

Creative action in a river of change



FUNDACIÓN LA PUERTA, A.C.



President's *message*

Tecate is known throughout our region as a friendly small town and as a community that values nature with a colorful cultural life and innovative programs. Fundación La Puerta has worked for nearly fifty years to nurture and preserve these qualities; a dynamic process amidst the chaos, contradictions and vitality of a border town.

I am proud to report that in 2023 we fully recovered from Pandemic restrictions. Parque del Professor, the beautiful park that we created and have maintain for the families of Tecate since 1989, continues its work of building community. Over 100,000 people visited Parque del Profesor in 2023, participating in workshops, hiking the nature trails, playing soccer and attending our festivals.

Four thousand elementary and preschool children attended our environmental education and gardening workshops, learning that we live in an inter-dependent world that we must care for and share with other living beings. Our youth leadership programs nurture a feeling of identity, community and responsibility through teambuilding, ecosystem restoration, investing in the health of our river, in the way we communicate, and in the dreams that we nurture.

Our seasonal festivals brought learning, connection and joy to the lives of families in Tecate, attended by 15,166 people.

Our work has grown beyond bringing young people into relationship with the natural world, teaching them to act responsibly, to care for their own bodies and to be stewards of their community. We are sowing seeds that are transforming our city and we are shaping culture through collaboration, education, vision and leadership.

We hope that you will be inspired as you read about our accomplishments in 2023.

We warmly invite your support and participation as we look to the future with hope and shared purpose,

Sarah Livia Szekely
President of Fundación La Puerta, A.C.

Mission

To **restore and honor** the environmental, cultural, and social heritage of the Tecate River watershed, **embracing a sustainable way of life** that thrives on collaboration, respect, and the joyous celebration of natural and human communities.

Vision

Fundación La Puerta will lead the city of Tecate and its watershed in sustainable environmental practices and cultural preservation, where **people and nature thrive together**, embracing creative growth solutions, fostering healthy communities through education, and nurturing a living river with parks, recreation, and wildlife.





2023 staff picture

Our team

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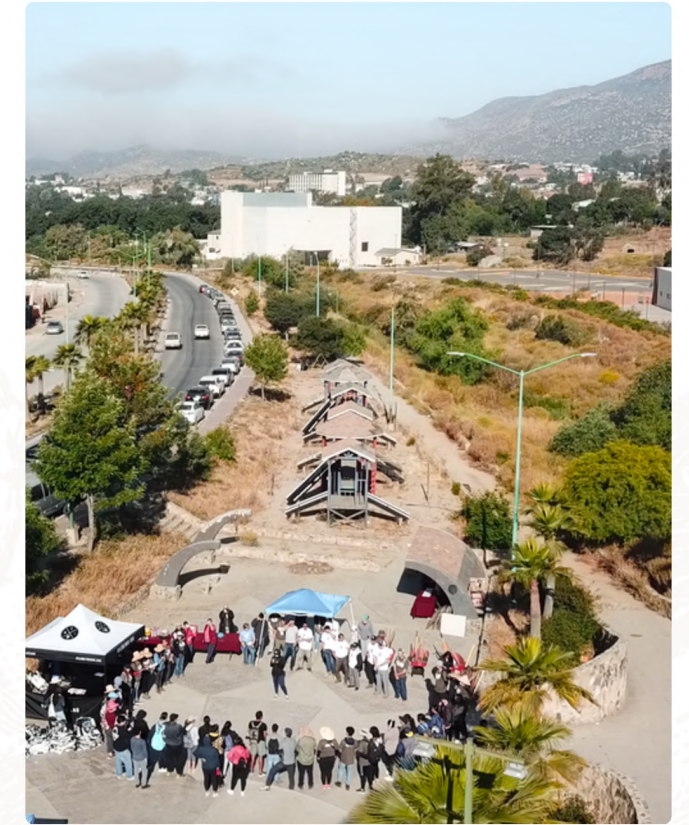
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Children

Children are the heart and soul of our future, and nurturing their connection with nature is essential for **fostering a generation** that values and protects the environment. At **Las Piedras Environmental Education Center**, we are dedicated to providing a transformative experience for young minds.

Our little ones first come in pre-school: pulling a carrot out of the family garden, making a rainbow colored salad and eating edible flowers; they learn about phytonutrients and how plants grow and feed us. They return throughout elementary school on field trips, becoming friends with our chapparal ecosystem. Learning how we breathe with our plant kin, how soil is made, how animals adapt to our long dry summers. And they slip into Las Piedras and feel the cool tunnels and shimmering colors of this magical classroom. They imagine being something small, a scarab beetle or a stink bug in the vast network of lives that live unseen and unnoticed in the city.





more than
4,000 children
attended our workshops in 2023

Workshops at Las Piedras provide school children with hands-on learning experiences. One of our key objectives is to **enrich the school system's curricula** by providing educational materials, activities, and training to **enhance environmental education**. Workshops encompass age-appropriate topics including the water cycle,

climate awareness, the value and importance of trees, healthy habits **to reduce our carbon footprint**, recycling, and a basic knowledge of local plants and animals.

By fostering a sense of place among the citizens, **our workshops educate and inspire the people of Tecate** to respect and care for their immediate natural environment, the chaparral ecosystem.

Environmental Educational Curriculas



Guardians of *El Chaparral*

In this curriculum, children embark on an **exploration of their local ecosystem** through interactive and educational activities. They uncover the rich tapestry of living and non-living elements, along with **cultural and social interactions** within this **natural sanctuary**



Seeds *of Awe*

In this workshop, young ones take their first steps into **organic horticulture** and **healthy eating**. The aim is to cultivate an appreciation for nature through **hands-on experience** with the soil and its fruits, promoting both health and spiritual delight.



Tree *of Life*

Through these activities children discover the importance and **value of trees** and explore the metaphor between **personal growth**, a forest, and a **community ecosystem**. This workshop fosters a feeling of **reverence** for all that trees contribute to our lives.



Water's *Journey*

Through this workshop, children explore the importance, **uses, forms, and composition of water** through engaging activities. The goal is to encourage **reflection on their daily actions** and how these impact **water quality** and the sustainability of this essential resource.

Municipal Science Fair

The competition to award **the best science fair projects** in the city, brought more than 30 innovative sustainable prototype projects presented by 7th and 8th graders to *Parque del Profesor*. These projects, representing the best of 30 schools, were evaluated and awarded by specialists in science and technology, in order to foster innovation and encourage environmental awareness among young students.

*Students from Colegio Salvatierra,
presentin their "Microplastics
Elimination Solution"*



Summer Camp

This coeducational day camp is the only one of its kind in our region devoted to learning about the environment and appreciating the natural beauty of Baja California, Mexico. For three weeks, the children are exposed to different ecosystems in the State —desert, beach, and forest —helping them to know and value the diversity of the region. For many Tecate children Summer Camp makes possible their first visit to the sea.

In 2023, 60 children enjoyed our annual Summer Camp program. In the picture, they are visiting for the very first time the cave paintings of the first native settlers of Baja California



- 32 *Volunteers*
- 10 *Special Projects*
- 82 *Community Activities*
- 34 *Collaborations with local groups*

= 7,060 *Volunteer hours donated*



Youth

Through personal growth activities, community service, environmental care, and nature appreciation, **young leaders** develop creative, responsible solutions to address **social problems** and **environmental challenges**.

Volunteering fosters **awareness**, develops **skills**, and **empowerment**. Our youth become **agents of change** for the benefit of their community.

Youth Leadership and Volunteer *program*

This program serves youth aged 14 to 21. Our youth learn to work together, and imagine changing the world, **cleaning trash along the river**, feeding the homeless, supporting veterinarians during our free spay and neuter clinics, devising ingenious ways to **reuse, recycle and renew**.

They journey from "me" to "we", the empowering, enlivening experience of working together for a **common goal**. And they have fun, being generous, kind, and playful with each other; a skill set that seems to be disappearing in this time of reactivity, dissent and conflict.





Training and inspiration

To strengthen our Youth Leadership Program, activist Carlos Prieto from the international organization Greenpeace shared his extensive experience in volunteering and environmental activism, inspiring participants with his personal stories and insights on how to effectively advocate for environmental causes.



An Ecopsychology workshop was conducted by Carlos del Campo, one of the pioneers of the methodology in Mexico.

Carlos Prieto from Greenpeace in the top images, and Carlos del Campo (Ecopsychology) in the ones below.



Animal Welfare



Youth Volunteers creating a new Dog Walking Trail in the park to provide a safe and enjoyable space for dogs and their owners while promoting **responsible pet ownership**.



Youth Volunteers supporting **free spay and neuter** clinics at *Parque del Profesor*

Internships and Community Service for College Students



College students develop skills at Fundación La Puerta, receiving college credit and contributing to their community. Exchange students are also welcomed.

Internships are available for:

- Business Administration
- Accounting
- Engineering
- Bio-engineering
- Biology
- Health Sciences
- Psychology
- Social Work

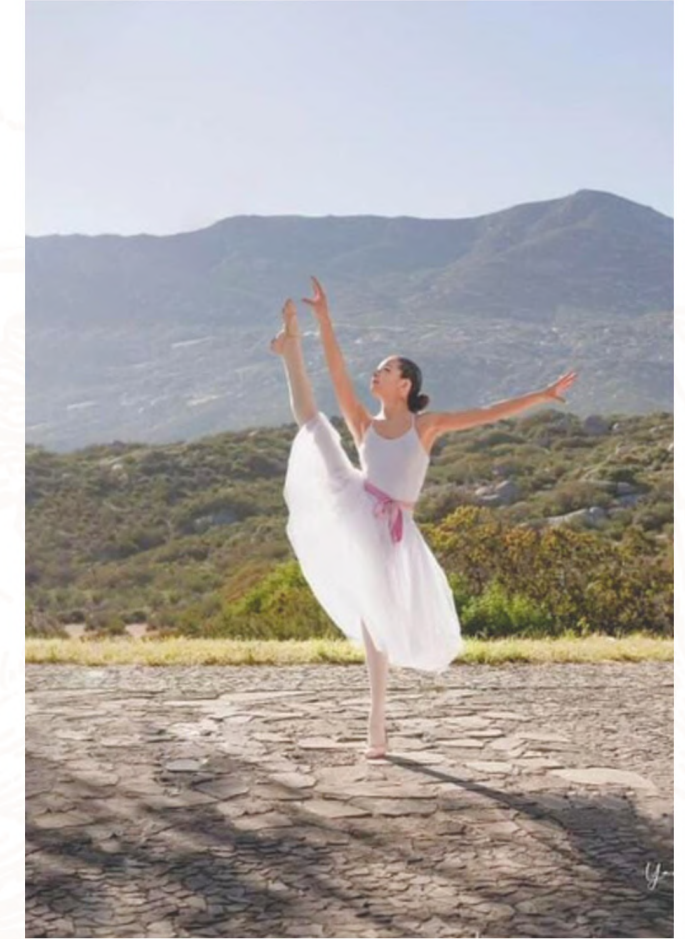
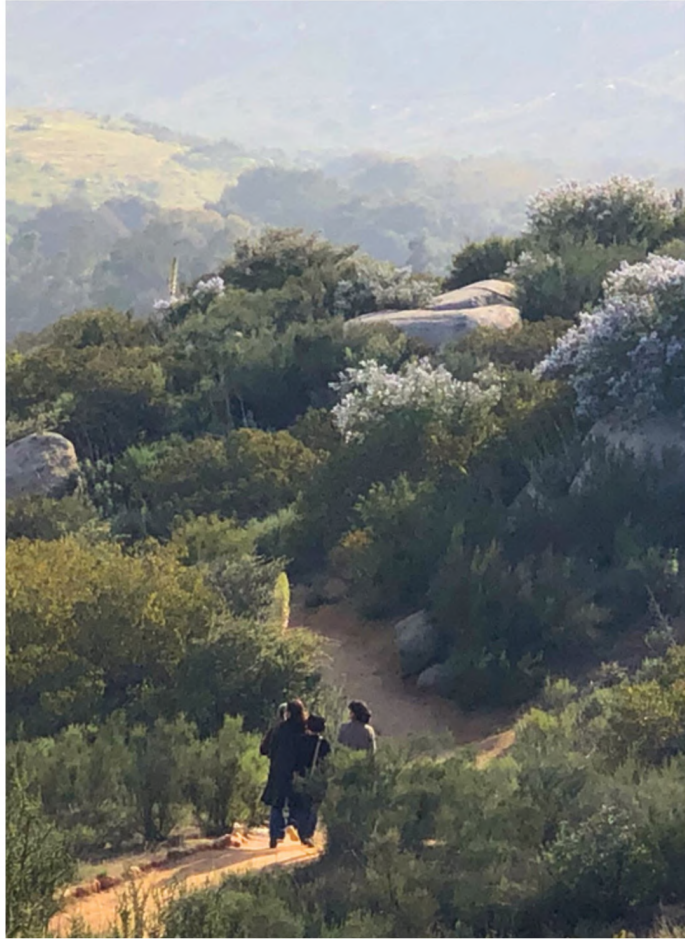
The Park

Named after Prof. Edmond Szekely, co-founder of Rancho La Puerta, Parque del Profesor is a **28-acre community oasis** attracting 100,000 annual visitors. It's a unique venue in Tecate, **providing a natural environment for families to connect.**

The park features intimate classrooms and a plaza for events, plus a mile-long trail offering views of Mt. Kuchuma and **an intact chaparral ecosystem.** Workshops and programs inspire and educate in this beautiful setting. The park's mission is to **provide Tecate with a safe space that enhances community engagement** through recreational, cultural, and health-promoting activities, improving quality of life for all.

+107,462 visitors
in 2023

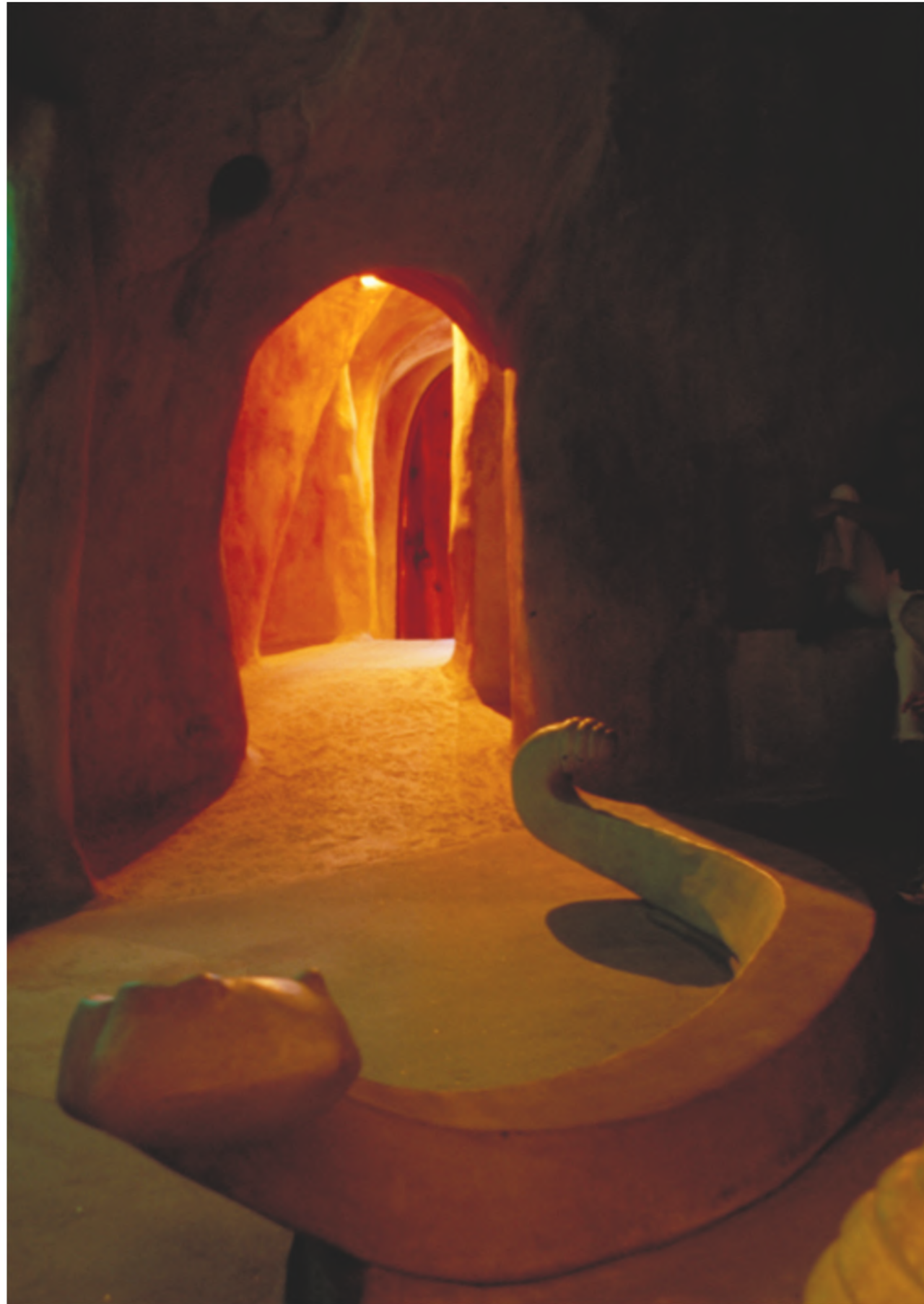




Daily life at the Park

Working mom's and dads come early to **walk in nature**, to jog on the trails, and on weekends the park fills with families; at soccer games, festivals, yoga classes, gardening and art classes. Every saturday our **family gardening program** is fully enrolled with a waiting list, these families are eager to begin growing food in their homes and communities.

The Park **provides a beautiful setting** for engagement photos, anniversaries, quinceñeras, graduations and weddings. Mercadito Cuchuma, a monthly craft fair, supports local craftsmen and cottage industries.



A Place of Beauty



Welcoming
Spring Festival

1,000 participants

More than 25 activities

Cuatro Puntos Native Dance

Arts & crafts

Seed Bombs

Farmer's Market



23rd World Environment Day

2,166 attendees





23rd Day of the Dead *Festival*



12,000 attendees





Community

Our city-wide campaigns have led to the **preservation of the Tecate River**, established **community gardens** provided **urban planning** for a **green corridor** along the Tecate River which is now home to Tecate's museums and performing arts center. We have sparked **partnerships** and woven networks with other organizations to **preserve and protect** our diminishing wild spaces.



Community garden at "La Colosio" Comité Mujeres Lluvia del Sur



For twenty five years, Fundación La Puerta has worked with neighborhood and **community groups** leading **river clean ups**, participating in **citizen's committees** to protect the watershed and **monitoring policies** that effect the natural environment in our watershed.

As a key tributary of the Tijuana River, the Tecate River faces considerable **impact from industrial and urban growth** with more than 50% of Tecate's wastewater entering the river channel untreated.



Homeless encampments within the river corridor are a new challenge for Tecate. Parks and walkways, seven miles of urban river once free of trash, are no longer healthy or safe.

These conditions require a **coordinated effort** between civil society, business and the city government.

Advocacy and urban planning



Visit to the San Diego River Park Foundation



Inauguration of the Citizen's Committee for the River

In 2023 we

- organized visits to the San Diego River Park Foundation and Santee
- supported local environmental organizations
- presented at three conferences in major cities in Mexico
- participated in urban planning policies through official channels such as El Comité Especial del Río

Our Green Umbrella

Deborah Szekely 100th Birthday Fund is a newly established program of Fundación La Puerta to plant trees throughout the Tecate community in her honor.

With your help Rancho La Puerta purchased a water truck with a capacity of 3,880 gallons. It will be used to fight fires and water that trees we will plant in Tecate. Now Deborah's dream has wheels! Stay tuned as we partner with schools and neighborhood parks to extend the canopy of Our Green Umbrella.



2023 was a **year of collaboration**. Through new alliances with the UABC, the state university system in Baja California, and many other institutions, we are **addressing urgent issues** in our community. Tecate is experiencing new levels of homelessness, insecurity and a decline in basic services such as sanitation, waste collection and water quality. Together we are able to **create synergies** to address these issues.

INPLADEM
Urban Planning Authority of Tecate

San Diego Foundation

San Diego River Park Foundation

TRAN
Tijuana River National Estuarine Research

CESPTE
State Public Services Administration

Fundación Hélice
Recycling paper program

Polos Unidos
Rehab and Community Service

CDET
Economic Development Council of Tecate

CEMEFI
Mexican Institute of Philantropy

Mujeres Lluvia del Sur A.C.
Community gardens

UABC
Baja California State University

UCSD
University of California San Diego

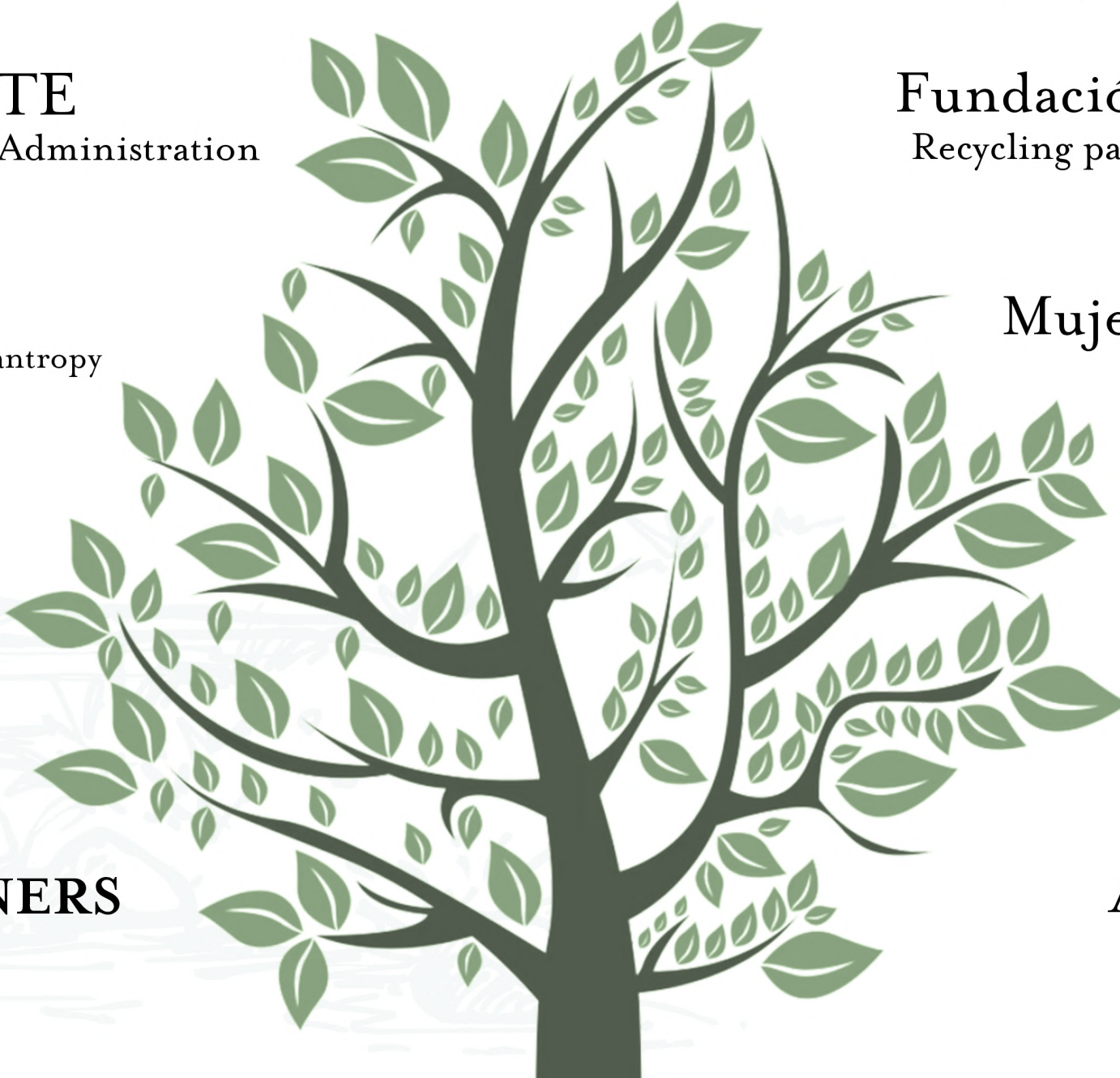
Familia Blancarte
Fundraising project

SEE
State Department of Education

Promotora de Bellas Artes
Support for Fine Arts / Community Chorus

INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

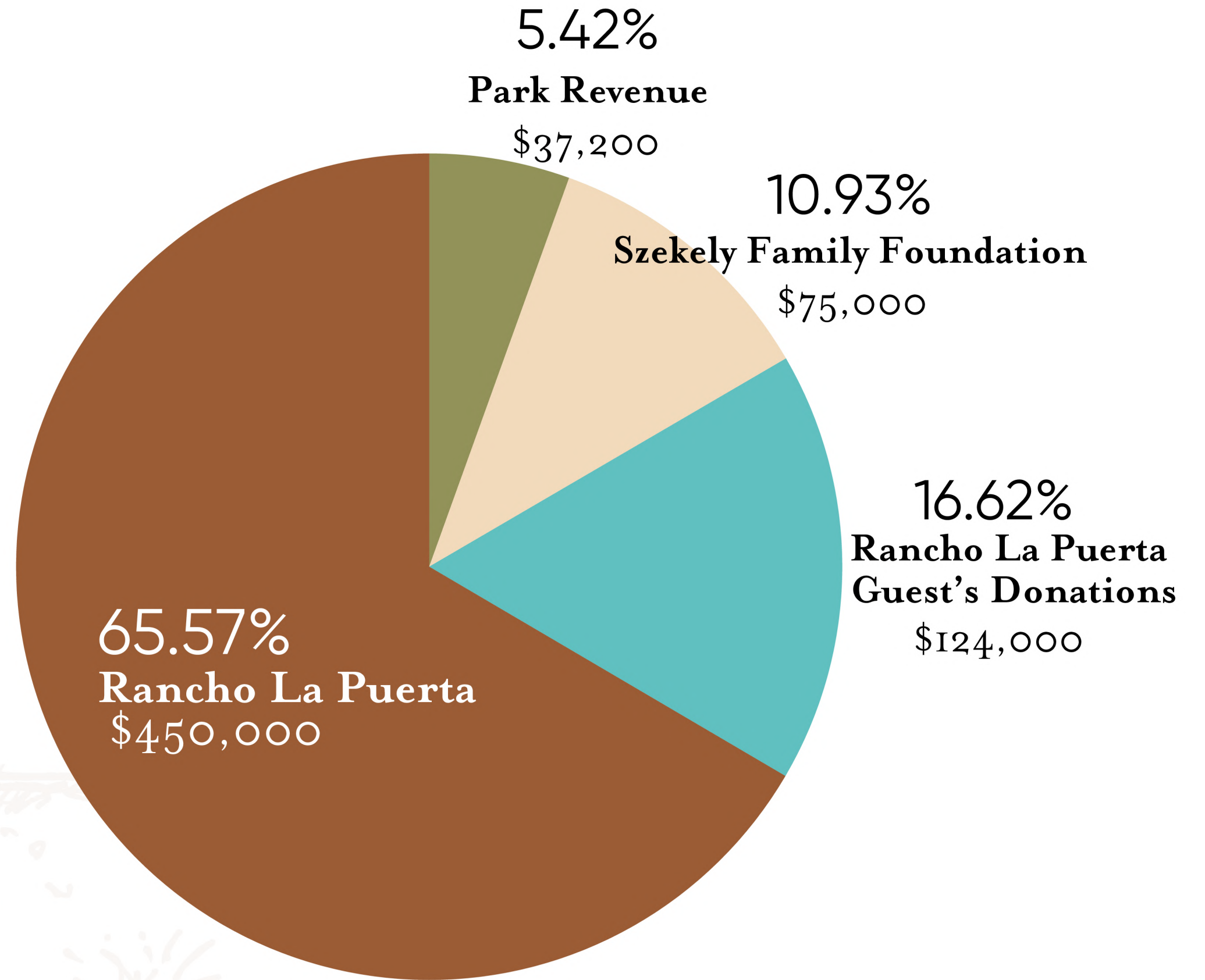
ALLIANCES



Financial Summary

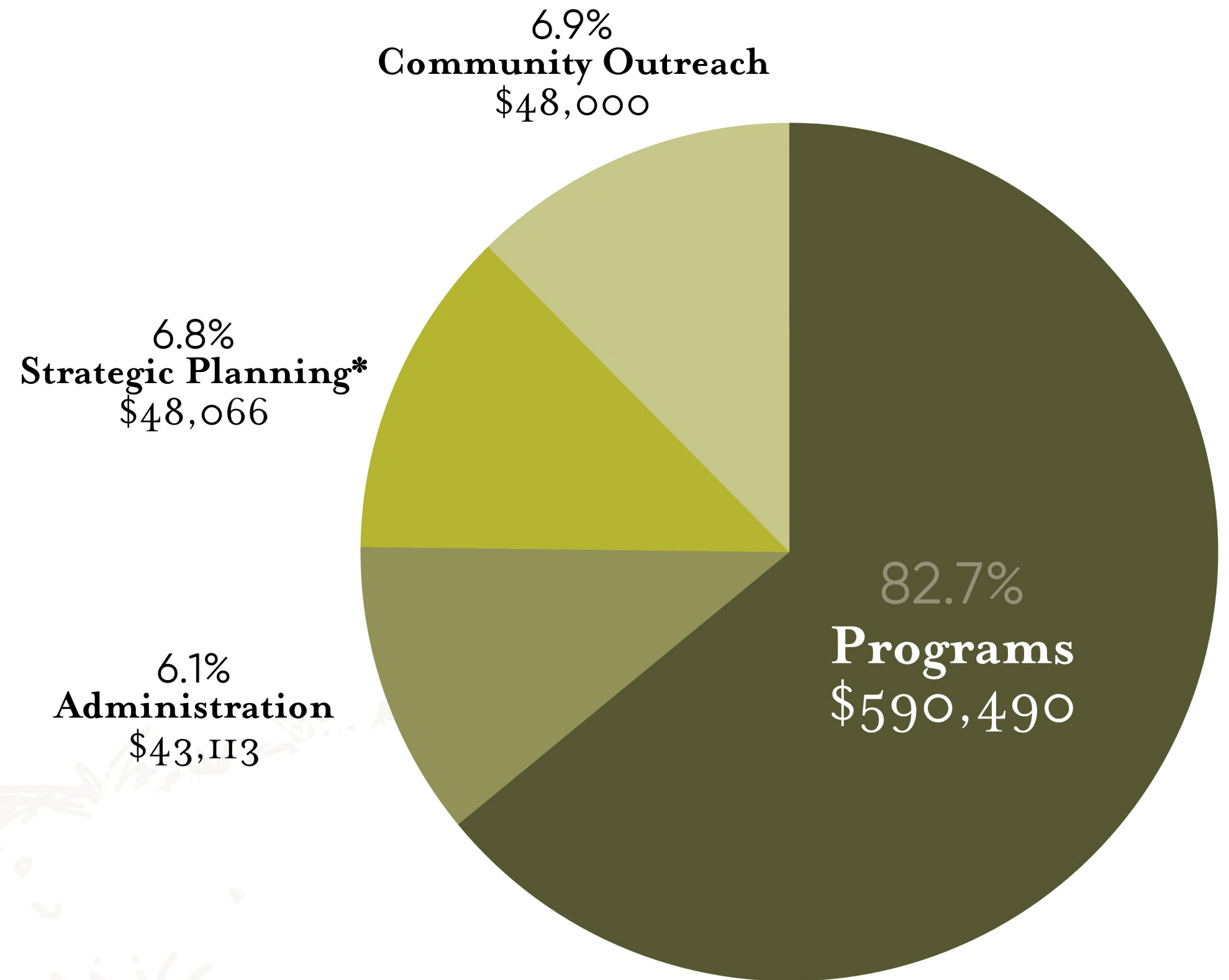
Total Income 2023

\$686,200 usd



Financial Summary

Total Expenses in 2023
\$709,383 usd



*Not a recurring expense
5 year strategic plan and institutional development
external consultants

For the past 25 years our educational programs have reached over 100,000 children and we have made profound changes in the city of Tecate and its watershed. Parque del Profesor has transformed lives for two generations as a source of health and wellbeing.

With your support we can continue to do our work for many generations to come!

Your donation is tax deductible in the United States

Checks payable to: San Diego Foundation – Friends of La Puerta

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<https://fundacionlapuerta.org/donate/>

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