

Press Release

Oklahomans for Equality fundraiser reaches \$70,000

OkEq board members provide additional information on the state of the organization and announce leadership transition

For Immediate Release

Tulsa, OK (February 13, 2024) - Following a recent fundraising effort focused on sustaining operations, the Oklahomans for Equality (OkEq) Board of Directors is providing an update on the organization's financial status.

"As of Monday, February 12, OkEq has received just over \$70,000 in donations," Board President Eric Wilson said. "We are encouraged by and optimistic about the outpouring of support we've seen over the last few days. We are looking forward to working together as a board and with our donors and volunteers to build a plan that will secure OkEq's future for generations to come."

Representatives from OkEq say that the organization's financial challenges are rooted in a few related issues occurring prior to 2022: fiscal mismanagement by a former volunteer, a lack of adequate financial controls to ensure appropriate oversight and accurate accounting, and operating beyond available revenue.

Vice President Bob Hanson said, "In February 2022, the former volunteer Treasurer presented a falsified audit report to the Board, and the Board discovered this within 24 hours of receiving it. The individual was immediately dismissed, and the Board began reviewing the financial structure of the organization and identified numerous gaps that needed to be addressed. This process was cumbersome and took a great deal of time and volunteer hours."

A police report was filed with the Tulsa Police Department in September 2022. Once the forensic audit was completed in August 2023, it was provided to the Tulsa Police Department. At this time, the OkEq Board awaits further information and updates from the Tulsa Police Department about the status of the ongoing investigation.

The Board immediately set out to create appropriate financial oversight and develop a full financial picture. Through this process, the Board of Directors also uncovered that in years prior to 2022, restricted funds were reallocated to cover monthly expenses. Steps were immediately taken to prevent this kind of reallocation from occurring. "So while expenses were covered at any given time, OkEq was spending more non-restricted cash than it had," explained President Eric Wilson. "It has taken over a year to create a clear financial picture. We have much work to do to better engage with local

philanthropy, historical donors, and our business community. We now have strong fiscal foundations in place to confidently do so.”

In the last several months, representatives from the OkEq’s Executive Committee also shared that the organization experienced a decrease in end-of-year giving. Charitable donations in the fall and early winter have historically supported the organization until major spring fundraisers occur.

In the last 18 months, OKEq’s executive director and board members have worked urgently to implement rigorous financial controls, including:

- In October 2022, engaged with an accounting firm, with expertise in non-profit accounting to handle all of the finances for the organization.
- In November 2022, Workman Forensics was contracted to conduct a forensic audit which was completed in August 2023.
- The new Treasurer, who has an extensive background in finance, implemented necessary controls and processes to ensure accuracy and transparency. Some of the new controls and processes include multiple layers of approval for all invoices, specific approval from the executive committee for the use of restricted funds to ensure that funds are used for intended purposes, elimination of all credit cards, monthly meetings between the external accounting firm and the Finance Committee.
- An external Certified Public Accounting Firm was hired to complete a financial audit. This was completed and reviewed by the Board in January 2024. The results of the audit demonstrated that the organization now has all of the needed and recommended financial controls in place. This audit can be reviewed [here](#).

The Board of Directors and Executive Director Dorothy (Des) Ballard have also worked with staff and community members to identify and prioritize OkEq’s most essential services. Maintaining the health clinic, mental health services, and youth and elder programming are at the top of the list. Even with improved controls and prioritized services, OKEq’s Board and staff will urgently pursue continued fundraising efforts with intentional outreach to Tulsa’s philanthropic and business communities, long-standing donors of the Center, and local and national grant opportunities.

Executive Director Dorothy (Des) Ballard has made incredible strides in steering OkEq’s restructuring and stabilization through the strategic plan developed under her leadership. She recently stepped back to ensure that work could continue as she focuses on meeting serious health challenges.

“My time at OkEq has been an honor and a privilege that now must sadly end. The Board had been working with me to ensure a smooth transition as I face these critical health challenges but the remaining deficit in our funding required I take that step sooner to ensure staff and programming could be preserved” said Ballard. “I’m proud of all we have accomplished and will remain an active advocate of OkEq, its mission, and our community.”

Vice President Hanson shared, “We thank Des for her work, passion, and love for the Tulsa 2SLGBTQIA+ community.”

Over the next few months, the OkEq Board will take urgent steps to chart a sustainable path forward for the Center. Some key next steps are to identify an interim executive director, to work with staff to determine how to best support essential programming at the Center as existing revenue is maximized, and to continue to engage local foundations and long-term donors and supporters in fundraising efforts.

Community members interested in supporting OkEq can visit <https://OkEq.org/donate/> to make a tax-deductible donation.

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The information below provides a high-level overview of the actions taken by OkEq's Board of Directors as it navigated through a set of organizational and financial challenges from February 2022 through present. One timeline shares the steps taken to create effective financial oversight. The second timeline provides information about fundraising efforts.

Creating Financial Oversight

February 2022: The former volunteer Treasurer presented a falsified audit report to the Board, and the Board discovered this within 24 hours of receiving it. The individual was immediately dismissed, and the Board began reviewing the financial structure of the organization and identified numerous gaps that needed to be addressed. In addition, the Board added members with strong financial backgrounds to provide stronger oversight.

September 2022: Initial report filed about potential embezzlement with Tulsa Police Department

October 2022: The Board contracted with Oklahoma Nonprofit Partners, an outside accounting firm who specializes in non-profit accounting, to handle all of the finances for the organization.

November 2022: Workman Forensics was contracted to conduct a forensic audit. Letter shared with OkEq members and community to explain the potential embezzlement and steps taken.

April 2023: The Board voted unanimously to amend the bylaws to require the Treasurer be a member of the Board of Directors and subject the position to term limits in line with all of the other executive committee officers.

August 2023: The forensic audit was completed. A copy of the audit report was provided to the Tulsa Police Department.

October 2023: Certified Public Accounting firm hired to complete a standard annual financial audit.

January 2024: Annual financial audit completed for the first time since 2015. This audit also allows OkEq to seek more funding opportunities.

Fundraising

April 2022: The 2022 Equality Gala generated enough revenue to sustain the organization for several months.

Summer and Fall of 2022: Several Tulsa area foundations supported the organization with enough funding to maintain operations through 2022.

January/February 2023: Additional funding was given by individuals and area foundations that ensured the continued operation of the organization.

May 2023: The 2023 Equality Gala raised enough donations to sustain the organization for several months.

June–September 2023: OkEq hired a grant coordinator to focus on identifying and writing for new grants. A number of grant applications for grants which were attainable without a financial audit were submitted. OkEq also received funding from several area foundations that were able to assist to get us through 2023.

January 2024: It becomes clear to the Board that OkEq received much less in end-of-year giving than typical. This lack of revenue significantly impacted revenue and cash flow.

February 2024: OkEq launches the “100K to Valentine’s Day” fundraiser. ED Dorothy ‘Des’ Ballard elects to step away as a cost saving measure.