



Frequently Asked Questions (updated March 2018)

Q: What's OWR about? Why have you started it, and what's your goal?

OWR is about mobilizing the power of organized people against the reckless abuse of power by rich elites. We started it because we're sick of what's happening in this country and this state. In both, public life has been coarsened and corrupted by a swarm of greedy, rules-rigging, billionaire takers. But we believe both can be set right by organized citizen action.

Our goal is to make Wisconsin a democracy, with a government by and for the people. That would be good for the people of Wisconsin and also set an example for the nation. In national politics, Wisconsin has long punched above its weight. In the past, the effect was often pretty good. Lately, it's been awful; Walker's Wisconsin has become Trump's America. But it can be great and good again if we make Wisconsin an example of the power of a real democracy.

Doing this is also part of our goal.

Q: A lot of people agree with your goal. Why do we need another group to achieve that?

Because what we've done so far clearly hasn't worked, and Bernie Sanders gives us an opportunity to do something better (which Trump and Walker motivate seizing). The Sanders campaign identified a very large group of people in Wisconsin who share our values. He won last year's primary in 71 of 72 counties, and lost only narrowly in the 72nd (Milwaukee). Our Revolution (OR), the organization he helped set up after his presidential campaign ended, is willing to share use of his list of 100,000+ Wisconsin activists and supporters with OWR. We think this gives us a good start in building an independent (nonpartisan, indeed "transpartisan") political organization to remake Wisconsin government for democracy — at all levels of government, all over the state. That requires organization.

OWR will be an election- and governing-focused, democratic mass-membership organization, with a member-ratified "People's Platform" for change in Wisconsin. It will endorse candidates (some new, some incumbent) based on their loyalty to that platform; publicize and explain its support through intensive canvassing and other activity with voters; and help our endorsed candidates who win office to keep their commitments once in office. It will work in Wisconsin's large number of nonpartisan local elections as well as its partisan ones. It will be governed by

its members. It will have a statewide brand and staffing, but operate largely through local chapters. It will make its biggest organizational investments in developing an active, informed, organized membership — the key to unlocking our political future.

There's no other organization in Wisconsin with this ambition, governance structure, and focus. That's why we've started a new one. But we don't want to compete with existing small-d democratic organizations and don't ask people active in them to leave them for us. Instead, we invite all of them, and their members, and any other citizens who share our democratic values, to join us as their electoral arm. Since OWR's members will govern OWR, this invitation is not a power-grab but a power-give. We are simply proposing that Wisconsinites who share our concern about undemocratic trends in the state act together to get something of great importance to us all: the people's control of our government. Those who share our democratic convictions currently have little political power. That's because we're not doing much together. We're organizationally divided. But this power-deficit is fixable if we unite in a competent, democratic, determined organization big enough to find on a political map.

Q: Will OWR be a new “third” or minor party?

Not unless and until electoral rules change pretty fundamentally! Remember, we're after real not fake political power and want to be constructive not harmful. So we don't want to fall into the trap which current rules (written by the major parties, of course) force third parties into.

We don't want to ask our supporters to “waste” their vote on candidates with no chance of winning, or risk “spoiling” an election by letting their first choice among candidates take enough votes away from their second choice to give the election to someone they really don't want at all (think, in recent history, of Stein-Clinton-Trump or Nader-Gore-Bush). We also don't want to spend our energy meeting all the onerous and discriminatory rules and requirements (also written by the major parties) of acquiring and defending a distinct minor party line on election ballots. So we're not now even thinking of becoming a third party.

This said, we think democratic political parties can be very useful in organizing real public debate, and we'd like to be exactly the sort of organization that any party that took that function seriously would also want to be — rooted in some popular values, governed by its members, with a platform chosen by them, endorsing and helping to elect candidates based on their commitment to that program, and holding its candidates to that program once elected.

Building that sort of an organization, doing these kinds of things, is what OWR is centrally about. But we can do all this (while avoiding the costs of acquiring and defending a separate ballot line) by operating as a “social welfare” organization under IRC §501(c)(4), with members.

So that's what we're doing.

Q: But can OWR really compete in elections without its own line on the ballot?

We most certainly can. Nearly all of Wisconsin elections (and there are a lot of them, >15K) are nonpartisan. These don't identify candidates with any party. And even partisan elections (for example, for Governor, state legislature, or federal officials) have open primaries that anyone can enter. “All” we need to do is have an active membership big enough to compete with the big money in getting our candidates' message, and our program and hopes for this state, out to

the public.

Q: Is OWR trying to take over the Wisconsin Democratic Party?

No we're not. That's the simplest answer and an accurate one. But a more complete and nuanced answer, which depends on what such "takeover" means and to what it's applied, is "no, no, no" and "yes, of course!" and "no." Here's that answer, expanded ...

"No" if "takeover" means making the replacement of current Democratic Party of Wisconsin (DPW) leadership an OWR organizational priority. We don't think current leadership are bad people, don't want to spend time messing with somebody else's organization, and don't think replacing leadership is the way to change the DPW. We think change will happen in the DPW by using its ballot line to elect better candidates with a better program than present. That will get the DPW's notice. "No" also because we don't think political parties in Wisconsin have much real organizational power. They're basically owners of known political brands and ballot lines, rented by individual candidates who pay the rent with cash from big donors. We favor a more values- and program-based way of choosing candidates. "No" finally because we think our values and program will appeal to many who don't vote at all, or don't regularly vote in Democratic primaries, and we don't want to lose their support by identifying with an existing party. Among many of the working people we see as our natural base, the Democratic brand — sadly, stupidly, but true — is toxic. For all these reasons, an effort to "take over" the DPW is not a fight we're interested in. We're after much bigger game — making Wisconsin a democracy, with a government responsible to the people and working for the many not the few.

But "yes, of course!" if "takeover" means making DPW's policy commitments closer to our own. Of course we want that. And where we have the capacity and don't think a current Democrat is fighting for our values and program, we'll primary them with candidates of our own.

And "no" again because we're after that bigger game. We want our values and program to include all Wisconsin government and all parties, not just the DPW.

Q: Who's in charge of OWR? Who's really making decisions?

The members, through an elected board. Statewide, and in each of our chapters, we have co-chair, secretary, and treasurer officers, all elected by appropriate membership using ranked-choice voting. We incorporated as a 501(c)(4) organization and are current waiting for IRS certification as such. We also incorporate an allied 501(c)(3) organization, called Our Wisconsin Education Fund, which has been certified by the IRS.

Q: How does OWR relate to the national Our Revolution?

We're one of four OR-affiliated groups with a statewide organization (the others are Maryland, Massachusetts, and Texas). National supports our work in Wisconsin with a little bit of money, permission to use the Wisconsin portions of its national email/cell-phone, and varied services and tools to help with our organizing here. We talk with their staff and leadership all the time, and meet semi-monthly with them and the other state organization to compare notes and try to learn from and help each other. Relations with national have been frustrating at times, but are getting better, as they themselves staff up and get better organized — something that took a bit longer to happen than we'd hoped. 😊

Q: How does the state OWR relate to its local chapters?

We want vibrant, high-involvement, largely independent local chapters *and* an effective statewide organization and brand. What that means for the nuts and bolts of organizational operation (definition of chapter boundaries, division of labor between state and local, etc.) is always a work in progress, but what it means for governance and program is easier. On governance, “one-member, one-vote” is our basic rule. On program, state program will have “supremacy” in the sense that nothing contrary to its values and elements can be done, but locals are free to experiment above and beyond them. The state platform is a floor, not a ceiling, on constructive democracy in chapters.

Q: Where did your name come from?

We like the name “Our Wisconsin” and its tagline “our home, our values, our voice, our votes.” This directly states our view on how things should be in Wisconsin — namely that the people rule and thus collectively own the terms of their state life together. We added “Revolution” — which many of us don’t like at all — because OR required it. We may be dropping it.

Q: What’s your platform?

Our platform is up on our website. It currently has many planks (73!), but is basically organized around four big things we want for Wisconsin:

A Real Democracy: Democracy’s been trashed in Wisconsin, and we’ve got to get it back. That means again drawing fair election districts, making voting secure and convenient for all, getting big money out of politics, voting rules that weight all views the same, improving government transparency, restored home rule, free association and the right to organize, standards on public performance and honesty, ending corrupt privatization, and recommitting to extinguish racism and sexism and respecting human rights. Pretty basic.

An Economy that Works For All: This means raising income and living standards and reducing inequality and waste by taking the “high road” instead of the “low road” in economic policy and development. Instead of treating people like road kill and the earth like a sewer, and democratic government has something to mock and starve and corrupt we’d like to invest in people, increase flourishing, and make government both accountable to the people and more efficient in its operation. We think Wisconsin could have a very bright material future, but that requires doing our knitting better and respecting real people more than private corporations. The program has lots of details on what that means, but it comes down to working together to reduce waste, add value, and capture and share the material benefits of doing both, locally.

Quality Public Goods and Services: Wisconsin has never been a rich state and doesn’t have exceptional natural resources. But that doesn’t mean we can’t have the best quality life on earth. It does mean, and it’s always meant, that we need to work together and pool our individual resources to build great public goods for all that advance our shared convictions about what a good life, for all, requires. Providing them gives everyone a shot at that life, every kid a chance at greatness and contribution. What are

these goods? Great public schools, a clean environment, safe and healthy communities, high-performing transportation, energy, and communication systems, quality human services including health care, and a robust democracy to choose and defend and improve all those things. Unfortunately, in recent years we've let the quality of all these public goods decline. We need to get them back.

Fair Taxes: We can certainly afford a better quality public goods and more respect and opportunity for all. But everybody's got to pay their fair share, which means that burdens should be roughly equal, which means revenue based on the ability to pay. We really want to improve the efficiency of government, but we also want the government we choose to have the money to do the job we ask of it. Taxes are the price we pay for civilization. We all pay them, based on our ability, or say goodbye to civilization. It's really as simple as that.

Q: Why do you think the public would support such a program?

Because they already do! We know this from opinion polls on all the things above and Bernie's success last year. What OWR needs to do is find and develop members to make and defend the case for the program in understandable terms in the thousands of conversations with millions of voters we'll need to have. And it needs to find, develop, and elect candidates committed to the program to the same in more public venues.

Q. What are you doing outside campaigns, elections, and governing?

There are three big things we are doing, and committed to doing more of.

One is helping in protest against and resistance to bad things our governments (national and state and sometime local) are doing right now. While our chief focus is on building an organization capable of taking back the government many are protesting, we're extremely concerned about the present moment and support all kinds of peaceful direct action to show, with our bodies, that we don't like what's going on and will resist it. Our members protecting Trump's sadism on DACA changes and the DREAMers, and willing to go to jail to show these new Americans are welcome here, is a case in point.

Two is member development. We'd like all our members to have a clear picture of the world they're acting on. That means knowing *what's happened to this country and state, what/who's to blame, and what's a feasible way to improve it*. Getting everyone on the same page on these things will take some time and work. We also want our members to have the skills needed to do the work we're going to ask of them. Some of that is about "soft" (but harder to learn) organizing skills: how to talk with those who disagree with you; how to develop the patience with others to really listen to them; how to identify the issues and interests they have that might lead them to see what you want as good for them. These skills aren't magic; they can be learned. But like a musical instrument, they take time and practice to master. Finally there are management, technical, and research skills we want chapters and members to have — knowing how to organize and run a productive meeting, construct a work-plan, enough of the election law to keep us well within it, or competence in using the VAN (Voter Activation Network) database to cut some turf for canvassing, Action Network to keep in touch with members, Relay to do mass text-messaging and response, 'Lil Sis to begin to map the power structure in

community or region, etc. We don't expect everyone to learn all these things, but we need a lot of people to know them, and this too will take work and time.

Three is chapter development. We want chapters to get things done, but we also want them to be the kind of community people would actually want to belong to — that feeds their brain and spirit, not just political success. So only part of chapter self-management is about setting clear goals and work-plans, with metrics on progress, and delivering political success. Another part is offering members the range of activity needed to engage them — anything from opportunities for direct action in protest, resistance, or support of different government actions; to public events like community town halls; to films series, speaker series, or reading groups and discussion circles — while keep an eye on the prize of that success. And a final but very important part is developing a culture of mutual respect, encouragement, fellowship, and even fun. We have some ideas about how to build that culture, and much more to learn. Its care and development will also take work and time.

The key to OWR's success is developing a large organized base of informed members having fun doing good work they really believe in. If that's what OWR becomes, we don't think anything can stop us. If it doesn't we think we'll fail, and the state will continue to fail. It's really that stark and important. That's why we member and chapter development stuff so seriously, and have taken as much time as we have with an answer.

Q: How is OWR going to be funded? What's the money for, and how do I know it's spent well?

We hope to be funded largely by regular contributions from our members. But we'll also try to get support from other individual donors and organizations like foundations or unions. The money is used to meet basic operational needs (like printing, travel, and legal and insurance services) and salary and expenses for staff — of which you need some, even in an overwhelmingly volunteer operation, to help in its and their organization. On the second question, financial information (revenue, expenditures, accounts receivable, etc.) is reported very regularly to the board, which is elected by members, and shared with local leadership as well. OWR is a very transparent organization. Whether it's using its money wisely and well is something that's easy to find out, but you've got to get involved to get all the details.

Q: How can I help?

In all sorts of ways. You could start by joining the organization (just go to the landing page at www.ourwisconsinrev.com and click the "Join" tab). Then look around the website, follow us on Facebook ("Our Wisconsin Revolution") and see what interests you. You should definitely find your local chapter (they're all over the state, with contact info on the website) and try to get involved with it. They're all gearing up right now for the spring elections in Wisconsin but are doing lots of other things as well. Find out and get involved in some of it! And if for some reason you can't find someone else local, or a fit for your skills, just contact us: info@ourwisconsinrev.com. We know we can get you some useful work you can to help make Wisconsin a real democracy ... and still have a life to enjoy it!