



OUTWARD BOUND
CALIFORNIA

2023

IMPACT REPORT





365 DAYS.
3000+ STUDENTS.
COUNTLESS SMILES.



FROM THE TOP



Dear Friends and Supporters,

At Outward Bound California, we are dedicated to unlocking human potential through

transformative outdoor experiences. Our programs resonate with students from underserved neighborhoods, educators, community leaders, veterans, and parents who, together, are building a vibrant, inclusive community committed to growth, learning, and shared experiences in nature.

In 2023, more than 3,000 students of all ages completed a program with Outward Bound California—the most students on courses since 2008—and more than half received support from our scholarship fund or participated in our inaugural courses available on a sliding scale.

This means that more students than ever are experiencing the profound benefits of Outward Bound programs, regardless of their financial circumstances. From wilderness expeditions to our city-based Ropes Challenge Course, these programs not only encourage participants to move through adversity, but also foster critical life skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving.

Outward Bound California experienced our own challenges last year with the flooding and damage of our Midpines basecamp, but true to the Outward Bound spirit, we took

adversity as an opportunity to come together and create a sense of community by rapidly cleaning (and improving!) our facility to better support staff and students.

Building community is at the heart of what we do. Whether it's through team-building activities on a high ropes course or shared moments of reflection around a campfire, our programs are designed to create lasting connections among our participants. The connections formed in rebuilding our basecamp or around a campfire extend back to students' everyday lives, enriching their communities with the values and skills they have developed. By bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds, we cultivate an environment where empathy, mutual support, and collaboration thrive.

We believe in the power of these experiences to inspire and equip the next generation of leaders. Thank you for your continued support and belief in our mission. Together, we are making a profound impact, one student at a time.

In community,

Josh Brankman (he/him)

Founding Executive Director and Senior Advisor

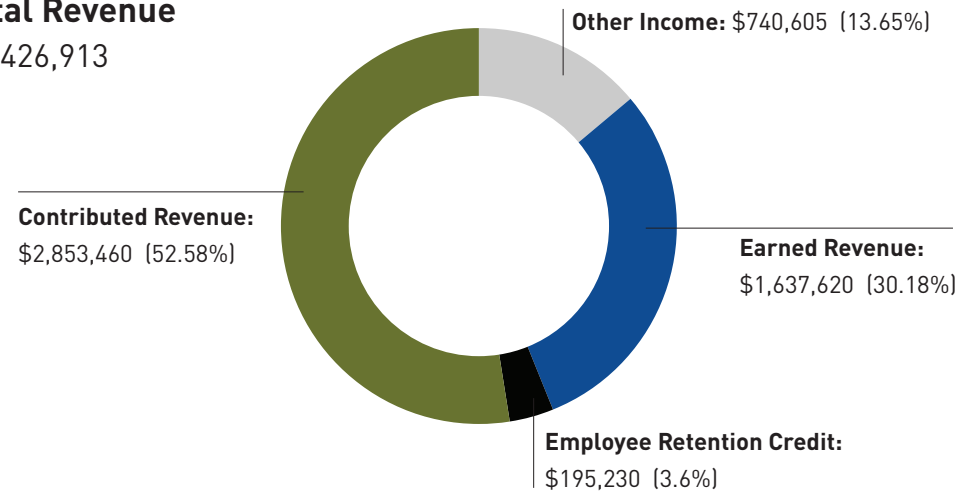
FINANCIALS



OBCA ended the year with a surplus of \$583k. Earned programming revenue came in under budgeted projections. The Midpines basecamp in the High Sierra faced two major flooding events which required reconstruction and gear replacement. Insurance funds covered the cost of rebuilding and the replacement of gear, resulting in a net neutral impact on OBCA's Profit and Loss.

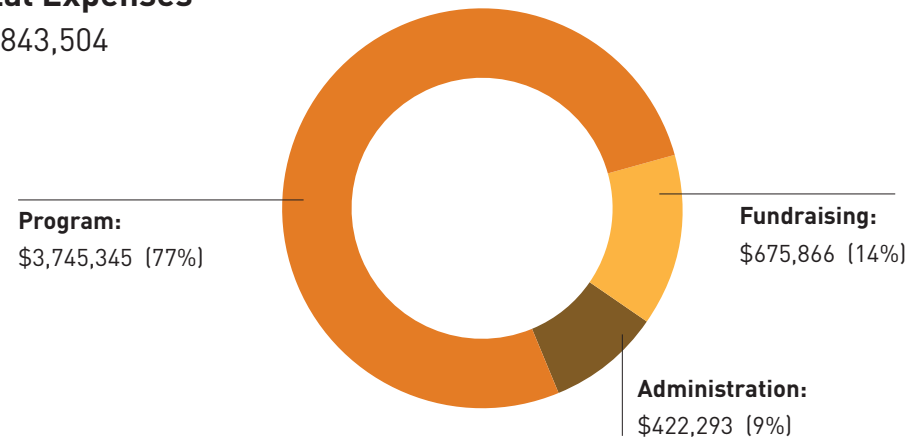
Total Revenue

\$5,426,913



Total Expenses

\$4,843,504



Unaudited financials

BASECAMPS



In 2023, more than **3,000 students of all ages** completed a program with **Outward Bound California**. This is the most students we've had on our life-transforming courses since **OBCA's inception in 2008**. From a day on the ropes course amidst towering cypress trees in San Francisco's McLaren Park, to rock climbing warm granite boulders in Joshua Tree, our participants took their individual and collective moves in expanding their comfort zone.

Outward Bound California has three basecamps throughout the state.

Main Basecamps in California:

- 1. San Francisco
- 2. Midpines
- 3. Joshua Tree

High Sierra Course Locations:

- 4. Yosemite National Park
- 5. Courtright Reservoir
- 6. Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks





MIDPINES

During the periods of heavy rainfall caused by multiple atmospheric rivers, our Midpines basecamp experienced significant flooding in January and March of 2023, causing over \$1 million in damage to structures and gear. OBCA leadership engaged with OBUSA and insurers to rebuild basecamp structures, replace gear and materials, and clear massive amounts of debris. During a successful Service Weekend, a team of volunteers and staff constructed weatherports for our summer staff sleeping quarters and mended and organized hiking gear for our students' upcoming expeditions into the wilderness.

Some of the bigger damages were in Scotty's, our main meeting space, kitchen, and offices, where we had to replace plumbing hookups and a water heater.

The bridge over Bear Creek that leads to staff housing required repair before vehicles could safely cross. In addition to structural damage, more than 6,000 pieces of gear and supplies needed replacement.

Although we opened basecamp not long after our initial plan, the first two 22-day Sequoia and Kings Canyon (SEKI) courses were canceled to give staff more time to prepare for the summer season. Staff were provided alternative work opportunities for their time preparing the basecamp if their courses were canceled, and students registered on those courses were offered alternatives at OBCA and other Outward Bound schools.

Basecamp repairs are now complete. The images below show the damage from 2023 and then after it was repaired and the area was pruned by OBCA staff.



Damaged by flooding



Area being pruned by OBCA staff, Nick Fasciano, Owen Bismeyer, Roger Lopez and Kenja Griffin (left to right)



Repairs complete



JOSHUA TREE

Outward Bound California celebrated 40 years since the inaugural Outward Bound Joshua Tree expedition New Year's Eve 1983! Expeditions ran consistently into the 80s and 90s, but the program closed after the 2007-08 financial crisis. OBCA reopened the base in 2014 and served enough students annually to hire year-round staff and maintain a live/work basecamp there. So it was with great heartache when OBCA again shuttered in 2020 during the pandemic. Despite the unexpected detour on our path, OBCA welcomed back staff and students in the fall of 2021.

With our long-standing presence in Joshua Tree, we want to invest in our future there. With this in mind, we are putting down deeper roots. We are in the process of purchasing a property in the area where we can build on the existing structures to have a long term basecamp.

The establishment of this basecamp will improve our logistical operations, and will continue building a vibrant, engaged Outward Bound California community within Joshua Tree and the high desert region.

Student numbers are back to pre-pandemic levels, with more than 260 students served, including 37 veterans. Students joined us from school groups, non-profit organizations serving youth of color, and teens looking for adventure on their spring break. Because of the weather, Joshua Tree operates in the winter, fall and spring. During the winter season, students faced unseasonably cold weather, storms, and even snow in the desert.

We hosted our first ever LGBTQ+ veterans course, fully funded through the generous support of a network of partners, sponsors and donors. The course was focused on building community with shorter hiking days to make more time for lessons and connection. These veterans found space to explore their service experiences and transitions home in a shared identity group.

“Our basecamp vibe is very community centered. We are in an area that’s so close to the backcountry, but there are still things we can do together like trivia and karaoke. We have access to beautiful rock climbing here in Joshua Tree, and we can set up different abilities on the same crag. There’s been a culture here and the people who resonate with the culture keep returning and building our community. It starts with our admin team, like Kenja, who center individuals and kindness.”

—Patricia Lynn, (she/they), Southern California Program Director

Join us for a fall Base-Warming Volunteer Day in Joshua Tree! Donor Engagement Manager **Eric Cabunoc** (he/him/siya) at **ecabunoc@obca.org** to let him know you’re interested.



ROPES CHALLENGE COURSE IN SAN FRANCISCO

“Taking risks, fostering trust and overcoming fear in a supportive environment can be life-changing,” said San Francisco Recreation and Parks General Manager Phil Ginsburg. “San Franciscans in every neighborhood deserve equal access to empowering outdoor experiences. For a young person, a ropes course can be the first step to becoming a lifelong steward of nature.”

The Ropes Challenge Course was created to make Outward Bound California programs accessible to city-based students who might not be able to commit to multi-day programs. Nestled in the beautiful cypress trees in McLaren Park, within walking distance from program partner Burton High School and along several buslines, this location has allowed us to reach new communities who typically haven’t had access to outdoor education.

Because of this, our growth has been exciting, as it indicates we’re doing what we set out to do. In 2023, 2,400 students across 61 program partners came out to the challenge course, surpassing our goal of 2,080 students.

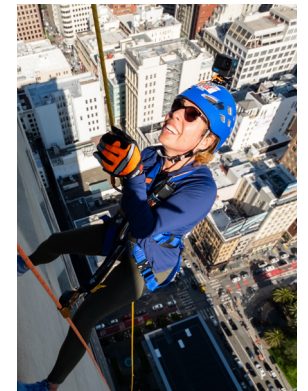
Burton High School teacher and program partner Olga Camacho (she/her) said the biggest expense for schools is the bus transportation, and that puts a lot of programs out of reach for students. “We walk to the ropes course. It’s right there, and our students wouldn’t otherwise have this access. It’s equitable,

it doesn’t matter if you are low income or not. It’s an amazing challenge for our students. **We have so many challenges in life and this challenge transfers into real life situations—one small step leads you to the end.**”

“First you agree to go, then it’s signing the paperwork, and then showing up, getting into the harness, and climbing up—oh my gosh, it’s so scary—but then the next thing you know, you are at the end. With support from teachers, friends, you get there. Same with graduation, it’s step by step—with support, you get there. The ropes course helps you realize no matter how big or small, you’ll get there one step at a time.”

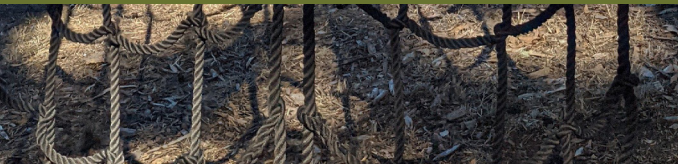
In addition to schools and youth serving organizations, we had six corporate groups join us for team building. Corporate team building experiences on the ropes course, which are fee-based, help fund scholarships for students.

A staff member from Zenith Aerospace shared, “My team and I loved climbing the high elements as well as the group games and other low elements initiatives. Everyone had a lot of fun, many conquered their fears and the team learned how to work well and communicate. Staff did an excellent job dialing in on the team’s main challenges and helped us learn better communication and collaboration techniques. Most folks on the team noticed how much easier working together became almost immediately after the ropes course off-site.”



Olga rappelled and fundraised as part of our 2024 City Skyline Challenge event! Photo credit: Irene Yee / Instagram @ladylockoff

Contact info@outwardboundcalifornia.org if you’d like to improve your communication with your team, while also supporting scholarship programming at OBCA.



COMMUNITY-BASED IMPACT

From Granite Domes to Growth: The Branson School's Sophomores Deepen Their Community

Courtright Reservoir is a beautiful spot in the Sierra National Forest, with granite domes, shaped by ancient glaciers, rising from the shore. A deep canyon cut by Helms Creek is the backdrop to Mt. Goddard, which stands tall at 13,568 feet.

Since 2021, through a partnership with The Branson School in Ross, California, Outward Bound California has taken Branson's newly minted sophomores on a five-day expedition near Courtright Reservoir as their student orientation. The partnership has been successful, in large part, because of the shared values of Branson and OBCA. Building character and leadership through outdoor experiences is a key initiative in Branson's Strategic Plan, aligning perfectly with Outward Bound's mission.

In addition to the Courtright trips, Branson students have visited the Challenge Ropes Course and staff has participated in Outward Bound California's bi-annual City Skyline Challenge fundraiser.

Branson School Director of Outdoor and Global Education and Science teacher Peter Zdrojewski (he/him) says, "What I've seen students garner after an Outward Bound expedition is twofold."

"First, they have more confidence and curiosity to navigate challenges and try new things. Secondly, they have a much broader sense of community to lean on as they navigate challenges. They aren't doing it alone. Even if they came in with friendships, they deepen what they already have, and their confidence is boosted as they lean on those relationships."

Through their adventures with Outward Bound programs, Branson students have grown more resilient, curious, and connected. These experiences equip them with the confidence to tackle new challenges and the support network to do so together. As they move forward, the lessons learned and bonds formed in the stunning landscapes of the Sierra National Forest will continue to shape their journeys, both individually and as a cohesive, supportive community.

Photo credit: Karl Schmidt



Spotlight on Tony Paz

Advancing Growth Through Outdoor Experiences with Outward Bound

After the military, there's a tongue-in-cheek question people will pose: "Now that you're done playing army, what are you going to do?" Tony Paz (he/him) never liked that question because that was all he ever wanted to do. He loves to help people and his country, so after his military service, he knew he needed to continue doing those things.

Initially, Tony was working at Tragedy Assistance Program, or TAPs, a nonprofit which provides compassionate care for those grieving the death of a military loved one. Tony believed the deepest healing resource was nature, so he looked for a program that could be the balm to the profound pain of loss these families experienced.

He found a kindred partner with Outward Bound, aligning in values, even in exploring grief in nature. He attended his first Outward Bound for Veterans program in Joshua Tree National Park. He then co-developed a program to bring grieving families on expeditions in Point Reyes and the High Sierra, and expanded to take a group of veterans who had served together on a veterans course in Joshua Tree. The experience brought them even closer together.

Tony Paz. Photo credit: Irene Yee

"The veterans courses helped us come to grips with our identities after leaving the army, figuring out our next steps," said Tony.

After his time with TAPs, Tony helped Pittsburg High School start a JROTC training program (Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps), a military-themed program that helps high school students develop leadership, citizenship, and character. Tony stayed connected to OBCA during this time, bringing student crews to Joshua Tree and providing outdoor experiences to those who, due to financial constraints or lack of access, may otherwise not have the opportunity.

Tony brought student crews out for a more local adventure on the Ropes Challenge Course – an experience, Tony reports, that pushes students out of their comfort zone, "These experiences teach them to support one another, instilling confidence and teamwork. When students struggle in class, I remind them of their accomplishments at Outward Bound programs, reinforcing that they've done something most others will never do. This boosts their confidence, reminding them of their resilience and capability."

Tony Paz's dedication to fostering growth and community through outdoor experiences exemplifies the mission of Outward Bound. His journey from the military to working with veterans, students, and grieving families highlights the transformative power of nature.

SCHOLARSHIPS & COMMUNITY BUILDING



Cultivating Community: The Impact of OBCA's Scholarships

Outward Bound California's scholarships and sliding-scale programs go beyond reducing financial barriers; they build bridges across differences and create inclusive spaces.

In 2023, more than half of OBCA program participants received scholarship support.

These scholarships come from Outward Bound California's vision to open access to safe, transformational outdoor experiences to students from economically vulnerable communities and communities of color or other non-dominant identities, regardless of ability to pay.

Explore Outward Bound Scholarships Opportunities:

- **Full tuition and sliding scale scholarships for overnight expeditions** cover the full tuition cost for participants on open enrollment expeditions—where students enroll as individuals.

- **Scholarships for intact groups for one-day programs** are designed for community groups to attend one-day programs on the Ropes Challenge Course and rock climbing or hiking in Joshua Tree National Park.
- **Scholarships for intact groups for multi-day expeditions** support community and veteran groups that attend 4-6 day expeditions in the High Sierra and Joshua Tree National Park.

On open enrollment courses in the High Sierra, we offer affinity groups for students to join, staffed with Instructors who share the identities of the students, like an LGBTQ+ expedition and the High Sierra Alpine Backpacking & Rock Climbing for POC (People of Color) Young Adults. Both of these used a sliding scale tuition model, where OBCA met every level of requested need.

“The sliding scale model brings in a tremendous amount of diversity, aside from socioeconomic differences. There is something that is mutually healing for students and for Outward Bound staff who hold marginalized or

intersectional identities,” said Residential Course Director and Equity Project Manager Nat Shyu (she/her) who led the first-ever POC expedition.

OBCA staff designed the 14-day High Sierra backpacking course to provide students with more than just a sense of accomplishment and new specialized skills; it aims to foster a strong sense of community.

This sense of community was particularly evident in the way students bonded over food. “Especially for communities of color, food is so central,” said Nat. “This group of students came together around food—that was really special. On a lot of OBCA courses, you’ll have a couple students excited about cooking. On this course, all of them wanted to be involved in the preparation, cooking, and creation process.”

Even the final course challenge, which is normally a physical challenge, became a Master Chef-style cooking competition between two groups of students.

“The ability to facilitate across differences is a skill that OBCA staff members actively hold and develop, and it’s a skill our students need as future change makers,” Nat continued.

Scholarships extend far beyond financial support, breaking down barriers to getting students outside. Through shared outdoor experiences, students cultivate empathy, leadership skills, and a deeper appreciation for community, fostering a more connected, compassionate, and inclusive environment, *one expedition at a time.*





LEARNINGS FROM DOMAINS OF THRIVING

Since its inception, Outward Bound has heard countless stories from alumni about how their experiences on course changed their lives. However, quantifying such transformative impact has always been a challenge.

This changed with the creation of the Domains of Thriving, developed in collaboration with the PEAR Institute (Partnerships in Education and Resilience). The Domains of Thriving is a framework that codifies and measures program and staff practices that foster student growth, driving program quality improvements at all levels and supporting staff development.

Impact is measured through the Outward Bound Outcomes Survey, a retroactive pre- and post-program survey in which students self-report changes in key social and emotional skills at the end of an Outward Bound program.

“With the Domains of Thriving, we put data and results to questions like, are students communicating with each other well? Are they problem solving effectively? Are they practicing group and self-care? The Domains of Thriving and survey data allow students and OBCA staff to evaluate if they are seeing the outcomes in practice,” says Founding

Executive Director and Senior Advisor Josh Brankman.

“This science-based tool validates Outward Bound California’s work externally, and simultaneously, allows us to improve our work internally based on student outcomes. We can say, here are areas where we excel as it relates to young people’s wellbeing, and here are the areas where we want to improve.”

One- and two-day OBCA programs use a subset of the framework with the outcomes that are most relevant to these programs. OBCA staff work with program partners to identify one or two areas within the framework to focus on and tailor the program to meet those specific outcomes.

“The Domains of Thriving outcomes are the seeds that we get to plant that transfer to everything else that students do in their life,” says Bay Area Associate Program Director Sean Altman (he/him). “Before everyone gets on the bus and goes home, we say, the real course starts now. What you do from here, the skills you learned, now it’s up to you in how you apply it. We hope that we instill an awesome baseline for students to instill in other areas of their lives.”

12
Outcomes Measured

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Assertiveness | Responsibility |
| Emotion control | Self awareness |
| Empathy | Self regulation |
| Group relationships | Staff and student relationships |
| Learning interest | Teamwork |
| Perseverance | |
| Physical confidence | |

NEARLY 75% of all students surveyed said they gained confidence to try new things and felt more connected to people in their group

88% said they gained courage to face more challenges



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Half of all OBCA students receive scholarships to join a program. This is because of all our generous donors, making challenge and discovery possible. If you'd like to support our operations, programs, or scholarships, visit obca.org/donate.



We are grateful to each of YOU for your contribution and for making a difference. Thank you.

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OUTWARD BOUND
CALIFORNIA

My name is Jay and I'm a disabled transman veteran. This trip was completely surprising, I signed up thinking it would be a mistake to do something completely out of my comfort zone. Since the military I suffered with anxiety/PTSD/Depression and a back injury that has had me afraid to try to be physical. This trip pushed me to a level I didn't think was possible. I pushed and was always at the front as uncomfortable as it felt. I found the physical strength I forgot I had thanks to my groupmates helping me with words of encouragement and little acts of help whether holding my pack while I put it on helping me zip up my ~~pack~~^{sleeping bag} or wake me up with a hug. This opportunity allowed me to meet amazing queer veterans who will be my friends for a long time. Thank you,

[name redacted for privacy]



OUTWARD BOUND
CALIFORNIA

Contact Us

For more ways to get involved with Outward Bound California, email us at info@outwardboundcalifornia.org or call 415.933.6222

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