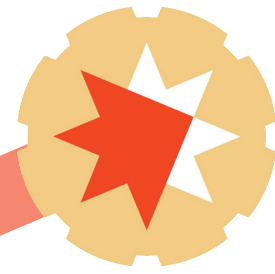


# 2021 Annual Report



**Adapting our methods, staying  
the course, and striving for  
solidarity, justice, and equity.**

**East Side  
Freedom  
Library**



## Dear ESFL Friends and Supporters:

We hope this letter finds you and your loved ones safe and well. Last year at this time we wrote: “The end of 2020 and a turn into 2021 suggest no lifting of the challenges posed by the pandemic, the economic crisis, and systemic racism.” We were right.

The East Side Freedom Library continued to engage these challenges in 2021. Our collections now exceed **26,000 books**, cataloged by collaborators under the direction of Bruce Willms, and the team has begun to catalog journals, dvd’s and vhs tapes, and musical recordings. The ESFL team has extended and deepened our programming, largely online (please visit our [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) pages to see what we have done) but also through creative use of our beautiful front lawn. We hosted lively, well-attended events, including musical performances, poetry readings, art exhibits, movies, and puppet shows, and we drew many neighbors for National Night Out in early August and our first Labor Solidarity Picnic in early September. While we look forward to being able to convene in-person gatherings, we intend to incorporate what we have learned from our online programming (participants from England, Germany, Japan, and Ethiopia have joined conversations with East Siders) and our outdoor presence (seeing neighbors’ kids settle in to watch and listen to live music or raucous puppets is just the best) as we move forward.

**Despite the challenges we face, we are optimistic about the future of the Twin Cities, the state of Minnesota, our communities and the East Side Freedom Library.**



**We continue to learn that partnerships are key to our work.** In 2021, we co-created programming with the Ramsey County Historical Society, Historic Saint Paul, Minnesota Humanities Center, University of Minnesota’s History Department and School of Public Health, Hmong Archives, Hmong Educational Resources, Inc., Karen Organization of Minnesota, Horn of Africa, TPT-2, Twin Cities Japanese American Citizens League, Family Values for Life, One Voice Mixed Chorus, On Stage, Saint Paul Public Library system, Saint Paul Public Schools. Trilingua Cinema, Women Against Military Madness, Middle East Peace Now, Subtext Books, the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation, New Brookwood Labor College, and local unions in MAPE (Minnesota Association of Professional Employees), Teamsters, Elevator Constructors, Pipefitters, and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

In the face of the pandemic, a wide range of donors enabled ESFL to stay afloat. **More than 1100 individuals made donations**, and nearly 100 of them joined our "Solidarity League" of sustaining donors. Thirty-eight local unions, as well as the Saint Paul and Minneapolis Regional Labor Federations, made donations. We received support from many local foundations and charitable organizations – the Saint Paul and Minnesota Community Foundation, the F.R. Bigelow Foundation, the Mardag Foundation, the Xcel Energy Community Foundation, the AARP, the Otto Bremer Trust, and the Butler Family Foundation. We also received publicly-funded support from the Metro Regional Arts Council, the Minnesota State Arts Board, the City of Saint Paul's Cultural STAR program, and state Legacy dollars disbursed by the Minnesota Historical Society. This support not only made it possible for ESFL to keep functioning, but also to undertake significant improvements to our material capacity. Alliance Mechanical Services completed their replacement of our entire HVAC system. We purchased a 200 foot long ethernet cable so that we can access the internet from our front lawn. As we are running out of space for books (!), we are renting a substantial room next door, at the Arlington Hills Lutheran Church, and several collections, as well as films and musical recordings will be safe and accessible there. **Thank you, everyone!**



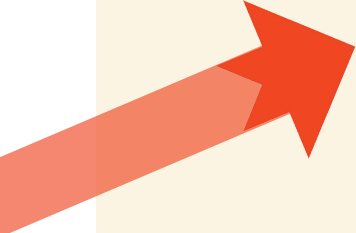
Despite the challenges we face, we are optimistic about the future of the Twin Cities, the state of Minnesota, our communities and the East Side Freedom Library. **In this historical moment, nothing is easy, but much is possible.** We thank you for your support as we continue to lay a foundation for solidarity, justice, and equity.

In solidarity,

Peter Rachleff, Co-Executive Director

Rick Macpherson, Chairperson, Board of Directors

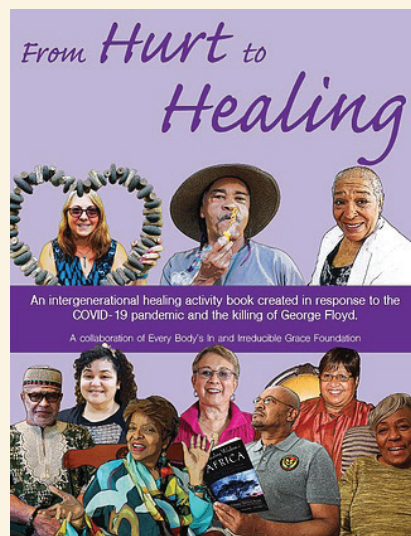
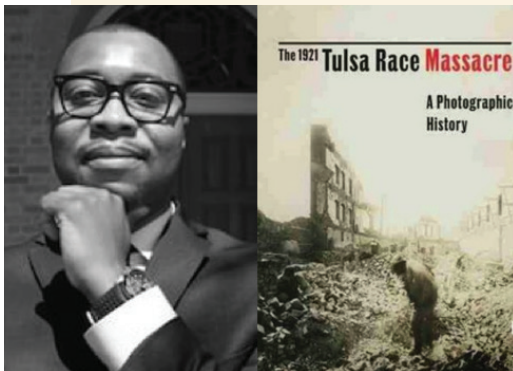




## ESFL Program Area: Teaching and Learning

**We like to think of the East Side Freedom Library as a space where new knowledge is created.** Everyone who enters this space, both in person and virtually, can contribute questions, ideas, and stories that become part and parcel of our collective storehouse of knowledge. We curate our Teaching and Learning work, indeed, all of our work, with this goal in mind.


Despite the pandemic, ESFL was able to maintain several programs on a regular basis by shifting to virtual meetings. In partnership with the St. Paul Recovery Act Reading Group, our Reparations Reading Group, which began in early 2020, convenes a monthly conversation, looking at the concept



of reparations from diverse angles. We have read books and articles, watched films, listened – and questioned – scholars, and shared our ideas with each other. In the beginning of 2021, an important aspect of our efforts came to fruition when the Saint Paul City Council unanimously passed a resolution **“Committing to Racial Healing Through the Exploration of Reparations for American Descendants of Chattel Slavery Living in Saint Paul,”** and appointed a “Legislative Advisory Commission” to superintend the work.

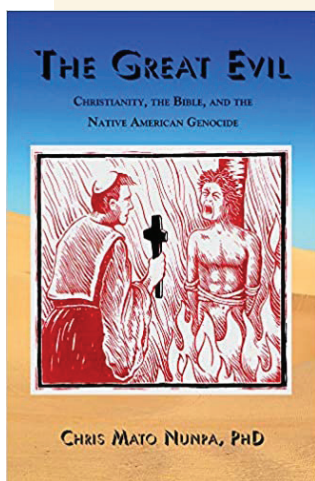
ESFL also convenes a monthly Labor History Discussion Group. In 2021, we watched and discussed such films as “Willmar 8,” “Finally Got the News,” “Uprising of ‘34,” “Bisbee ‘17,” “Harlan County USA,” and several films of the “Plutocracy” series. Zoom also gave us a great benefit, that we could invite a labor historian from anywhere to provide a reading and join us for a conversation. We met with such scholar-activists as Lane Windham (Georgetown University), Jordan Camp (Trinity University), Gabe Winant (University of Chicago), and JoAnn Wypijewski (The Nation magazine), and engaged them in dynamic conversations.

**No, we do not shy away from difficult topics.**



### Teaching and Learning continued

We also continued our efforts to engage young scholars through our National History Day work. Our mentoring team shifted to a "zoom room" format with, frankly, uneven results. While we worked with fewer students, there were some notable successes, including two Open World Learning Community students who made a **prize-winning documentary about Ethel Payne, the first African American woman to be part of the White House Press Corps** (in 1954). Ms. Payne caught their attention due to her confrontation of President Eisenhower about the lack of anti-Jim Crow regulations in the new federal highway system. ESFL also engaged the "Read Brave" project as a way to reach younger readers. We not only distributed great new books to youthful members of our community, but we also co-hosted a dynamic event with the Minnesota Humanities Center, featuring writer Junauda Petrus.




ESFL shifted our monthly "Book Geek Happy Hour" to online, with the added benefit of **including readers and discussants from California to New York**. It's been a delightful way to find out what people are reading and what they are learning. We have also hosted workshops in Community Journalism and creative writing (Cracked Walnut). We were also intentional about providing a platform for writers whose engagement with critical issues deserves to be shared with a wider audience. In April we hosted the editors and contributors to FROM

**We were intentional about providing a platform for writers whose engagement with critical issues deserves to be shared with a wider audience.**

HURT TO HEALING, an intergenerational activities book centered in the African American community. In June, **on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre**, in collaboration with the Ramsey County Historical Society, we hosted Prof. Karlos Hill and his new book on that painful subject. A graduate of Macalester College, Dr. Hill teaches in the History Department of the University of Oklahoma. In October, Dr. Chris Mato Nunpa, a Dakota elder and scholar, presented his new book, THE GREAT EVIL, exploring the ways that settlers and the military visited genocide upon Dakota people in Minnesota.

**No, we do not shy away from difficult topics.**





## ESFL Program Area: Labor and Equity

The pandemic and heightened awareness of racial inequities have put a **spotlight on housing issues in Saint Paul**, and our Housing Justice work has had a significant impact. Under the leadership of Ben Werner and Sidney Stuart, we have organized a Community Advisory Committee and a Housing Justice Working Group and we have convened a virtual Housing Summit in which 90 people participated. Through a series of information-focused programs on home ownership, renting, rent stabilization, evictions protections, and services for the unhoused, we have helped community members expand their knowledge about issues, resources and programs that they might access.

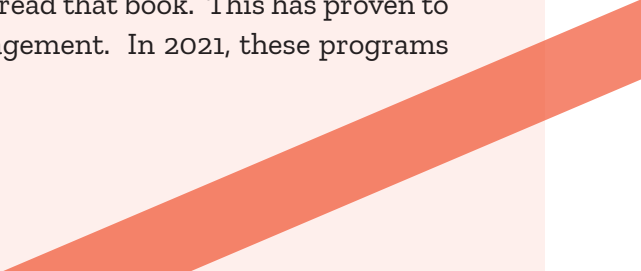
**We continue to be guided by our mission to “inspire solidarity, work for justice, and advocate for equity for all.”**

We have also convened discussions of the TPT-2 documentary, “**Jim Crow of the North**,” and of the “**Mapping Prejudice**” project. We have also sought to encourage our community members to develop their voices about publicly-funded projects. When city councilors Jane Prince, Nelsie Yang, and Amy Brendmoen wanted to hear from East Siders about how the City should spend the \$166 million coming from the American Rescue Plan, they asked us to convene a public discussion. Forty people attended on our lawn and shared their ideas with the councilors. **Our advocacy of greater community input has had an impact** on the Port Authority’s process around the Hillcrest development project, and our Housing

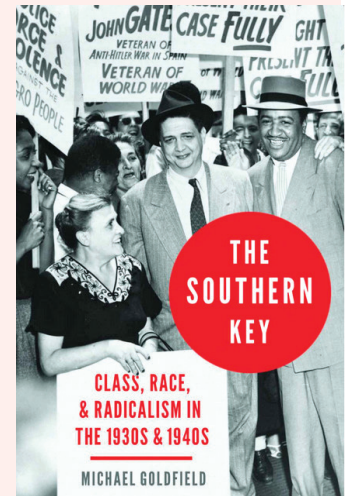


Justice team is getting ready for public discussion around the upcoming Hamm’s Brewery project. We continue to be guided by our mission to “inspire solidarity, work for justice, and advocate for equity for all.”

ESFL has also hosted programs to bring labor history, the history of movements for social justice, and the lives of activists from the margins of our community’s awareness into the center. **We are also intentional about curating programs which place the past in conversation with the present.** Our favorite method is to bring the author of a new book and place her/him/them in discussion with several local community members who have read that book. This has proven to be a format which encourages ever-widening circles of engagement. In 2021, these programs



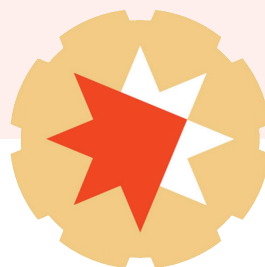
included David Roediger and his *THE SINKING MIDDLE CLASS*, Donna Haverty-Stacke and her *THE FIERCE LIFE OF GRACE HOLMES CARLSON*, Mike Goldfield and his *THE SOUTHERN KEY: CLASS, RACE, AND RADICALISM IN THE 1930S AND 1940S*, "Nurse T" and her *A PANDEMIC NURSE'S DIARY*, and Eric Lotke and his novel, *UNION MADE*. Authors, discussants, and audience members have been enthusiastic in their responses to these conversations.

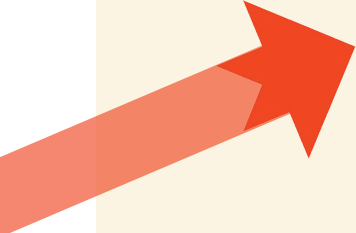


Our "Labor and Equity" programming is interwoven with our "Teaching and Learning" focus. **Not only do we organize and host informative programs, but we also participate directly in teaching about labor and equity.** ESFL continues to collaborate with the New Brookwood Labor College, and our Co-Executive Director Peter Rachleff and our Board member Caitlin Reid collaborate in teaching a "Working Class History" course for NBLC. Peter also teaches courses in Immigration and Labor History for the Adult and Community Education programs of the Saint Paul and Minneapolis Public Schools. In the wondrous world of zoom, he has also been able to make labor history presentations to a wide range of local unions and to provide presentations to apprentices in the IBEW and the Pipefitters. Peter's "Immigration History" walking tours, which begin

in Swede Hollow and then venture north along Payne Avenue to the Library, have been another platform for teaching and learning. Peter hastens to add that he is not merely dispatching information to tour participants, but that he always learns something new about the neighborhood from one or more of them.

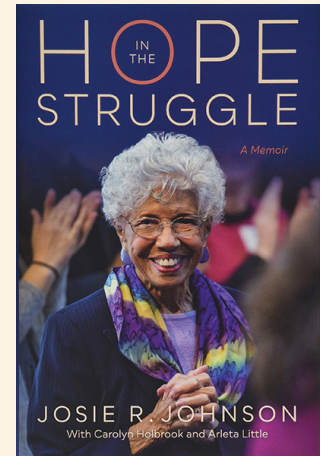
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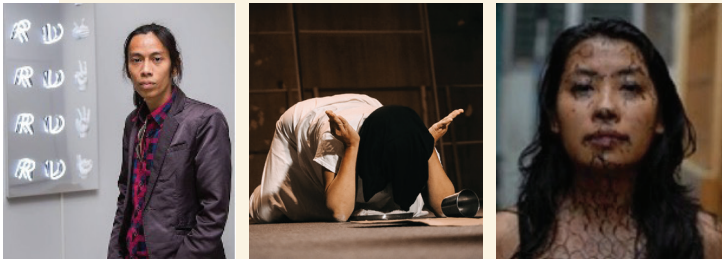


## ESFL Program Area: Communities; Past, Present, and Future

As we have already said, **ESFL is committed to bringing stories from the margins and shadows to the center of our awareness.** Often, this work relies on partnering with diverse organizations and creating platforms for members of those organizations to share their stories. Our collaboration with the Ramsey County Historical Society in the "History Revealed" series has been especially productive. In 2021, this included putting a spotlight on Dr. Josie Johnson and her memoir *HOPE IN THE STRUGGLE*, Anna Peterson and her historical research on the Scandinavian Women's Suffrage Association, Bill Lindeke and his new book, *SAINT PAUL: AN URBAN BIOGRAPHY*.



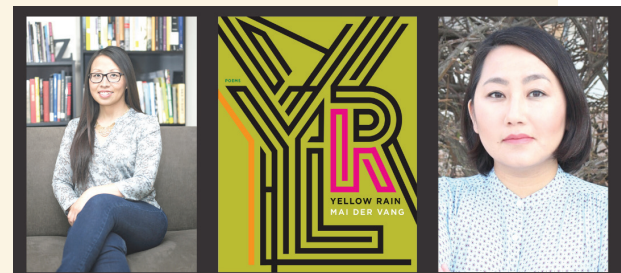
With our partners, the Twin Cities Japanese American Citizens League, we commemorated "Day of Remembrance" (the anniversary of FDR's executive order to arrest and incarcerate Japanese Americans in 1942) with a screening and discussion of the new documentary film, "Conscience and



the Constitution." Together and with our friends in Asian Studies at the University of Chicago, we hosted a conversation of "Black Rain," the consequences of fallout from nuclear testing and nuclear power in both Japan and the U.S. And with the assistance of a theater artist from the University of Minnesota, we hosted a remarkable evening of performance art by two Burmese artists, one in our basement

auditorium and one in Yangon, exploring "Artists and the Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar."

**ESFL is particularly appreciative of our ongoing relationship with the Hmong Archives** and the publisher Hmong Educational Resources, Inc.. Together, we have conceived, promoted, and hosted programs featuring writers, artists, poets, and community leaders, including Kao Kalia Yang, Mai der Vang, Cy Thao, Senator Fong Hawj, and Hmong legislators. We were honored when Ger ("Jackie") Yang gave us his diorama of the Ban Vinai refugee camp, and we have been excited to see the Hmong Archives' collection of paj ntaub (story cloths) grow. These are all teaching resources both for younger generations in the Hmong community and for members of other communities who do not know a lot about our Hmong neighbors.





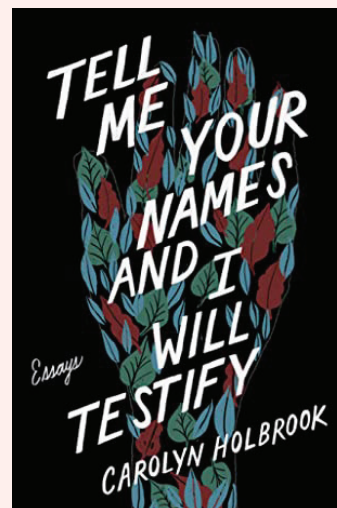
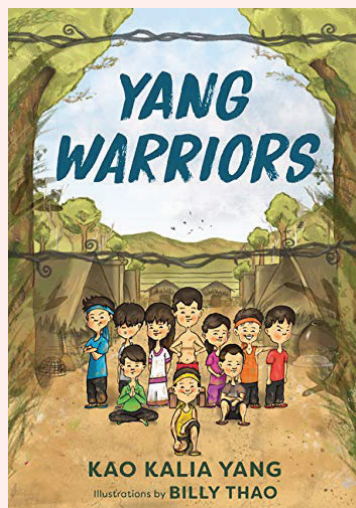


## ESFL Program Area: Cultural Work

As should be obvious by now, **almost all of ESFL's programming includes the goals of teaching and learning and relies on cultural work as a form of expression.** Despite the pandemic and its challenges to in-person gathering, we have used Zoom, Facebook, and YouTube to provide platforms for artists and writers to tell their stories and for diverse audiences to listen, watch, engage, and learn.

In addition to what we have already regaled you with in the categories of "Teaching and Learning," "Labor and Equity," and "Communities Past, Present, and Future," **there is more to say about ESFL's support of "Cultural Work" in 2021.**

We hosted a rich array of author presentations and conversations, often using our format of reader-discussants. Kao Kalia Yang presented *SOMEWHERE IN THE UNKNOWN WORLD: A COLLECTIVE REFUGEE MEMOIR* and was engaged by a panel of refugees from our communities. Later in the year, she presented her children's book, *YANG WARRIORS*, and introduced our community to



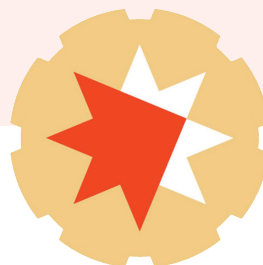
the young Hmong illustrator Bill Thao. In another program, Peter interviewed Abdul Dire about his new book *OROMO WITNESS*, and a couple of months later, Abdul joined the ESFL Board of Directors! In late March, early April, Carolyn Holbrook presented her *TELL ME YOUR NAMES AND I WILL TESTIFY*, and Mary Moore Easter presented her *FREE PAPERS: POEMS INSPIRED BY THE TESTIMONY OF ELIZA WINSTON*. **Both presentations led to dynamic conversations, first with panelists and then with audience members.** There were similarly great events with Danny Klecko and poems from his new collection, *LINCOLN LAND*, and Sophia Kim and her manuscript-in-progress "Tomorrow We Will Celebrate." There was the reading by two indigenous writers, Christine Stark and Mona Power from their books, *CARNIVAL LIGHTS* and *COUNCIL OF DOLLS*, and a particularly deep conversation with Ranae Hanson and her book *WATERSHED: ATTENDING TO BODY AND EARTH IN DISTRESS*.

**The ESFL team also made intentional use of cultural work as a way to build empathy and solidarity.** Rebecca Nichloson coordinated "The Kaleidoscope Project," in which they used the insights of "human-centered design" to convene writers' workshops in which African American, Asian American, and indigenous writers explored experiences of alienation and solidarity. The writers were recorded reading their essays or poems, and ESFL posted the videos on our website and YouTube page. We appreciated the Minnesota Humanities Center's support of this project. We also hosted, along with Payne Avenue-based art galleries, a three day festival called "Solidarity Street Gallery." At ESFL, **we featured art boards from the 2020 uprising, curated by "Memorialize the Movement,"** and we added music and poetry readings, all on our front lawn.



ESFL also began an exciting new project to plan an archive of the work of local African American artists. In partnership with In Black Ink, the Minnesota African American Heritage Museum, Seitu Jones Studio, Pillsbury House Theater, and the Million Artists Movement and with support from the state's Legacy funds, disbursed by the Minnesota Historical Society, **we are exploring ways to develop a physical archives as well as a digitized collection, and curricular proposals for educational programming.** Seitu Jones has ignited this work with his concerns that generations of African American artists' work – and stories – have been lost. His own concern that his work, much of which has been in public spaces, might also be overlooked, disregarded, and erased. Our approach to this project is informed by the work of friends at the Smithsonian who have been charged with "decolonizing the archive" and friends in Chicago ("Blackivists") who are bringing artists, archivists, and community members together to develop new methodologies and programming. We have just learned that the Ford Foundation is supporting this project!

**There is much to learn and much to do.**



## Financials



### 2021 REVENUE

Individual donors and organizations..... \$ 151,087  
Foundations and Grants..... \$ 112,500  
Fees, interest and other revenue..... \$ 420

**Total revenue..... \$ 554,869**

### 2021 EXPENSES

Program expenses..... \$ 188,223  
Fundraising expenses..... \$ 62,985  
Administration and management..... \$ 59,759

**Total expenses..... \$ 310,967**



## Thank You to our Organizational Sponsors

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*While many non-profit organizations list their donors by the size of their donations, at ESFL we think about our collaborators and donors as part of a community, a community that we are building through our work and through the contributions of labor, time, ideas, books, rocking chairs, and money. Our emphasis is on the community-building, so we do not want to call attention to specific individuals or specific donations. We know—and honor—what so many have contributed.*

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Lecturer in Languages and Cross Cultural Studies,  
Augsburg University

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Associate Professor in Geography, Environment, and  
Society, University of Minnesota

### **Abdul Dire**

Product Development Manager, 3M, and author of  
OROMO WITNESS (2020)

### **Robyn Gulley**

Executive Director, New Brookwood Labor College

### **Marlin Heise**

Founder and Director, Hmong Archives

### **Sarah Lake**

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### **Saengmany Ratsabout**

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### **James Robinson, Ph.D.**

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University

### **Denise Rodriguez**

Past President, St. Paul Federation of Teachers

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Minnesota State University-Mankato,  
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**Beth Cleary**, Co-Executive Director

**Clarence White**, Associate Director

### **Collaborators**

**Steve Boland**, Next in Nonprofits, Fund  
development and communications

**Ann Jin Soo Preston**, Sahng Sahng LLC, Orga-  
nizational Development

**Bruce Willms**, Librarian

**Greg Poferl** (Jack of all trades, Master of many)

**Keith Christensen**, Design

**Sami Heller**, Social Media

**David McAllister**, Space management

**Carla Riehle**, Videographer, Podcasts

**David Zierott**, Videographer



### **Mission Statement**

**The ESFL's mission is to inspire  
solidarity, advocate for justice  
and work toward equity for all.**



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