

THE COMMONS  
Social Change Library



## ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

COMMONSLIBRARY.ORG



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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**The Commons pays respect to the traditional owners of the land in which we operate and wherever the Commons Library website is accessed. The Commons Library staff team live and work on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.**

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

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Over the past year the Commons Library staff have remained attuned to the needs of the community. They have not only responded to search spikes but stayed ahead of the curve, gathering resources from our existing collection as well as new acquisitions to provide timely and relevant resources to those engaged in working for positive social change. The Countering Disinformation project is an example of this responsive curation.

Misinformation and disinformation has been around for centuries but has become a scourge on our fragile democracies in the digital age. Public libraries are critical in addressing these threats to information integrity. They have a role as trusted institutions that hold accurate and reliable information; librarians, trained in information literacy, help people assess and identify trustworthy research. Historically, a key strength of libraries has been to support people to empower themselves through information, and be more effective actors in history.

In a digital world, the tools have changed but the case remains that high-quality libraries support the development of a more literate, curious, knowledgeable and critical society.

Our hardworking board of Django, Robyn, Phong, Holly D and Hugh have done all they can over the year to support the staff and volunteers with their work on the research advisory committee and library advisory committee, and providing support with finance, fundraising and more. This coming year will see Django and Robyn retiring from the board; we thank them for their tireless and invaluable service and look forward to welcoming new board members from an impressive field of candidates.

The library would not exist without money to keep it running, and we are all grateful to the many donors who keep the digital doors open to everyone, providing a consistently high quality collection that is increasingly accessible to more people every day.

Your support enables us to build civil society's capacity to learn and grow its work for the common good.

People use the library from across Australia and the world. Some visit for a particular project; some for regular resources to support their everyday work; some become active volunteers, working to support the library to better meet the needs of social change-makers everywhere.

We are all grateful to these wonderful volunteers offering their valuable skills and time in the service of others. They work with the support of our incredible staff Antje, Iain, Aiofe and Sophie, led by our wonderful Library Director Holly Hammond, who consistently display their commitment to the mission and vision of the library. Thank you!



**Sue McKinnon**  
Commons Library Chair



# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

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## **A human-powered library**

I recently saw a promotional email for an online resource directory which put a lot of emphasis on being 'AI powered'. They offered the option of conversing with a chat bot to access the key insights in their resources.

This prompted me to reflect on the Commons as a 'human powered' library. Every resource we add to the Commons is the result of a chain of human interactions and decisions. We track needs and trends to determine what to prioritise. Our own experiences in social change inform us, our communities spark ideas, and we reach out to people with complementary skills to fill gaps.

Of course, we're not anti-technology! It would be impossible to run an online library without a healthy appreciation for labor saving and user friendly plug-ins and widgets. But as awareness grows of AI's reliance on burning fossil fuels and stealing intellectual property, I'm more and more pleased that we aren't relying on it to support social change.

Whenever you visit the Commons Library you're just a click away from the humans behind the scenes. If you have a question just message us through the contact form and one of your friendly librarians will be in touch. It won't be as instantaneous as a chat bot, but it will be real.

## **5 years of making activism smarter and stronger**

After earlier iterations we launched the Commons Social Change Library in its current form in April 2019. So in April 2024 we celebrated 5 years!

A lot has changed in the world in those five years and the Commons has grown and adapted alongside people's movements.

We seem to be finding the balance between providing stable and reliable infrastructure (like the brick and mortar libraries that are a crucial part of so many communities) and quick thinking innovation (like a campaigner shifting tactics against a wealthy and powerful opponent).

It is also clear that what we have built for the benefit of the Australian public is making a difference to people all around the world.

## **Responding to movement moments**

To provide a library that meets the learning needs of people engaged in social change we need to respond to the big shifts going on in the world.

The year 2023/24 saw profound growth in collective action in response to Israel's genocide of Palestinian people. Other important themes have been First Nations sovereignty, climate justice, promoting democracy and resisting autocracy, and defending the right to protest.

I'm proud we have played our part in supporting people power through learning in these crucial times of change.



*Holly Hammond*  
**Commons Library Director**

# THE COMMONS HAS...

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1400+ resources to access



10 000+ visitors a week



700+ Contributors and 40+ Collections

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**The Commons Social Change Library is a world-leader in social change resources.** It is the largest and most impactful hub of its kind, with a strong focus on current social change issues in the global context.

The Commons Social Change Library: A Comparative Analysis of Social Change Resource Hubs, University of Queensland Global Change Scholar Program, 2024

# WHAT WE DO

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## 1 The 'go-to portal' for social change

Like all good libraries, the Commons gathers materials from many different sources in one accessible location. Utilising the skills of information management the Commons has user friendly cataloguing and search capacity, so users can find what they need fast.

## 2 Work with others on special projects

The Commons provides customised services to organisations and networks engaged in social change activities. This includes collating resource kits, developing curriculum, designing and cataloguing resource directories, writing case studies, and researching issues.

## 3 Bespoke advice from librarians

The Commons Librarians respond to queries on a wide range of social change topics. Our quick response resource recommendations enable change makers to get what they need and jump back into their work quickly. Other queries catalyse bigger research projects resulting in new resources.

## 4 Connect to social movement history

Social movement history can provide insights about strategy, a vast toolbox of potential tactics, and abundant inspiration. The Commons gathers case studies, chronologies, and historical materials with a particular emphasis on Australian stories.

## 5 Amplify the impact of conferences

Civil society conferences are an important source of knowledge and innovation but without intentional curation their impact can be transitory. The Commons team works to make the insights of conferences available to a larger audience for the long term in the form of recordings, articles and presentation materials.

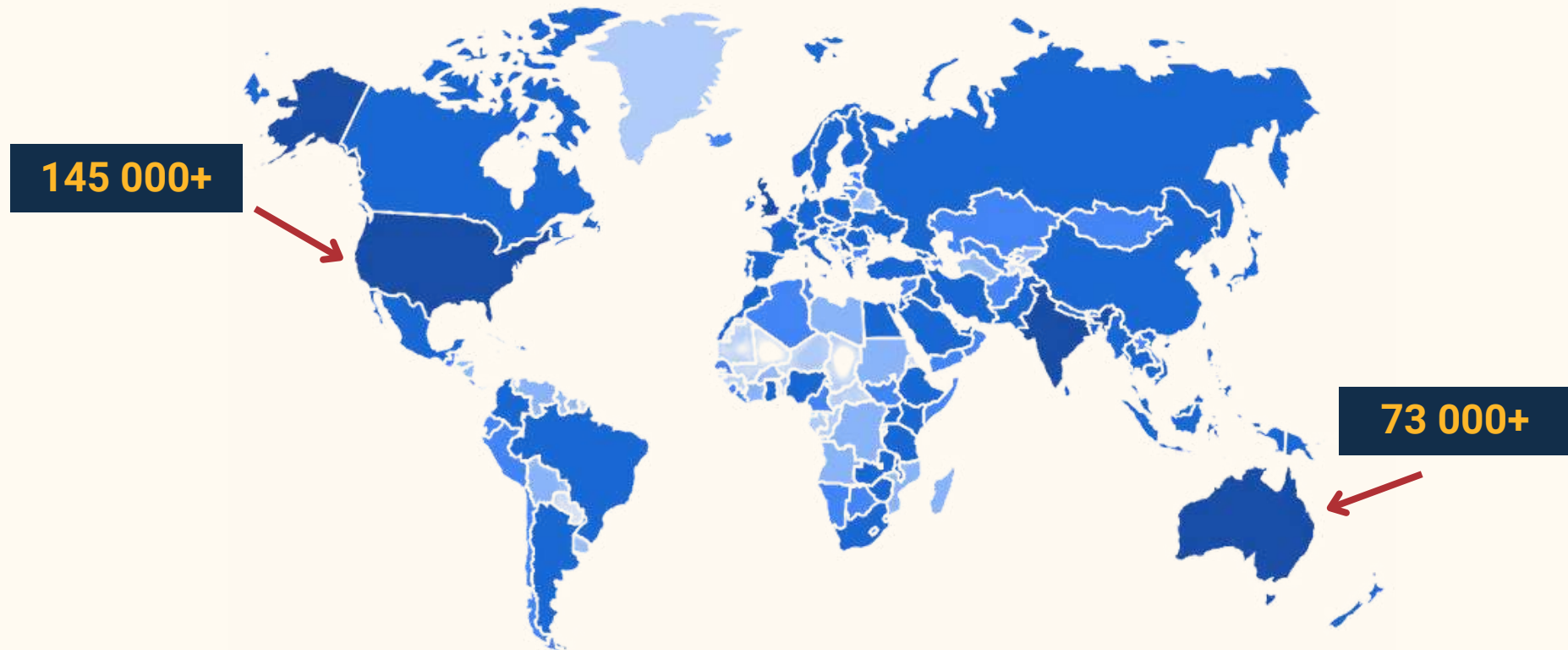
## 6 Respond to 'movement moments'

The Commons Librarians monitor trends and needs in social movements. At times of crisis and opportunity the librarians gather and distribute relevant materials to assist campaigners and community builders to seize the moment.



# COMMONS USERS ARE GROWING

525 000+ visitors from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024



## Colour coding

The darker the shade of blue the higher the number of visitors.

The Commons Library continues to grow steadily around the world every year. From Jul 2023 - Jun 2024 on average 10 000+ users accessed the Commons every week! The biggest users were from the United States and Australia but the site is being accessed regularly by people on every continent, especially by young people who are our biggest group of library users.

# FEEDBACK FROM LIBRARY USERS

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Watch the video to hear from Daniel, Mohini and Anitra

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The Commons Library is a gift to the world. It's a contribution to support our learning, to make sure that we don't have to just keep repeating the same things, and we can notice advancements and shifts and changes.

I'm just delighted that the Commons Library exists, that it has been so carefully curated over the years, and that it continues to be a free resource for activists all over the globe.



**Daniel Hunter**

Global Training Lead  
350.org

“

The wealth of information and diverse perspectives the Commons Social Change Library has is remarkable. It's a pocket of liberation in a world that doesn't feel as liberated as it should.

It's a space where activists and organisations can come together to find inspiration to connect and learn through knowledge and people from all around the world. It's like this reciprocally existing community led ecosystem that is just thriving.



**Mohini Govender**

Knowledge Curator,  
YouthxYouth

“

The Commons Library reflects the liveliness and breadth of activism today, facilitating 24/7 sharing and building of knowledge and skills, which are crucial for social change transformation. As a degrowth activist scholar I identify the Commons Library is a convivial tool. Conviviality in this context means it's user friendly, transparent, durable, open access, continually updated, and inclusively produced to the benefit of all. The Commons Library is our springboard to an emancipatory future.



**Anitra Nelson**

Degrowth Activist Scholar  
University of Melbourne



# POPULAR RESOURCES

The Commons Social Change Library includes resources in many different formats, focused on a wide array of skills and approaches to social change.

The Commons librarians track engagement with our resources to identify areas of need. The resources that are popular at different times, and the search queries used, give fascinating insights into the ebbs and flows of social change.

The most popular Commons resource of all time is [Marshall Ganz Quotes and Wisdom about Leadership, Hope, Organizing and Narrative](#) reflecting the popularity of quotes, interest in organising, and the high profile of Marshall Ganz as a leading social change thinker.

[Disinformation and 7 Common Forms of Information Disorder](#) has received significant traffic over the last year, in part leading to a new Commons project on disinformation.

Bill Moyer's [Four Roles of Social Activism](#) is a perennial favourite, helping people understand tensions in movements and ways to improve collaboration.

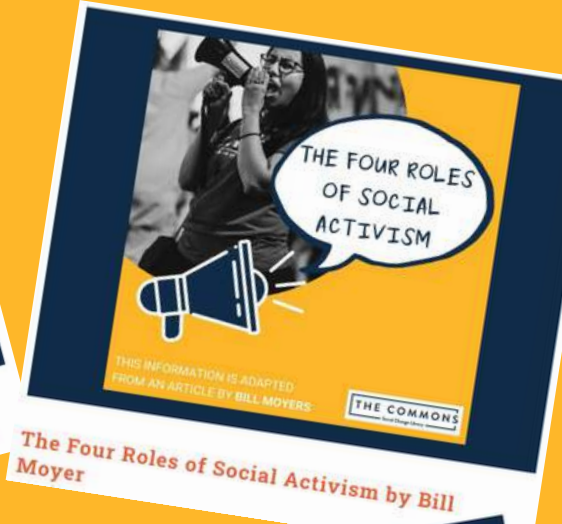
Resources about [Campaign Strategy](#) are consistently popular, including the power mapping tool, leading us to develop an expanded guide, [Power and Power Mapping: Start Here](#).

Library users also prioritise resources that support effective work in groups, including [Facilitation Tools and Techniques](#).

Curated guides help people find paths through the library. You can access several via [New to Campaigning & Organising? Start Here](#).



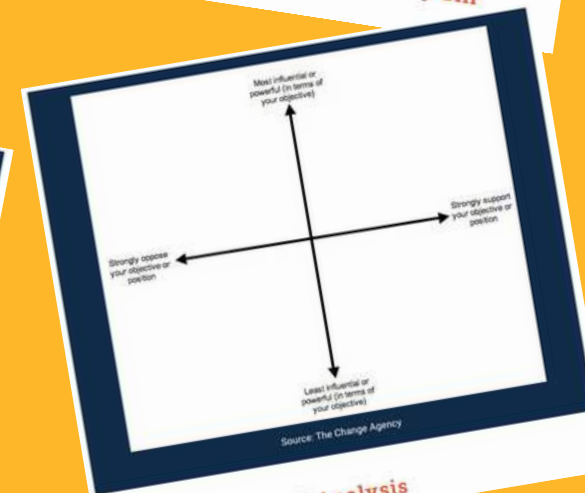
Marshall Ganz Quotes and Wisdom about Leadership, Hope, Organizing and Narrative



The Four Roles of Social Activism by Bill Moyer



Disinformation and 7 Common Forms of Information Disorder



Power Mapping and Analysis



Campaign Strategy: Start Here



Facilitation Tools and Techniques

# MOVEMENT MONITOR

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Movement Monitor is a two year research project focused on the Australian climate movement. Commons Library researchers have refined a comprehensive movement measurement methodology with input from academics, international movement experts, and many stakeholders in the Australian climate movement.

In the first year of the project the research team have:

- Gathered and analysed a database of over 1,500 Australian climate groups and organisations and over 1,800 Australian climate campaigns
- Developed a website (In collaboration with Glenn Todd from ActionSkills) including an interactive map for climate campaigners to explore past and existing groups and campaigns
- Run a survey with 81 groups and organisations across the climate movement, building knowledge on what groups are working on, how their organisation is structured, and how they work with others
- Analysed the outcomes and impact of the climate movement across the 2023 calendar year.

The second year of the project includes:

- A skills audit survey to assess the skills and training needs of the climate movement
- A series of focus groups with First Nations people and People of Colour in the climate movement, run by consultant Neha Madhok
- Providing training on impact evaluation
- Movement Monitor research fellowship with three fellows undertaking climate movement research



## MOVEMENT MONITOR

Measuring the Impact of the Australian Climate Movement

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Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many campaigners and activists have felt the challenges of building power and activity back in the climate movement. Now more than ever, it's vital that we're giving activists the tools to evaluate their impact. The Movement Monitor project is developing new and innovative methods for impact evaluation at a movement-wide scale, helping the climate movement to learn and grow into the future.



Sophie Hartley

Movement Monitor Researcher

# COMMONS PROJECTS

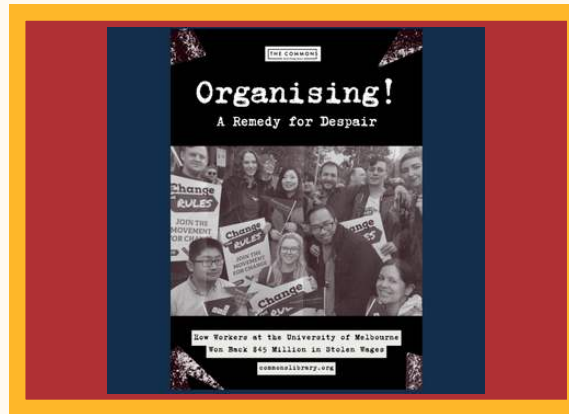
## 1 Outreach Around Australia



In the second half of 2023 the Commons team reached out to people in Australian cities and regions outside the Eastern seaboard capitals. We ran 'Welcome to the Commons Library' and 'How to Write for the Commons Library' webinars, distributed hundreds of promotional bookmarks and gained new subscribers and contributors.

The librarians gathered campaign case studies from Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory. See [Campaigns that changed Australia](#) on the Commons.

## 2 Case Study Research



The Commons gathers stories of innovation in campaigning and organising. One example is the story of how casual workers at the University of Melbourne won back over \$45 million dollars in stolen wages. Iain McIntyre interviewed members of the NTEU Casuals Network and put together an inspiring oral history and summary of the campaign highlights.

[Organising! A Remedy for Despair](#) contains many lessons for people challenging exploitation and building union power in their own workplaces.

## 3 Commons Conversations



Season 2 of the [Commons Conversations](#) podcast featured campaigners, grassroots activists, academics and capacity builders from Australia, Aotearoa, UK, Europe and India. Topics include Indigenous solidarity, social movement research, disability justice, women and leadership, coalition building, forest protection, artificial intelligence and social transformation.

Thank you to all of our interviewers and interviewees and to 3CR for airing the episodes in our summer radio show.

# COLLECTIONS

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**The Commons Social Change Library includes 40 collections contributed by civil society and capacity building partners.**

New collections added in 2023/24 include:

- [European Center for Digital Action](#)
- [Tectonica](#)
- [How to Win Campaigns: The Chris Rose Collection](#)

Growing international collections include:

- [Global Grassroots Support Network](#)
- [Democracy Resource Hub](#)

In 2024/25 the Commons will also include:

- The Daniel Hunter Collection
- The George Lakey Collection
- Narrative Change Hub - a major new resource collection in partnership with IRIS (the International Resource for Impact and Storytelling)

Increasingly, organisations are choosing to create collections on the Commons rather than building separate new websites for their resources. By doing so they benefit from the site's established reputation and traffic, user-friendly cataloguing and search functionality, and ongoing maintenance by the Commons librarians.

“

Our respect and admiration for The Commons Social Change Library runs deep, and we are honoured to now have our very own resource collection as part of their online library.

The Commons Library is an unparalleled resource for activists worldwide, sharing over a thousand resources on a breadth of social change practices from all over the globe. It's an honour to contribute our work, including our original guides, frameworks, and insights on organising in the digital and AI ages, to such a respected and valuable online resource.

*Tectonica TON newsletter, 11 April 2024*

# FEEDBACK FROM LIBRARY USERS

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I'm delighted to be congratulating the Commons Social Change Library on five years of its amazing work. Before the Commons existed, I often reflected in frustration that there was so much collective knowledge in the sector held by campaigners and organisers with lots of experience, but very few people had the time to document or share that information, and no easy way for people to find that. The Commons Library changed all that.



*Anita Tang*

**Community Organising Director  
Australian Progress**

“

When I came across the Commons it really blew me away. I had never seen a resource centre that was alive where you can actually find things.

There are many different kinds of resource centres - there's the back of the closet where things accumulate, there's the filing cabinet you never go back to...

This is the opposite, a living resource centre: growing, adapting and thriving!



*Marshall Ganz*

**Harvard Professor &  
Organising Leader**

“

I can't overstate how useful and important the Commons is when it comes to building the capacity of those of us fighting for a just world.

From comprehensive resources to expert advice, the Commons is making an enormous impact, and is my go-to recommendation to anyone needing help, resources or inspiration for their next campaign.



*Justin Whelan*

**Senior Campaign Manager  
RE-Alliance**



# PLANS FOR 2024/25

## 1 Growing the Library



The Commons Library is a progressive institution for the longterm. The ongoing maintenance and growth of the Commons is crucial.

Priorities in the next year include upgrading the site (for speed, accessibility and security), amplifying diverse voices (in particular First Nations People and People of Colour), resources for strengthening democracy (with the Democracy Resource Hub) and supporting narrative practitioners (with the Narrative Change Hub).

## 2 Countering Disinformation



In this 24 hour social media dominated world ideas and stories spread fast! Right wing forces peddling falsehoods can cause significant harm: targeting communities, hijacking public debate and skewing political processes. It's crucial that progressives prepare to counter disinformation and misinformation.

With support from Humanists Victoria and the LUSH Charity Pot program, the Commons is developing and curating educational materials for civil society and young people.

## 3 Investigating User Needs



In 2023/24 the Commons was fortunate to partner with the University of Queensland's Global Change Scholar Program. A team of PhD students produced [A Comparative Analysis of Social Change Resource Hubs](#) which identified the Commons as world leading.

In 2024/25 a new team of scholars will research barriers, needs, and preferences of Commons Library users and potential stakeholders. The findings will inform the Commons Library strategic plan.



# COMMONS STAFF

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**HOLLY HAMMOND**  
Director

Holly directs the Commons Library: developing and implementing strategy, overseeing library operations, tracking social movement needs, forging project partnerships and building the financial sustainability of the organisation.

She is one of Australia's foremost activist educators.



**ANTJE DUN**  
Librarian

Antje maintains the library, creates and adds new content, supervises volunteers, does graphic design and contributes her information management expertise to special projects.

She has worked in many specialist libraries and is also a graphic designer.



**IAIN MCINTYRE**  
Commons Historian

Iain brings past social movements stories to present day change makers through social media posts, articles, campaign case studies and research projects.

He is a social movement historian and author of several books.



**AOIFE CARLI HANNAN**  
Engagement Officer

Aoife develops engagement pathways for Commons supporters. She plans and delivers social media outreach, fundraising appeals, and events.

Her many years of grassroots fundraising and solidarity work with Timor-Leste have skilled her up to strengthen the Commons.



**SOPHIE HARTLEY**  
Researcher

Sophie is a researcher on the Movement Monitor project, helping to measure the impact of the Australian climate movement.

She draws on her years of experience researching climate activism and working in various community organising and activism roles.

We would also like to thank Emily Wood-Trounce for her support with adding resources and transcripts; CTAS for bookkeeping; and Action Skills for crucial website maintenance.

# COMMONS BOARD

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## **SUE MCKINNON (Chair)**

Sue (BEc, DipEd, GIA (Cert)) has a background in forensic accounting, lecturing in economics, and educating people about the complexities of poverty and the important role of grassroots community organising in making the voices of the oppressed heard through local and international advocacy. She has been treasurer for a number of organisations and is the director of the McKinnon Family Foundation.



## **ROBYN GULLIVER**

Robyn (PhD) is a Research Fellow at Australian National University and the University of Queensland. She researches the antecedents and consequences of environmental activism. She is the author of 'Civil Resistance Against Climate Change' and 'The Psychology of Effective Activism'. She has led and served in numerous environmental and community organisations in Australia and New Zealand.



## **DJANGO MEROPE SYNGE**

Django (BA) has worked in advocacy and Australian civil society for over 10 years. He is experienced in managing staff, reviewing and evaluating programs, developing ambitious fundraising programs, and advising organizational leadership on reform and change management. He has a particular focus on using technology to drive organizational innovation.

The Commons Library is governed by a passionate team of leaders from across civil society.



## **HUGH RUNDLE**

Hugh is a librarian who has worked for two decades in public and academic libraries, mostly specialising in library technology and discovery systems. He also has experience coordinating electoral campaigns and helping lead non-profit organisations. Hugh grew up among the forests and coasts of lutruwita/Tasmania and is always happiest among the trees with a view to sea.



## **PHONG TRINH**

Phong (MIR) has worked in advocacy for 10 years in the youth, international development and refugee sectors. He specialises in digital marketing, communication, graphic design and strategy development. Phong currently works at Australian Progress, building the collective capacity of civil society movements to achieve systemic change.



## **HOLLY DAWSON**

Holly is a descendant of the Bunurong people and grew up in Boorloo (Perth) on Nyoongar Country. She has worked as a campaigner and strategist for international organisations and environmental advocacy groups with a strong focus on movement building and knowledge sharing. She has almost 10 years experience. Holly works at the Online Progressive Engagement Network which supports 20 digital first advocacy groups across 20 countries facilitating learning and coordinating transnational campaigns.

# VALUED CONTRIBUTIONS

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## 1 Volunteers & Champions

Volunteers contribute new ideas, skills, interesting resources, community connections and reliable support that makes the Commons Library stronger.

Much appreciation to Relle Graefe, Jo Collins, Jan McNicol and ET Smith for their contributions this year, as well as several writers who have contributed their work to the Commons for others to learn from. We would also like to thank everyone who champions the Commons through their networks, including all those who sent kind words during the 5th birthday celebrations.

“

I feel privileged to have witnessed this wonderful initiative go from strength to strength. Thank you for all the energy, care, and dedication behind the scenes!

ET Smith

## 2 Research Advisory Committee

The Research Advisory Committee advises the Commons Library on research methodology; social change related research to summarise or ‘translate’ for our audience; outreach to researchers and academic networks; and the set up and oversight of the new Movement Monitor research fellowship.

Many thanks to Robyn Gulliver (convenor), Calista Castles, Shanthi Robertson and Iain McIntyre.

“

The Commons Library bridges the gap between research and resistance, helping us build more effective movements through evidence-based information. It is the only place where activists can access the research they need, without paywalls or academic jargon standing in the way.

Robyn Gulliver

## 3 Library Advisory Committee

The Library Advisory Committee advises the Commons Library regarding: cataloguing and collection policy; managing materials and making information accessible to visitors; and trends and innovation in libraries that may be relevant to the Commons. In addition the committee is an opportunity for the Commons to share updates with people engaged in libraries and build a supporter base amongst librarians.

Many thanks to Hugh Rundle (convenor), Nat Enright, Steve Wright and Antje Dun.

“

Just as the Commons provides access to the lessons of past campaigns and the collective wisdom of activists, the Library itself connects to the experience, techniques and lessons learned within the Library profession through the LAC.

Hugh Rundle

# COMMONS DONORS

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Thank you to all our supporters, big and small!

Your commitment to the Commons Library puts crucial resources in the hands of change makers.

The Commons Library is made possible through financial contributions from a mix of sources:

- core funding
- project funding
- project partnerships
- donations
- monthly subscriptions

The Commons Community, our regular giver's program, continues to grow. The guarantee of ongoing funds provided by monthly giving means that we can plan for the future; provide rapid response resources at times of crisis and opportunity; and take on new and exciting projects.

In April we held our first in person fundraising event, a trivia night and 5th birthday celebration! Thank you to Trades Hall for providing the venue, everyone who attended, and all of the individuals and businesses who donated prizes.

## 2023/24 Grant Providers & Philanthropic Supporters

- Alf & Meg Steel Fund of the Australian Communities Foundation
- ACME Foundation
- McKinnon Family Foundation
- AEGN Members
- Sunrise Project
- Boundless.Earth

## Funders of the 2024/25 Countering Disinformation Project

- Humanists Victoria
- LUSH Charity Pot

The Commons Library is seeking further core and project funding to continue and grow our important work. We also encourage organisations who benefit from the Commons to become financial supporters. Contact Holly Hammond to discuss options for working together to make activism smarter and stronger.

“

I value everything you do at the Commons Library.

I utilize your resources all the time for our grassroots campaigning.

I always say to my partner if I win the lottery the first thing I'd do is donate to you!

I appreciate your newsletters of updates and how, at the bottom of every resource, there are other resources and similar resources you might like. It makes it so easy to navigate.

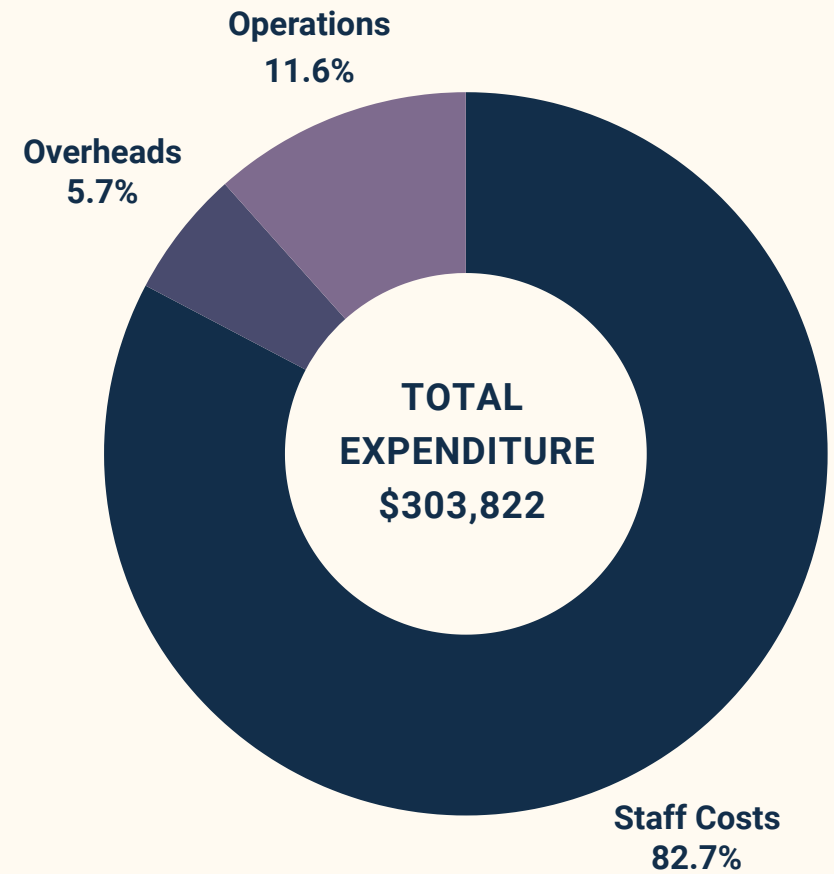
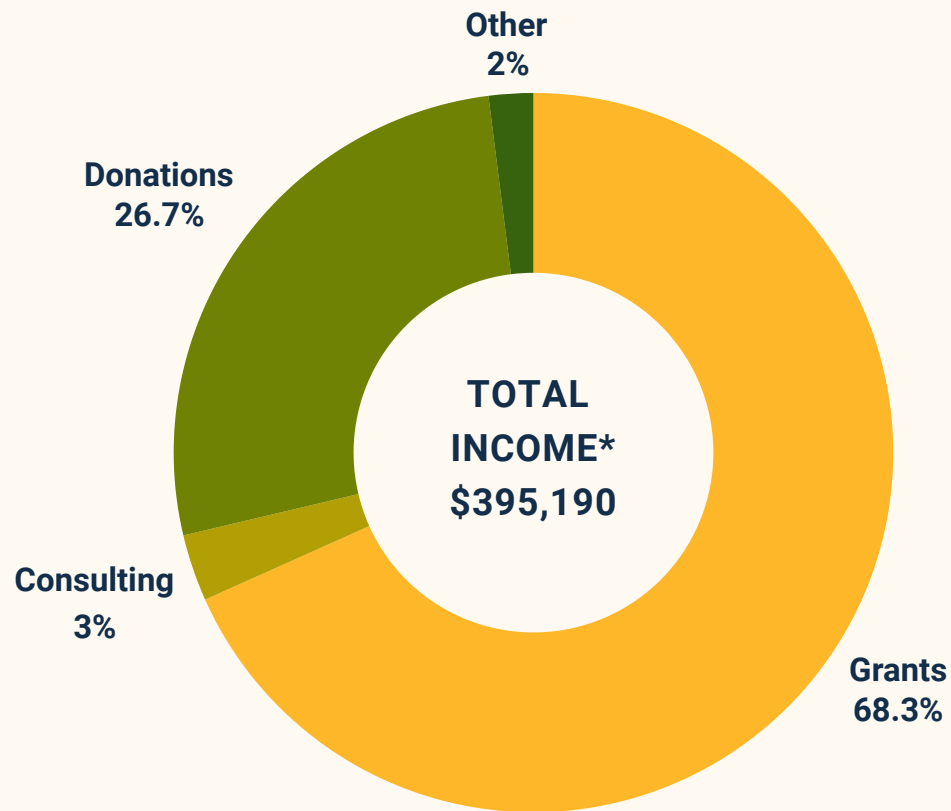
Thanks for everything you do, you really really make a difference to our work.

*Ash Peplow Ball*

**Women Transforming Cities  
Canada**

# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

## 2023/24 FINANCIAL YEAR



\* Income received in 2023/24 includes funds for projects in 2024/25.



# THE COMMONS

Social Change Library

## VISION

The Commons Library vision is an Australia that has well informed, skilled, collaborative and effective movements for social and ecological justice.

## MISSION

The Commons Library exists to make social movements smarter and stronger.

We support the power and effectiveness of progressive social change efforts by collecting campaigning best practice from Australia and around the world.

## CONNECT WITH US



[commonslibrary.org](https://commonslibrary.org)



[librarian@commonslibrary.org](mailto:librarian@commonslibrary.org)



[facebook.com/commonslibrary](https://facebook.com/commonslibrary)



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