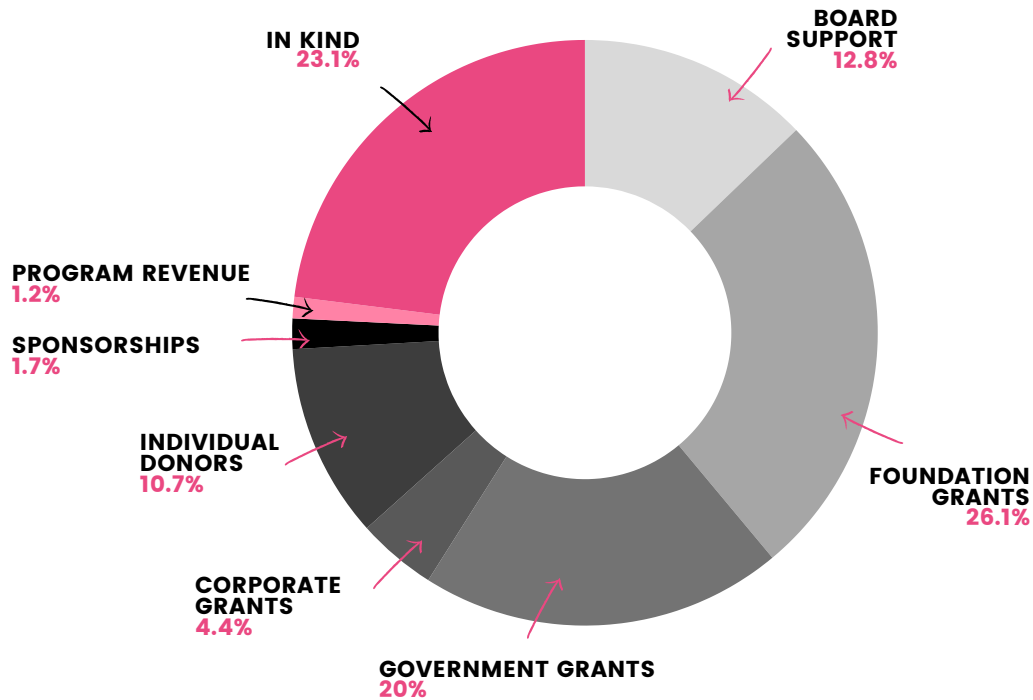




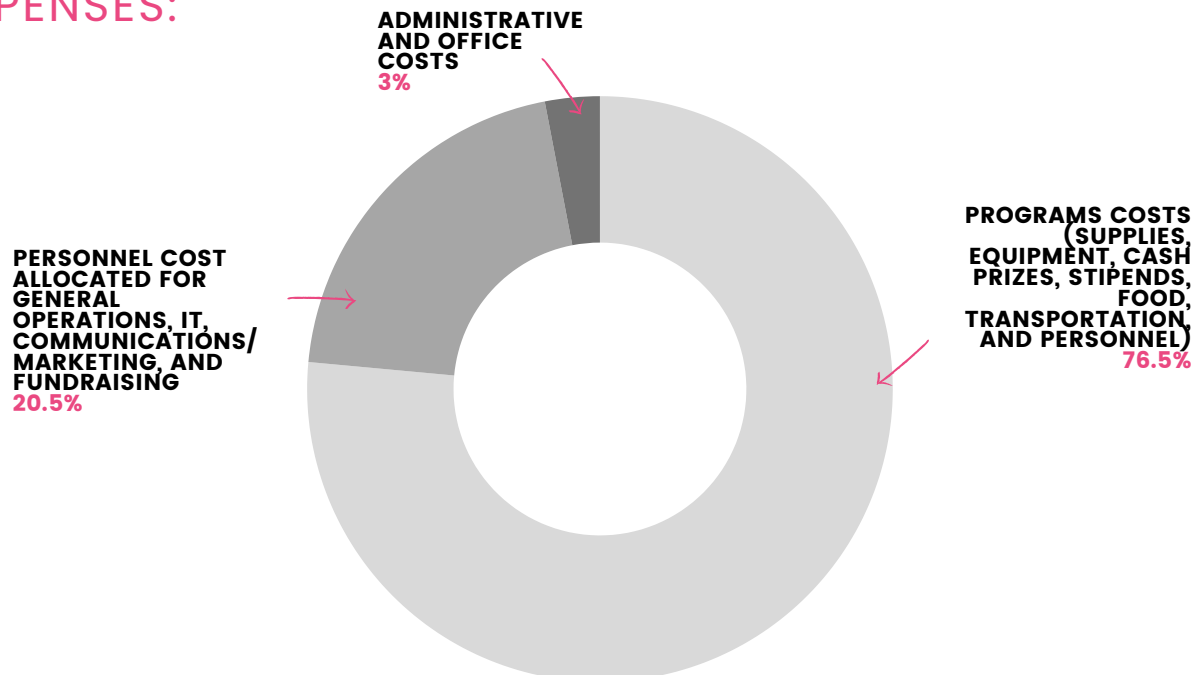
# Our Finances

In 2023, our operating budget was **\$573,140.09** and our total revenue was **\$596,171.00**. Here is a breakdown of our revenue and how our expenses are allocated:

## REVENUE:



## EXPENSES:



# Thank You!

**Our organization and programs could not run without the dedicated support of our amazing Women's Voices Now community!**


## VOLUNTEERS

Assist us with various projects, from data analysis to film previewing, to CRM programs implementation and graphic design! Your work has a tremendous impact on our operations and efficiency.

## DONORS

Our donors are the backbone of our organization, and their generosity is key to our success and motivation! A big thank you to our 2023 donors!

Michael Ackerman  
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