



**STRONG
TOWNS**

Annual **20** Report **23**

1001 Kingwood Street
Studio 116
Brainerd, MN 56401

strongtowns.org

President's Message



2023 was an astounding year for the Strong Towns movement. We've seen a significant acceleration in our membership and we are now over 5,000 strong, with advocates from all over the world doing what they can to spread this message.

There's been a similar explosion in the Local Conversation program: Nearly 200 local groups are out there doing things together in the real world to make their communities stronger. This is what we've been working toward. It's happening before all of our eyes.

2023 was a year of firsts: the first National Gathering, the first year of the Crash Analysis Studio, the first set of Community Action Labs, the first with a video team creating great content on YouTube. The pace has been frenetic. It has to be; we feel the urgency, too.

I'm humbled by all of this. I remember starting a blog in 2008, feeling very alone, an insignificant voice speaking out for change. It is impossible for me to express the gratitude I experience waking up every morning knowing I'm not alone. We found each other—none of us are alone, anymore. And our voices matter.

That's not because of me. It's not because of anyone else on the Strong Towns team. If it's just me and my colleagues, none of this is possible. We'd fail quickly. The momentum of this movement is because of you, and thousands of others like you, who have supported it over the years. Never lose sight of how important to this project you are. We never will.

On behalf of the Strong Towns Board of Directors, my colleagues, and myself, I want to thank you for all that you have done to give this movement so much momentum. The positive change on the ground, the shift in conversation we have all witnessed, is your success story. We are all so thankful.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Marohn". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

Charles Marohn
President of Strong Towns

Highlights From the Year

Photo by ZED Images



Community Action Lab

This year, Strong Towns developed the Community Action Lab as an intensive, community-focused effort that introduces Strong Towns ideas to places and then kickstarts implementation of them. Through a series of engagements, the Community Action Lab convened 2,200 people through in-person events, got over 1.3 million clicks through social media, formed two new Local Conversations, and shared what we learned from these communities to millions through the broader Strong Towns audience. We worked with a team of implementers in each community to kickstart the adoption of Strong Towns ideas. Medicine Hat, Alberta, developed a new comprehensive housing strategy focused on citizens as developers and investment in its core neighborhoods. Norman, Oklahoma, and Lake County, Florida, are now mapping liabilities and productivity, which will be included in their comprehensive plans. Chisholm, Minnesota, took the next smallest step to lower the bar of entry for entrepreneurs, creating a space for three new businesses to open in the heart of their downtown. These are just a few of the successes the Community Action Lab program has seen in 2023. We look forward to working with new communities in 2024.

This was a big year for Local Conversation groups, which are gatherings of people who meet to talk about and act on Strong Towns issues in their community. As of this writing, there are 182 Strong Towns groups across the United States and Canada. About 120 of them have been formed in just the last 18 months. What's more, there are nearly a thousand other Strong Towns leaders who have raised their hands to learn more about starting a group where they live. These groups are taking action on every key Strong Towns issue and in a wide variety of ways, from hosting neighborhood clean-ups to getting their members elected to city council. In 2023, we had the chance to share dozens of success stories featuring Strong Towns Local Conversations on our website and podcast. We expect that number to rise significantly in 2024 as we dedicate more resources to supporting, accelerating, and celebrating the work of Local Conversations.

Local Conversations

Crash Analysis Studio



One of the most impactful initiatives that kicked off this year was the Crash Analysis Studio, which brings together a panel of technical and non-technical experts each month for a video discussion of a traumatic car crash. This revolutionary approach goes beyond merely blaming crash victims to instead analyzing the multiple factors that caused the crash and identifying what can be done to reduce the frequency and trauma of future crashes. This year, we examined 12 crashes with the help of over 40 local and national experts discussing the design factors that led to these collisions. Numerous local news sources reported on Crash Analysis Studio findings, catalyzing local discussions and policy and street design changes as a result. In 2024, we will supercharge the Crash Analysis Studio concept with live, on-the-ground Studio sessions, as well as training for anyone who wants to implement a session in their city.

In 2023, seeing the desire for Strong Towns members to connect in person, we organized the first ever National Gathering, bringing together advocates from across the country to meet one another, learn, and be inspired in Charlotte, North Carolina. Five hundred people showed up to explore topics ranging from running for local office to unleashing the benefits of parking reform to creating an ecosystem where incremental developers can thrive. Highlights of the event included a keynote speech by developer and revitalization strategist Majora Carter; presenting the Strongest Town award to representatives from Brattleboro, Vermont; and the sheer momentum and power that came from bringing hundreds of Strong Towns advocates from all walks of life together in one place. This event took place in partnership with the Congress for the New Urbanism and thanks to many dedicated sponsors.

National Gathering



Three Big Numbers We're Proud of

5,000 Members
(+1,496 in 2023)

100,000 YouTube
Subscribers
(+69,261 in 2023)

12 Crash Analysis
Studio Sessions

There are three big numbers that stand out as emblematic of 2023 at Strong Towns. First, our membership grew to over 5,000 people from all 50 states and around the world. This is a significant moment and represents the sea of change that is happening as more and more communities embrace the Strong Towns message and run with it.

The second number is 100,000. That's the number of subscribers to the Strong Towns YouTube channel who are engaging with exciting, professional videos covering everything from the revolutionary incremental development movement happening in South Bend, Indiana, to the fight for more equitable property taxation in Western North Carolina. These videos are reaching new audiences and telling the Strong Towns story like never before. It's thanks to the thousands of people who financially support Strong Towns that we were able to hire a full-time video creator in 2023, and in 2024, we'll be expanding our video capabilities even further.

Finally, throughout the year, we hosted 12 Crash Analysis Studio sessions, which stood out as one of the most impactful initiatives of the year. These sessions introduced a new framework for analyzing—and ultimately preventing—car crashes. The efforts undertaken in 2023 have set a solid foundation for our 2024 work facilitating the adoption of the Crash Analysis Studio approach by communities across North America.

Member Momentum

We hear from passionate Strong Towns members every day about the power of this movement and the ways they are putting it into action. Here are some notes from just a few of them:



“ I’ve been a Strong Towns fan for a long time and decided it’s time to support this movement. I love the common-sense, grassroots approach!

Julie Westerlund
Shorewood, MN

“ It seems that North American cities and how they are planned is getting a lot more attention nowadays, even from mainstream media sources. I appreciate how Strong Towns provides a plan and genuine optimism for the future instead of just using the state of things as a bludgeon against the U.S. or fodder for despair.

Prasant Acharya
Verona, WI



“ Thank you for all you do to make our cities more bicycle and pedestrian friendly, safer, healthier, and more sustainable. All elected officials should subscribe to Strong Towns!

Suza Francina
Ojai, CA (City Council, Mayor Pro Tem)



“ Strong Towns has helped me find my niche in life. As a college student, it is great to see an organization that encourages me to make a change in my community!

Sam Otte
York, NE

“ I was previously a member and am happy to be jumping back in. I just filed to run for my local City Council race and anticipate using more of your media to help with my training!

Eric Riddle
Columbus, IN

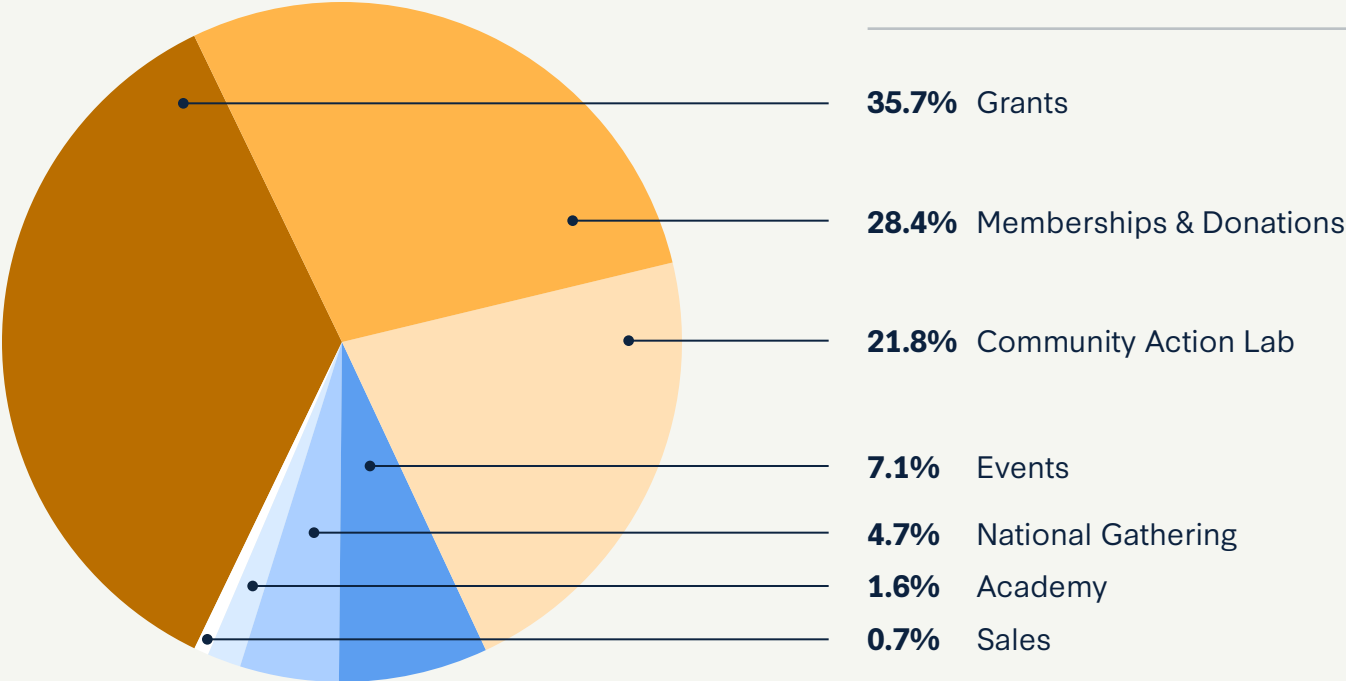


“ It’s such a relief to see that there are other people who are trying to address what is really an existential emergency in America.

Jillian Murphy
Denver, CO

Strong Towns is supported primarily by our members and other donors who want to see our message spread.

2023 Income



2023 Key Stats

~ **2 Million** Total Audience

182 Local Conversations

5,161 Total Membership

37 Cities Visited for In-Person Events

221 Friends of Strong Towns (>\$500 donation)

This is a broad movement of people doing what they can—71% of our donors gave under \$100 in 2023.

Preview of 2024

Here are some of the exciting ventures you can look forward to Strong Towns leading in 2024:

- ▶ Our second annual **National Gathering**—this time in Cincinnati, Ohio.
- ▶ A new and improved (ninth annual!) **Strongest Town Contest**.
- ▶ The next book in the Strong Towns series will be released in April. It is called **Escaping the Housing Trap: The Strong Towns Response to the Housing Crisis**, and you can pre-order it at housingtrap.org/order. We're announcing the book and launching a signup for the book tour that will begin in April and run through the end of 2024.
- ▶ An expansion of our **Strong Towns Academy** offerings.
- ▶ A strategy guide for local leaders on **ending highway expansions**. We've been working on this package for a couple months, and it will be really powerful.
- ▶ The rollout of the **Crash Analysis Studio course and workshop** opportunity. We want to see hundreds of cities establishing their own studios. We're going to make that easy for them.
- ▶ An expanded **Local Conversations** program. We have retooled the program so we can add more groups, get them well-trained and supported, and get them out doing great work.

Thank you to our members. You make all of this possible!

Strong Towns' goal is to change the conversation everywhere about how we build and maintain productive places. This is an expansive, some would say naively ambitious, goal—and yet it's essential. We don't believe that our cities and towns will stop digging themselves into financial holes when two or three key federal policies change, for example. We believe a mass movement is required. We believe a paradigm shift in how we think about local prosperity is required—and that has to happen at the grassroots, among the people who elect local leaders, not just among the leaders currently in office.

If you're not part of the movement yet, we invite you to become a member by making a donation of any amount. This support is essential to continue this work. Strong Towns members are at the very heart of this whole organization. Visit strongtowns.org/membership to become a member today.

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844-218-1681 | strongtowns.org