



THE PLASTIC PANDEMIC

“I want to say just one word to you, just one word – Plastics. There’s a great future in plastics.” *The Graduate*, 1962

For the last 75 years a man made virus has spread across the globe hidden in the promise of convenience and affordability. It’s destroying our health, choking our oceans, and threatening wildlife and biodiversity. *What’s the name of this pandemic? Plastic.* It’s everywhere in our lives. In our cars, our phones, even our clothes. Everywhere you look and touch we’re surrounded by plastic. It’s so common that we forget plastic is a toxic synthetic material made from fossil fuels. And like so many other false promises from the oil and gas industry, plastic has unforeseen costs.

Plastics have fueled our throw-away society. Today, single-use plastics account for 380 million tons or 50% of all plastic production ([see scientific](#)). So many of our “modern conveniences,” like shopping bags and water bottles, are often just used for minutes, while they live on as waste for hundreds of years. These single-use plastics collect as garbage patches in our oceans, releasing methane gas, a contributor to climate change, as they degrade. Floating through the water, leaching toxic chemicals, our aquatic animals mistake this pollution for food and can get tangled in its debris, threatening food chains around the globe. Like the ocean and its inhabitants, humans are not immune to plastic, with the average person consuming roughly 70,000 microplastics each year (Vuleta, 2022).

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past two years, we have seen a sharp increase in single-use plastics connected to medical

waste from hospitals, personal protective equipment, and online shopping package material. A 2021 report estimates that 8.4 million tons of plastic waste has been generated from 193 countries since the beginning of the pandemic (eng et al.). Our consumption and disposal habits are leading to the next global reckoning: a plastic pandemic.

The plastic pandemic is a product of globalization and a reminder of the connection between our communities and the environment. When a country litters, its pollution floats down rivers, into estuaries, and across oceans, washing up on neighboring shores. Just as our nations, waterways, and oceans are deeply connected, so too are factories to consumers, and communities to the waters that support them. But just as we have helped create plastics pollution, we have the ability to stop it. And we can take a lesson from COVID! Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have thought globally and acted locally, donning masks to stop community-level spread. In a similar vein, tackling the plastic pandemic begins at home, changing local consumption and pollution patterns.

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NEW VOICES ON AIR QUALITY

If you had two minutes to convince a skeptical public agency to care about your community, what would you say? What facts would you cite? What story would you tell? How do you speak your truth in such a way that those in power not only listen, but are convinced to agree with you?

That’s the challenge our New Voices youth face: finding the facts, the feelings, and the words to tell their story and be taken seriously in spaces that have historically overlooked youth and other community-level voices.

New Voices Are Rising (NVR), is our in-house environmental justice leadership program for under-represented youth in the Bay Area. We know that those who are closest to the issue are the most equipped to solve it, and this belief is the guiding principle behind our NVR program. Our youth learn frameworks and language around central elements of their lives – like climate resiliency, food justice, racial equity, and police brutality. Then they turn their knowledge into action through civic participation and community organizing, developing skills and confidence in environmental justice leadership.

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(continued from front page.)

It is August in California, and smoke from neighboring wildfires chokes the air. The sun is red and the heat feels unusually oppressive beneath the cloud of pollution overhead. For individuals living in previously redlined areas, this poor level of air quality is nothing new.

With less green space and more paved surfaces to absorb and radiate heat, historically redlined neighborhoods are 5 degrees hotter in summer, on average, than other areas. A 2019 study of eight California cities found that residents of redlined neighborhoods were twice as likely to visit emergency rooms for asthma. (Plumer & Popovich, 2022).

Many New Voices youth have grown up in previously redlined neighborhoods across the Bay Area that have suffered from air pollution and its consequent health impacts for decades. This issue has become a central connecting point for our students to learn about environmental justice and the intersections of climate issues, civic participation, racial equity, and community health.

Many of our current New Voices students' first experiences in air quality activism has been through the California State Assembly Bill AB617. Signed into law in 2017, AB617 is designed to promote more community participation in reducing the levels of and exposure to air pollution in order to improve public health. The bill tasks the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and local air districts to protect neighborhoods that are disproportionately impacted by air pollution. The local air districts recommend certain areas to be designated as 'priority communities,' and then work with these communities to develop an air protection plan.

Despite high levels of pollution, a number of communities in the Bay Area have yet to be classified as AB 617. East Oakland is among this group of neighborhoods lacking government recognition and support. Our New Voices students have advocated for East Oakland's designation as a priority community over several years by writing letters and attending local meetings. One of our students, Angela Pineda, prepared and delivered the following remarks

at an August workshop with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD): "It's important that the community be included in what measures are being used to protect them. If people who don't live here make the decisions, how will they know if they truly work? That's why we need people who live in East Oakland to make a plan to clean up our air."

Along with the voices of many other community members, our students are being heard, and in November BAAQMD recommended to the California Air Resources Board that East Oakland be a designated priority community under AB617. While East Oakland has yet to be officially approved by CARB as an AB617 priority environmental justice community, backing from the local Air Quality District Management Board is a major step towards achieving this goal. This win was driven by multiple stakeholders in East Oakland, including Communities for a Better Environment and East Oakland Collective, and supported by other community groups like Local Clean Energy Alliance.

In recognition of our students' track record of air quality advocacy, last year the BAAQMD gave us funding to launch our first Youth Air Quality Control Task Force. The goal of the program is to give youth the chance to educate and engage their communities on air quality and energy injustices. Over six weeks, New Voices students in the Youth Air Quality Task Force created media projects focused on air quality, associated health risks, and utility advocacy. The task force offered students an opportunity to hone their activism on the aspects of clean-air advocacy that are most important to them, and to focus projects on community-based solutions.

Many of our New Voices fellows have remained engaged with the AB617 designation and implementation of air quality control plans through their externships with community partner organizations. Four of this year's seven fellows will be focusing on air quality control projects across the Bay Area. In growing their voice and confidence to advocate for themselves and their communities, our New Voices students are creating real change in local policy. We are proud to participate in these programs which recognizes the importance of engaging youth and communities in building solutions to environmental injustices. 

HELLOS

With over 20 years of experience working with underserved frontline communities developing and implementing environmental justice and sustainable development strategies, **Amy Holland** joins us as our Grant Writer! Before moving to California, Amy worked on social and political development issues as a program officer and fundraiser specialist for a variety of international organizations. Her work has allowed her to live all over the world – including China, Hong Kong, Brazil, Panama, Dominican Republic, Argentina, Korea, Botswana, England, and Australia. In her free time, during the day you might find Amy getting lost in the wild spaces of SoCal with her adventure cats, Lil Dude and Pico De Gato, and at night attending concerts, plays, and art installations.



Mykela Patton is returning to the Rose Foundation as our *New Voices Are Rising* Program Manager. She first joined Rose in 2016 as a Summer Academy student and over the years has taken on ever-increasing leadership roles in the program. Mykela has played an integral part in defining and building *New Voices'* youth leadership pipeline including designing youth leadership positions and mentoring many students to help them develop their skills and gain experience in environmental justice work. We are thrilled to have her back now that she has completed her environmental policy degree with a justice concentration at Colby College.

GOODBYES

Anya Diamond first joined the Rose Foundation in 2006 as a high school intern. As she moved forward in her academic and professional career, she has regularly orbited back through Rose, handling ever-increasing responsibilities. Her most recent role has been Project Manager, where she helped us completely overhaul our donor database, and led several of our grantmaking funds including our Consumer Privacy Fund. Anya now leaves us to pursue her passion for outdoor education, and she was last seen headed to the Sierra leading a youth backpacking trip. Aloha Anya!



After 6 years of leading our watersheds funds grantmaking in California, Oregon and Washington, we say a very fond farewell to our senior Program Officer **Laura Fernandez** as she steps forward into her exciting new role at the Goldman Environmental Prize, where her new portfolio will be the six international Goldman Prize winners! We thank Laura for always putting communities first, and centering every step of the grantmaking process around justice and equity.



As the Rose Foundation has grown over the last two years, we've benefitted from HR Administrative Assistant **Rachel Farahbakhsh's** deft human resources guidance as she took a bit of time out from her long-term relationship with the LeaderSpring Center. As she moves back to Leaderspring full-time as Director of Operations, we offer warm thanks for teaching us about how to unlock the human potential which will always be our most important organizational asset.



After 5 years of driving our organizational growth and uplifting the impacts of the Rose Foundation's grantees, community partners and *New Voices* students, Development and Communications Director **Sheela Shankar** is returning to her development consulting practice. Sheela's leadership and commitment to expressing all the challenges and achievements of our students and grantees has been integral to Rose's success. Under Sheela's watch, our Development Department grew from a one-person shop to a professional team of four. Her guidance around authentic messaging improved every campaign from the *New Voices* Crowdfund to the Grassroots Challenge, and when the pandemic forced us to transform our Film Fest into a 100% virtual event, Sheela responded by increasing our film line-up tenfold and unlocking a national audience. Every bit of the Rose Foundation is stronger for her contributions towards building the organization and commitment to equity and grassroots power, and she will always be a part of the Rose Foundation community.



We wish our Development Assistant **Tierra Lu** the best as she enters the next chapter of her career at Youth Speaks. This great local group has been helping young people speak for social change through poetry and performing arts for more than 20 years. Tierra's warm spirit, quiet humor, and consistent dedication to serving communities make her a joy to work with and to know, and we know she'll thrive as she moves forward in her career.

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A TOXIC CYCLE

A drilling rig bores a hole through the earth, digging deeper and deeper until it reaches a reservoir of oil. The rig plunders the well of her finite resources, creating air pollution that threatens human health and contributes to climate change (usa.oceana). This is how plastics are conceived. The crude oil is moved to a manufacturer where it is refined, heated, and transformed into a plastic bottle. This chemical process of creating plastic results in toxic byproducts that pollute our air and soil and have been known to cause cancer. A now-sealed bottle of water dons its coat of single-use packaging material for the long journey ahead. The water bottle travels by truck, rail, or ship to the hands of a consumer, trailed closely by the growing shadow of its carbon footprint. Within hours or days, the water bottle is thrown away. It may be “wishcycled” by a well-meaning user, however the bottle’s likely resting place is a landfill, where it will take several hundred years to decompose. These graveyards of waste emit hazardous pollutants that threaten human health and are the third largest source of methane pollution. But many bottles never even make it to the landfill. Lighter plastics like bottles and bags may simply be tossed aside, or even blown away by the wind. They end up in street drains, and drift on to their final resting place in rivers, beaches, and oceans.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

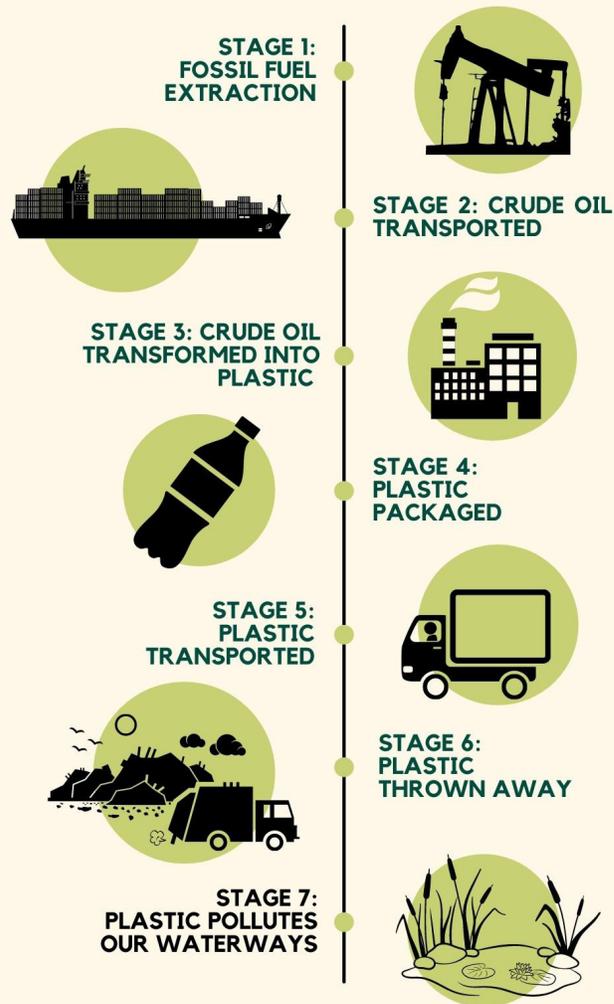
From the WHO to medical establishments and contact tracers, our world has joined forces to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. The immense progress we have made in the past two years demonstrates just how much can be achieved through global collaboration and a united sense of urgency. Along with many other environmental advocates, Rose Foundation grantees believe similar progress is possible in fighting plastics. Here are a few of their stories.



Fossil fuel extraction: California Environmental Grassroots Fund grantee **Committee for a Better Arvin (CBA)** fought and won a case to protect its community’s homes, schools, and public spaces from nearby oil drilling and fracking pollution. Arvin sits atop an oil field in Kern county. Oil and gas industries exercise immense political power in Kern, boasting over 80,000 oil wells across the county. It is no coincidence that Arvin is home to a majority low-

income Latino community with minimal voice and representation. Exposed to ozone and particulate matter at concentrations higher than 94 to 98 percent of the rest of California, many Arvin residents suffer from health conditions like asthma, allergies, and cancer (“CBA— Oil And Gas Ordinance”). To protect their community and the environment from further harm, in 2014 CBA filed a lawsuit to modernize Kern County’s oil and gas ordinance.

THE LIFECYCLE OF PLASTIC



Four years and 2,600 petitions later, CBA won their fight. The new oil and gas ordinance will ensure a 300-foot distance between wells and residences, create additional monitoring and reporting requirements, and significantly increase permitting fees (“CBA— Oil And Gas Ordinance”).

Crude oil transported: For years, the Tacoma Tidelands district in Puget Sound’s Commencement Bay has been home to oil refineries and fossil fuel distribution centers. Many local jobs are connected to the port, which serves as a central point for moving oil and gas through Washington state. However, over the past century this heavy industry activity has released thousands of tons of pollution into Commencement Bay and in the early 1980’s the bay was declared a national Superfund site as one of the most polluted bodies of water in the United States (healthybay.org). Despite posing health, safety, and welfare threats to the environment and public, the fossil fuel industry has retained a stronghold on local development and regulations. But with support from our

Puget Sound Stewardship and Mitigation Fund, and through close coordination with community members, local organizations, and government agencies, Tacoma-based **Communities for a Healthy Bay** recently disrupted this legacy, winning significant changes to Tacoma’s land use policy called the Tideflats Non-Interim Regulations. The new regulations will prevent the expansion of heavy polluting industry, while advancing sustainable, forward-thinking development in Tacoma.



Crude oil transformed into plastic: California Watershed Protection Fund grantee Ecological Rights Foundation represents community members throughout California in cases focused on protecting local waterways from pollution. One of their cases centers around Ormond Beach and its adjacent wetlands on the southern coast of California in the city of Oxnard. This sister city to picturesque Ventura is home to a predominantly immigrant community. Over 85% of Oxnard residents are people of color and the average individual income in Oxnard is less than \$24,000. Oxnard is also home to manufacturing and other commercial activity, including Diversified Panels Systems, a producer of industrial-scale refrigeration and freezer systems which discharges plastics and toxic metals that compromise the area’s water quality and destroy critical wildlife habitat. In Oxnard, EcoRights’ attorneys have determined that Diversified Panels Systems does not have a Clean Water Act permit; this makes the company’s pollution illegal under federal law. EcoRights is filing a Clean Water Act lawsuit to ensure the company adopts pollution control measures. By eliminating plastic pollution from the facility, EcoRights aims to protect the Ormond community’s right to a clean, safe, and healthy environment.



Plastic packaged: To reduce the use of single-use plastic packaging and foodware, California Environmental Grassroots Fund grantee **Zero Waste Humboldt** (ZWH) spearheaded a food serviceware and packaging choice project. ZWH created a packaging analysis report which measures the toxicity, recyclability,

and sustainability of different packaging materials. The report can be used as a reference tool for businesses in evaluating their use of plastics and packaging. ZWH also partnered with schools districts and Arcata’s main food-serving businesses to organize a cooperative bulk purchase of sustainable foodware. The ultimate goal of ZWH’s plan is to educate consumers and businesses that the only good choice when it comes to food packaging products are reusable food and beverage containers.



Plastic Transported: Many small rural communities have minimal power to demand regulatory oversight and environmental mitigations from large corporations. So when Crystal Geysers Water Company decided to bring a bottling facility to Mt. Shasta, local activists knew that had to get organized, and community members formed **We Advocate Thorough Environmental Review** (WATER) (pictured above) to educate themselves and the community on the impacts of extraction, pollution, and plastic production. The group identified many environmental consequences linked to the plant, including increased air pollution. Trucking bottled water to far-off destinations inevitably leads to noise, lights, fumes, and traffic that disturb the natural ecosystem. WATER rallied its community to participate in the California Environmental Quality Act, filed a lawsuit against Crystal Geysers, and was able to secure an environmental impact review on the plant’s operations. The persistent community effort paid off! Though legal challenges are ongoing, Crystal Geysers is selling its property and has announced it will not be operating in Mount Shasta.



Plastic thrown away: San Benito is a lower-income, majority Latinx community located an hour south from Silicon Valley. This makes it a prime dumping ground for Santa Clara County’s trash and in recent years, the San Benito County landfill has been targeted for a fivefold expansion (from 95 to 483 acres) to accommodate garbage shipped from Silicon Valley. But all that trash from San Benito’s wealthy neighbors would exacerbate pollution problems connected to the landfill, negatively impacting the health of local residents. In response, local activists formed **Don’t Dump on San Benito** (pictured above) and asked our Grassroots Environmental Fund to help with seed money. Through public education and local policy advocacy, this emerging group of committed local volunteers hopes to stop the landfill expansion.

Plastic pollutes our waterways: Abundant with flora and fauna, Santa Barbara is a nationally recognized biological hotspot. Its unique ecosystems span from the Santa Ynez mountains to the winding California coast. Since 2020, California Watershed Protection Fund grantee **Santa Barbara Channelkeeper** (pictured right) has identified increased litter at creeks, rivers, beaches, and trailheads as a result of the pandemic. This pollution threatens all that makes Santa Barbara unique: its resilient coastal watersheds, pristine beaches, and thriving, diverse habitats. Channelkeeper is stemming the tide of plastic pollution in Santa Barbara through a coordinated effort of monitoring, outreach and education, community engagement, and advocacy activities. As stewards of the Santa Barbara ecosystem, Channelkeeper calls for the reduction of plastic in all its pernicious forms, including single-use items, microplastics, and balloons.



ENDING THE PLASTIC PANDEMIC

Every step in the life cycle of plastic results in pollution. And Rose Foundation grantees are disrupting this cycle, harnessing grassroots power to fight our pandemic of plastic. While local wins can seem small in the face of global problems, the aggregate of many small efforts united by a shared purpose is the catalyst for large-scale change. The shifts in local policy, education, and behavior that our grantees have achieved are being mirrored on an international level. On March 2nd, 2022, representatives from 175 nations committed to the development of a legally binding agreement by 2024 to end plastic pollution. “The resolution addresses the full lifecycle of plastic, including its production, design and disposal” (UNEP 2022).

In 2020, the world radically changed. Amidst chaos, fear, and the unknown, we united to find a solution. Like COVID-19, the plastic pandemic will require enormous local and national efforts. And like COVID-19, through a combined and concerted effort we will be able to celebrate the fruits of our labor. 🌱

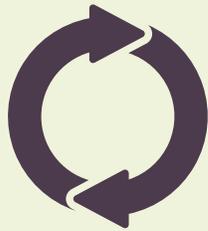
HOW YOU CAN REDUCE YOUR PLASTIC FOOTPRINT

*“Recycle only what you cannot refuse, reduce or reuse,”
- Zero Waste Home founder, Bea Johnson*



JUST SAY NO!

Learn to refuse single-use items like the shopping bag at the grocery store, and straws and cutlery for takeout.



SWAP DISPOSABLE WITH REUSABLE



Soap and shampoo bars



Beeswax wraps or tupperware made from glass or stainless steel



SHOP SMARTER

Purchase items that use little or no plastic packaging.

Buy in bulk



Avoid bubble wrap and other excess packaging from Amazon and other suppliers

Support your community's economy and keep your dollars circulating locally



CREATE YOUR OWN ZERO-WASTE KIT

Reusable water bottle

Cloth bag

Reusable cutlery

Reusable coffee cup



MEET OUR FILM SELECTION INTERN YENNY MARTIN



Every September, our Film Fest features a mix of short videos and feature films that celebrate the power of grassroots activism. Have you ever wondered where we find our films? Meet our Film Selection Intern Yenny Martin! Yenny leads our entire film selection process and her weekly “sneak previews” where she shows us clips and trailers of possible films has become an ongoing Friday highlight. I had the opportunity to talk with Yenny about her film selection process, how the work connects to her graduate program, what she enjoys most about documentary filmmaking, and so much more!

1. This is your second year sourcing and selecting films for the annual Film Fest. How do you find them? When you pick films for the Rose Foundation, what are you looking for?

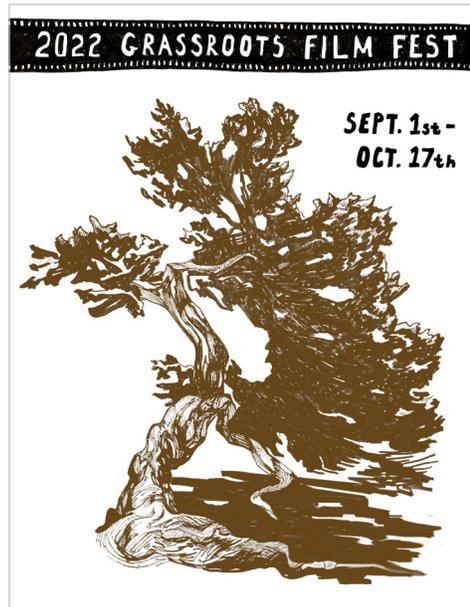
I usually start by looking at the lineups for other film festivals like the DC Environmental Film Festival or One Earth Film Festival. It's through other film festivals usually or through other filmmakers or production companies that we've looked at in the past. When I'm selecting films, I'm looking for some component of environmental justice. I'm looking for uplifting stories that involve some degree of grassroots action and resilience. And then, stories that are inspiring and that people can connect with on an emotional level. Stories that will prompt people to want to take action in some way or where there are actionable steps.

2. Do you have a favorite film from last year? Which one and why?

I have a lot of favorite films from last year. Some were more powerful because the main character was so magnetic. For example Catherine Flowers in *The Accidental Environmentalist*. I also really loved *Big River* because it's made in such a quirky and humorous way that it doesn't make these really overwhelming issues of climate change feel so bleak and depressing. It makes it much more accessible.

3. You are currently working towards a masters in Art Education and Community Practice at NYU. How does your degree connect with this work?

There's the program and what I'm focusing on. And what I am focusing on is how to communicate environmental issues using visual art and creative communication and also how to educate the public through imagery. I think it relates really well to the Film Fest in that a lot of these films are good and interesting examples of how to communicate these issues. The Film Fest is very niche, but the breadth of films that can be within this niche covers so many different ways to approach storytelling and communication of these overwhelming issues. It's cool to learn from these examples of how to reach people and to know that there are different ways of reaching people and that whatever your style is and whatever your interest is, there's a need for that.



4. What makes a good documentary-style film?

From my perspective, I really like documentaries that are participatory. So the filmmaker has a relationship with the subject. From my perspective, I really like documentaries that are participatory. So the filmmaker has a relationship with the subject matter, and there's some communication between what's in front of the camera and what's behind the camera. I think it's really interesting to see the filmmaker's journey because it becomes more relatable and more intimate. This applies to this great film I recently saw, *My Octopus Teacher* – it's a participatory film. I normally like films that are more *cinéma vérité*, which is kind of like a fly on the wall, very natural observing style of documentaries. There's no sit-down interviews, it's kind of a non-conforming style with no talking heads. I love that style but *My Octopus Teacher* goes back and forth between

incorporating interviews that are kind of the sit-down traditional talking head and these incredibly intimate explorations with this animal below the water, and these narrations of his thoughts on top of what's playing out before you. It's almost like listening to a journal entry, and you just feel so connected to the story and the relationship. Focusing on one subject and one relationship play out over time is really effective. Especially when it comes to something abstract that's hard to identify with, like an octopus that lives on its own, it's not a social creature and you can't even begin to try to relate to it from a human's perspective, so you relate to it through this man's perspective as the octopus's friend instead.

5. What have you learned or most enjoyed in this position?

One thing I've learned is that there are a lot of environmental films being produced which is something that I didn't for some reason expect to see but it's really exciting to know that there are so many filmmakers working in this arena. I don't know if it's a recent upsurge or trend. I'm learning that people seem very involved with this subject not only with environmental justice and public health, but also with different environmental subject matter whether that's climate change or engaging with nature or stories about animals in the environment. There's a lot being made.

I've most enjoyed working with Rose staff and communicating with filmmakers. I would love for there to be an in-person component and actually meet people and celebrate their work in person. Some of these films are just so extraordinary and I'd love to know more about people and their journey. So the people side of things.





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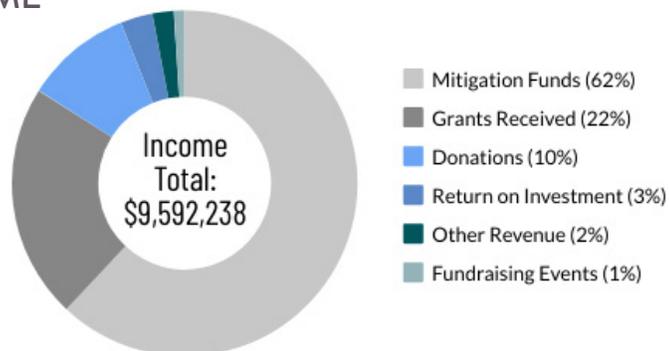
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