



**OCEAN
DISCOVERY
INSTITUTE**

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ANNUAL
REPORT



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A LETTER TO OUR COMMUNITY

Growing into the organization we always wanted.

Dear Friends and Supporters,

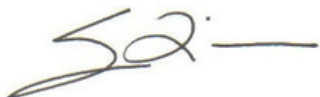
Ocean Discovery Institute's community shares a sense of purpose. Our collective motivating force is a belief that our world will be better if every young mind can discover and be captivated by the wonder of science.

As we share this report, I am filled with immense gratitude for the remarkable stories and accomplishments that have unfolded over the past year. In March, the Living Lab was filled to the brim with scientists, students, families, and community members joining in a live reading of *Jada's Journey Under the Sea* from author, professor, marine microbiologist, and Scientist-in-Residence Dr. Jeanette Davis. In September, and for the first time in our history, hundreds of 9th-grade In-School programming students conducted hands-on scientific research on the majestic cliffs of Torrey Pines. And in November, we hosted our first-ever *SPLASH!* fundraiser at the Living Lab, where all our stakeholders came together to support young lives being transformed through science.

In 2023, more students grew in their science belief, achieved in school, and learned what it takes to pursue a career in science. And now, more than ever, our alums are shattering barriers to higher education, entering high-paying science careers, and becoming catalysts for change in their lives, community, and our world.

The impacts from 2023 are a testament to the collective efforts of our highly skilled team, passionate volunteers, generous supporters, and dedicated students and families. And because of you, stories of resilience, curiosity, and accomplishments lie in the pages ahead. Join me in celebrating as you see the results of your efforts and contributions.

With gratitude and unwavering commitment to our mission,



Shara Fisler



SHARA FISLER
FOUNDER/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE COMMUNITY WE ENGAGE

CITY HEIGHTS

Ocean Discovery Institute is located in the heart of City Heights, one of the country's most ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods. Though rich in culture, City Heights lacks economic wealth and resources. One of the poorest areas in San Diego County, children in the community also lack access to quality enrichment opportunities – especially in hands-on science.

This means that young people in City Heights don't gain exposure to high-paying careers in the sciences that could enable them to break cycles of generational poverty. We know this isn't because of a lack of potential but a lack of opportunity.



Students at Ocean Discovery's Living Lab

96%

of students identify
as People of Color

91%

of students rely on free or
reduced meal programs

43%

of students live below the
federal poverty level

34%

of residents identify as
immigrants

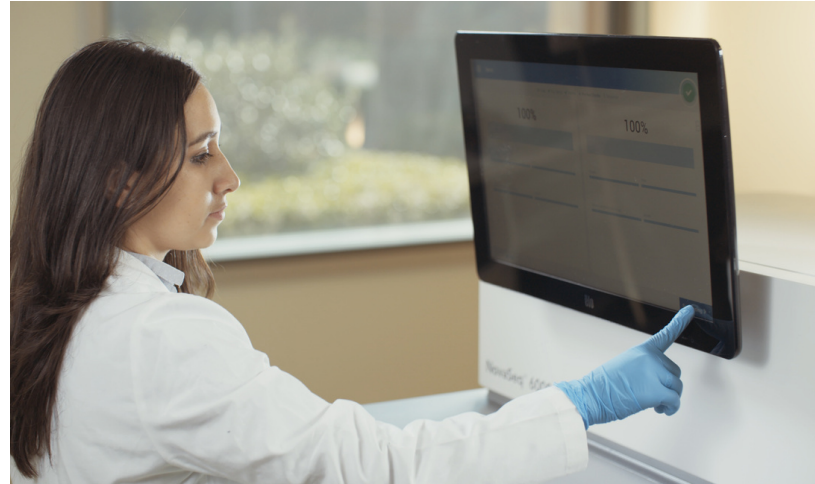
33%

of residents are
not high school graduates

OUR MISSION

YOUNG LIVES TRANSFORMED THROUGH SCIENCE

To inspire the next generation of science leaders, Ocean Discovery Institute creates learning experiences for young people traditionally excluded from science due to race, income status, and educational opportunity. Our students, like Marlem, will join high-paying fields, break generational poverty, and change the future of science.



Marlem Rivera, Class of 2010, Field Scientist at Illumina

5,826

K-12 students reached

100%

of schools in
City Heights reached

11

elementary schools reached

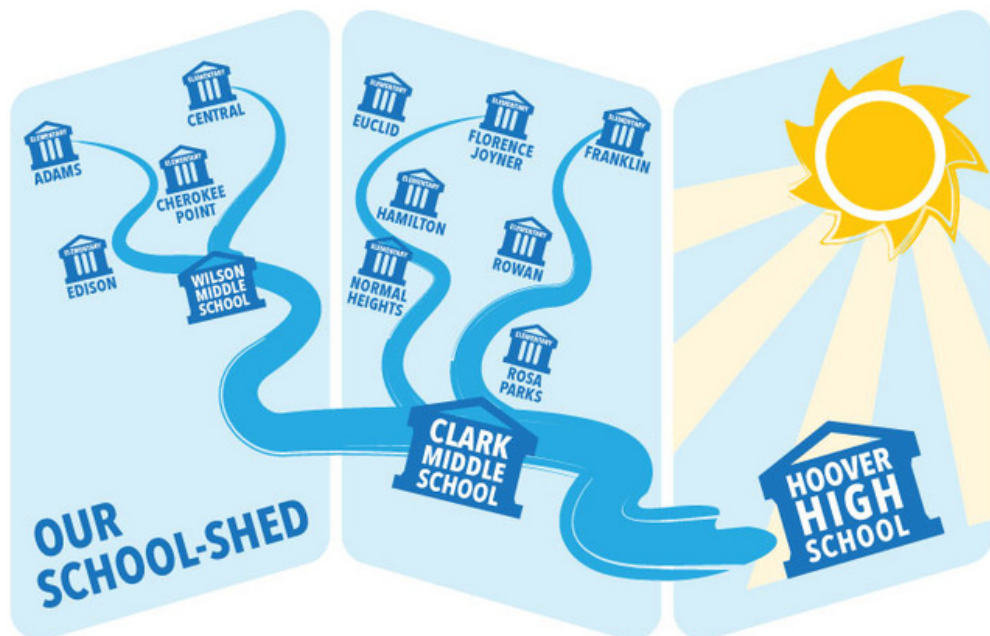
2

middle schools reached

1

high school reached

Through Ocean Discovery programs, students do science, experience mentoring, and develop the growth mindset needed to overcome the challenges along their journey to becoming science leaders. When these elements work together – and only when working together – young lives are transformed through science.



IN-SCHOOL PROGRAM



IN-SCHOOL PROGRAM

2023 was another year of expansion for our In-School Program as we grew to reach every 8th and 9th grade student in our cluster - that's more than 800 new students! Teachers felt the program “planted seeds”, “highlighted science as an option for a career”, and “provided students with leaders from diverse backgrounds that allowed them to see themselves as scientists”. In 2024, we are thrilled to be launching 10th and 11th grade programming for the first time as we continue expanding to reach every K-12th grade student in the Hoover High cluster of schools.

44,976

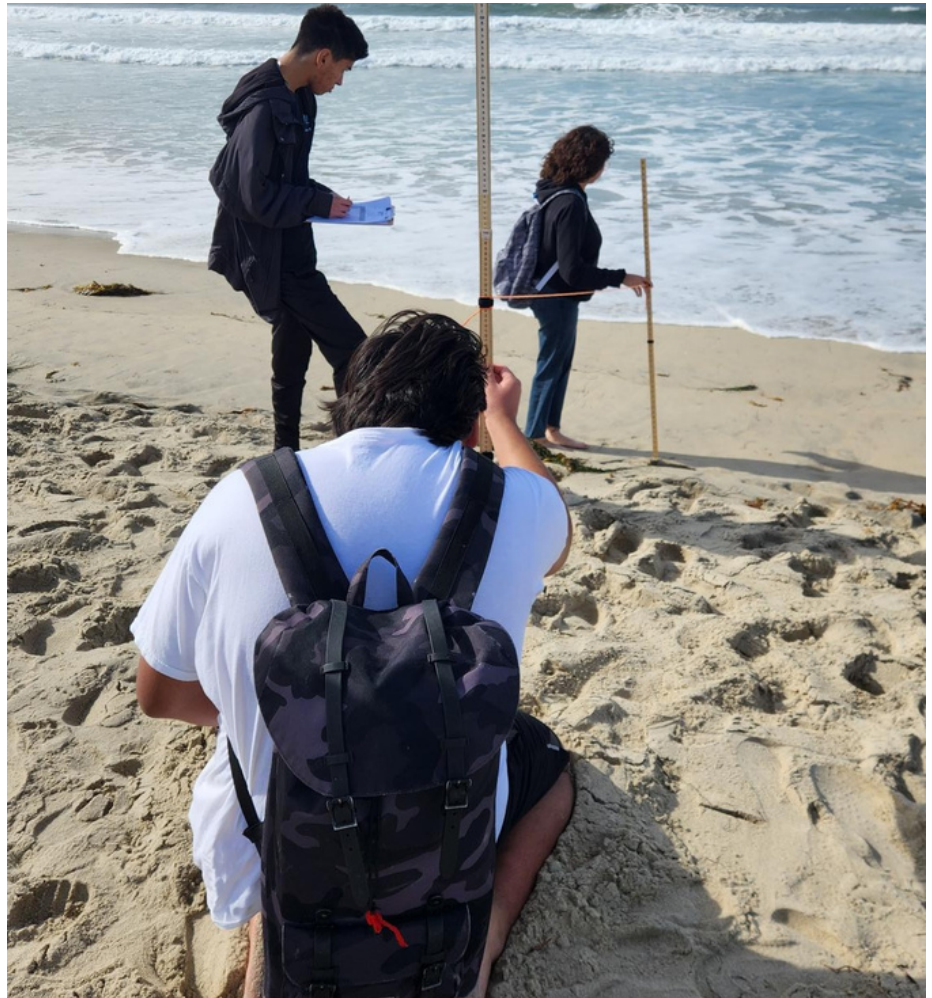
program hours with students

2

new high school grade levels participated for the 1st time

5,622

K-9th grade students reached



9th Graders from Hoover High School, measuring transects at our local beach

IN-SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

Elizabeth Castillo Duvall, Wilson Middle School Principal

Our work to reach thousands of students during the school day each year would not be possible without the support of educators who champion our programs in their schools. Principal Liz Duvall at Wilson Middle School is one of these pivotal champions. As a member of the City Heights community for the last 10 years, Liz has witnessed our programs strengthen and expand. She has observed our programs in action and is astounded by the level of engagement from all students – even those who typically struggle to focus or participate.

According to Liz, “Our students often only experience what is in our City Heights neighborhood, and although we try to give them science experiences here at school, there is nothing like experiencing it firsthand at Ocean Discovery. From kindergarten to high school, our students can have a strong foundation in hands-on science that impacts their growth and understanding of the world around them and how their choices impact others. I’m confident there are countless young adults from City Heights choosing science in higher learning as a result of experiences they’ve had through our cluster partnership with Ocean Discovery.”

Thank you Liz for being such an indispensable partner and advocate!



*Elizabeth Duvall,
Principal at Wilson Middle School*

100%

of teachers in our school shed
opt to participate each year

OUT-OF-SCHOOL PROGRAM



OUT-OF-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Innovation was at the heart of the Out-of-School Program this year as students engaged in a new curriculum that embeds math instruction into hands-on science learning. This summer, students coded terrestrial robots and engineered remotely operated marine robots in three 2,000-gallon swimming pools here at the Living Lab! Because of their summer experience, a parent shared that her child “comes home excited about science.”

With math being a gatekeeper to student achievement in the sciences, this curriculum will continue to evolve, and in 2024, we will develop, pilot, and research more rigorous math programming to foster student belief and achievement in both science and math: a win-win!

18,782

program hours with students

891

students reached

91%

of students now believe they can use science to make a difference



Summer camp students displaying their marine robots

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

The Gutierrez Valentin Family

Ocean Discovery is honored to have countless families like the Gutierrez Valentin family who believe in our programs and the impacts they have on students. Araceli Valentin's youngest son, Kevin (8th grade), has participated in Out-of-School Program for the last four years, and her oldest son, Victor (11th grade) is in his second year as an Ocean Leader.



Araceli with her two sons, Kevin & Victor

Because of these programs, Araceli has seen her sons “become excited about science, motivated to study, have fun learning, and grow in their self-confidence.” Her favorite aspect of our programs is seeing her sons learn so much! Victor is focused on graduation in 2025 and Kevin is ready to join Ocean Leaders in the summer of 2024. We couldn't be more excited to have the whole family as part of our community.

“Me encantan los programas!” - Araceli Valentin

“I love the programs!” - Araceli Valentin

OCEAN LEADER PROGRAM



OCEAN LEADER PROGRAM

In 2023, the Ocean Leaders Program grew to reach more high school students than ever before! Excitingly, the program is being led exclusively by Ocean Leader alumni. Newly developed programming through the academic year included “Ocean Leader Wednesdays”, hosted here at the Living Lab, where students engaged in community building, math enrichment, tutoring, mentorship, and learning about college and career pathways in science.

In summer 2024, and in partnership with the University of San Diego, 11th-grade Ocean Leaders will participate in a brand new intensive summer program focused on hands-on research, with a residential experience on campus!



Dr. Anai Novoa, Ocean Leader Alumna, Board Member, Scripps Institution of Oceanography 2023 Ph.D. Graduate

100%

of Ocean Leaders enroll in higher education

87%

of Ocean Leader alumni major in science-related fields

60%

of Ocean Leader alumni are pursuing science-related careers, as compared to 1% of their peers nationwide

84

Hoover High students engaged in the Ocean Leaders Program

1st

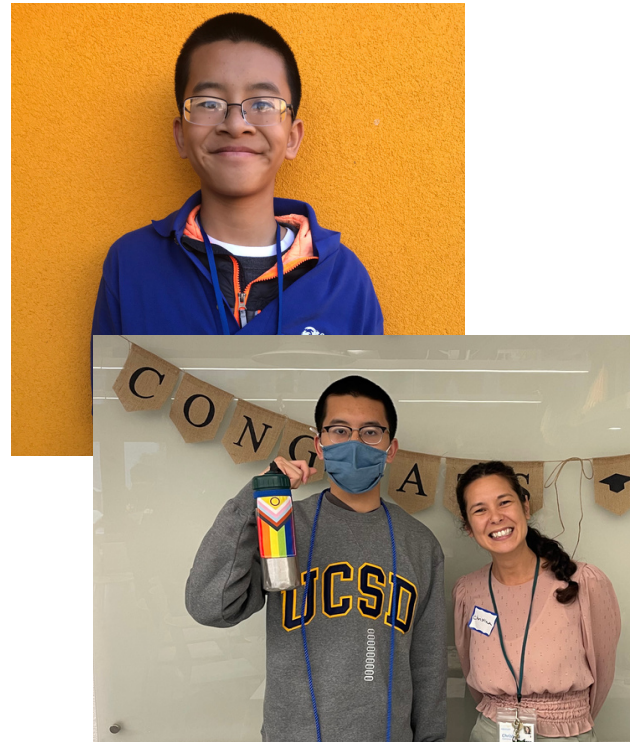
Ph.D. received by an Ocean Leader

OCEAN LEADERS SPOTLIGHT

Dan Ngo, Class of 2023, Freshman at the University of California, San Diego

Dan is a recent Hoover High graduate and Ocean Leader alum who has been involved with Ocean Discovery since middle school. During his time as an Ocean Leader, Dan participated in every experience we offered, as well as the University of San Diego's STEAM Academy. Today, Dan is a freshman at the University of California, San Diego majoring in Molecular and Cell Biology. Because of his own experience as an Ocean Leader, Dan takes time out of his busy schedule to volunteer and lead campus tours with our current Ocean Leaders. We can't wait to see what's next on Dan's journey!

Dan, in the 6th grade, as an Out-of-School Program Student



On his way to UCSD!

Upon graduating high school, Dan shared, "Ocean Discovery has illuminated potential pathways I could take to pursue a career in science and fed my curiosity through hands-on STEM experiences, opening a window into the scientific world for the last six years. In college, I plan to continue strengthening my STEM identity and experience with Ocean Discovery through internships, as well as give back to the younger generations of Ocean Discovery students."

24%

of Ocean Leader alumni give back as volunteers

37%

of Ocean Leader alumni give back as donors

VOLUNTEERS



VOLUNTEERS

We are grateful for our Volunteers, whose support allows us to fulfill our mission

As is true every year, our work in 2023 was largely made possible by the support of an incredible team of hundreds of volunteers. With more than 14,500 hours given to our programs, volunteers were critical in ensuring that our young people were engaged in transformative mentorship and science opportunities.

14,500

volunteer hours

280

total volunteers

201

Science Leaders virtually mentored our students

13

mentors helped our senior Ocean Leaders apply to college

From Ph.D. student Ric DeSantiago providing hands-on instruction for shark dissections this summer, to 11 science mentors mentoring high school students during their intensive summer program in Baja California, Mexico, the dedication of our volunteers continues to be instrumental to our community.



Dr. Jeannette Davis, engaging our students with invertebrates

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Wilnelia Recart Gonzalez, Scientist-in-Residence

Dr. Wilnelia visited the Living Lab in February of 2023 as our Scientist-in-Residence and inspired hundreds of students with her work as a plant ecologist, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology doctoral recipient, researcher at the University of San Diego, and now Assistant Professor at USD. Her passion for the inclusion and retention of People of Color in science and academia shone as she mentored first-graders exploring the kelp forest and shared her personal story with our Ocean Leaders. Students were excited to discover that Wilnelia is also a native Spanish speaker and were inspired to learn that Spanish-speaking scientists from communities like their own exist!

Excitingly, Wilnelia will be supporting the Leadership Program as a faculty principal investigator during the 11th grade intensive summer experience in 2024.



Wilnelia dissecting a kelp holdfast with our students

7

Scientists-in-Residence visited

100%

of Scientists-in-Residence
share similar racial
backgrounds as our students

“Ocean Discovery Institute manages to empower the next generation of science leaders by promoting scientific exploration and discovery and fostering and centering the diverse life experiences and cultural identities of the students of City Heights. During my stay as a Scientist-in-Residence, I was able to experience the beauty of seeing students engage with science and the importance that diverse scientists have on a student’s science identity.” – Dr. Wilnelia Recart Gonzalez

SPLASH! 2023

First-ever fundraiser at the Living Lab

This year, we hosted Splash! at the Living Lab – a fundraising event in our community, supported and attended by our community. To make the event accessible, we lowered ticket prices, and to ensure more support went directly to our students, we reduced our expenses. Our community came, supported, and embraced this vision.

One moment that stood out that night was when our alum and Board Chair, Rudy Vargas, invited guests to raise their paddles and contribute \$5,000 to our programs. Rudy looked into the audience and saw his father, Ruben, with his paddle held high. The Vargas family has been a part of the Ocean Discovery Family for almost 20 years, and this gift was undoubtedly extraordinary.

When asked what inspired him, Ruben said, "When I looked around me and saw so many others giving to support these experiences for students like Rudy and Sonya [Ruben's daughter], I knew I wanted to do something big, too. I hope this donation can set an example for other parents, alumni, and partners."

Had we not hosted an event with this new format, Ruben wouldn't have been in attendance. And if our community had not supported it so strongly, we would not have other opportunities like this ahead. But they did. In 2024, we look forward to hosting Splash! on May 18th so our entire community can unite for this shared purpose.



Ruben and his wife, Hilaria

250

supporters attended

\$115K

contributed by our supporters

ENDOWMENT UPDATE

As you may know, just a few years ago, Ocean Discovery launched a special initiative to create an organizational endowment. The endowment is an integral part of Ocean Discovery's strategy to maintain a diverse funding base, strengthen financial stability, and make our organization more sustainable in the long run.

100%

**of Board of Directors
contributed**

\$1.5M

**committed to the
endowment**

In 2023, we were honored to have our partners at the J.W. Sefton Foundation demonstrate their continued commitment to our students and programs by providing a challenge grant supporting our endowment - if we could raise \$300,000 toward the effort, the Foundation would match it!

With the help of many other generous donors, 100% of our Board Members, as well as some staff members, we are thrilled to share that we met the challenge!

Thank you to everyone who supported this effort to ensure we never turn a kid away.

"Ocean Discovery Institute represents the excellence in science we seek. We are proud to support the endowment initiative to ensure its mission to provide science education, leadership skills, and college preparation to inspire its students to succeed in science - and life." - J.W. Sefton Foundation

LEAVING YOUR LEGACY

Our new planned giving community

One of the primary ways Ocean Discovery will continue to grow our endowment and move toward sustainability is by launching our Legacy Circle planned giving program. A generous planned gift will ensure that Ocean Discovery Institute's 100% tuition-free programs continue to make an impact today and into the future.

Grow your legacy by making a bequest, creating a charitable trust, purchasing a charitable gift annuity, or contributing a property through a life estate to Ocean Discovery Institute.

Your plans today will ensure tomorrow's young people have every opportunity to make a difference in their lives, their community, and ultimately our world as science leaders.



If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact MacKenzie Sandy by emailing msandy@oceandi.org and we thank you for considering this amazing opportunity!

[Click Here to Learn More](#)

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Richard Spinrad, NOAA Administrator

Since 2005, our partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has been fundamental in providing our students with once-in-a-lifetime science opportunities, from offering our students hands-on experience in science research to addressing real-world, global issues, to providing mentors as Scientists-in-Residence at our Living Lab.



Dr. Spinrad with an Out-of-School student

In late 2023, we had the honor of hosting Dr. Richard Spinrad, the head of NOAA. Dr. Spinrad, who shares our passion for science and discovery, took a tour of our Living Lab, learned about our programs, and witnessed our students in action.

Our Ocean Leaders showcased their intensive summer program experiences and discoveries through poster presentations. Dr. Spinrad was impressed by all we have accomplished together and is as eager as we are to continue strengthening our partnership.



Dr. Spinrad with our Ocean Leaders

"I had the privilege of visiting the Ocean Discovery Institute to learn more about the organization and to see first-hand the deep impact it is having on the students of San Diego's City Heights community. I am grateful for the partnership NOAA has with Ocean Discovery Institute and the work we are supporting to expose students to the wonder and opportunity of STEM careers. Together, we are helping to cultivate, equip, and empower a more diverse cohort of next-generation scientific and conservation leaders. Seeing this partnership in action was an inspiration."

- Dr. Rick Spinrad, NOAA Administrator

ADVISORY COUNCILS

We are grateful to the members of our Advisory Councils for their ongoing support in guiding our programs, influencing our goals, and serving as mentors to our students

ALUMNI ADVISORY COUNCIL

MONICA CISNEROS
MARY COZY
KHANCHI DAM
EZRA EL-ATON
SUSAN GARCIA
MERVEILLE KOU EKABAKILAH
JARED OCAMPO
ERICK RUIZ
LUIS RAMIREZ
KEILLY SANTOS
PILAR SORIA

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BARBRA CALANTAS
MARK DENNY
VICTORIA MARTINEZ
MATHEW MITCHELL
PERLA MYERS
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PRITI PHARKYA
MARLEM RIVERA
LAURA RODRIGUEZ
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YONAT SWIMMER
DREW TALLEY
THERESA TALLEY
SAGAR VAIDYA
JOHN WANG
TANZANIA WARE

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BIANCA BANKS
YOLANDA CHILAPA
MARIA DEL SOCORRO-NICASIO
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OLIVIA GUERRA
ALEJANDRA MENDOZA
CINTHIA MORENO
ESTHER PINTOR
PATRICIA PINTOR
MARICELA RAMIREZ
SUSANNA RAMIREZ
ROSA RANGEL
JUDITH RUVALCABA
JANNETTE SANCHEZ
NORMA SANTOS
MARIA TIRADO

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*Proud recipients of University of San Diego's Kaleidoscope Award
for Exceptional Governance*



RUDY VARGAS

Board Chair

Ocean Discovery Institute
Alumnus, Class of 2008



HEATHER BENTLEY

Vice Chair



DEVON GIBSON

Treasurer



TARA MARATHE

Secretary

BOARD MEMBERS

BARBRA CALANTAS

JASMINE DAVENPORT

SCOTT GRIMES

KRISTEN KOCH

JESSICA MIER

MATHEW MITCHELL

ANAI NOVOA

VANESSA SANDOVAL

CABINET MEMBERS

SEAN CADDELL

TRES CONRIQUE

KURT GERING

THEODORE J. GRISWOLD

JOHN JOHNS

DAN MCCLELLAN

NOELLE NORTON

ILEANA OVALLE

SCOTT PEARSON

OUR SUPPORTERS

Ocean Discovery Institute offers free-tuition science programs, and we depend on the generosity of individuals, corporations, government agencies, and foundations to sustain these initiatives. We express our gratitude to the numerous contributors who contribute to the support of Ocean Discovery Institute.

LEGACY CIRCLE

ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

ANONYMOUS (3)

ANNE CORREIA

AQUALIA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION, LTD.

BARBRA CALANTAS

BOB MEINZER & STEVE MCINTEE - IN HONOR OF
THEIR PARENTS, EILEEN & FRANK MCINTEE, AND

MARIE & BOB MEINZER

DAVID C. COPLEY FOUNDATION

DEVON GIBSON

FISLER FAMILY FOR TOMORROW'S SCIENCE LEADERS

HEATHER BENTLEY

ILEANA OVALLE

J.W. SEFTON FOUNDATION

JASMINE DAVENPORT

JENNY & TONY SWEENEY

JESSICA MIER

JOHN & DINA JOHNS

JOSE ZUNIGA

KRISTEN KOCH

KURT GERING & NICK WAGMAN

LISA & SCOTT SCHALON

LYNN GORGUZE & CONGRESSAN SCOTT PETERS

MACKENZIE A. SANDY

MATHEW MITCHELL

MONICA & CHARLIE COCHRANE

RUDY VARGAS

SCOTT AND LATRESA PEARSON

SCOTT GRIMES

SHARA FISLER & FAMILY

TARA S. MARATHE & LAWRENCE LUM

VANESSA MARIE SANDOVAL

VERONICA VARELA JOHNSON

WALTER J. & BETTY C. ZABLE FOUNDATION

We express our sincere appreciation for the ongoing support you provide to our programs. Thank you for your continued commitment.

OUR SUPPORTERS

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IMPACT CIRCLE

(\$250,000+)

ALUMBRA INNOVATIONS FOUNDATION
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
J.W. SEFTON FOUNDATION
NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
NEUROCRINE BIOSCIENCES INC.
PRICE PHILANTHROPIES
SAN DIEGO FOUNDATION
SAN DIEGO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
SATTEBERG FOUNDATION
WALTER J. & BETTY C. ZABLE FOUNDATION

INNOVATION CIRCLE

(\$100,000 +)

AQUALIA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION, LTD.
CALIFORNIA COASTAL CONSERVANCY
DAVID C. COPLEY FOUNDATION
SIDNEY E. FRANK FOUNDATION

DISCOVERY CIRCLE

(\$25,000 +)

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 11TH HOUR RACING | LAURA & CHRIS MALONEY |
| ALLISON & ROBERT PRICE FAMILY FOUNDATION | LILY LAI FOUNDATION |
| CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION | PARKER FOUNDATION |
| CITY OF SAN DIEGO | THE CAMPBELL FOUNDATION |
| ENDANGERED HABITATS CONSERVANCY | THE CLARENCE E. HELLER CHARITABLE FOUNDATION |
| HARRIET E. PFLEGER FOUNDATION | JENNY & TONY SWEENEY |
| HERVEY FAMILY FUND AT THE SAN DIEGO FOUNDATION | UNIFIED PORT OF SAN DIEGO |
| HOLOGIC CHARITABLE FUND | VERITEXT |
| KENNETH A. PICERNE FOUNDATION | VERTEX PHARMACEUTICALS FOUNDATION |

We express our sincere appreciation for the ongoing support you provide to our programs. Thank you for your continued commitment.

2023 FINANCIALS

Ocean Discovery Institute can secure the ongoing sustainability and future growth of our programs by cultivating an extensively varied donor network, including national and local foundations, government agencies, corporations, and dedicated individual contributors.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Revenues, gains, and other support

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Corporate | \$282,162 |
| Foundation | \$1,619,774 |
| Government | \$647,962 |
| Individual | \$149,106 |
| Endowment | \$404,900 |
| Fundraising Events | \$400,115 |
| Other | \$435,506 |

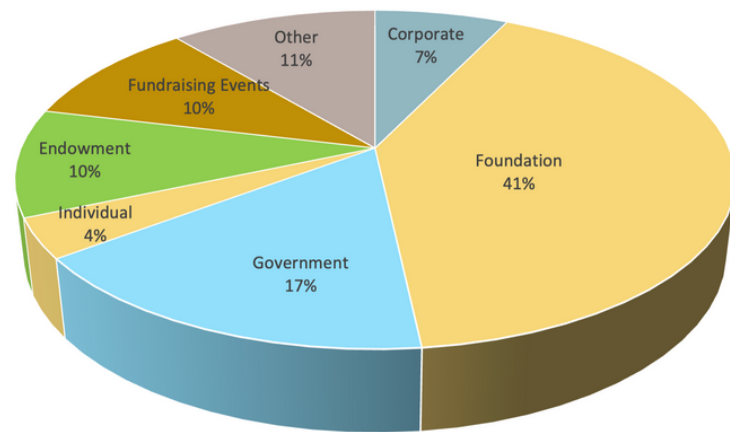
Total Revenues, gains, and other support **\$3,939,525**

Expenses

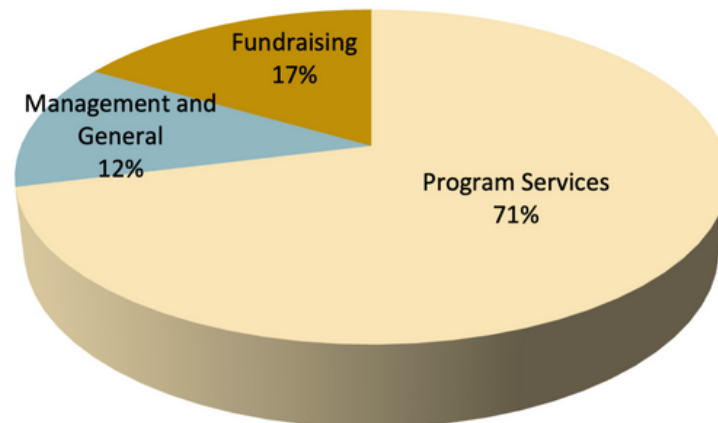
| | |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Program Services | \$2,746,983 |
| Management and General | \$474,802 |
| Fundraising | \$641,920 |

Total Expenses **\$3,863,705**

REVENUE CATEGORIES



EXPENSE CATEGORIES



Change in Net Assets **\$75,820**

Net Assets at the beginning of year **\$8,784,644**

Net Assets at the end of year **\$8,860,464**



**GIVE.
LEARN.
VOLUNTEER.**



**OCEAN
DISCOVERY
INSTITUTE**

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