

Community Impact Report



Monterey Bay
Aquarium



Introduction

SINCE 1984, the Aquarium has played a central role in the economic recovery of Cannery Row and the vitality of the Monterey Bay community. Data from IMPACTS Experience, which surveys public attitudes toward 224 cultural institutions nationwide, show that the Aquarium is not only an important cultural institution located in Monterey, but also an economic and civic anchor for the city.

The Aquarium is an internationally recognized visitor destination considered by peers and the public alike as one of the best in the world—a leading nonprofit organization known for its innovation and impact. IMPACTS Experience consistently finds the Aquarium to be far and away the top-rated aquarium in the United States.

Beyond advancing its core mission—to inspire conservation of the ocean—the Aquarium studies and showcases the habitats and sea life of Monterey Bay, and collaborates with people and organizations within the region toward a shared goal of helping our community thrive. For Monterey County residents, recent research in collaboration with the American Alliance of Museums finds that the Aquarium—beyond being a tourist attraction—serves the local community as an accessible educational resource, a gathering place for families and friends, a place of respite in challenging times, and a source of community pride.

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The Aquarium is not just an institution located in Monterey; it is one of the principal assets through which Monterey County's visitor economy is constituted, intensified, and sustained.

2025 economic contributions

The Aquarium employed 542 people at year-end, and 692 paid employees over the course of 2025

With 2 million visitors annually, the Aquarium is the leading force shaping Monterey's tourism economy—the sector the city itself describes as the heart of its economic well-being.

The Aquarium's economic impact extends across the entire Monterey Bay region. IMPACTS Experience finds that the Aquarium generates \$638.6 million in total annual economic activity across Monterey County, supporting 4,370 jobs, and producing \$63.3 million in state and local tax revenue each year.

The majority of the Aquarium's economic impact in Monterey County is concentrated in the City of Monterey. The analysis shows \$462.5 million in economic activity to the City of Monterey in 2025. Of that, \$10.9 z was the Aquarium's capital investments in its facilities that year, and \$357.4 million

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Economic impact

THE AQUARIUM brings people to Monterey from across California, the U.S., and the world. Its two million annual visitors generate activity in Monterey County and its businesses by staying at local hotels, shopping in local stores, dining at local restaurants, and taking part in activities from bike rentals to whale watching trips.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium doesn't just support tourism to the region; it contributes to year-round activity, supports jobs and contracted services, sustains infrastructure relevance, provides public access, and reinforces Monterey County's civic identity. Its contributions are embedded across multiple layers of the city's economic life.



is how much Aquarium visitors have spent at businesses within the City of Monterey, in addition to what they spend at the Aquarium itself for tickets, food and drink, and gift items.

AQUARIUM EMPLOYMENT: The Aquarium employed 542 people at year-end, and 692 paid employees over the course of 2025, paying approximately \$70.8 million in wages, benefits, payroll taxes, retirement contributions, and recruitment expenses. 22 percent (153 employees) of its employees live in the City of Monterey.

DESTINATION MARKETING: The Aquarium drives visitation to Monterey through a large, deliberate, and multi-year nationwide investment in destination marketing. Through these investments, it is enlarging the market for Monterey Bay Aquarium visitation to attract guests from nonlocal markets—including visitors who are likely to stay overnight in Monterey hotels and spend their travel dollars with local businesses.

TRANSIT PARTNERSHIP: The Aquarium partners with the City of Monterey and Monterey-Salinas Transit (MST), investing \$150,000 per year in the free seasonal Monterey Trolley program, helping reduce traffic and parking impacts while improving visitor access and connectivity throughout Monterey.

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Monterey Bay Aquarium 2025 economic contributions by the numbers

\$70.8 MILLION
Payroll supporting 542* employees

\$357.4 MILLION
Visitor spending with businesses
in the City of Monterey

\$10.9 MILLION
Aquarium spending on capital investments
in the City of Monterey

\$462.5 MILLION
Total direct spending in 2025

*Year-end employees; 692 individuals were on the Aquarium payroll for at least a portion of 2025



Social impact

AS A NONPROFIT with the mission to inspire conservation of the ocean, the Aquarium’s deep community involvement takes many forms, including investments in mission-related programs that serve local school students, educators, and community members. These investments advance its mission and contribute to the social well-being of people on the Monterey Peninsula and in the greater Monterey Bay region.

The Aquarium has supported local schools by providing free admission and programs for 2.7 million schoolchildren, professional development for more than 38,000 educators, and programs for more than 6,200 youth and emerging teen leaders.

The Aquarium’s free school visits, Museums for All access, teen programs, volunteer engagement, and educator development strengthen the city contribution in several interlocking ways: they increase utilization of a major public-facing asset; they broaden participation in the institution beyond narrow market segments; they deepen labor, skills, and volunteer pipelines; they sustain repeat local and regional

engagement; and they reinforce Monterey’s identity as a place where educational, scientific, and conservation infrastructure is not merely present, but actively used at scale.

FREE EDUCATION PROGRAMS: Since 1984, the Aquarium has supported local schools by providing free admission and programs for 2.7 million schoolchildren, professional development for more than 38,000 educators, and programs for more than 6,200 youth and emerging teen leaders. In 2025, 51,198 students from 214 school districts attended one of these programs; more than half took part in programs led by Aquarium staff educators. These programs don’t just teach about the ocean—they help people feel they have a role in caring for it. Independent evaluation found that nearly all youth participating in the Aquarium’s summer programs felt a sense of belonging, and close to 90 percent reported improved well-being. Participants across programs also developed greater empathy for marine life, grew their ocean knowledge, and gained confidence in their ability to act for the ocean.

The four Future Leaders Scholarship Award recipients thus far, from left to right: Desiree Torres, Rylee Jue, Catrina Chavez, and Sofia Garcia. Inset: Since 1984, the Aquarium has served more than 2.7 million schoolchildren from pre-K through high school through its free education programs.

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR FUTURE OCEAN LEADERS: The Aquarium’s commitment to providing educational opportunities for young adults has grown through the years. The Lucile S. Packard Youth Volunteer Award for outstanding volunteer service includes a \$5,000 scholarship toward their future studies. The Future Leaders scholarship to California State University, Monterey





Bay (CSUMB) has been given to four local students, covering full tuition to CSUMB, including housing and books, and four years of mentorship from Aquarium staff.

FREE ACCESS PROGRAMS: Free-access programs keep the Aquarium welcoming to all. In 2025 alone, it provided complimentary admissions to 320,164 visitors through the Museums for All program that serves individuals participating in SNAP/EBT, 30,607 local residents through special free-admission days, and another 31,004 complimentary visits offered to local organizations that serve low-income and disadvantaged populations.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT: In addition to paid staff, 1,200 individuals volunteer at the Aquarium and receive in-depth training in marine science—an enriching lifelong learning experience for them. In 2025, they contributed nearly 150,000 hours of their time: as guides, working with students and teen

Volunteer scuba divers are among the more than 10,000 people who have given more than 5 million hours of their time and talents at the Aquarium since it opened: underwater, behind the scenes, and as ambassadors connecting with more than 70 million guests.

leaders, caring for exhibit animals, contributing to sea otter rescue and research, and in many other behind-the-scenes capacities. These volunteers come from more than 100 cities across central and northern California. Since the Aquarium opened in 1984, more than 10,000 people have given more than 5 million hours of their time and talents as volunteers.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT: Starting with the \$55 million gift that funded construction of the Aquarium, tens of millions of dollars have been invested to expand and maintain an internationally acclaimed attraction and conservation center. From the \$57 million Open Sea wing that opened in 1996 through the creation of nearly two dozen short-term exhibits over the past 40 years, the Aquarium continually invests in facilities and exhibits to remain one of the most iconic attractions in the United States that drives visitation to Monterey.

In 2025, the Monterey Bay Aquarium participated in a multi-institution survey through the American Alliance of Museums. Survey results found that the Aquarium functions as much more than an attraction or cultural institution for the Monterey community. Participants emphasized the learning and education aspects of their visits and of the many ways an Aquarium visit helped them deepen their connections with others, including friends and family members. Other findings suggest that the Aquarium is a powerful engine that strengthens the social fabric of Monterey County while advancing ocean conservation.

The numbers tell only part of the story. Behind the economic and social contributions lies a simple truth: the Aquarium and the Monterey community grow together. Our mission to inspire conservation of the ocean, in turn, strengthens the place we all call home. The Aquarium remains committed to being not just a world-class destination, but a partner to Monterey.



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Monterey Bay Aquarium

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