



Frequently Asked Questions (May 2017)

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

OWR is basically about mobilizing the power of organized people against the reckless and abusive power of organized money. 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; massively publicize and explain its support and gain the candidates' election through intensive canvassing and other activity with voters; and help those new electeds 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 power-give. We are simply proposing that we act together to get something of great importance to us all: control of our government. We now have little political power, even though people basically agree with us, because we're organizationally divided. But this power-deficit is fixable if we unite in something 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 oppose (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, without any party ballot lines at all. 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 where it's applied, is "no" "no" "no" and "yes, of course!" and again "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. (Change will happen by electing better candidates with a better program, showing that that's good for DPW.) "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" also 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. For all these reasons, "taking over" the DPW is not a fight we're interested in. We're after much bigger game — making Wisconsin a democracy, and making its government responsible to the people. 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. But "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 themselves, as soon as our founding convention happens in June. In the meantime, an Interim Organizing Committee (members listed at www.ourwisconsinrev.com) makes the decisions. To be able to take money and enter into contracts, we had to incorporate the organization, and that entity (Our Wisconsin Revolution Inc., EIN 81-4853693) has officers (Joel Rogers as President, Peter Rickman as Secretary-Treasurer, Maxwell Love as Vice President). Both the IOC and these officers will resign from their current duties upon member election of a board at the convention. That elected board will then be the "decider-in-chief."

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

Right now, we look to OR mostly for help in working its Wisconsin email/cell-phone list. But relations are good, and we expect to be doing more with them in the future.

Remember, OR itself is just a few months old, with only about 15 staff covering the whole country. Given that, it's been impressively active and successful this past winter. OR led a big struggle within the national Democratic Party to make Keith Ellison, the progressive Congressman from Minnesota, Chair of the DNC. He lost, but the Sanders-OR folks made their point (helped along, by the way, by leadership from the DPW) about where they wanted the

party to be heading. Ellison was made Deputy Chair by acclamation. He'll have real say and influence. OR has also helped lead a number of coordinated multi-state and national demonstrations on health care, immigration, and other issues. It endorsed and helped elect some new candidates. And of course its staff is helping us and other statewide chapters, as well as a larger number of small groups in states not yet organized statewide. OR staff are running fast and overworked, but the organization has become an important part of the progressive political landscape. Stay tuned.

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

Our basic goal is vibrant, high-involvement local chapters, with 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.) isn't crystal clear, and probably never will be, but we're talking with members all the time and are confident we'll get to workable rules on all. What the goal 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 outside them.

Q: Where did your name come from, and is it permanent?

This is a longish story. We were first told by national Our Revolution that its name, or at least the words "our" and "revolution," needed to be in the name of any state affiliate to be recognized. We like the phrase "Our Wisconsin," which 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 — simply meet this requirement. We were then told by national that they were relaxing that rule, so intended to poll members the name issue. But they're reversed themselves again recently, so we're sticking with Our Wisconsin Revolution as the official name.

Q: What's your platform and when can I see it?

The "People's Platform" is in formation, and won't be official until after the convention. But members will be able to see drafts-in-progress as soon as May. We'll basically be trying to apply the broad commitments of the Sanders national campaign (now reflected in national OR's program) to Wisconsin, limiting it to things we can do in a state. It will have four big "pillars" of reform. They are:

1. **A Real Democracy:** drawing fair election districts, making voting secure and convenient for all, getting big money out of politics, single transferable voting, improving government transparency, restoring home rule, guaranteeing free association and the right to organize, raising standards on public institutions, ending corrupt privatization, fighting racism, fighting sexism, respecting human rights
2. **An Economy that Works For All:** raising income and living standards and reducing inequality and waste by taking the "high road" instead of the "low road" (competing on productivity [quality & distinctiveness] rather than sweating workers, avoiding taxes,

dumping costs, and extracting rents [*aka* “rigging”]), and promoting labor-management partnerships, local independent business, employee ownership, cooperatives, and clean energy

3. **Quality Public Goods for All:** improving the performance of all natural services and built physical infrastructure (in air and water, transportation, energy, communications) and essential public services (education, public safety, healthcare, housing, childcare, child protection, elder care)
4. **Just Revenue:** ending regressive loopholes and providing adequate revenue, paid for based on the ability-to-pay

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, or committed to doing.

One is helping protest against and resistance to what’s now happening. 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.

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. And getting members to even begin to use them will take work and time.) Other needed skill are more organizational or technical — “cutting turf” for voter canvassing, working with the VAN (Voter Activation Network) database, managing a productive meeting, doing effective advance work on events, power-mapping a political community, opposition research, policy research. 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: You're asking for contributions. What's the money for, and how do I know it's spent well?

The money will be 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 biweekly to those in charge (currently, the IOC). Whether it's spent well or not, of course, depends on your judgment of our success and efficiency in achieving it.

Q: How is OWR going to be funded?

We hope to be funded largely by regular contributions from our members. But we'll also try to get support from other donors and organizations like foundations and labor unions.

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). All it requires that you endorse our principles. Then look around the website and 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) and try to get involved with it. (If you don't have a local chapter but want to start one, contact us, again: info@ourwisconsinrev.com.) If you have a particular interest or skill in one of their areas, you might join any one of the many statewide working groups or local ones always forming in chapters. Also, if you can make a contribution of money, that'd be welcome. And it's certainly needed!

And, if you still have time on your hands, just write us. We promise to get you some good work you can do to help make Wisconsin a real democracy ... and still have a life to enjoy it!