

Impact Report 2020

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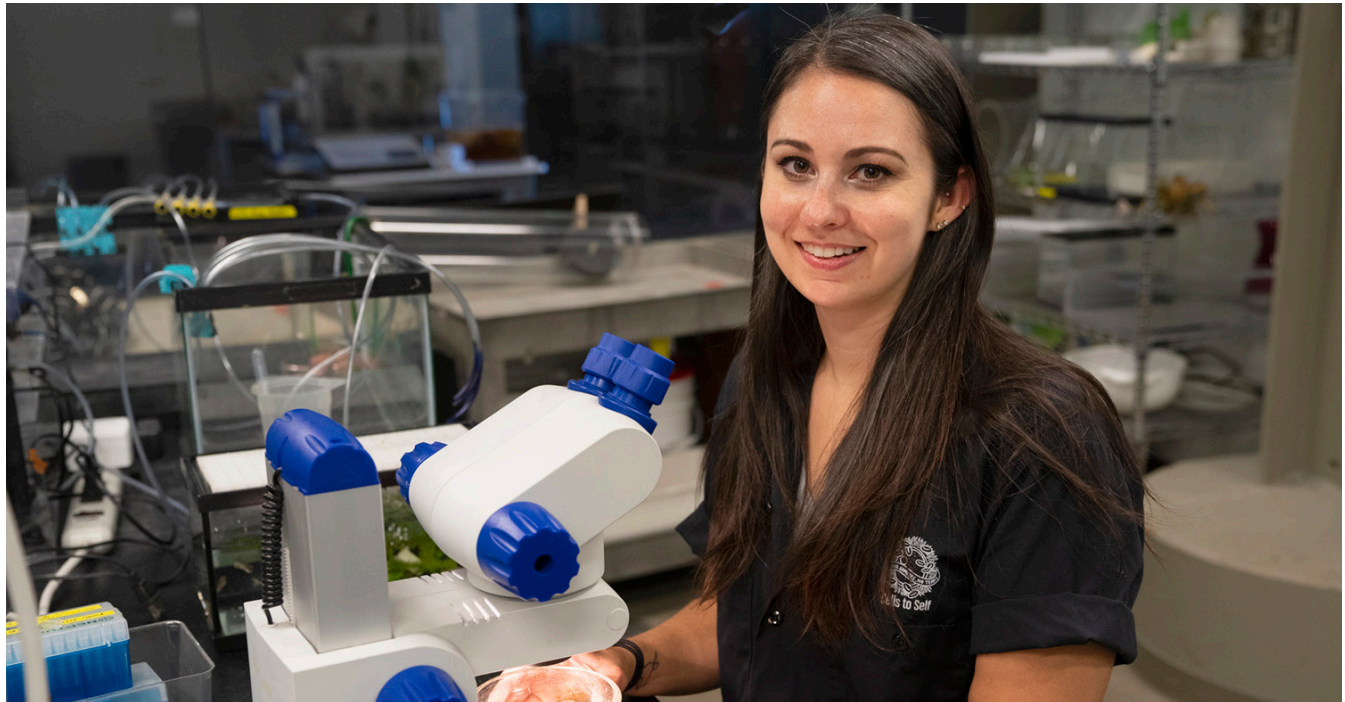
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On the cover: Play with Sophisticated Shadows, Colored Shadows, or our other shadow exhibits, and you'll notice that shadows can be surprisingly complex. Here, multiple light sources illuminate a single object—a foam "O" salvaged from our Exhibit Development Shop—to create colorful overlapping shadows.

Welcome!

LAB NOTES FROM A RESIDENT MICROSCOPIST



As a Living Systems lab tech, I love interacting with Exploratorium visitors. Our doors are closed to the public as I write this, so I'm glad to greet you here. I hope you'll enjoy these stories of the collaborations and connections you helped make possible this year.

When I interact with visitors, I'm reminded of my elementary school days, when I charted my life course to becoming a scientist—during a school assembly on marine biology, presented by a science research institution. Now with every discovery I help facilitate under the microscope, I hope our visitors, too, get a glimpse into the life of a scientist. As scientists, we passionately explore, question, and uncover the world in ever-new ways.

I often facilitate at our Bio Bar, “serving up” microscopic demonstrations: the visible DNA of a fruit fly, the moment of fertilization between sea urchin gametes, or comparing cheek cell samples from two or more visitors. Visitors “choose their own adventure,” and it's *their* questions, reactions, and actual cells that make these experiences possible.

I've had the pleasure of observing a breadth of “No way!” reactions in my visitor-collaborators. For example, I like to point out that the tiny blue blob at a cheek cell's center may look insignificant, but it contains every inch of the six-foot-long DNA strand that makes an individual unique. No matter who you are, your cheek cells are uniquely yours, and yet they also look just

like everyone else's! It's personal, yet universal. At the Bio Bar, not only families recognize how amazingly similar they are at a cellular level; diverse school groups witness it too.

When we get up close with the microscopic world, we can broaden our minds and give ourselves a different view that's useful in our own lives. So zoom in. What do you have to learn?

Veronica Johnson
Lab Technician
Gallery 4: Living Systems

Here's why we do what we do.

THE EXPLORATORIUM'S MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

The Exploratorium is a public learning laboratory exploring the world through science, art, and human perception. Our mission is to create inquiry-based experiences that transform learning worldwide. Our vision is a world where people think for themselves and can confidently ask questions, question answers, and understand the world around them. We value lifelong learning and teaching, curiosity and inquiry, our community, iteration and evidence, integrity and authenticity, sustainability, and inclusion and respect.

Can we teach hands-on science—and connect—wherever we are?



Environmental scientist Dr. Suzanne Pierre in her backyard. While stuck at home, she and the rest of the Exploratorium's Teaching and Learning team are finding creative ways to support their fellow educators, including "Sidewalk Science" workshops on discovering the plants in your own neighborhood.

ENGAGING EDUCATORS DURING A PANDEMIC

These days, coping with isolation is something to which we can all relate.

But if you're a teacher, on the morning of March 14, 2020, you were tasked with much more: rebuilding your classroom community online and keeping young people engaged, despite their isolation and yours. Your lessons required adaptation; your students had wildly different tools at home and access to resources; and, as a science teacher, students and families were looking to *you* for answers to this new and scary situation.

The shift in the learning environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic was stark, both physically and emotionally. Fortunately, the Exploratorium's [Teaching and Learning team](#) was ready to help.

“I never expected to be an online teacher. Without these positive examples, I don’t know where I would have started.”

They tapped into the Exploratorium’s California Statewide Science Leader Network, a robust community of teachers and education leaders, in order to discover, “What do teachers need most right now?” The answer was confidence. And connection.

So the Exploratorium team expanded resources and partnerships and used their decades-long expertise in online learning to reach more educators than ever before. In a world of unknowns, the Exploratorium worked to provide a home base where educators could build resources and strategies—together.

With April 22 fast approaching, our new environmental educator Dr. Suzanne Pierre teamed up with veteran Exploratorium educator Lori Lambertson to focus the team’s efforts on Earth Day. It was an opportunity to bring together the needs of teachers, the needs of families, and a fresh look at virtual learning.

Leading up to Earth Day, Suzanne and Lori presented two workshops that prepared teachers with the tools to bring environmental science to life in their own online classrooms—along with the space they craved to ask questions and connect.

Suzanne and Lori then hosted a public, online Earth Day program on April 22. Segments addressed broad environmental science topics, such as climate change and pollution, as well as conversations on environmental justice and activities intended to connect viewers with their immediate environments. The aim was to build confidence around environmental education in the many adults—both educators and caregivers—now supporting students in new ways, and from a wide variety of home bases.

The resulting program was watched around 10,000 times on April 22 alone and has (literally) gone down in history; the United States Library of Congress selected it for inclusion in its Earth Day 2020 Web Archive.



EXPANDING OUR ABILITY TO TEACH TEACHERS ONLINE

In a little over 10 weeks—between March 18, their first online workshop on the science of viruses, and the end of May—the Exploratorium’s Teaching and Learning team:

- hosted 20 online workshops
- partnered with four other education-focused organizations
- and connected 3,197 teachers and teacher leaders and approximately 10,000 early childhood educators to resources they needed to succeed.

The impact of this work has been immediate and powerful. Said one workshop participant:

“I am so thankful for the online classes that I have attended with the Exploratorium this year. I never would have expected to be an online teacher, and without these positive examples I don’t know where I would have started. They provided me with the confidence to lead other teachers in engaging in this new realm we are living in, and they gave me the framework for providing online classes to students myself.”



Dr. Isabel Hawkins demonstrates the indigenous technology of the Q'eswachaka suspension rope bridge in the Peruvian Andes with young visitors on Latinx Engineering Day at the Exploratorium.

How does a museum create belonging for Latinx communities?

THE CAMBIO PROJECT AND LATINX BELONGING

At its core, the Exploratorium is a research and development museum. Beyond our work developing ways to exhibit phenomena, our Visitor Research and Evaluation team also studies how we engage audiences. As a community museum with a successful track record of inquiry-based exhibit development for sister institutions worldwide, it's crucial for the Exploratorium to be responsive to the needs



and aspirations of many overlapping communities—including the diverse Latinx communities. That’s where Cambio (“change” in Spanish), our 2020 National Science Foundation award, comes in. This five-year project, our collaboration with the Cultural Competency Learning Institute, a partnership led by the Children’s Discovery Museum of San Jose, aims to build Latinx-focused cultural competence across the field of informal science education through professional development.

Cambio’s focus on authentic exchange between museums and Latinx communities requires museums to have a nuanced understanding of how diverse the communities are. The authenticity comes from truly infusing every aspect of the museum, from marketing to visitor experiences, with respect for Latinx perspectives and identities. That means co-creating STEM experiences with Latinx communities, increased Latinx representation in all departments and levels of management, and data analysis in conjunction with community dialogue.

Cambio’s ultimate goals are transformative: a museum field that is inclusive of Latinx communities, cultures, and audiences at all levels of the organization; cultural competency in every museum worker; and achieving sustainable change. This initiative builds on 15 years of work at the Exploratorium around Latinx audience engagement, and is a direct outgrowth of our 2017 NSF-funded summit GENIAL.

GENIAL participants and organizers celebrate after the summit’s first day of sessions.

Authenticity comes from infusing every aspect of the museum with respect for Latinx perspectives.

Making Latinx cultural responsiveness part of the fabric of institutions will amplify the intersection between Latinx identities and STEM. This *compromiso*, or commitment, is well expressed by Veronica Garcia-Luis, one of Cambio's three co-principal investigators:

"The essence of the work is to support museum practitioners to increase their expertise in designing experiences that will invoke emotional engagement, spark curiosity, and build excitement. We are committed to doing this in ways that explicitly value our Latinx identities and make visible the rich legacy of STEM in our communities."

Cambio and GENIAL are based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant Nos. 1906595 and 1611143. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.



Cambio is co-led by Veronica Garcia-Luis, Jenni Martin, and Dr. Isabel Hawkins (left to right).

BRINGING LIVED EXPERIENCE TO WORK

Cambio is crucial to our field because many Latinx audiences don't identify with the culture of museums. On a personal level, it's also crucial to Veronica Garcia-Luis, who co-leads the project in addition to her role as our Program Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, because as a young Latina, she never saw herself as a part of the museum world.

Only when Veronica got a job at the UCLA Wight Art Gallery, as a bilingual gallery educator for their *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* exhibition, did she realize that she not only belonged in the museum world—she and other Latinx were *needed* there. Today Veronica uses both her cultural and lived experiences and her educational and professional background to inform her work and guide the Exploratorium on our learning journey.

"Being the first in my family to go to college brought a series of realizations, including that I didn't know I could work in museums, I didn't grow up going to them, and I figured they were not for me," Veronica says. "Little did I know that the Exploratorium and the museum field would become my professional journey."

Cambio is a collaborative project co-led by Garcia-Luis and Dr. Isabel Hawkins, both of the Exploratorium, and Jenni Martin of the Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose and the Cultural Competency Learning Institute.

Can we build empathy, one exhibit at a time?



MIDDLE GROUND IN SF'S CIVIC CENTER

Even before COVID-19 reshaped our social interactions, most of us walked through the city in an imaginary bubble, rarely pausing to connect, actively avoiding eye contact. But what if instead we created spaces for people to have a playful moment, think deeply, and connect with one another? What if we took the spirit of the Exploratorium's exhibits, and put them in public spaces for anyone to find?

If you've walked past San Francisco Public Library's main branch since August 2019, you probably spotted the collection of bright yellow chairs on its front steps. This free-to-all installation, *Middle Ground*, blends the Exploratorium's learn-by-doing culture and the latest social science research. Fourteen interactive exhibits encourage both conversation and introspection. They invite passersby to consider stereotypes and bias, prosocial behavior, and social polarization. They even get strangers talking.

But the exhibits don't do this alone. People are their partners—specifically, skilled stewards who care for and mediate the installation.

At *Middle Ground*, you'll see strangers talking—often across social, racial, and ability lines.

These practitioners work for Urban Alchemy, a San Francisco nonprofit and a key shaper of the *Middle Ground* project. They facilitate the experiences for visitors, mentoring, mediating, and encouraging thoughtful interaction.

Middle Ground comes out of the Exploratorium's Global Collaborations group, which works with partners both locally and worldwide. Project lead Shawn Lani says its aim is to “transform the library's plaza into a place comfortable enough, safe enough, and intriguing enough to open up that wondrously massive human capacity to question, explore, and learn.”

Sometimes it can be hard to see the impact of museum exhibits. But at *Middle Ground* you'll see the exhibits and stewards creating visible, powerful moments of empathy. You'll see strangers in Civic Center talking, laughing, and connecting—often across social, racial, and ability lines.

The full *Middle Ground* experience only happens at Civic Center; as we write this, we're working to extend it beyond its temporary closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, you can explore many of the ideas, videos, and interactives on the *Middle Ground* website. And what we've learned from this extraordinary project will continue to influence exhibits and experiences in the Exploratorium's Bernard and Barbro Osher Gallery 1: Human Phenomena.

The installation was designed and developed by the Exploratorium, in close partnership with the San Francisco Public Library, the Civic Center Commons Initiative, and other site partners. Middle Ground was funded by the National Science Foundation and Science Sandbox, a Simons Foundation initiative dedicated to inspiring a deeper interest in science.



WHAT IS URBAN ALCHEMY?

Urban Alchemy is a San Francisco nonprofit that aims to bring peace and respect to urban areas struggling with extreme poverty, addiction, mental illness, and hopelessness. The organization prioritizes hiring individuals who experienced long-term incarceration and have dedicated themselves to healing and redemption through service.

These practitioners bring inclusive, prosocial leadership and their communication and negotiation skills to projects across San Francisco, working to ensure safe and clean public restroom facilities, BART elevators, sidewalks, and parks for everyone. Their involvement in *Middle Ground* challenged and inspired the Exploratorium team to think about engagement and public installation in a whole new way.



Middle Ground's emphasis on social connection opened this Federal Court worker's eyes (above left) to how little human contact she had at work. So she sat down and made a sign saying "Hi!," hoping someone would talk to her. Jesse Zamora, an Urban Alchemy steward, did just that. These two strangers—different enough that, ordinarily, their lives might never intersect—talked deeply for more than half an hour.



Strangers often hold hands at Hands On Music to close the electrical circuit that makes music play. One day a visually-impaired visitor (above center) sat nearby, listening and tapping his toes. Another visitor invited him to join her, but he demurred, saying he needed his cane to stand. But Zamora jumped in to suggest that together they could steady him. They guided him into the chain, for a moment of joyful connection.

Can a hologram illuminate how we're all connected?

TRISTAN DUKE'S *APERTURE LUCIDA*

Mind-bending plays on perception. Optical illusions that use science and art. Playful investigations that encourage you to think about something in a new way. Artist Tristan Duke and the Exploratorium's Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program have a lot in common.

The AIR program is a two-year journey that begins with the exploration of myriad scientific principles and artistic ideas, progresses through concepts and prototypes, and culminates in a thought-provoking work of art.

Duke's journey to his final artwork at the Exploratorium was not a straight line. During the two years, he explored filming video with a lens made of ice, creating entirely new fabrication processes with the Exhibit Development Shop, and more. This interdisciplinary dialogue, this dreaming and exploring, this creation of something that simply wouldn't be possible without deep collaboration and trust—these are hallmarks of the AIR program. By encouraging artists to work hand in hand with the Exploratorium team, the program, Duke says, gives “birth to something that has never been seen before.”



A hallmark of the AIR program is creating something that would be impossible without deep collaboration and trust.

In February 2020, Duke's culminating work as Artist-in-Residence, *Aperture Lucida*, was installed in the Exploratorium's Black Box. Step into the installation space and you'll see a ball of light floating in midair. Walk toward the illusion, enter it, and its mechanism becomes visible: light is being focused by a series of screens, drilled with half a million precisely aligned holes.

To Duke, the piece has a deeper meaning, which he has found particularly powerful as the global pandemic has forced us all into prolonged separation: "In the hologram, we find a striking physical demonstration of interconnectedness: break a hologram into pieces and in each separate shard, you will still glimpse the entire image. In this time of physical separation, I hope we can all remember our interconnectedness—and access the knowledge that the whole is truly contained in each of us."





Artist-in-Residence Heather Dewey-Hagborg and Chelsea E. Manning's *Probably Chelsea*, 2017.

Does your DNA define you?

EXPLORING CELLS TO SELF, A NEW EXHIBIT COLLECTION

Whatever you learned about cells in school, the picture is infinitely more complex.

Yes, cells are the building blocks of all living organisms. But cells also act as timekeepers, alarm systems, “microphones” that perceive sound, and much more. How all these cells work together to make you *you* is the topic of *Cells to Self*, a permanent collection of life science exhibits unveiled in fall 2019.



Your cells act as timekeepers, alarm systems, microphones, and more.

Cells to Self exhibits allow visitors to zoom in on a fascinating microscopic world. Get a startling view of your own skin, scars, or tattoos at the Self Scope; see live human heart cells mimic *your* heart rate at [Give Heart Cells a Beat](#); or feel the length of a neuron (your body's longest cell) via an electrical pulse at Nerve Journey.

But beyond physical complexity, cell biology can also shed light on complex questions of ethics and identity.

Consider—are your cells you? This question is posed by a [Cells to Self exhibit](#) about “HeLa” cells and the person they came from, [Henrietta Lacks](#). This “immortal” human cell line divides indefinitely and helped revolutionize biomedical research, from the polio vaccine to studying human tissue in space. But the original HeLa cells—cervical cancer cells—were sampled from Lacks, an African American mother of five who died of her cancer shortly after, in 1951 without her knowledge or consent.



In [Give Heart Cells a Beat](#), grab hold of the heart rate sensor and watch the live, beating human heart cells on the screen—you'll see their rhythmic contractions adjust to match *your* heart beat.

Now that HeLa cells have lived and divided by trillions for seven decades in labs around the world, are they still Henrietta Lacks? And to whom do they belong?

And your DNA—how much does it determine who you are? We know that [DNA dictates our eye color](#), our nose shape, even aspects of our personality. But with how much precision are those instructions carried out?

You can ponder that at artist Heather Dewey-Hagborg's piece [Probably Chelsea](#), produced in collaboration with activist and whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

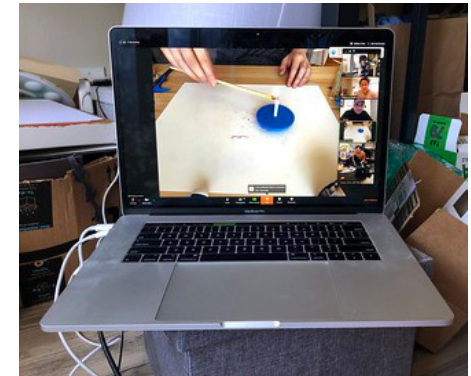
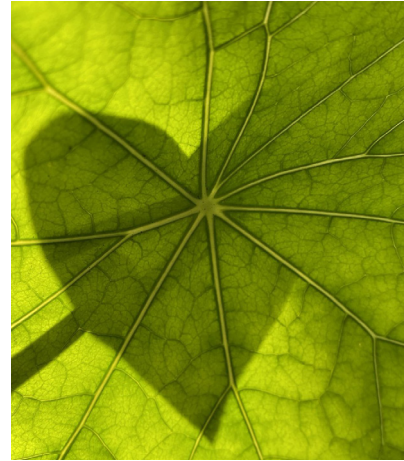
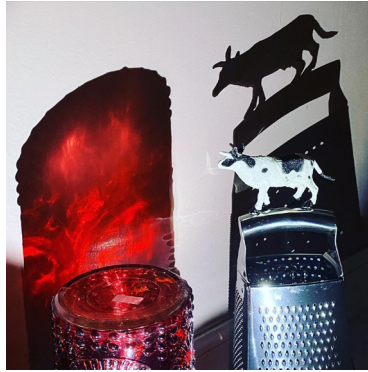
Dewey-Hagborg extracted and interpreted Manning's DNA to create this set of 3D-printed portraits: 20 possible faces, all interpretations of the same genetic information.

Cells to Self reminds us that biology plays only one part in the formation of “you,” that science is not neutral and carries its own ethical challenges, and that art can bring the possibilities of biological science to light.

Cells to Self is a multi-year initiative encompassing both exhibit development and museum visitor research projects. It is made possible through the generous support of the Troy and Leslie Daniels Fund for Life Sciences and from Genentech, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and the National Science Foundation under grants 1514612, 1612831, 1322828, and 1548297.

We explore together— wherever we are.

During shelter in place, we continued to expand our global movement of tinkerers through social media invitations like #RoundTheWorld_ChainReaction and #LightUpOurDays. Thank you for joining us in the joy of learning through play.



Photos (clockwise from top left) courtesy of Casey Federico, Jennifer Frazier, Bradley Quentin, Deanna Gelosi, Lamplighter School, Luigi Anzivino, and Deanna Gelosi.

Ask questions. Question answers. Together.



Breakthroughs are rarely made by one person working alone.

That's not how science or innovation typically work. Complex problems are best solved with skilled collaborators, who ask questions, question answers, build on one another's ideas, and debate assumptions.

You need a partner to get the most out of many of our interactive exhibits, too—and doesn't it feel terrific to share your "aha!" moment with a friend?

At the Exploratorium, no one works alone. Artists collaborate with talented makers in our Exhibit Development Shop. Visiting researchers work with Living Systems staff and our educators to bring new learning experiences to life. Our

Global Collaborations team co-creates with a diverse range of partners around the world.

This year, the global COVID-19 pandemic challenged us to rethink how we collaborate. And the renewed momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement and the societal reckoning with police brutality against Black people further opened our eyes to the importance of holding space for the expertise and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in everything we do.

The Exploratorium is only at its best when our smart and passionate community of staff and partners thrives. We continue to evolve and are working to improve as a more equitable and anti-racist organization.

You, our esteemed donors, are indispensable partners too. Your generosity has propelled us through 51 years of learning and growing. When the pandemic required us to close our doors, you went above and beyond to help sustain the Exploratorium.

We are phenomenally grateful. Your continued support is essential and gets us closer and closer to recovery. I can't wait to invite you all back into our museum to make new discoveries—together.

Thank you,

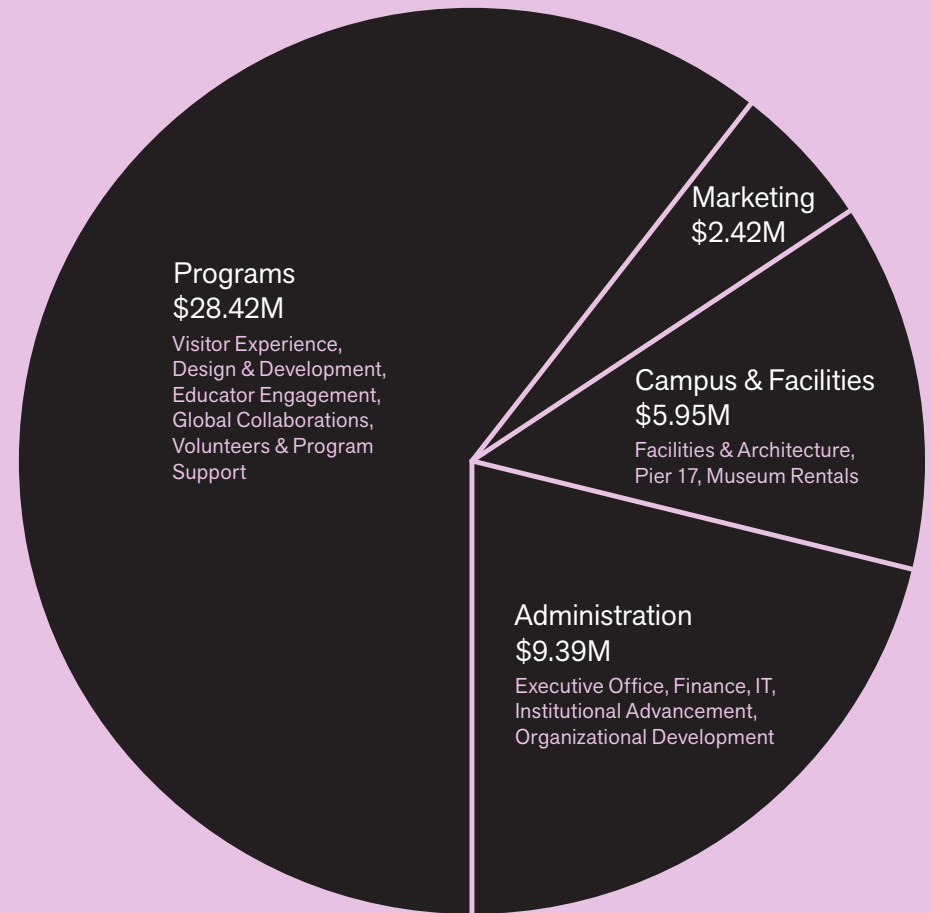
Chris Flink
Sakurako and William Fisher Executive Director

FY2020 EXPLORATORIUM PRELIMINARY ACTUALS

Total revenue: \$39.42M



Total expenses: \$46.18M



In addition to the income listed above, the Exploratorium applied for and received a \$5.8M loan from the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) under the 2020 CARES Act.

Final audited financial statements for FY20 will be available in the fall of 2020.

INDIVIDUAL GIVING

Our thanks to the friends who helped support the Exploratorium with gifts made July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020. Their generosity provided much-needed resources to help deepen our impact on science education and interactive learning worldwide.

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