OUR MISSION

is to inspire conservation of the natural world by exhibiting and caring for animals, by excelling in education and research and by providing an exceptional visitor experience.
Dear Aquarium Family,

On the evening of November 16, an Aquarium technician flipped a switch and with that, South Carolina Aquarium Aglow debuted, and a new local warm glow. On the evening of November 16, an Aquarium technician flipped a switch and with that, South Carolina Aquarium Aglow debuted, and a new local warm glow. On the evening of November 16, an Aquarium technician flipped a switch and with that, South Carolina Aquarium Aglow debuted, and a new local warm glow. The Aquarium itself grew carefully in midsummer our halls were teeming with animal appearances.

It represents the first step in reconceiving or a place to house programs and people. This was a year in which we embraced the uncertainty, the after-hours experience served to protect our guests, our team and our animals, alike.

In the field, our conservation team faced the same odds. For that, we are truly grateful. The Aquarium’s board of directors has been engaged throughout the year and considered how best to prudently invest our impact to the next level, has been an effort driven in large part by our donors.

By the end of the year, it was clear the Aquarium had triumphed over adversity and was once again positioned to achieve its mission at an accelerated pace. Record earned revenues, robust fundraising and government support provided a backdrop for an important reduction in our conservation programs in the face of shifting shorelines, through which future generations will observe and respond to shifting coastlines.

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After our animals, alike.

The past year will stand out powerfully for me and for the Aquarium as one marked by hope, and the promise of a return not merely of normalcy, but the potential for much more. If the close of 2020 felt like survival, the close of 2021 felt like momentum — for the Aquarium family, and for the community we are honored to serve.

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At the start of the pandemic, we reimagined and expanded upon for years to come.

Symbolically, Aquarian Aquarium Aglow served as a vital reminder that an Aquarium had overcome strong odds and had emerged from the pandemic brighter and stronger than ever. In fact, the entire year of 2020 provided evidence of an organization on the rebound — re-engaging communities, rehabilitating animals and replanting the natural environment.

In classrooms across the state and around the globe, our in-person and streaming digital education programs introduced children to important scientific concepts and environmental concerns. Aligned with state and national curriculum standards, these programs offered away teachers a breadth of rich teaching materials with animal appearances.

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In the field, our conservation team worked steadfastly to lead the cleanup of contaminant-laden sediments and seafloor sands. More than half a million pieces of debris were collected and documented in our Ultra Fine Digital Journal, a project in the South Carolina Aquarium Clean Sea Science app, combining valuable data for identifying source points of pollution and endemic concerns.

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In the historic Marjory’s backyards, a team of research scientists from the Aquarium and partnering agencies navigated a beleaguered saltmarsh, replanting marsh habitats and going new to an unexpected hope.

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with plans to open publicly in early 2024. Renovations will commence in early 2023, conceptual phase of planning for the facility. The facility will welcome solutions for the rapidly changing environment, the newly conceived Teen Conservation Corps. The Learning Lab will also house our expanding slate of teen standards-based STEM program. The Learning Lab provides hands-on experiences for K-12 students currently served by this core education facility includes creating a new home for Dominion Energy School Programs, allowing us to nearly double the number of K-12 students currently served by this core standards-based STEM program. The Learning Lab will also house our expanding slate of teen programs, including the Teen Science Café and the newly conceived Teen Conservation Corps, which trains students to embrace innovative solutions for the rapidly changing environment that surrounds them. The facility will welcome community partners to engage in dialogues around environmental and social justice and climate change, among other topics. With the conceptual phase of planning for the facility now well underway, new construction and renovations will commence in early 2023, with plans to open publicly in early 2024. A cornerstone of the Aquarium’s teen programming, our High School Intern Program was in full swing during the summer of 2021. This program provides paid summer working experience for rising seniors in the tri-county area as well as fieldwork and professional development opportunities. After 99 applications and 60 interviews, 10 local students were selected to participate, representing eight different high schools. Throughout the program, interns were trained on engaging with guests at our touch tanks, handling ambassador animals like our snakes and turtles and providing an exceptional guest experience in our galleries by sharing their animal knowledge. Classes also provided students with practical skills like resume writing and interviewing techniques, giving our interns a solid foundation and a head start as they enter the workforce or postsecondary education.

In December, Charleston’s City Council unanimously approved the Aquarium’s plans to develop the new Learning Lab at the Maritime Center. The vision for this unprecedented education facility includes creating a new home for Dominion Energy School Programs, allowing us to nearly double the number of K-12 students currently served by this core standards-based STEM program. The Learning Lab will also house our expanding slate of teen programs, including the Teen Science Café and the newly conceived Teen Conservation Corps, which trains students to embrace innovative solutions for the rapidly changing environment that surrounds them. The facility will welcome community partners to engage in dialogues around environmental and social justice and climate change, among other topics. With the conceptual phase of planning for the facility now well underway, new construction and renovations will commence in early 2023, with plans to open publicly in early 2024. A cornerstone of the Aquarium’s teen programming, our High School Intern Program was in full swing during the summer of 2021. This program provides paid summer working experience for rising seniors in the tri-county area as well as fieldwork and professional development opportunities. After 99 applications and 60 interviews, 10 local students were selected to participate, representing eight different high schools. Throughout the program, interns were trained on engaging with guests at our touch tanks, handling ambassador animals like our snakes and turtles and providing an exceptional guest experience in our galleries by sharing their animal knowledge. Classes also provided students with practical skills like resume writing and interviewing techniques, giving our interns a solid foundation and a head start as they enter the workforce or postsecondary education.

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A brand new experience in 2021 was the introduction of Aquarium Aglow, a unique holiday light spectacular. As we passed the one-year mark of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Aquarium saw an opportunity to bring light, literally, to our still weakened and somber community. Throughout the year, the immersive experience was brought to life, designed and constructed completely in-house. Thousands of lights illuminated indoor and outdoor exhibits, from luxe and innovative to festive and nostalgic, wowed guests and proved a successful formula, hitting 157% of our revenue goal and 111% of our attendance goal. We look forward to establishing Aquarium Aglow as a Lowcountry holiday tradition in the years to come!

NEW ANIMALS

In collaboration with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Special Survival Plan® Programs for both North American river otters and roseate spoonbills, our animals joined the Aquarium family and have quickly become guest favorites. We introduced two juvenile river otters in the spring, a brother duo that was properly welcomed with the help of devoted fans and followers who chose their new names: Charlie and Beau (short for Charleston and Beaufort, respectively). Both otters have acclimated well to their new habitat in the Mountain Forest and delight guests each day with their curiosity to connect tankside to their new names: Coral and Pearl, have quickly become fan favorites thanks to their uniquely vibrant pink plumage and characteristic spoon-shaped bill.

IDEA EFFORTS

The Aquarium spent another year making exceptional progress in advancing the Aquarium’s ambitious goals for inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA). Striking to expand access to the Aquarium for underserved communities, we created and distributed 3,500 bilingual booklets to local organizations and schools, increasing visibility of our discounted Angelfish membership program operating, but also enabled us to complete the Our World Without campaign closed in March 2021, demonstrating the overwhelming support of our community of supporters all over the world. With approximately 80% of our revenue being generated by general admission sales and memberships, being closed for 68 days and operating in extremely limited capacity upon reopening was a devastating blow to the entire organization. Facing the threat of losing both our education programming and our Sea Turtle Care Center®, we called upon our leadership, longstanding donors and sponsors. Our annual Conservation Gala live auction opportunity secured over $200,000 for the Animal Care Sustainers Fund, enabling us to purchase a cold laser therapy machine to aid veterinary staff in treating animals with a wide range of injuries. This year, the Aquarium marked the launch of a dedicated fundraising effort to secure resources for the multifaceted care of the more than 5,000 animals within our facility. Donors were presented the opportunity to sponsor and sustain elements of the animal care experience, including their favorite exhibits and species. The Animal Care Sustainers Fund drove a powerful movement in philanthropy and by the close of the year, we secured nearly $1 million for areas of work less visible than others, including our Nutritional Care Program, our Veterinary Innovation Program and our Animal Ambassador Program, all of which have now been fully funded by generous donors and sponsors. Our annual Conservation Gala live auction opportunity secured over $200,000 for the Animal Care Sustainers Fund, enabling us to purchase a cold laser therapy machine to aid veterinary staff in treating animals with a wide range of injuries.

OUR WORLD WITHOUT CAMPAIGN

The Aquarium’s Our World Without rescue campaign closed in March 2021, demonstrating the overwhelming support of our community of supporters all over the world. With approximately 80% of our revenue being generated by general admission sales and memberships, being closed for 68 days and operating in extremely limited capacity upon reopening was a devastating blow to the entire organization. Facing the threat of losing both our education programming and our Sea Turtle Care Center®, we called upon our leadership, longstanding donors and sponsors. Our annual Conservation Gala live auction opportunity secured over $200,000 for the Animal Care Sustainers Fund, enabling us to purchase a cold laser therapy machine to aid veterinary staff in treating animals with a wide range of injuries.

SUSTAINING OUR ANIMALS

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OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL FORTIFICATION

As our community emerges from the days of the pandemic, the Aquarium finds itself in an encouraging financial position thanks to the support of our donors, members and guests. Multiple factors contributed to our institution finding its way to its firmest financial footing in our 21-year history. Having secured nearly $5.8 million in federal relief funds, we enjoyed our best year ever for admission revenue, while fundraising reached the same level as 2020’s record year. The launch of the Aquarium Aglow holiday lights experience was a huge success that generated over $400,000. This infusion of critical funds enabled us to develop, for the first time, an investment strategy to keep our organization strong and stable for the next generation. Each of these exciting successes are due to the community’s commitment to our survival, and we will continue to steward these resources with prudence and intentionality in the years to come.
As evidenced by a turbulent 2020, you never leave our side, even in moments of darkness and instability. Whether inspired by our award-winning education programs, our world-class animal care operations, or the powerful spirit of a place that draws your family closer to one another, your belief in our work and our people is what makes us who we are, and renders us resilient.

2021 was a year of returning to the unique corners of our mission and re-engaging with the diverse array of projects that make our institution so unique. You found your way back to our mission, perhaps even your unique corner of that mission, and because of you, we are positioned to lead as never before. We are all honored by your willingness to walk alongside us on a journey unlike any other. You truly make us what we are.

$250,000+ DONORS
South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism
Jonathan M. Zucker *

$100,000–$249,999 DONORS
City of Charleston
Mary and Mason Holland
Holland Family Charitable Fund
The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation
Carla and Kevin Richard
Hiroko Yanagida and Frederick Baker

$50,000–$99,999 DONORS
Cheryl and Thomas Boswell
The Oliver S. and Jennie R. Donaldson Charitable Trust
The Samuel Freeman Charitable Trust
John and Marilyn Hill *
Ingevity
Susan and John Neely
In Memory of Addison Runge
Emily and Steve Swanson

$25,000–$49,999 DONORS
Anonymous (1)
The Boeing Company
Charles River Laboratories
International, Inc.
The Oliver S. and Jennie R. Donaldson Charitable Trust
The Samuel Freeman Charitable Trust
John and Marilyn Hill *
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THANK YOU
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**SUPPORTS AND REVENUE**

- Admissions $7,748,001
- Contributions $4,645,266
- Memberships $1,082,866
- Concessions $768,750
- Miscellaneous $26,183
- Other Income
  - PPP2 $1,425,833
  - ERC $1,286,260
  - SVOG $2,926,861
- Programs and Events
  - Special Events $658,111
  - Fundraising Events $376,798
  - Program Revenues $91,331
- Supplemental $2,248,600

Total Revenue $21,248,600

**EXPENSES**

- Program Services $2,213,019
- Guest Programs $2,104,495
- Animal Care $1,665,304
- Education $1,042,710
- Conservation $775,269
- Memberships $386,910

Total Expenses $11,064,753

**BY THE NUMBERS**

- 22% of total revenue contributed by donors
- 42% of total revenue earned through admissions and memberships
- 27% of total revenue through federal relief funding
- $1,665,302 spent on Animal Care
- 74% applied directly to education, conservation and animal care missions

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**NAUTILUS SOCIETY**

Members of the Nautilus Society have pledged their support to the James L. Ferguson Permanent Endowment, ensuring the South Carolina Aquarium will be a source of magic and wonder for generations to come. We are thankful to these individuals who have included us in their estate plans.

Jim and Esther Ferguson
Tom Tate and Lori Fox
Dr. and Mrs. Dennis Grettenthaler
Karen and Jack Higgins

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2021 marked the triumphant return of Landmark 2025, our road map that charts a path to a unified and connected east peninsula waterfront and reimagines the exhibits and experiences within our walls. We are eagerly anticipating the opening of the Learning Lab in early 2024, marking the emergence of the peninsula’s first dedicated interdisciplinary waterfront educational facility that will serve thousands of schoolchildren every year. As our classroom programs migrate to this revolutionary new space, a new opportunity will begin to take shape in our central facility’s classroom spaces vacated by those programs. This reimagined gallery space will serve as a rotating, immersive exhibit environment, enabling us to provide regularly refreshed exhibits and experiences. On the not-so-distant horizon as well are plans for us to spearhead a revitalization of Liberty Square, in partnership with the City of Charleston and our cultural partners along the waterfront. A vision for a brilliantly animated outdoor space that serves our community year round lies at the heart of the Liberty Square concept. In the coming year, we will connect with communities throughout our city to engage their creativity and feedback as to how this space should look and feel.

A central plank of Landmark in 2022, we will also deepen our commitment to serving teen audiences with the launch of our Teen Conservation Corps. This program will engage teens to interact with and learn directly from innovators in resilience-related fields, from conservation planning to water management. Ultimately housed within the Learning Lab, this program will activate the next generation of environmental stewards to formulate solutions to our planet’s most pressing challenges. The future is brighter than ever at the Aquarium, and on our city’s vibrant east peninsula.