

WSCO Board Candidates - 2020 Annual Meeting



Kia Moua

Why do you want to serve as a board member of the West Side Community Organization (WSCO)? What excites you about our mission and work?

I am proud to say I live on the West Side in doing this very important work of equity and social justice. I am energized to do work with an organization that isn't always trying to do things that are part of the status quo and maintaining it. We do important work that takes strategic risks and strong leadership in taking sides that are not as "safe".

Please tell us how your personal and community values would inform your decisions on WSCO's board.

My experience shapes my lens on how I approach my work with WSCO. I can say that my values on community reflects that of the direction WSCO is moving.

What will you bring to the table as a board member?

What I bring is my expertise on equity, decentering whiteness work and my work within community. I am also a small business owner. I have experience with strategic planning, fundraising, community organizing and outreach. I have experience serving on other boards as well.

What do you hope to gain from this experience? How can WSCO help you grow as a leader?

I hope to remain grounded in the work that I do.



Marcus Troy

Why do you want to serve as a board member of the West Side Community Organization (WSCO)? What excites you about our mission and work?

My family moved to the westside in 1972. Our address was 218 Congress st. I attended (then) Roosevelt Elementary(now Rlvreview) which is situated at the north end behind the neighborhood house. From there I attended and graduated from Humboldt High school in 1979. I became friends with and in many cases consider them as my extended family members. I am a staunch supporter of my community as a sports,education,employment, housing,and judicial advocacy concerns. This communities proud heritage and inclusive lifestyles makes us all the more of a richer society to belong to. Now add advocate's and agencies like WSCO and The Neighborhood House for this communities social and judicial needs only strengthens our bonds as each others brothers keeper. I am as proud a resident as I am a member of this Our Lady of Guadalupe anchored and prideful area of St. Paul. Thank you WESCO for being my judicial/social and housing advocates/mentors as I am becoming a member of your agency.

Please tell us how your personal and community values would inform your decisions on WSCO's board.

I will be bringing my personal experiences that I have gone through legally against community members that I once considered them to be my friends. It was those exact community values that I drew from to help get me through that period against them. It will also guide any future responses to adverse issues that I will encounter.

What will you bring to the table as a board member?

To start, my 50 plus years of life to draw from those experiences. Knowing this communities values, lifestyles, what matters to us and what concerns our families have about our side of town and how the actions of those from other parts of the city bring over to our community. I feel this puts me in a position to be able to address such situations, knowing persons from the other sides of town and having judicial and social relationship with some personnel within the different agencies throughout the downtown areas. This will help with the networking aspect of this position wherein dispute resolution can be applied. I am currently finishing my bachelor's degree in human services at mctc and metro state universities. This has been put on hold during the covid-19 mishap. Plus I have attended many CLE forums through the Ramsey County law Library series on their numerous presentations about justice forums. I was a panel member on a couple topics at college forums concerning students financing problems and concerns. These exercises will help me give the appropriate and qualified feedback response I hope. What I lack in some areas, I hope to adjust and participate in upcoming events.

What do you hope to gain from this experience? How can WSCO help you grow as a leader?

I hope to become an effective and LIFELONG social advocate for my WESTSIDE COMMUNITY and continue to gain infinite knowledge to share with my friends and neighbors. WESC should keep doing what it is doing with me. Inviting, encouraging, and allowing me to express myself my way, in my tone and in my dialect....



Sebastian Ellefson

Why do you want to serve as a board member of the West Side Community Organization (WSCO)? What excites you about our mission and work?

I've always been interested in using my energy to help out society, in the careers I've chosen and the volunteer work I do. Since moving to the West Side a few years ago, I've volunteered in various ways, but wasn't sure of the impact I was having. I wanted to be more involved.

Although I am particularly passionate about housing justice and small business support, I love the wide array of issues that WSCO is involved with – and how those issues are chosen. From my chats with WSCO staff, the growth into these areas is organic, based on ongoing conversations with community members. We find out there are more and more issues with landlords not fixing up apartments? Let's start working on tenant organizing. This is the kind of community-led work that is actually solving problems that the community wants to be solved, rather than a philanthropic group deciding what they think are important issues. Bottom-up rather than top-down.

I am also excited about the variety of methods being pursued to effect change. There are actions toward immediate assistance such as food-drives, info sessions, and action circles to connect and inform residents about each other and existing justice work in key areas. There are also long-term policy initiatives including the ambitious work of making new building projects listen to community voices in the "equity scorecard", and involvement with trying to pass city-wide legislation with the recent Safe Housing Ordinance and the upcoming work on a Rent Control Initiative. I am super excited to be involved in an organization that has deep community connections and uses this knowledge and experience to help push larger, city-wide policy as part of its mission.

I want to be involved in WSCO, not just as a volunteer in this area or that, but in a committed and more holistic way. I hope to use my knowledge and skills to help the board make the best decisions and execute all our projects successfully.

Please tell us how your personal and community values would inform your decisions on WSCO's board.

"There are two aspects of decision-making to consider, the process and the goals we are working toward. Both are important, and both are informed by values.

Beliefs on Process:

A decision-making body is typically judged on its goals and results, but the process can be just as important. If people feel included in a process, they will feel heard and will respect the end decision more, even if results are not fully to their liking.

As one of three co-founders of a fast-growing start-up company (BallotReady), we had to make decisions on many contentious matters quickly - policy questions, business questions, what to focus on, what to ignore, how to respond to outside criticism. We collectively selected a set of communication norms called "Conscious Leadership", and spent a portion of each week specifically reading and discussing the tenants of this communication style. It includes such values as "approaching problems with a sense of wonder", "honestly communicating feelings", and "listening first without judging". I have found this to be invaluable to fostering good feelings in our company as we have grown and dealt with many stressful situations. I would personally bring these communication values to the WSCO board and, if appropriate, help institute these norms beyond myself.

Beliefs on Goals:

The values that will drive my decisions as a WSCO board member are the same that make me seek the seat in the first place.

-I first and foremost believe that we as humans have a duty not just to do no harm, but to actively work towards doing good. I have a lot of energy to do whatever needs to be done, and do not mind doing "boring" or difficult administrative tasks such as phone calling, budgeting, researching, or doing statutory analysis.

- Social justice means recognizing the systemic oppression of marginalized people and opposing it.

- I believe that all people (myself included) have a very limited perspective. You should trust yourself, but always be open to learning and updating your understanding of the world.

- I trust science and experts, but also believe that local decisions must include genuine participation and inclusion of the local community members to be legitimate.

-I believe that national corporations are too powerful, and their continued displacement of local small businesses is a tragedy. We should work to support and strengthen small businesses.

- I believe our current social safety net is too weak. It is too easy in American to get stuck in a cycle of poverty. We should treat drug addiction and mental health issues as social problems to solve together, and not as criminal matters to lock in jail or shoot dead in the streets.
- I believe a car-centric society contributes to climate change, and that we should make our community as walking/biking/transit friendly as it can be.
- I think people want to do good, but sometimes need help taking the next step. We should make it as easy and inviting as possible.
- I believe that reasonable people can disagree about many things, some of them very important issues. But I think that dismissing the opposition as “crazy” or “stupid” NEVER helps move things forward. Dehumanizing or deligitimizing other humans is never the best way to understand them, and cuts off any potential in working with them in some way.

What will you bring to the table as a board member?

I have the legal, policy, and business experience to understand systems and make actual change in people's lives. Additionally, I have practical skills, board experience, and local relationships.

Legal and Policy:

I have a JD from the University of Minnesota and a Masters in Public Policy from Loyola University. From this I have a foundational understanding of how government and politics operate. I have years of experience making the powerless feel powerful, from my work as an attorney, my volunteer work, and my co-founding a company dedicated to providing voter information. For example, I have helped those in foreclosures get loan modification from banks as a Foreclosure Case Manager, advised people being evicted or having other housing troubles as a pro bono attorney with the Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services and Cabrini Green Legal Aid, and prepared financial projections and lobbied city government as an intern with the Metropolitan Tenants Organization in Chicago.

Business:

I have helped many small businesses navigate entity formation, legal filings, and other matters, including a West Side business. I have also founded or co-founded a number of small businesses, including a solo law practice, a scavenger hunt event company called Finders Keepers, and a tech start-up called BallotReady. I am currently the Principal Elections Researcher at BallotReady, which creates free online voter guides in all 50 states and has partnered with organizations such as Snapchat, the Miami Heat, NPR affiliates, and the Center for Youth Voice (running mock elections across Minnesota K12 schools!).

Relationships and Board experience:

I am a member of Cherokee Park United Church and served on their Pastor Nominating Committee. I am an AVID tutor for St. Paul Public Schools. Previously, I served on the Young Professionals Board for Louis Arroyo, Jr. for Cook County Commissioner. My wife is a ESL teacher at Humboldt High School and is a member of West Siders for Strong Schools.

I am technologically savvy and bring many practical skills to the table as well. I am a wizard with database management, spreadsheets, and Google Sheets. I know SQL, and am proficient in GIS software such as arcmaps and QGIS.

What do you hope to gain from this experience? How can WSCO help you grow as a leader?

My main goal from working with WSCO is to use my talents and skills to help out my community and city. But the good news is that benefits flow both ways when we help others!

- Through this work, I look forward to learning more about and becoming more connected to the people and institutions on the West Side. I am relatively new here (3.5 years) so I don't have the bonds that people who were born on the West Side or have lived here decades have developed. I want to learn more from people who have been here longer.
- I look forward to working with other partner groups such as those in the Housing Equity Now St. Paul (HENS) coalition, and getting a first-hand experience of how such coalitions work together.
- I have worked to develop skills around collective decision-making, and I am excited to exercise those skills in a setting beyond my workplace.
- I also want to increase my knowledge of the nitty-gritty of how city government functions.



Teresa Zaffiro-Day

Hello, neighbors! My name is Teresa Zaffiro-Day. I first want to acknowledge that I am addressing you in the traditional homelands of the Dakota people, Mni Sota.

I also want to humbly acknowledge that I am fairly new to the west side (one year, homeowner) and I am so grateful to be getting to know this community. I am someone who deeply values accountability to the community, working together in action and solidarity for social and racial justice. I am an MSW social worker, and for the past 2.5 years have been privileged to work as an Indian Child Welfare Social worker serving Red Lake Nation citizens living off of the homelands in the urban areas of the state. I am a mom and a wife, my step son is 10, my baby is 4. My husband and children are Ojibwe, and culture is a big part of our life. I myself am non Native, but between my work and my family, the twin cities Native community is a huge part of my life. I am a third generation Italian American. Family is the most important thing to me. When I am not working I love riding my bike, hiking, reading fiction that helps me learn about other cultures and experiences, doing crafts with my kids or walking my dog Zizi. When COVID is not here, I love to travel. I am a relationship oriented extrovert, so I am an open book! I look forward to knowing and being known to all of you.

Why do you want to serve as a board member of the West Side Community Organization (WSCO)? What excites you about our mission and work?

The close knit community and community led efforts of the West Side are a large part of what drew our family to moving here. I am someone who was raised giving back to her community and has always sought out opportunities to do so throughout life. The most fundamental, guiding principles of my life and work are equity, community accountability and social justice. I find much affinity in the values and mission of WSCO with my personal paradigm. I am new to the west side (just one year) but I am committed long term to being in relationship with my neighbors and community, and giving back in important ways.

Please tell us how your personal and community values would inform your decisions on WSCO's board.

If I had to choose one word that is most important to me, it would be community. I am someone who always seeks out how to be in accountable and active relationship with the community I am a part of. In the twin cities, I am very involved with the Native American/American Indian community both through my work and my family. I think of myself as accountable to this community and am always challenging myself to show up alongside them. My friends would probably tell you I am known for speaking my mind, and always bringing a social justice and anti-racism lens to my work and relationships. I have been involved in anti-racist education efforts with my peers and other communities, especially as they relate to Indigenous allyship and settler colonialism. I am drawn to WSCO because I see that it is an organization not just about "diversity" but about active antiracist and social justice work. I am also a social worker by trade, and there are parallels between the social work code of ethics and WSCO's mission. These values of the dignity and worth of every human, positive social change for all addressing oppression in all forms (to paraphrase just a FEW) are the values at the core of my personal, family, professional and community life. One of the values and the work I am most drawn to is making this a community that works for everyone, a community that stands up for all of its members and advocates for development, services and dignified housing that meets everyone's needs; a community that uplifts and creates opportunities for the strengths and talents of all members, and works to prevent the tide of gentrification that displaces and hurts communities.

What will you bring to the table as a board member?

I have a lot of experience working in nonprofits, specifically developing programs, grant writing, building donor relationships, event planning. I worked as a development director for a small nonprofit in Kansas where I wrote grants and cultivated donors as well as worked with the board to orchestrate a capital campaign. I have training with Greenpeace, Ohio Citizen Action and various other organizations in community organizing. At a large nonprofit in Kansas I assisted to design a community orientation and English language program for newly arrived refugees. I have taken graduate classes in community and organizational practice as it relates to the field of social work, as well as a graduate level community health and development course.

What do you hope to gain from this experience? How can WSCO help you grow as a leader?

I am just excited to humble myself to learning with this community and offering whatever skills are valuable! I have not utilized some of these skills (grant writing, fundraising, community organizing) as much as I would like in the recent years, and so I am excited to re-engage with them in a meaningful way with my neighbors!



Mario Paez

Why do you want to serve as a board member of the West Side Community Organization (WSCO)? What excites you about our mission and work?

My grandparents were migrant farm workers and settled in the West Side over 70 years ago. My immediate family have lived on the West Side for 16 years and attend community schools. The West Side is a unique community like none other in MN with a rich and diverse history in its people, businesses and environment. Our family is already vested in this community and I believe the mission and work of WSCO to support community engagement, thoughtful development and community growth in educational systems are critical to ensure sustainability, safety and investment in our people, businesses and community.

Please tell us how your personal and community values would inform your decisions on WSCO's board.

My family's history and presence in the West Side community drive me to be even more engaged in supporting the initiatives of WSCO. Personally, my faith is a driver to prompt justice, love and equity especially for the marginalized in our community and being conscious of all stakeholders to promote a holistic approach to our community development. I want this community to be stronger for my three kids and their grandkids, but also for their future friends, classmates, teachers, business owners, and community leaders. We are helping support their foundation in the future which inspires me and will be a motivator for continued optimism in our community.

What will you bring to the table as a board member?

My educational and career background in business and risk management coupled with my passion for community justice and equality create a balance and holistic approach to understand the bigger picture of community development. I believe we need to promote sustainable growth that is conscious of our diverse community. My background in risk management will help assess the potential pros and cons of decisions being made in our community to help promote a greater good and fiscal benefits for our community and protect our citizens and environment. I also currently sit on the WSCO Equity Scorecard which is a passion of mine in ensuring equitable and community involved development of the West Side.

What do you hope to gain from this experience? How can WSCO help you grow as a leader?

I hope to gain more experience and connections with other West Side leaders to help promote community engagement for my kids and family. I hope to become a better example in community leadership and to develop more formal ways to support the community and institutions in our vibrant community.