



**OCEAN
DISCOVERY
INSTITUTE**
*young lives transformed
through science*



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

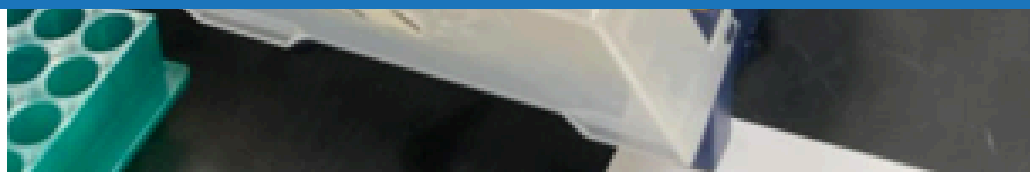


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LETTER TO OUR COMMUNITY

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS IN CITY HEIGHTS

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Incredibly, this year marked the 25th anniversary of my founding Ocean Discovery Institute. On any anniversary, I love to reflect on the past and look to the future.

What am I proudest of in these 25 years?

I'm proud when I'm at the Living Lab, look out the windows, and watch streams of students walk from their schools, down our sidewalk, and through our front doors. Our facility is a place where science happens and sets high expectations – expectations our students deserve.

I'm proud of what our students have accomplished. The 10, 11, and 12-year-olds who boldly joined our earliest programs are now working on pressing science issues while providing economic prosperity for their families. Today, almost 60% of our graduates are leaders in biotech, oceanography, environmental education, and healthcare. I'm proud that Ocean Discovery is led by passionate staff who live in the community we serve. With 40% of our 40-person team being City Heights residents, many of my teammates use the phrase “for us, by us” to describe our work.

I'm proud that our supporters reflect all of San Diego. 15% of our program alumni are committed to our monthly donor program. Our supporters are empowered to give at whatever level is comfortable to them because they deeply believe in our students.

This anniversary also makes me excited for what's to come!

I'm excited that this year, we will reach every student in every grade level at all 14 schools in our community – representing nearly 10,000 City Heights students. I'm excited that new efforts, such as math initiatives, are already yielding impacts, with students improving from a C to a B average. And I'm excited for the opportunity to begin to plant new seeds of Ocean Discovery's model in other locations that have taken notice of what we've built in City Heights.

We know from experience, there will be challenges along the way. Today, we are faced with growing needs and greater uncertainty. But we are certain about this work together. Whether you've been on this journey for 25 years or you have just begun your involvement, you are the reason our students will succeed.

With deep gratitude,



Shara Fisler
Founder/Executive Director



THE COMMUNITY WE ENGAGE

CITY HEIGHTS, THE HEART OF SAN DIEGO

Ocean Discovery is located in the heart of City Heights, San Diego, one of the country's most ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods and a tapestry of people from all over the world. Multiple urban canyons provide residents with opportunities to recreate in the outdoors, and a myriad of annual cultural gatherings span from the Lunar New Year to the Mexican celebration of Día de los Muertos.



Our diverse students from City Heights

Though rich in culture, City Heights is scarce in economic wealth and resources. One of the poorest areas in San Diego County, children in the community 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.

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

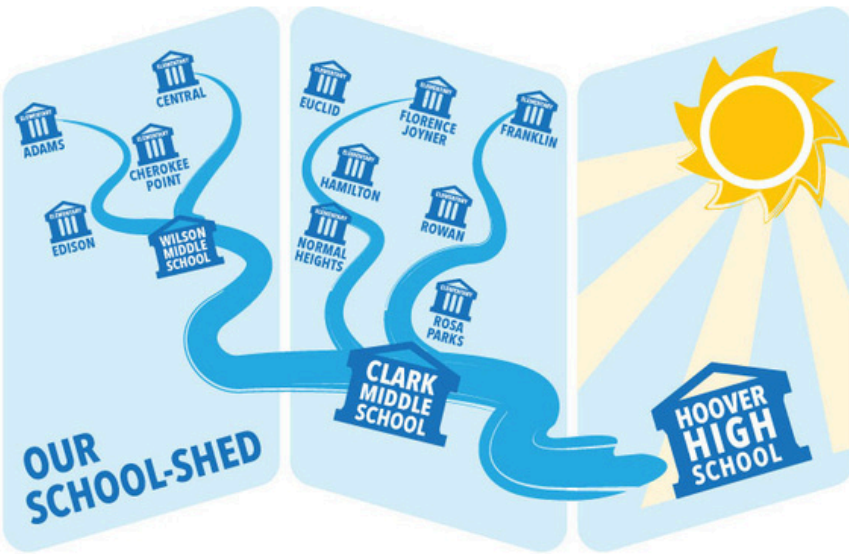
OUR MISSION

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 will join high-paying fields, break generational poverty, and change the future of science. Our students, like Irazema, will join high-paying fields, gain financial freedom, and change the future of science.



Jorge, Class of 2011, Environmental Consultant



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.

100% of schools in City Heights reached

7,358 K-12 students reached

11 elementary schools reached

2 middle schools reached

1 high school reached

IN-SCHOOL PROGRAM



IN-SCHOOL PROGRAM

In partnership with the San Diego Unified School District, our In-School programs engaged 6,035 students from kindergarten through 11th grade, inspiring them to see science as important, accessible, and a pathway to change.

Our program continues to grow in impact, offering rigorous opportunities to K-12 students attending the 14 schools in our community, our program provides:

- Hands-on science lessons led by expert instructors
- Immersive field trips exploring coastal ecosystems
- Real-world discovery at our state-of-the-art Living Lab

This year, we expanded to include 10th and 11th graders at Hoover High School and partnered with a record 243 classes and 183 teachers—100% participation!

Together, we're shaping the next generation of scientists, innovators, and changemakers. Here's to another year of discovery!



High School students survey our canyons for native plant species

2 new high school grade levels participated

6,035 K-11th grade students reached

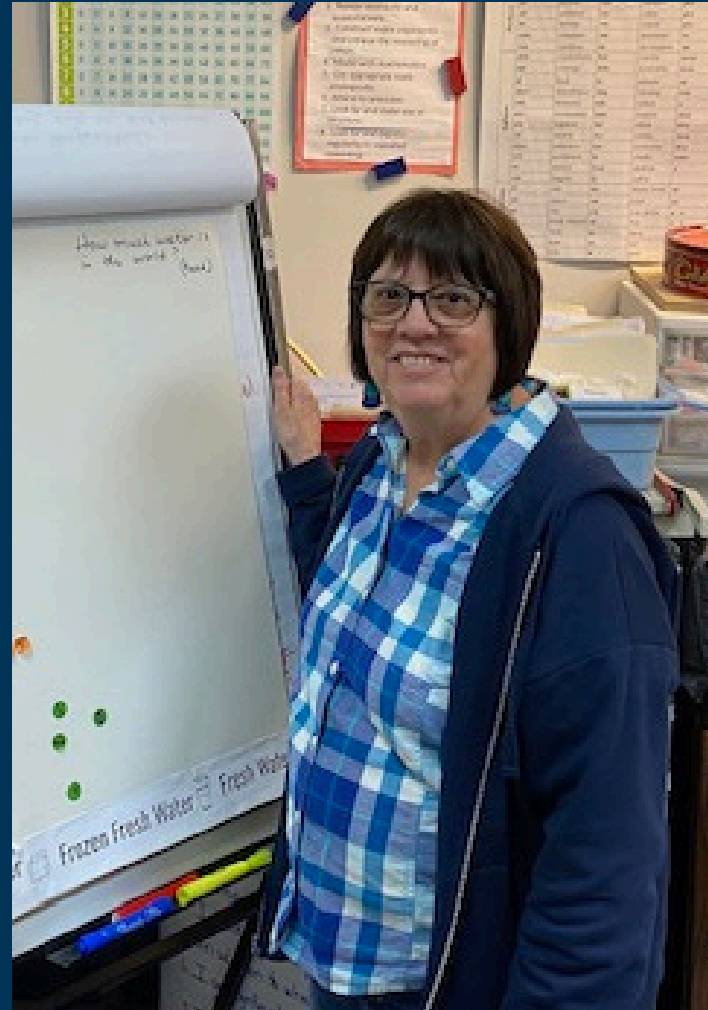
49,050 program hours with students

IN-SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

COLEEN CRANDALL - 5TH GRADE TEACHER ROSA PARKS ELEMENTARY

Colleen Crandall has been an educator at Rosa Parks Elementary in the Hoover Cluster since 1998. A long-time partner of our program, Colleen has opened the door to transformative hands-on science experiences for many of her 5th-grade students.

During her many years of involvement with the program, Colleen's classes have planted native seeds in the canyon by our Living Lab, designed devices to combat ocean pollution, learned the importance of environmental stewardship, built underwater robots, examined DNA, and tested water samples in Mission Bay. Colleen's impact extends far beyond the classroom. "Now, I get to see some of my former students working at the Ocean Discovery Lab in City Heights," she says. "It fills my heart with joy to hear about them going to, or completing their college degrees around a passion for science, and then using it to inspire future generations of City Heights students."



Colleen Crandall is a 5th grade teacher at Rosa Parks Elementary

Her commitment to sparking curiosity and fostering a love of learning through our In-School Program is leaving a legacy that will transform the lives of her students, our community, and the future of our planet.

243 individual K-12th classes reached

100% of teachers opt in our program

OUT-OF-SCHOOL PROGRAM



OUT-OF-SCHOOL PROGRAM

This year, our Out-of-School Program brought science to life through Wonders of the Wetlands. Students explored canyons, studied wetlands' role in erosion control, learned about native plants from the Kumeyaay, and monitored bird populations. With San Diego Unified, we provided free transportation for 700+ K-8 students in the Hoover Cluster—our largest group yet.

We also launched a math-infused pilot to boost STEM confidence. The results among 60 participants showed increased confidence and belief in their potential.

In the summer of 2024, we expanded math-science integration with Hermit Crabs and Friends camp, where 300+ students explored tidepools, studied hermit crabs, conducted barnacle feeding experiments, and examined rocky shore ecosystems.



Out-of-School students identifying native wetland plant species in our local canyon

By year's end, students at participating schools scored 38% higher in math, science, and English than peers at similar schools.

38%

is the percentage that our students score higher on standardized tests

700

students participated in our academic year program

22,071

program hours with students

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

AN VO - 1ST GRADE STUDENT AT CENTRAL ELEMENTARY

Meet An, a first grader at Central Elementary School and one of our most enthusiastic young scientists! An's curiosity knows no bounds—he loves asking big questions, exploring new ideas, and taking every opportunity to learn about science.

An has been a part of our Out-of-School Programs since he was old enough to join, starting with an after-school camp in 2023 and continuing with summer camp in 2024. His mom shared, "An is so happy when he's at Ocean Discovery programs. He learns so much about science—and about himself!"

This fall, An returned for after-school camp and continues to thrive. We're thrilled to announce that he's officially our first student signed up for summer camp 2025!

An's excitement and dedication remind us of the power of curiosity and hands-on learning. We can't wait to see where his curiosity and determination take him next!



1,108

students reached in both after school and summer camp

An coding his remotely operated vehicle on his iPad

OCEAN LEADERS PROGRAM



OCEAN LEADERS PROGRAM

This year, the Ocean Leaders Program saw remarkable growth, empowering students to excel academically, lead with confidence, and pursue science careers.

In partnership with the University of San Diego, we launched a new program for rising 11th graders, immersing them in academic research to build inquiry and investigative skills. It culminated in the long-awaited return of "Report to the Community," where students proudly presented their research, showcasing their growth in science communication.

Our redesigned academic-year program thrived, with students gathering weekly at the Living Lab for tutoring, math enrichment, college prep, mental health support, and community building—reinforcing their leadership and academic success.

These milestones highlight our commitment to shaping the next generation of science leaders, ready to create meaningful change.



Our College Corps volunteers offer one-on-one academic tutoring for our Ocean Leaders

100% of Ocean Leaders enroll in higher education

55% of Ocean Leader alumni are pursuing science-related careers, as compared to 1% of their peers nationwide

12,906 of program hours

67 Hoover High students engaged in the Ocean Leaders Program

OCEAN LEADER SPOTLIGHT

ANGEL MARTINEZ - UC SANTA BARBARA, POLITICAL SCIENCE MAJOR

This summer, Angel Martinez, an Ocean Leader alumnus, reached an incredible milestone by participating in the prestigious National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Internship Program, becoming the first Ocean Leader to achieve this honor. Angel traveled to American Samoa, working with the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, where he gained hands-on experience at the intersection of science, political science, and law enforcement—bringing together his diverse passions and shaping his career vision.

During his internship, Angel developed critical skills in environmental policy enforcement, fisheries management, and investigative techniques, deepening his understanding of how science and law intersect to protect marine ecosystems. His work included conducting field research, analyzing regulatory compliance, and collaborating with federal enforcement officers—experiences that strengthened his ability to navigate complex environmental challenges. His dedication to science, public service, and law enforcement exemplifies the transformative power of our Ocean Leader Program, demonstrating how exploration across disciplines can lead to meaningful careers.

We are proud to celebrate Angel's accomplishments as he forges new opportunities and inspires the next generation of leaders.



Angel, UCSB Sophomore, with his research team in American Samoa

"I discovered a variety of career paths that align with my major and interests, combining science, political science, and law enforcement. This experience has connected my passions and helped shape my career vision."- Angel Martinez, Class of 2023

OCEAN DISCOVERY FELLOWSHIP



TEACHER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

This fall, Ocean Discovery Institute launched the Teacher Fellowship Program in partnership with the University of San Diego and AmeriCorps. This initiative provides pre-service educators with hands-on teaching experience, instructional coaching, and professional development, preparing them to engage and inspire students in communities like ours.

Our inaugural cohort of 12 fellows is already making an impact, working with our K-12 students while gaining invaluable experience in science education. This program strengthens science instruction at Ocean Discovery and helps develop future educators who will shape classrooms beyond our programs.

By equipping these emerging teachers, we're building a stronger, more capable teaching workforce and ensuring that science education remains relevant and inspiring. We are proud to launch these fellows on their journey to shape tomorrow's science leaders.



Our 2024-2025 AmeriCorps Fellows

FELLOW SPOTLIGHT

CHEYENNE AVILA - TEACHING FELLOW

Cheyenne is from Bellflower, California, and earned a Bachelor's degree from the University of La Verne before completing a Master's in Fine Arts at UCSD. She joined Ocean Discovery Institute during a period of transition, seeking more experience in teaching within nontraditional classroom settings, particularly outdoor learning environments.

At Ocean Discovery, she is gaining valuable practice in teaching students of all ages, which she finds both exciting and a great opportunity to build adaptability. She enjoys teaching environmental sciences and facilitating experiential learning alongside co-teachers who bring unique perspectives to the classroom. She appreciates how Ocean Discovery allows students to connect geosciences to their own communities by exploring San Diego's diverse natural habitats.

Looking ahead, she hopes to continue teaching at the collegiate level while also focusing on her art and poetry. She values the opportunity to gain insight into the behind-the-scenes process of curriculum development at Ocean Discovery, an experience that will inform her own approach to designing syllabi in the future.



Cheyenne is helping students connect environmental sciences to their communities through outdoor learning

VOLUNTEERS



VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are essential to Ocean Discovery, transforming young lives through science education. With 280 dedicated volunteers—63% people of color—we reflect the diversity and belonging we foster. These mentors, innovators, and role models guide the next generation of leaders.

In 2023–24, our volunteers made a lasting impact:

- **4 Scientists-in-Residence** inspired students on-site.
- **201 virtual scientist-student conversations** expanded career awareness.
- **11 volunteers traveled to Baja** to mentor high school Ocean Leaders.
- **13 mentors guided seniors** to a 100% college acceptance rate.
- **26 Parent Leader Volunteers** contributed 305 hours.



Shelby Johnson participated in our Scientist-in-Residence program, guiding our young scientist as they code ROVs.

By mentoring, leading hands-on science, and building confidence, Ocean Discovery volunteers break barriers, create opportunities, and empower students to succeed.

If you are interested in volunteering with us, please find us at <https://oceandiscoveryinstitute.org/volunteer/> or reach out to our Volunteer Coordinator and Program Alum, Nalleli Arriaga, at narriaga@oceandi.org

305 hours contributed by our Parent Leader volunteers

201 virtual conversations with science leaders from across the nation

280 dedicated volunteers, 63% of whom identify as people of color

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

MIKAL MONTGOMERY - METEOROLOGIST

We were honored to have Mikal Montgomery, a meteorologist, mentor our students in a variety of volunteer roles. Mikal engaged with students multiple times as a virtual "Science Leader," discussing his personal and career journey.

In November, Mikal traveled to the Living Lab for a week as our Scientist-in-Residence. His passion for educational and climate justice was evident through his many conversations with students and staff. Students were also thrilled to learn about his exciting work flying on airplanes into the eye of hurricanes to collect critical atmospheric data! Furthermore, he inspired students to want to learn more and get involved with science jobs, one of Ocean Discovery's top partners. We're so grateful to Mikal for his commitment to transforming young lives through science!



Mikal's story is an inspiration to many of our students who have faced a lack of educational opportunity

"During my time at Ocean Discovery, my sense of community was profoundly renewed as I witnessed youth grow through hands-on projects, receive college application assistance, and share inspiring stories of perseverance and success. These experiences highlighted the enduring impact of Ocean Discovery's initiatives, which continue to shape the scientific curiosity and future potential of the community's youth for generations to come."

- Mikal Montgomery

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

ASML

We are thrilled to announce that ASML, a global leader in semiconductor technology, has awarded Ocean Discovery Institute a \$1.5 million grant as a part of their inclusive communities' focus area. Over the next three years, this grant will support our In-School and Out-of-School Programs, providing a tremendous boost to science education for the young minds in City Heights.

ASML

ASML's commitment to STEM education and including communities perfectly aligns with our mission, and we're so grateful for the investment in the future of our students and communities.



1.5

million dollar grant
over 3 years

Thanks to ASML even more students will do hands-on science-like shark dissections at the Living Lab!

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

Since 2017, our partnership with Southwest Airlines has provided hundreds of flights, enabling students to visit colleges, staff to attend conferences, and volunteers to support our mission.

This year, high school senior Isabella toured UC Santa Cruz, CSU Monterey Bay, and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with her mother and college mentor. Experiencing these campuses firsthand helped her find the best academic and social fit.



Isabella visiting college campuses with her mom and college mentor thanks to Southwest Airlines

Isabella is one of many seniors whose post-secondary journey has been shaped by this opportunity—one that wouldn't have been possible without Southwest Airlines' support.

"Thanks to Southwest Airlines, my mom, my college mentor, Marilyn, and I went on a college trip. This trip was very influential in my college decision. Seeing these colleges in person is so much more impactful than viewing them virtually because I was able to imagine myself there and even experience the community on campus. I am very grateful for the possibility of this trip because, without it, I'd be unsure of which college would be right for me." -Isabella, Class of 2025

Southwest[®]

Southwest Airlines is the official airline of Ocean Discovery Institute

LEAVING YOUR LEGACY

NEVER TURN A KID AWAY

One of the primary ways Ocean Discovery will continue to grow our impact is through 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 actions today will ensure that we'll never turn a kid away, empowering tomorrow's young people to 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.



Students arriving at our Living Lab to become the next generation of Science Leaders

[Click Here to
Learn More](#)

LEAVING YOUR LEGACY

JUDY SWINK - LONG TIME SUPPORTER AND LEGACY CIRCLE MEMBER

DISCOVER JUDY'S STORY AND THE IMPACT OF HER PLANNED GIVING

“The ocean and its margins have always been special places for me. I come from a family of beachcombers and I’ve had the good fortune as a child to explore the beaches of Chesapeake Bay, where I grew up sailing with my family, and visiting many beaches and shorelines in other parts of the world. After I settled in San Diego, I took up Scuba Diving and expanded my explorations beneath the sea and into the kelp forests. These experiences shaped who I have become and I want every child—no matter their circumstances—to enjoy the opportunity to learn and understand the importance of our rivers, bays and oceans in their own lives. When I first connected with Ocean Discovery Institute nearly two decades ago, I saw the incredible impact they were making. They were giving young people—many who had never even seen the ocean—the chance to learn, explore, and realize their potential. That’s why I’ve chosen to leave a bequest. I want to ensure that other kids can experience the magic of our ocean world and find inspiration in it, just as I did. Planned giving isn’t just about a donation; it’s about leaving behind a legacy of possibility and hope.”

– Judy Swink



Your gift today empowers the science leaders of tomorrow.

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

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ADVISORY COUNCILS

We thank our Advisory Council members for their support in guiding our programs, shaping our goals, and mentoring our students.

ALUMNI ADVISORY COUNCIL

MARY COZY
KHANCHI DAM
EZRA EL-ATON
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THERESA TALLEY
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TANZANIA WARE

FAMILY ADVISORY COUNCIL

| | |
|---|--|
| RICARDO ARREDONDO | PATRICIA PINTOR ESTHER PINTOR |
| MICHELLE ARTEAGA OCTAVIANO BARBOZA | PATRICIA PINTOR EVILA RAMIREZ MARIA RAMIREZ |
| GRACIELA BERNAL YOLANDA CHILAPA DORA HERNANDEZ MARIA HERNANDEZ CARMEN LARA BEATRIZ LOPEZ ESMERALDA LOPEZ TERESA MENDOZA RAQUEL NOLASCO LUCERO OROZCO | ROS Y RANGEL ESTHER ROJAS MARIA ROSALES YOLANDA RODRIGUEZ JANNETTE SANCHEZ MARIA SANTILLAN ALBA SERNA ARACELI VALENTIN |

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

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

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JOHN & DINA JOHNS

JOSE ZUNIGA

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LYNN GORGUZE & CONGRESSMAN SCOTT PETERS

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RUDY VARGAS

SCOTT AND LATRESA PEARSON

SCOTT GRIMES

SHARA FISLER & FAMILY

TARA S. MARATHE & LAWRENCE LUM

VANESSA MARIE SARDELLA

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

IMPACT CIRCLE

(\$250,000+)

ALUMBRA INNOVATIONS FOUNDATION
CALIFORNIA COASTAL CONSERVANCY
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND
RECREATION
J.W. SEFTON FOUNDATION
SAN DIEGO FOUNDATION
SAN DIEGO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
PRICE PHILANTHROPIES
SATTEBERG FOUNDATION
WALTER J. & BETTY C. ZABLE FOUNDATION

INNOVATION CIRCLE

(\$100,000 +)

DAVID C. COPLEY FOUNDATION

DISCOVERY CIRCLE

(\$25,000 +)

11TH HOUR RACING
CALPINE ENERGY SOLUTIONS
THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITH
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT TO THE CITY
OF SAN DIEGO
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
HARRIET E. PFLEGER FOUNDATION
HOLOGIC CHARITABLE FUND
JEWISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

KIWANIS CLUB OF SAN DIEGO
LILY LAI FOUNDATION
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FAMILY FOUNDATION
THE KEITH CAMPBELL FOUNDATION FOR
THE ENVIRONMENT
UNIFIED PORT OF SAN DIEGO
VERTEX PHARMACEUTICALS FOUNDATION

2024 FINANCIALS

Ocean Discovery Institute ensures sustainable growth by building a diverse donor network of foundations, government agencies, corporations, and individual supporters.

REVENUES, GAINS, AND OTHER SUPPORT

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Corporate | \$277,623 |
| Foundation | \$1,583,495 |
| Government | \$774,101 |
| Individual | \$225,192 |
| Fundraising Events | \$362,259 |
| Other | \$660,685 |

**TOTAL REVENUES, GAINS,
AND OTHER SUPPORT** **\$3,883,354**

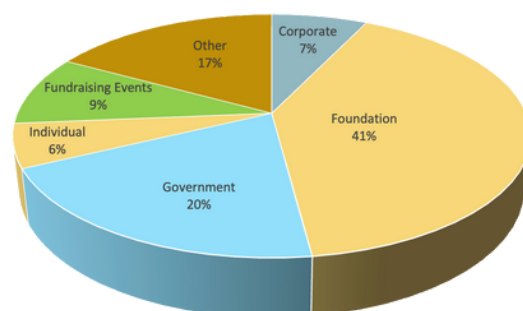
EXPENSES

| | |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Program Services | \$3,106,602 |
| Management and General | \$545,434 |
| Fundraising | \$557,531 |

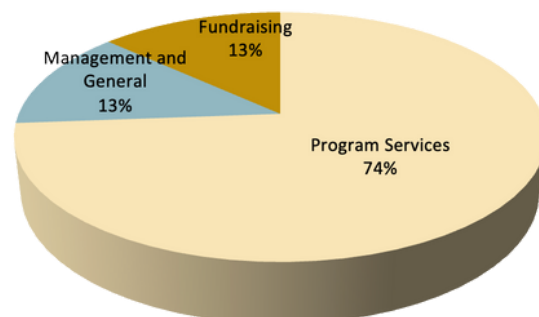
TOTAL EXPENSES **\$4,209,567**

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| CHANGE IN NET ASSETS | \$(326,212) |
| NET ASSETS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR | \$9,597,885 |
| NET ASSEST AT THE END OF THE YEAR | \$9,271,673 |

REVENUE CATEGORIES



EXPENSE CATEGORIES



SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITY, TRANSFORM OUR COMMUNITY

Today, our community faces big challenges. At Ocean Discovery Institute, we believe in the abilities of our young people, and we make sure every student gets the opportunities they need to succeed. With your continued support, we will keep moving forward, leading the way to support the next generation of science leaders from City Heights.



Domanick is a 1st generation college student studying Business Administration at UCSD

Now more than ever, our students need you. The future of science depends on new ideas and innovation and together, we can build a brighter future! One student at a time.

Donate to support today's science leaders – because the change we want for tomorrow starts now!



Abigail is a Sophomore at Hoover High and aspires to become the first in her family with a college degree

[Click here to Donate in support of our community](#)



**GIVE.
LEARN.
VOLUNTEER.**



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