

Main Street Alliance of Wisconsin

Building a powerful, progressive, small business voice

Overview

Main Street Alliance is a national network of state-based small business organizations that elevates the voices of small business owners on public policy issues impacting their businesses, their employees, and the communities they serve. Founded in 2008 to give small business owners a say in health care reform, MSA now pursues three main program areas: Developing Prosperous Local Economies, Smart Public Investment, and Good Government, and is fast-growing and active at the city, state, and national levels. In August we established our Wisconsin chapter and have been growing at a rapid pace, recruiting small mom-and-pop shops in addition to iconic businesses like Hinterland Brewing in Tiletown, Wonderstate Coffee from the Driftless region and Dan Dan in the Third Ward of Milwaukee.

As of January 28, we have grown our network to over 65 member businesses in the course of six months, and we expect growth to accelerate, with goals of developing 100 member businesses by the end of Q1 and 250 by the end of 2021.

Promoting the economic power of small businesses is at the heart of our work, whether we're campaigning for fair taxes and budgets, universal health care, job quality, or racial and economic justice. Across these and other issues, we're fighting for a small business economy grounded in equity, where small businesses, their employees, and their communities can thrive. Standing in the way of that future are Wall Street, big-box chains, and big-tech retailers and gatekeepers. That's why, from our inception, we have taken action as a powerful counter to business groups that purport to speak for real small businesses while carrying water for these corporate giants.

Main Street Alliance of Wisconsin

Main Street Alliance of Wisconsin (MSA-WI) is a leader in the fight against concentrated economic power in Wisconsin. Founded in 2020, MSA-WI is led by business owners dedicated to achieving systemic change. We know that strong small businesses thrive in strong communities. For that reason, we campaign for the public investments that our communities and families need to thrive. The policies we're fighting for would help level the playing field for values-based small businesses so they can create good jobs and compete with big business for employees. Examples include our

campaigns for BadgerCare expansion with a public option, Paid Sick and Family Leave, child care affordability and accessibility, and COVID relief.

BadgerCare Expansion with a public option: Wisconsin is one of only 12 states that has not yet expanded Medicaid (BadgerCare), as allowed under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This would provide insurance to over 100,000 residents of our state, increasing coverage within many low-income and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities across the state. It would also save the state \$200 million dollars a year, freeing up funds to make other critical investments in education, infrastructure, and economic development. MSA-WI-WI is a key member of the WI Health Matters coalition, and we are currently organizing other groups working on BadgerCare expansion to ensure there is a coordinated effort among advocacy groups and allies in the state legislature to move this campaign forward.

This will be an uphill climb with the current powerhold in the legislature. However, we know from wins in other states that better coordination, message testing, and organizing, will allow us to build political pressure on key lawmakers, as well as leadership, to get this done. We also have the experience necessary to hold those who stand in the way of progress accountable in 2022.

Paid Family & Medical Leave: Recently, the Biden Administration released its 'American Rescue Plan,' which includes 14 weeks of paid sick and family leave. MSA is working in coalition with national partners and allies to ensure that a permanent paid leave solution is forged. The new administration has created a pathway for the U.S. to join nearly every other country by guaranteeing paid sick and family leave for workers. In addition, MSA-WI is working closely with the Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health, 9 to 5 and others to build momentum for paid sick and family leave legislation at the state level.

Child care: Working in conjunction with WECA (Wisconsin Early Childhood Association) we are advocating for investments in increased subsidies for low-income families to afford child care and providing support to providers and workers at child care centers to address impacts from COVID.

COVID Relief: While the "We're All In" COVID-relief grants have provided nearly \$100 million to Wisconsin small businesses and venues, more needs to be done. The state legislature did not meet from April to January, an unconscionable lack of action during the deadliest pandemic since 1917. While small businesses shuttered across main streets in Wisconsin, state lawmakers did nothing except [make the situation worse](#).

MSA-WI is advocating to secure additional funding through the budget process for the most impacted small businesses across our state to both help them keep the doors open and folks employed. We will also continue to [rally against](#) efforts to compromise public health by misguided ideologues. What we need to do:

- Provide COVID-related financial assistance for small businesses and displaced workers;
- Increase access to capital, especially for BIPOC- and women-entrepreneurs.

Small Business Hub: MSA-WI is working closely with [Rep. Robyn Vining's](#) office in the state legislature to establish a small business hub, where Wisconsin small business owners can easily access all reporting, tax and assistance programs. MSA has successfully contributed to similar efforts in Minnesota and Oregon to create efficiencies and ensure effective communication with small business owners. We expect this legislation to be introduced this session.

Racial Justice: MSA-WI is working closely with [MKE Black](#) and other economic development organizations in Milwaukee and throughout the state to engage business owners of color, including women owned micro-businesses. The economic fallout of COVID brought more focus to the gaping disparities, especially in the case of PPP and other public program implementation that left far too many behind. It is critical to address the form of shadow red-lining within our private banking system that has allowed discriminatory lending practices to persist. With the national awakening about anti-Black racism and police brutality in the wake of George Floyd's murder and events in Kenosha, Wisc., small business owners have a critical role to play in shaping an inclusive progressive narrative that condemns racialized violence and reckons with institutionalized racism that is holding BIPOC entrepreneurs and communities back.

COVID-19's impact and an opportunity to rebuild a resilient small business economy

COVID has accentuated the plight of small business. It has exposed the holes in our social safety net and the impact of those gaps for small businesses, their employees, and communities. Support for small businesses is more important now than ever, and raising small business voices is one of the most effective ways to advance state and federal policies that actually support our small business economy.