



 NATIONAL AQUARIUM.

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24 | REPORT

Welcome

NATIONAL AQUARIUM 2024 IMPACT REPORT

The National Aquarium’s mission is to connect people with nature to inspire compassion and care for our ocean planet. As a nonprofit, we could not do this work without you—our 1.2 million annual guests, our household and corporate members, employees and volunteers, Board leadership, partners, donors, funders and our Baltimore community—and we are so grateful.

In 2024, we accomplished so much together to benefit people, animals and the ocean. Our mission was the guiding force behind all our work in 2024—on our campus, in Baltimore City, across Maryland, and beyond.

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On Our Campus

SPOTLIGHT ON NATIONAL AQUARIUM'S HARBOR WETLAND PRESENTED BY CFG BANK

The Aquarium's newest exhibit, [*Harbor Wetland*](#), is free and open to all. It sits in the Inner Harbor between Piers 3 and 4 of our campus in downtown Baltimore. After 14 years of research and planning and nine months of construction, *Harbor Wetland* opened on August 8, the 43rd anniversary of the Aquarium's 1981 grand opening. Guests can step onto *Harbor Wetland's* floating docks to experience a re-created salt marsh. In addition to teaching visitors about wetland ecosystems, *Harbor Wetland* reintroduces habitat into the Inner Harbor, promotes healthy water and supports native species.

Harbor Wetland opened on August 8 in Baltimore's Inner Harbor.



1 In total, the *Harbor Wetland* project cost more than \$14 million. Construction costs totaled over \$9 million, and more than half was paid to minority-owned, women-owned and small business enterprises. *Harbor Wetland* is presented by Baltimore-based CFG Bank, with other leading private investment from the Whiting-Turner Contracting Company, the Bunting Family Philanthropies and Constellation—as well as the generosity of the Aquarium’s philanthropic community and local, state and federal government support.

2 From *Harbor Wetland*’s opening in August through the end of 2024, a total of 54,458 guests visited the exhibit. From September to December, hundreds of students experienced *Harbor Wetland* through National Aquarium education programs, including more than 300 through [What Lives in the Harbor](#) alone.

3 Throughout 2024 (including during *Harbor Wetland*’s construction), community scientists documented 322 observations of 116 different species of animals, insects and plants on, in and around the exhibit. Notable sightings included river otters, diamondback terrapins, blue crabs, pumpkinseed sunfish and black-crowned night herons. *Harbor Wetland* is planted with 32,000 native grasses and shrubs. From August through December, 515 contributors uploaded photos tracking the vegetation’s growth on [Chronolog](#).

4 The work of local artists adds to *Harbor Wetland*, too. [Street artist and Baltimore native Nether created a large-scale mural](#) that serves as a backdrop to the exhibit. Musicians Jessica Keyes and Patrick McMinn, the featured artists of [Voyages: Chapter 2](#), returned to the Aquarium to create the sound installation that guests hear as they explore the floating habitat.

MORE IMPACT ON OUR CAMPUS



Welcomed our 60 millionth guest to experience thousands of animals in our award-winning habitats, creating memorable experiences that spark connection, curiosity and empathy for the natural world and each other. Each year more than a million people visit the Aquarium as part of their time in Baltimore. We look forward to continuing to welcome guests to the Aquarium—and the reimagined Inner Harbor—in the years ahead.

Provided exceptional animal care and welfare for the more than 13,000 animals we are responsible for. This requires significant expertise given the diversity of species represented throughout the Aquarium—including 115 kinds of invertebrates, 350 fish and shark species, over 80 types of reptiles and amphibians, nearly 40 kinds of birds, and three marine and terrestrial mammal species. As an AZA-accredited organization, we meet and exceed the highest standards for animal wellbeing.



Had one-on-one conversations with 725,200 guests and reached 221,700 more through group presentations like Animal Encounters and keeper talks. More than 16,330 guests also participated in Aquarium tours. Our team connects directly with Aquarium guests to discuss climate change, plastic pollution, and losses of biodiversity and habitat. We also talk about individual actions and community-level solutions that can help address these complex issues.



MORE IMPACT ON OUR CAMPUS

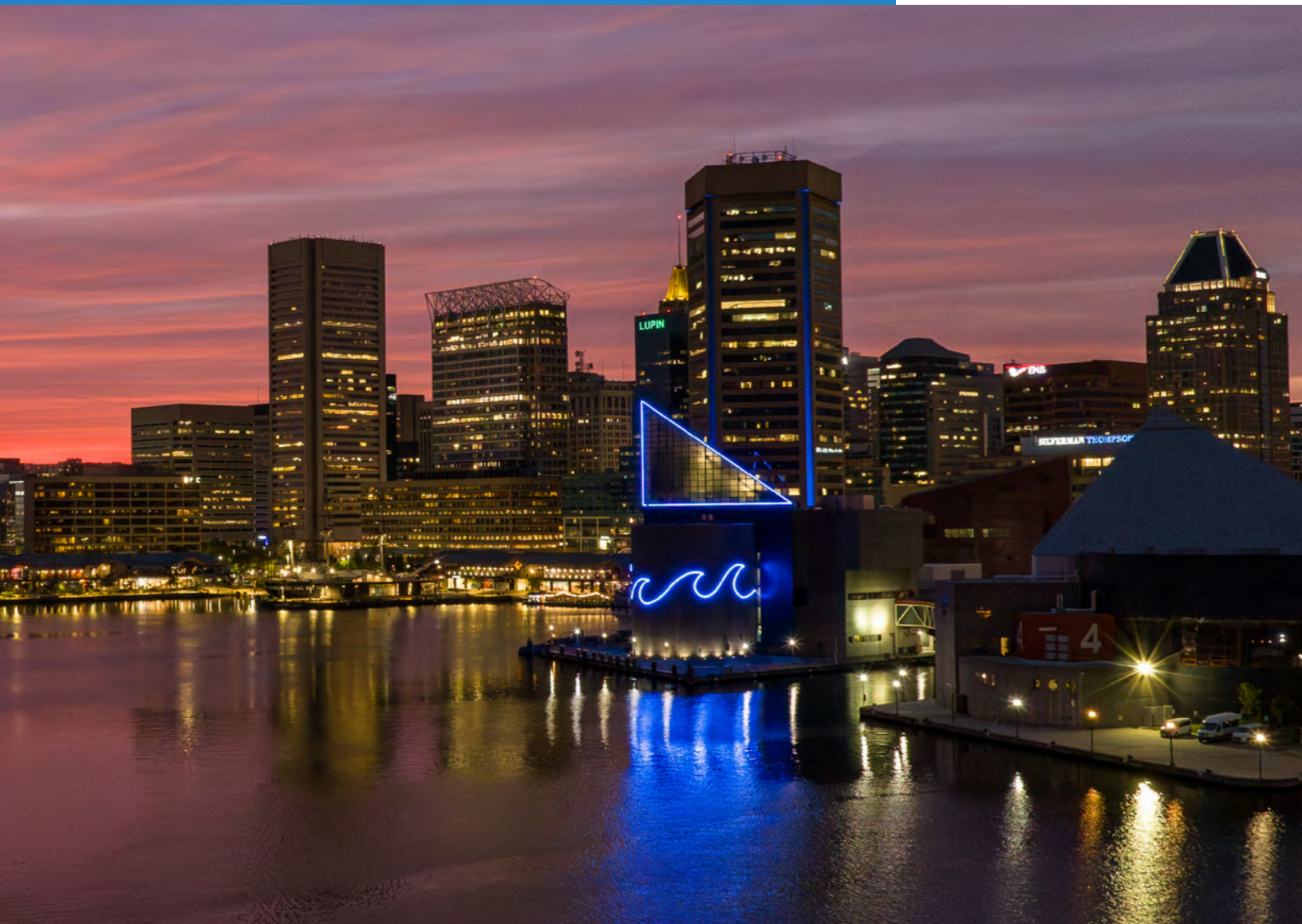
Offered [field trips](#) at no cost to 49,198 Maryland students and educators, thanks to a partnership supported in part by the State of Maryland. We also engaged more than 30,300 pre-K through 12th-grade students in other Aquarium education programs, including [AquaPartners](#) and [What Lives in the Harbor](#), and helped another 100 high schoolers prepare for college and careers through [YouthWorks](#), [Youth Exhibit Guides](#) and the Henry Hall Fellowship (renamed [Leaders for Environmental Action Fellowship](#)).



Conducted an energy audit and performed background research to inform strategies for attaining our goal of lowering our emissions to net-zero. We continued to advance energy efficiency measures with upgrades to smaller equipment and lighting. We also met with representatives from other institutions on a similar net-zero path, collected data to inform future planning and researched funding options.

Implemented a new, standardized waste flow system in back-of-house spaces in the Aquarium and the Animal Care and Rescue Center to improve waste diversion. As part of this, we standardized collection bins for trash, recycling and compost across the organization, created an education and training program for staff, and posted detailed waste sorting signs near bins. This has resulted in a significant improvement in proper waste disposal across the Aquarium.





In Baltimore City

SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY ACCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

The National Aquarium attracts visitors from around the globe, but we belong to Baltimore. We work to ensure that a visit to the Aquarium is possible for all our neighbors. In 2024, we welcomed a record 109,558 guests for free or reduced admission through our [community access programs](#). We also continued to engage city residents in important conservation work right in their own neighborhoods—from Jonestown to Locust Point to Curtis Bay.

The National Aquarium strives to be inclusive, accessible and welcoming to all.



1 Local residents visited the Aquarium for free or reduced admission through our [signature access programs](#) and citywide promotions we support, including [Free Fall Friday Night in collaboration with the Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts](#) and [Downtown Discovery Days in cooperation with Downtown Partnership](#). We also had our best-performing year of [Community Connections](#), which provides complimentary Aquarium tickets to qualifying nonprofits through generous support from our [corporate partners](#).

2 [Read to Reef, in partnership with the Enoch Pratt Free Library](#), is our most recognizable and important affordable access program. During the 2024 spring and fall seasons of Read to Reef, a record 13,324 young Baltimore readers and their family members visited the Aquarium for free after reading books about aquatic life and ocean conservation. We also integrated Read to Reef into Pratt Library’s Read to Me program, providing free shuttle transportation for those participants, and hosted seasonal author talks.

3 [Voyages](#) is an after-hours, adults-only event series that inspires connection to nature and celebrates all things Baltimore. A total of 1,309 people attended 2024’s two sold-out events, setting records for the fastest sell-out and highest attendance. We hosted two artists-in-residence to create original artwork for the events and collaborated with six restaurants, two craft beverage brands, two illustrators for custom poster art and 14 community advisors—all from Baltimore.

4 For the Voyages: Chapter 5 event in July, [artist Shaun Champion](#) created an original installation, “Braided Streams and Dreams,” with inspiration from featured scientist Angelo Villagomez. Shaun’s interdisciplinary exhibition featured photography, floral installations and live performances from WombWork Productions. The evening ended with live jazz by Brandon Woody and UPENDO.

5 At Voyages: Chapter 6 in November, Baltimore-based [recording artist and performer Dan Deacon](#) created “Feedback Loop” after conducting research with Patuxent Riverkeeper founder Fred Tutman. Forty local musicians performed Dan’s composition live throughout the Aquarium’s galleries, and an after-party featured his interactive DJ show.

MORE IMPACT IN BALTIMORE CITY



Held several cleanups at [Masonville Cove](#) and [Fort McHenry](#) to remove plastic from local waterways and wetlands. During these cleanups, volunteers removed 69,589 pieces of debris from the water and shore—96% of which was plastic. The most common plastic items found were foam, bottle caps, beverage bottles, straws, food wrappers and cigar tips.

Served as the Baltimore metropolitan area’s regional coordinator for [City Nature Challenge](#), a global initiative to catalog and identify plant and animal species. More than 760 participants recorded 10,150 observations of 1,645 different species of plants and animals in and around Baltimore during the 2024 challenge. These observations included more than 100 made during the BioBlitz at an [Urban Wildlife Conservation event at Masonville Cove](#).



Provided no-cost summer camp for 241 Baltimore City students. All [Henry Hall Summer Scholars camps](#) are immersive sleepaway experiences. More than 120 of these students traveled out of state to study and learn about the unique cultural stories and aquatic ecosystems found in Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

MORE IMPACT IN BALTIMORE CITY

Partnered with the Helping Up Mission and Jonestown residents for the sixth year in a row in the Exeter Street Community Garden near the [Animal Care and Rescue Center](#). We hosted gardening days for neighbors to plant, harvest and maintain the garden, and helped distribute food grown in the garden to people in the community. To attract insects and pollinators to the garden, volunteers installed a bug hotel built by Aquarium staff and filled by Flower Mart festivalgoers.



Took part in the [Baltimore Pride](#) parade to support and celebrate staff with LGBTQIA+ identities and as another way to engage in local community events. Over 40 Aquarium staff members signed up to be a part of this citywide celebration of love, diversity and progress, and many more chose to come together while at work prior to the parade for education and community gathering.

Donated tickets to nonprofits, including those supporting people impacted by the Key Bridge collapse through the [GBC Maryland Tough, Baltimore Strong Alliance](#), Maryland Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, and our [Community Connections](#) program supported by [corporate members](#). These tickets gave those directly affected by the collapse an opportunity for respite through a visit to the Aquarium. Also through Community Connections, we welcomed over 250 Baltimore City students through Council President Zeke Cohen's Field Trip Fridays summer program.





Across Maryland

SPOTLIGHT ON ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Aquarium—consistently ranked as one of the top three aquariums in the United States— attracts visitors to Maryland and creates jobs. It is the largest paid cultural attraction in the state. Since the day the Aquarium opened in 1981, we have served as an important economic anchor in Baltimore City and throughout Maryland. The Aquarium is a nonprofit that relies on community and public sector support, and in turn delivers robust economic benefits for the region.

The Aquarium's location is an important reminder of our responsibility to the Inner Harbor, Chesapeake Bay and the ocean.



1 Each year, the Aquarium drives more than \$430 million in statewide economic impact, generates \$36 million in state and local tax revenue, and supports 3,400 jobs statewide.

2 More than 70% of Aquarium visitors are from outside the Baltimore region, and more than 20% stay in the area overnight. Approximately 90% of Aquarium visitors report that the Aquarium is their primary reason for visiting Baltimore. Two-thirds of Aquarium visitors report spending money at nearby businesses before or after their visit.

3 The annual funding needed to maintain and operate the National Aquarium—a 24/7, 365-day-a-year facility—is substantial. Ticket sales and memberships alone cannot sustain it. Unlike many peer institutions across the country, we receive no dedicated annual general operating support from the city, state or federal governments. We depend on the generosity of our philanthropic community.

MORE IMPACT ACROSS MARYLAND



Planted 5,500 Atlantic white cedar trees at [Nassawango Creek Preserve](#) on the Eastern Shore in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and 237 volunteers—students from Snow Hill Middle School and Berlin Intermediate, members of the local community, the Aquarium Conservation team, the Aquarium Conservation team, and Maryland Conservation Corps members. For more than a decade, the Aquarium has been part of efforts to restore this ancient forest ecosystem.

Introduced 11,622 students in more than 40 schools to Maryland’s state reptile through the long-standing [Terrapins in the Classroom](#) program that places turtle hatchlings in Maryland schools so students can care for, observe and learn about these animals throughout the school year. The hands-on care students provide allows them to develop an appreciation for this vulnerable species and build conservation- and science-related skills. The students’ data also aids ongoing research at Ohio University.



MORE IMPACT ACROSS MARYLAND



Advocated for 79 bills and policies across all levels of government, including successful state legislation like the Whole Watershed Act to advance restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and the Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act to modernize how Maryland combats invasive plant species.

Organized a Latino Conservation Day at Patapsco State Park in collaboration with Templo de Alabanza y Restauración to celebrate the community’s conservation work. More than 200 people took part in the event, which was also supported by Chesapeake Conservancy, Corazón Latino, Defensores de la Cuenca, Latino Outdoors and Maryland Department of Natural Resources, as well as Maryland Environmental Service and Living Classrooms, both members of the Masonville Cove partnership in South Baltimore.





Beyond

SPOTLIGHT ON ANIMAL RESCUE

Since 1991, the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#) and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) have authorized the Aquarium to respond to sick and injured marine mammals and sea turtles. In 2024, our Animal Rescue and Animal Health teams admitted and cared for a total of 69 rescued animals—64 sea turtles and five seals. We returned all five seals to the ocean as well as 23 sea turtles (16 Kemp’s ridleys, three loggerheads and four greens), while 41 sea turtle patients (39 Kemp’s ridleys and two loggerheads) continued their rehab stays into 2025.

All sea turtles are federally protected by the Endangered Species Act.



1 We continued to play a major leadership role in advocating for the [Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act](#). This bipartisan legislation—which is supported by 92 organizations from 35 states/territories—overwhelmingly passed the U.S. House of Representatives in April and advanced out of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation in August.

2 Our [Stranding Response Center](#)—opened in partnership with the Town of Ocean City—marked its first full year of operations. The center fills a critical need within the Greater Atlantic region by providing immediate care for sick and injured marine animals being transported to the Aquarium or elsewhere for care or returned to the ocean. Our team in Ocean City responded to 28 seals, eight sea turtles and two cetaceans in the field and admitted seven seals and three sea turtles for initial assessment and triage care.

3 In February, the Aquarium’s Animal Rescue and Animal Health teams admitted our youngest patient to date—a [one-week-old pup nicknamed Selkie](#). Baby seals that have been separated from their mother too early require much more intense care in rehab. After three months of care, we released Selkie in May at Assateague State Park, outfitted with a flipper tag and a satellite tag that successfully collected 12 days of tracking data.

4 As part of our stranding response role for the state of Maryland, the National Aquarium Animal Rescue team provides 24-hour coverage of our Stranded Animal Hotline. This hotline gives the public direct access to Aquarium staff around the clock and ensures accurate and efficient response to incoming calls. We received 115 requests for response or service in 2024—a total of 60 for seals, 10 for sea turtles, 10 for cetaceans and 35 for other types of wildlife.

MORE IMPACT NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY



Selected as a top honors recipient of the [Association of Zoos and Aquariums \(AZA\) Green Award](#). This international honor recognizes the Aquarium’s conservation and sustainability efforts in energy and emissions, water management, material life cycle impacts, construction and building management, habitat and natural area management, engagement and awareness, and innovation.

Completed the first year of a renewed agreement with the Department of the Navy to [restore sand dunes in Naval Air Station Oceana Dam Neck Annex in Virginia Beach](#). We used a real-time global navigation satellite system to accurately map patches of Asiatic sand sedge, an invasive species, along 6 miles of coastline. The imaging captured the precise location and extent of the plants’ growth so they could be removed.



Participated in successful advocacy for the development of the first-ever National Ocean Biodiversity Strategy and a White House-level report on plastic pollution—highlighting the impact of plastic on the environment and human health—and for the expansion of the National Marine Sanctuary System. NOAA designated Lake Ontario and Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary in June and the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary in November.

MORE IMPACT NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

Sustainably propagated or bred 27 species, lessening impacts on these species' habitats and populations. This included neon gobies as part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' innovative [larval fish rearing program](#). Caring for fish through their larval phase requires specialized knowledge and expertise. This collective effort across AZA-accredited aquariums improves efficiency, supports animal welfare, and reduces impacts on wild populations.



Took part in the annual [Plastic Free Ecochallenge](#), which encourages participants from across North America to practice sustainable actions that reduce their use of single-use plastics during the month of July. The hope is that some of these actions become sustainable long-term habits. The Aquarium's 240 teammates secured fourth place out of 144 teams and kept 2,600 plastic containers, straws and bottles from entering landfills.

Continued preparing the dolphin colony for their future relocation to the [Dolphin Sanctuary](#). Throughout the year, our marine mammal trainers spent over 650 hours working with the pod in sessions designed to build the animals' behaviors related to medical care, physical fitness and mental wellbeing—skills they will need throughout the relocation process and afterward.





All Thanks to You

THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF THE NATIONAL AQUARIUM'S GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF HOPEFUL CONSERVATIONISTS, UNITED TO RESTORE OUR PLANET.

STAY CONNECTED

As a nonprofit organization, the National Aquarium relies on donations to support our animal rescue efforts, habitat restoration work, education programs and conservation initiatives. [Contact our Philanthropy team](#) if you'd like to join our community of hopeful conservationists. [Sign up for our newsletters](#) to stay updated on Aquarium news, conservation events and more.

There are thousands of animals representing hundreds of species at the National Aquarium.

Our Donors

UNLEASHING POSSIBILITY WITH YOUR GENEROSITY

LIFETIME GIVING

The National Aquarium exists today because of the leadership and continuing support of the entire community. The following list recognizes those who have contributed a total of \$200,000 or more to the National Aquarium since it opened in 1981.

Anonymous (4)	LaVerna Hahn Charitable Trust	PNC Bank
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Animal Planet/Discovery	William Randolph Hearst Foundation	Betty and Tom Robinson
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The National Aquarium is pleased to recognize those individuals who made generous philanthropic contributions in 2024.

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\$100,000-\$249,999

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