



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



**New England  
Aquarium**

*Protecting the blue planet*



An Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life researcher applies a tag to a leatherback sea turtle in Puerto Rico.



Researchers launch a drone to photograph North Atlantic right whales in Cape Cod Bay. Taken under NOAA permit #27066.



Young visitors admire the new Healthy Corals, Healthy Reefs exhibit at the Aquarium.

The **New England Aquarium** is who we are.  
**Conservation** is what we do.



Anderson Cabot Center researchers work to tag sand tiger sharks in Boston.



A Boston family visits the New England Aquarium during Boston Public Schools Sundays.



A Marine Conservation Action Fund grant recipient leads a lesson on sea turtle conservation in São Tomé.



## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CHAIR

Dear Friends,

In 2024, our work to ensure a vital and vibrant ocean for future generations continued here on Central Wharf and far beyond our walls. We're delighted to share with you the impact that philanthropy has on our organization in our annual report.

At the Aquarium, we unveiled refreshed and new exhibits for visitors to enjoy, including the brand-new Healthy Corals, Healthy Reefs. A myriad of live coral species and tropical fishes are on display in this impressive 5,000-gallon tank, inviting our guests to watch as the reef grows and changes—and to learn about the importance of these precious ecosystems.

We were proud to continue our partnership with the City of Boston to expand access to the Aquarium through Boston Public Schools Sundays (now known as Boston Family Days), offering free admission to all Boston students and their families twice monthly throughout the year. For many of those visitors, it was their first time at the Aquarium, and it was an incredible opportunity for us to share the wonder of our blue planet with them.

Scientists in our Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life continued their cutting-edge work to study and protect marine animals in New England and elsewhere. Right in our backyard, our researchers were working to tag sand tiger sharks in Boston Harbor to learn about their behaviors. Our North Atlantic right whale research team deployed drones to photograph and collect samples from whales in Cape Cod Bay—new technology that's bringing their work to new heights in more ways than one. Ongoing research into

leatherback nesting behaviors in Puerto Rico highlights the power of our collaborative efforts, with colleagues from across the Aquarium and Anderson Cabot Center working alongside local organizations in Puerto Rico to protect these incredible animals.

We were also thrilled to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our Marine Conservation Action Fund (MCAF). By investing over \$1.8 million in more than 230 projects across 60 countries, MCAF has been able to support community leaders pioneering solutions to pressing conservation issues worldwide.

All our work to protect the blue planet would not happen without your generous support. With your help, we will continue to advance our mission. A habitable planet needs a healthy ocean, and a healthy ocean needs all of us. Thank you!

Sincerely,



Vikki N. Spruill  
President and CEO



Thomas R. Burton III  
Chair of the Board of Trustees





*African penguin chick Bunker*

## Our Conservation Work

Thanks to your support, researching and protecting endangered species, opening new exhibits, supporting global conservation initiatives, and engaging with our visitors to become better ocean stewards are just a few of the ways we continued to protect the blue planet in 2024.



# Collaborating to Protect Leatherback Sea Turtles

Leatherback sea turtle nesting populations in the North Atlantic Ocean are undergoing dramatic and widespread declines at a rate of four percent per year. To better understand the decline and help the species—which travels to New England waters during the summer in search of jellies to eat—Dr. Kara Dodge, a research scientist with the Aquarium’s Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life, studies and tracks endangered leatherback sea turtles nesting in southeastern Puerto Rico.

In 2024, Dodge and her team expanded the study, introducing new partners and nesting beaches. They worked with the Puerto Rico Departamento de Recursos Naturales

y Ambientales, long-time partner Amigos de las Tortugas Marinas, and new partners Chelonia and Proyecto de Conservación de Tortugas Marinas – Vida Marina to study leatherbacks in Dorado on the north coast and Añasco on the west coast. In contrast with Maunabo, where the team has worked previously, the two new sites have had little to no prior satellite tagging effort, presenting an opportunity to compare turtle behavior from adjacent nesting regions for the first time.

These efforts represent collaboration across the Aquarium and Anderson Cabot Center, too, as staff from our Rescue and Rehabilitation team—who work to care for injured sea turtles at the Sea Turtle Hospital in Quincy—joined their colleagues’ tagging efforts in Puerto Rico.

Despite navigating new terrain and challenging weather conditions, including extreme heat, rain, and flash flooding, the team tagged 18 leatherbacks during the trip, a record since starting the project in 2018. “We really tripled our effort this year,” Dodge said. “It was our most ambitious field season to date.”



Scan to follow  
our Sea Turtle  
Tracker!



*Top: Anderson Cabot Center researchers Dr. Kara Dodge and Emily Jones apply a tag to a nesting leatherback sea turtle. Bottom: A leatherback hatchling makes its way to the ocean in Puerto Rico. Photos: Vanessa Kahn and Steve De Neef*



## New Tech Taking Right Whale Research to New Heights

Since 1980, the Aquarium and our Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life have been leaders in research on North Atlantic right whales. Last year, after decades of research from vessels and planes, Anderson Cabot Center scientists tried a new angle of study: they used drones.

One of the ways that scientists assess the health of right whales is by capturing droplets of mist from a whale's exhaled breath, or blow, and analyzing it for hormones. It's an area of study that Aquarium scientists have been using for several years, but the normal technique involves maneuvering a small boat as close as possible, which can be quite stressful for the whale. That's why, last summer, a team of trained Anderson Cabot Center researchers trialed a new approach.

The idea is simple: collect the droplets on a petri dish suspended below a drone as it flies over a whale as it exhales. It's the same principle as before, but less invasive and less stressful. It's also just the latest in a growing list of applications for drones in marine mammal research, from collecting measurements and tracking movements to even helping rescuers free whales from entanglement in fishing nets.

With fewer than 400 individuals remaining, North Atlantic right whales are critically endangered. Developing new tools and technology is just one of the ways the Aquarium and its partners are working to protect the species and ensure its continued survival.



*Top: A drone collects a blow sample from Callosity Back (Catalog #3750). Bottom: Members of the Anderson Cabot Center's right whale team launch a drone in Cape Cod Bay. Taken under NOAA permit #27066. Photos: New England Aquarium*



# New Exhibit Showcasing Reef Ecosystem Opens

Last year saw the arrival of a new nearly 5,000-gallon exhibit that celebrates the beauty, diversity, and value of coral reefs and reminds New England Aquarium visitors that we collectively have the power to help protect and preserve them.

Healthy Corals, Healthy Reefs, which opened in November, is home to a variety of live coral species native to the Indo-Pacific region as well as species that are new to the Aquarium, such as angelfish, butterflyfish, wrasses, surgeonfish, and reef-dwelling invertebrates. The exhibit explains that corals are animals, not plants, and that they are both tiny and massive: each individual animal, known as a polyp, may be only a few millimeters wide, but the reefs that they combine to create are like giant underwater cities that are home to about a quarter of all marine life.

Three smaller jewel tanks offer a closer look at relationships within the coral reef ecosystem. Interactive elements provide a variety of multi-sensory experiences that are especially impactful for tactile learners, and the exhibit features a low-set window to give children and visitors using wheelchairs an unobstructed view.

Unfortunately, reefs are in decline worldwide because of climate change, overfishing, and pollution, but the exhibit reminds guests that we all have the power to help protect them and the marine life they support.

Because of the careful work by staff aquarists, who raised and nurtured the coral and designed and created the rocky habitat, this is a living exhibit; the coral will grow and change over time, providing a different experience with each future viewing.



*Top: Healthy Corals, Healthy Reefs officially opened in November 2024. Bottom: Small jewel tanks offer a closer look at life on a coral reef. Photos: Vanessa Kahn*

## SUPPORTING OCEAN CONSERVATION

# Meet Nicole Obi

*Inspired by the Aquarium's conservation mission, Obi stepped into a leadership role for the organization.*

Entrepreneur and business community leader Nicole Obi knows big changes are needed to protect the blue planet. And she knows the Aquarium and its team of experts, including researchers in the Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life, are the ones who can drive that change.

"The seals and the penguins are great ambassadors, but there's so much more to the Aquarium," she said. "I'd love for people to take a closer look."

This is one of the reasons Obi joined the Aquarium's Board of Trustees in 2024. She has fond memories of visiting the Aquarium when she was young, and of bringing her own child to see the incredible marine animals that call Central Wharf home. Now, she's transitioned from visitor to leader, a journey that began with a call from Aquarium President and CEO Vikki Spruill.

"Part of what excites me about the role is the message that Vikki shared, which is the importance of having a healthy ocean," Obi said. "It was...sort of like a revelation," she added. "[The ocean] is such a huge part of our earth and plays such a significant role in the health of our planet."

As a co-founder of two venture-backed startups and the current president and CEO of the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts, Obi brings a unique blend of leadership, civic, and entrepreneurial knowledge to her role on the Aquarium's Board.



*Nicole Obi joined the Aquarium's Board of Trustees in 2024.*

"I have been keenly focused on climate and sustainability not just as an environmental justice area but an economic justice opportunity," she explained.

In her role on the Board, Obi wants to help connect the dots, letting people know that by supporting the Aquarium, they're helping drive the realization of its mission. In particular, she's excited to highlight the role the Aquarium is playing in conservation science, technology, and policy.



# Sand Tiger Shark Research Returning to Boston Harbor

The Aquarium's exhibits and research programs highlight much of the world's ocean, from Florida, to the Great Barrier Reef, to the southern tip of Africa. In 2024, Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life continued their work to protect marine life right in our backyard as well, studying sand tiger sharks in Boston Harbor.

During the 1990s, overfishing reduced the US East Coast population of sand tiger sharks, which are found in subtropical and temperate waters worldwide, by between 70 and 90 percent. But following federal and state protections, sand tigers have rebounded in the region. In fact, as a warming climate changes the environment, they now travel north of Cape Cod to places they were rarely previously observed, including Boston Harbor, where they are found between July and September.

The sand tiger sharks in the harbor are juveniles. At nearly three feet long, they are about one-third the length of fully grown adults. Boston Harbor is a nursery area, a place where juvenile sharks feel protected from predators while having access to abundant food sources.

From 2016 to 2019 and again since 2023, Anderson Cabot Center scientists have been fitting sand tigers with acoustic tags that "ping" off underwater receivers at fixed locations throughout the harbor, providing data on their movements and helping paint a picture of how they use the area.

Because Boston Harbor is a metropolitan area with lots of human activity, such studies are critical to understanding where and when sand tigers are found in the harbor and what protections they might need.



*Top: Anderson Cabot Center researchers and Aquarium staff work together to measure and tag a shark. Bottom: Looking for sand tiger sharks in Boston Harbor. Photos: Vanessa Kahn*



## Celebrating 25 Years of the Marine Conservation Action Fund

In 2024, the Aquarium celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Marine Conservation Action Fund (MCAF), which has supported community-based projects to improve the health of the ocean and its wildlife in more than 60 countries.

The philosophy behind MCAF is to provide support for conservation leaders in low- and middle-income countries around the globe who are working on small-scale, local projects. Such efforts are critical because local leaders who are closest to the issues are often best positioned to develop long-term solutions in partnership with their communities.

Some projects funded by MCAF have led to the establishment of Costa Rica's first shark sanctuary in 2018, the first national protection for giant manta rays in Peru in 2016, and the establishment of a marine species monitoring network in Haiti.

Recently, programs to receive funding include identifying key hawksbill turtle nesting habitats along Mexico's Yucatán peninsula and collaborating with the tourism sector of El Cuyo to reduce human impact on nesting sites; studying shark diversity and abundance in Utila, Honduras, and developing the country's first shark identification guide for local fishers and communities; and rescuing and hand-rearing African penguin eggs and chicks abandoned during severe storms in South Africa.

MCAF fosters lasting relationships with project leaders, providing ongoing financial, technical, professional resources, and fosters a worldwide network of conservationists to help sustain local efforts and organizations over the long term.

In the words of MCAF Fellow Dr. Asha de Vos of Oceanswell in Sri Lanka and the Oceans Institute in Australia, the program "creates a sense of custodianship and inspires future leaders to emerge from these communities. In the end, to save the world's largest ecosystem, we need to build the world's largest team."



*Top: MCAF Fellow Ani Henriquez, Project Leader Veta Wade, and Fellow Francklin Barbier at an MCAF reception in Boston. Bottom: 2024 MCAF grants included support for African penguins in South Africa. Photos: Collin Howell and Emily Duwan*



## SUPPORTING OCEAN CONSERVATION

# The Volgenau Foundation

*Supporting research to protect threatened and endangered species, like the North Atlantic right whale, is priority for a family's greater philanthropic mission.*

When Ernst Volgenau and his family established the Volgenau Foundation in 1994, their love of the great outdoors became a philanthropic goal to protect nature and the diversity of wildlife that calls Earth home.

"We believe in the intrinsic value of each species and our shared responsibility to safeguard and restore their populations," Ernst's daughter Lisa Volgenau shared about her family.

That's why the Foundation partners with the Aquarium's Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life to protect critically endangered North Atlantic right whales. These whales are one of the rarest species in the world, with an estimated fewer than 400 remaining in the wild.

"We have high respect for the science and research that goes on at the Aquarium," says Lisa, who now serves as a vice president and board director of the Volgenau Foundation.

A conservation biologist by training and initially focused on marine efforts, Lisa became familiar with the Aquarium's conservation work while she was in graduate school studying the impact of fishing gear entanglements on western North Atlantic humpback whales. She conducted her research alongside Anderson Cabot Center scientists and "realized how dedicated and passionate they are." That led her to eventually recommend the program for funding when the Volgenau Foundation began giving traditional grants.



*Back row: Chris DeCardy, Jennifer Volgenau Wiley, Lisa Volgenau, Lauren Volgenau-Knapp, and Jonathan Kaledin; front row: Ernst Volgenau and Sara Lane Volgenau.*

Now, through the Foundation's support, Anderson Cabot Center researchers are increasing efforts to understand and mitigate the impacts that human activities pose to right whales, such as vessel strikes and fishing gear entanglements, as well as climate change.

"I think that's what we're most proud of—all that the team is doing to save this species, which helps so many other species," Lisa said.

*"The Volgenau Foundation's long-standing support of our right whale research program has been invaluable to our efforts to conserve this critically endangered species. It has allowed us to carry out multiple research and outreach efforts that have improved our ability to monitor human impacts and to ensure this information is available broadly. We are incredibly grateful!"*

—Amy Knowlton, Senior Scientist, Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life at the New England Aquarium



## Expanding Access to the Aquarium Through “Boston Family Days”

In 2024, the New England Aquarium was one of six cultural institutions to partner with the City of Boston as part of Boston Public Schools (BPS) Sundays, a pilot program from Mayor Wu’s administration offering twice-monthly free access days for Boston Public School students. With over 40,000 attendees taking advantage of the BPS Sundays program, the pilot was expanded in 2025.

The renamed Boston Family Days program added three new participating institutions and opened free access to all Boston school-aged children and their families. Every student enrolled in grades K–12 or Pre-K and living in Boston enjoys free admission to the Aquarium and 23 other cultural institutions across the city on the first and second Sundays of each month, through December 2026.

Thus far, nearly half of the attendees who took advantage of BPS Sundays and Boston Family Days are first-time visitors to the New England Aquarium. “Programs like Boston Family Days that prioritize accessibility and inclusivity at cultural institutions are invaluable for young people,” said Aquarium President and CEO Vikki Spruill. “The New England Aquarium is honored to continue this partnership with the City and welcomes students and families throughout Boston to form a deeper connection to the ocean and the importance it has in our lives.”



*Top: President and CEO Vikki Spruill welcomes Boston Mayor Michelle Wu to the Aquarium. Bottom: Young BPS visitors attend a presentation at the top of the Giant Ocean Tank. Photos: Vanessa Kahn and Suzanne Liola Matus*



# Lowell Lecture Series Convening Award-Winning Journalists, Entrepreneurs, Explorers, and More

In 2024, the New England Aquarium's Lowell Lecture Series welcomed a diverse array of featured speakers on stage at the Simons Theatre, including world-renowned explorer and filmmaker Philippe Cousteau, grandson of famed oceanographer Jacques Cousteau. Joined by two youth leaders from EarthEcho International's Youth Leadership Council, Cousteau shared experiences from his decades of ocean exploration and showcased innovations that challenge us to evolve beyond sustainability and protect the blue planet.

Other notable speakers included renowned photographer and filmmaker Brian Skerry, an Explorer-in-Residence and former trustee at the New England Aquarium, who shared a behind-the-scenes look at the Boston premiere of NOVA's three-part-series *Sea Change*, which featured Skerry's photography; Jay Haigler, archaeologist and founding board member of Diving With a Purpose, an international nonprofit organization that documents and protects African slave-trade shipwrecks; and Daniela Fernandez, a pioneering ocean advocate and social entrepreneur.

Since 1972, the lecture series has featured talks and films by scientists, environmental writers, photographers, and others, helping to ignite important conversations about protecting our blue planet. The Lowell Lecture Series at the New England Aquarium is presented free to the public through the generosity of the Lowell Institute.



*Top: Philippe Cousteau presents at a Lowell Lecture Series event. Bottom: Jay Haigler answers audience questions following his talk. Photos: Tony Rinaldo*

# FINANCIAL RESULTS (in thousands of dollars)

## Operating Revenue and Support

	FY 2024	FY 2023
Admissions – Individuals and Groups	\$29,566	\$29,661
Retail Sales – Food, Gift Shop, and Events	5,280	5,221
Memberships – Individual, Family, and Corporate	2,983	3,236
Gifts and Grants	5,739	17,440
Federal and State Grants	2,203	3,408
Sponsored Program Grants and Contracts	5,575	3,310
Other	1,169	1,045
<b>Total Operating Revenue and Support</b>	<b>\$52,515</b>	<b>\$63,321</b>

## Operating Costs and Expenses

Research, Conservation, and Education	\$15,087	\$13,455
Exhibit and Retail Operations	28,901	26,853
Management and General Administration	8,359	8,357
Fundraising	2,757	4,730
Interest	511	524
<b>Total Operating Costs and Expenses</b>	<b>\$55,615</b>	<b>\$53,919</b>

## Net Assets from Operations

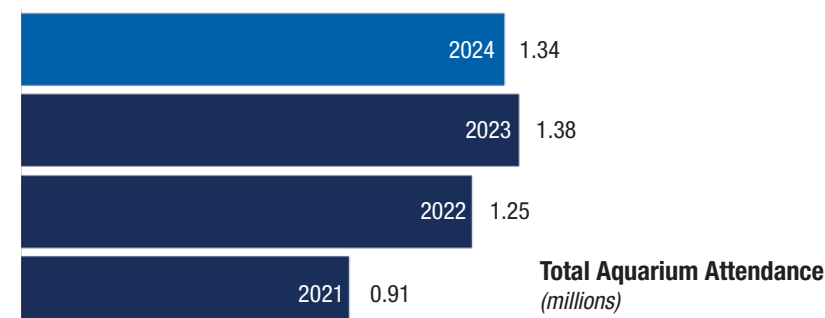
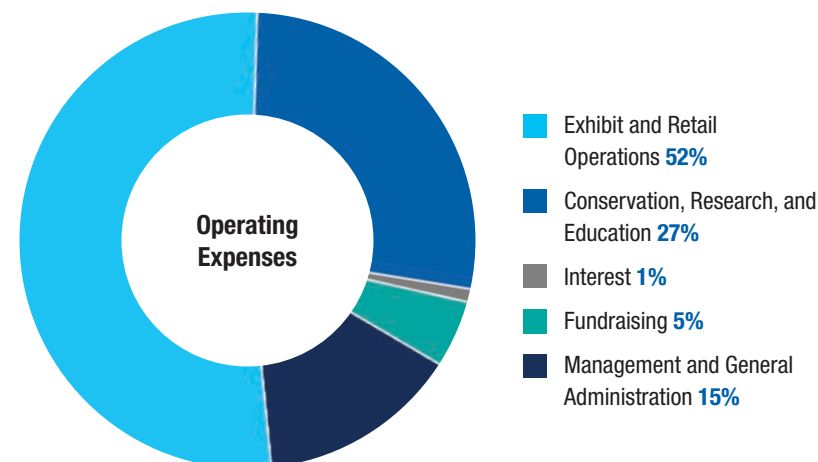
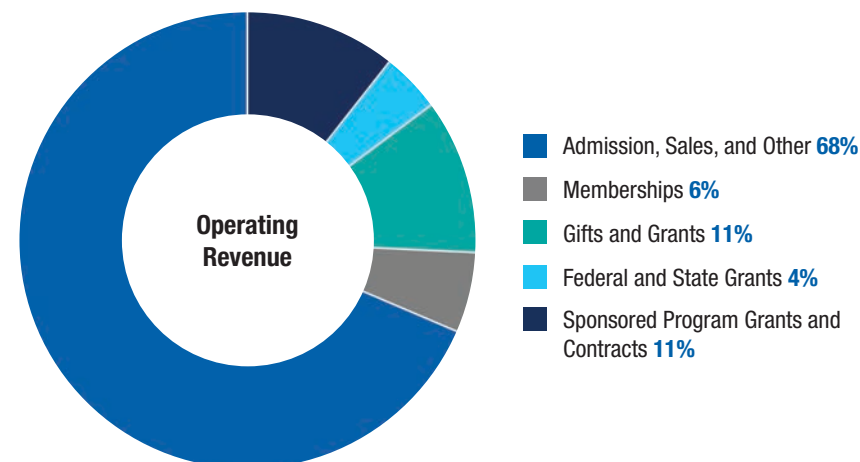
	(\$3,100)	\$9,402
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## Non-operating Revenues and Expenses

Non-operating Revenues	(\$434)	\$418
Investment Return (Loss)	4,207	4,081
Net Change in Beneficial Interest in Perpetual Trust	142	152
<b>Increase in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$815</b>	<b>\$14,053</b>

## Net Assets

	FY 2024	FY 2023
Beginning of Year	\$95,126	\$81,073
End of Year	\$95,941	\$95,126





# LEADERSHIP

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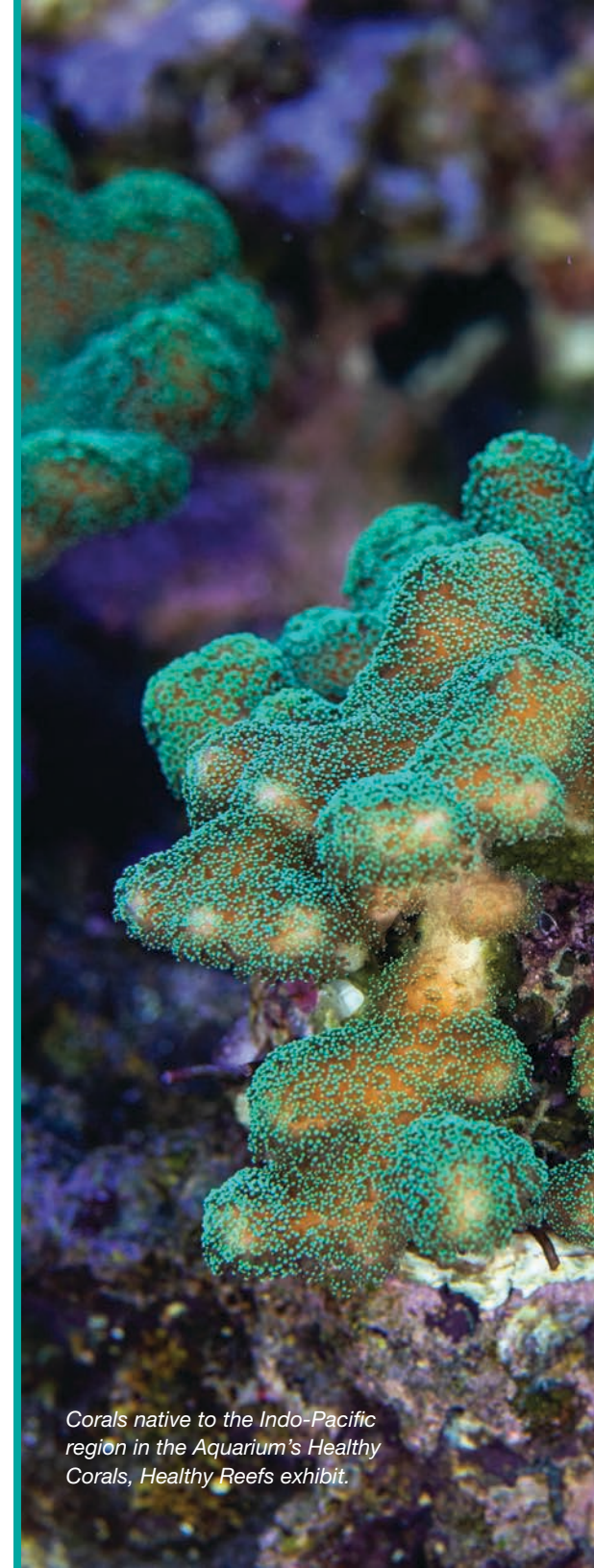
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*This list reflects our Governance members as of September 2025.*

*Corals native to the Indo-Pacific region in the Aquarium's Healthy Corals, Healthy Reefs exhibit.*

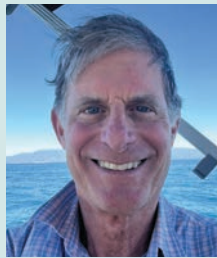


## SUPPORTING OCEAN CONSERVATION

# Meet Our New Trustees

The Board of Trustees recently elected Doug Lober, Sandhya Murali, and Tad O'Donnell to its ranks. Additionally, Steven Fox, Dave Leathers, Kris Meyer, and Anna Sommers joined the Aquarium's Ambassador Council, serving as essential links to the community and supporting the New England Aquarium mission.

**Doug Lober** has spent his career investing as a portfolio manager at Fidelity Investments, teaching and researching as an assistant professor at Duke University's School of the Environment, and working in international development as a fisheries extension officer in Kenya with the US Peace Corps. He has a BA, master's, and doctorate from Yale University and an MBA from Columbia University. Lober is most interested in supporting the Aquarium's conservation mission.



**Sandhya Murali** is co-founder and CEO of Solstice, an award-winning social enterprise dedicated to expanding access to clean energy to communities across the US. Prior to joining Solstice, she worked at Buen Power Peru, a social enterprise that distributes solar lamps and water heaters to off-grid communities in Peru. Murali started her career at Barclays' investment banking division in New York and London. Additionally, she was deeply involved in Barclays'



philanthropy work, championing initiatives that support economic empowerment and financial access. She holds a BBA from the University of Michigan and an MBA from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management, where she received the Sustainability Certificate.

**Tad O'Donnell** is a private investor who has invested in venture and private equity for more than 20 years with a focus on the health care sector. O'Donnell currently serves as the executive chairman of Positive Recovery Solutions and is an advisor to several search fund and investment managers. Previously, he served as a partner at TT Capital Partners and as a general partner at HLM Venture Partners. He began his investment activities at Greylock, where he was their first associate. Upon graduating from college, O'Donnell was an investment banking analyst with the health care group at Smith Barney. He holds a BA from Harvard College and an MBA from Harvard Business School.






## Thank you to our generous supporters.

The New England Aquarium gratefully acknowledges the individuals, foundations, and corporations whose generous financial contributions and pledges provided critical support to care for thousands of animals, power conservation research, and educate audiences of all ages. This list recognizes philanthropic gifts of \$500 and above.

As a nonprofit organization, philanthropic support enables us to take action for our ocean. We thank you for helping us to protect the blue planet!

An aerial photograph showing a large right whale mother and her calf swimming in the deep blue ocean. The mother whale is in the foreground, and the calf is slightly behind and to the right. Both whales are dark in color with white markings on their heads and backs. The water is a deep, textured blue.

*A right whale mother and calf photographed during an aerial survey in July 2024.*

## GREAT BENEFACTORS

The following donors have committed \$1 million or more cumulatively since the New England Aquarium's opening in 1969.

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## We Are Grateful for Our Members

We are pleased to recognize and express our gratitude to more than 14,000 active member households. We depend on our members' support to continue our critical work.

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The Apple Lane Foundation  
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