



# Celebrating 30 Years

ALIVE WITH CULTURE AND NATURE



Working to preserve & enrich the environment, culture and economy of the Sonoran Desert



# 2022 Annual Report



*This year marks the 30th Anniversary for the International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA). As a tri-national organization operating at the intersection of the Tohono O'odham Nation, Mexico, and the United States, ISDA has been a consistent convener of area land managers and stake holders as well as a strong platform for regional collective action. Over the past 30 years the organization also helped to set and meet a series of extraordinarily ambitious community development goals in Ajo, Arizona - an unincorporated place at the geographic heart of the Sonoran Desert. 30 years in, we are excited to begin expanding this 'small footprint' community work into the greater Sonoran Desert Biosphere Region (SDBR) - a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. We believe the SDBR is the perfect vehicle to share out the lessons learned, and innovative approaches piloted in Ajo throughout the region. We invite you to join us on that journey. - Aaron Cooper, Executive Director*

## Thank you to our 2022 Board of Directors



Lance Bell, President, Ajo Council for the Fine Arts  
& Art Under the Arches Gallery

Lorraine Eiler, Vice President, Hia C-ed O'odham Alliance  
& Tohono O'odham Legislative Council

Bridget Rendon, Secretary, Ballet Folklorico de Ajo  
& Ajo Elks Lodge

Cathy Hutton, Treasurer, Ajo Transportation Company  
& Ajo Elks Lodge

Dr. Nelida Barajas Acosta, Board Member, CEDO Intercultural

Eric Alegria, Board Member, Restaurateur  
& Former Personal Banker

Stanley Cruz, Board Member, Pisinemo District Chairman  
& Travelling Eagle, LLC

Aaron Flores, Board Member, Town of Sonoyta,  
Mexico & Centro de Esperanza

Jim Gillet, Board Member (Appointed),  
Ajo Council for the Fine Arts

Selina Jesus, Board Member, Native American  
Advancement Foundation

Annelise Keuper, Board Member, Artist & Entrepreneur

Jana Montana, Board Member (Appointed), Tohono O'odham  
Legislative Council

Marlakay Henry, Alternate Appointee, Tohono O'odham  
Legislative Council

Gene O'meara, Board Member, Pima County Sheriff's  
Auxiliary Volunteers

### **Director Emeritus**

Lee Baiza, National Park Service (Retired)

Bernard Siqueros, Board Member, Tohono O'odham  
Cultural Center & Museum (Retired)

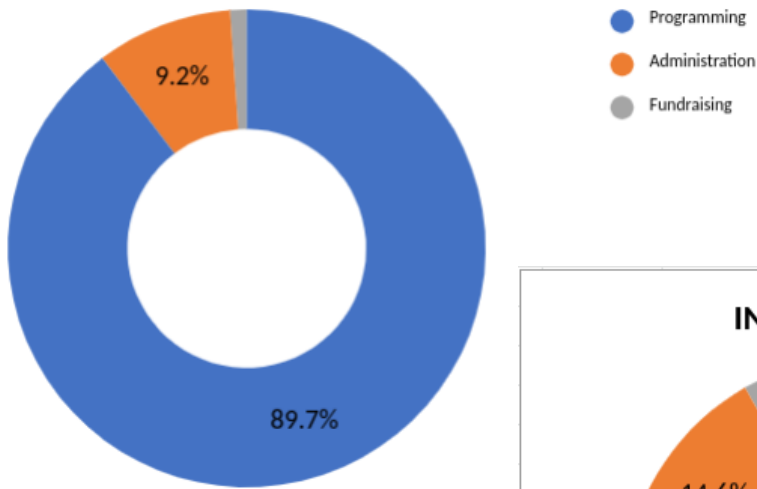
## 2022 ISDA Area of Focus Update: Sonoran Desert Biosphere Region

The ISDA board and staff saw 2022 as a key opportunity to further develop the identity and shared values of the Sonoran Desert Biosphere Region using the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere framework as a guide. During this process, we stretched beyond the formally recognized biosphere reserve boundaries toward a more aspirational landscape built around connected landscapes and connected communities. Out of this process, we created a Sonoran Desert Biosphere Region brand package that we will use to help organize and identify region-wide efforts in preservation, stewardship, and sustainable economic development. Thank you to our partners in this effort: The Pisinemo District of the Tohono O'odham Nation, Ajo District Chamber of Commerce, The Town of Gila Bend, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, and the US Biosphere Network.

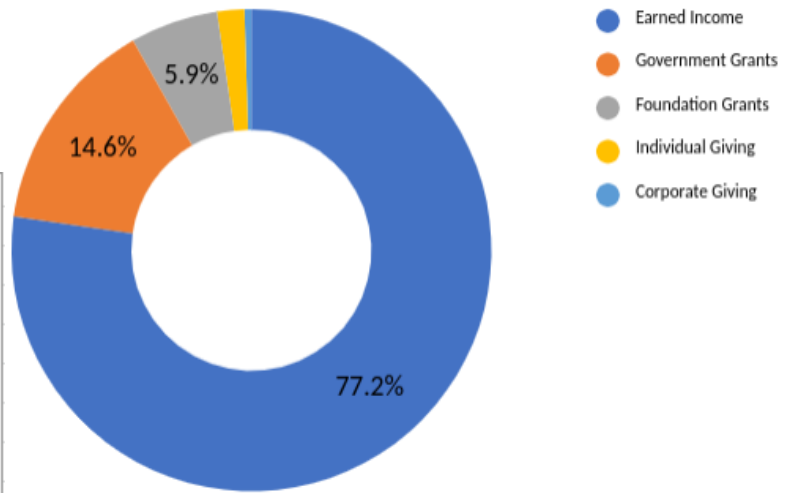


# 2022 Financials

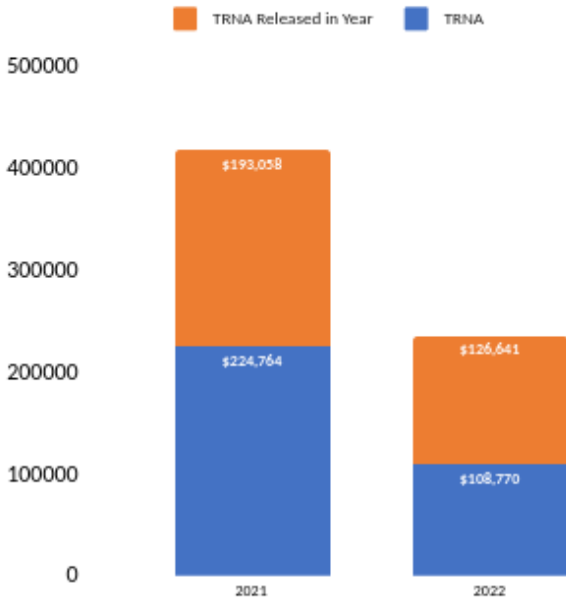
## EXPENSES: \$1.3 MILLION EXPENDED



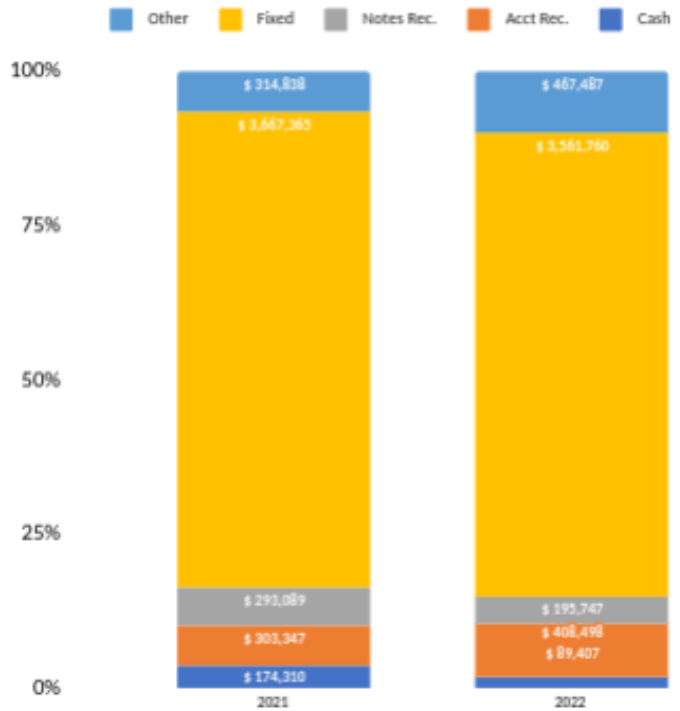
## INCOME: \$1.34 MILLION RAISED



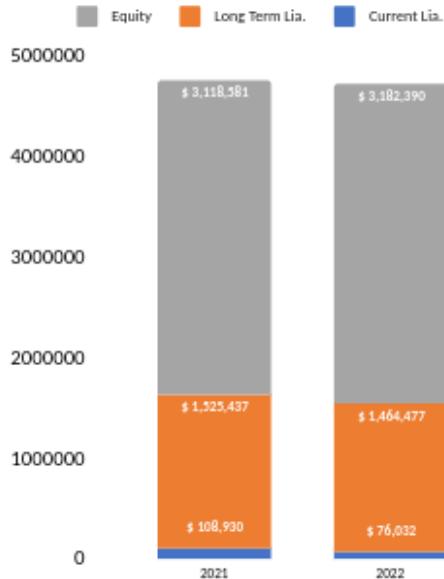
## Temporarily Restricted Net Assets (TRNA)



## Assets



## Liabilities & equity



# Thank You to Our Volunteers!

By offering varying types of support, ISDA helps to serve as a remarkable magnifier of what makes Ajo such a magical place by recognizing Ajo's true invaluable resource. The people, their culture, their ideas, their passions and their creativity.

From harvesting pomegranates for the Pomegranate Festival to untangling strings of lights and decorating SDCC's beautiful courtyard for the Christmas Market, to helping with event set up, to receiving kickstart funding to help me in building what has become a successful massage practice, to currently assisting myself along with a group of volunteers to create a three day community event, Love Works! Ajo Desert Festival, and so much more.

ISDA does an amazing job of facilitating opportunities to participate in and to create community here in Ajo. I am proud to be afforded the chance to be a part of it all.

-Carol Royall, ISDA Volunteer

1-27-2022  
To ISDA, Vikki Tapp and volunteers,  
THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU.  
The work you did in the Ajo Cemetery  
on MLK Day, makes all of Ajo Proud.  
It is such a wonderful feeling  
to know that people and organizations  
such as yours, care about and love Ajo  
so much. Thank you for helping  
us care for our loved ones.  
Sincerely  
AJO Cemetery Association



Night of Lights  
Volunteer - Harley



ISDA hosted "Day of Service" on Monday, January 17th. Approximately 30 folks arrived to help clean up ISDA's adopted Lot #5 and even picked up Lot #12. A huge THANK YOU to everyone that participated! A very sincere THANK YOU from the Cemetery Committee also! -Vicki Tapp, Outreach Coordinator

"Escape the Heat 3"



Memory Park &  
Toni Cubilla's Garden  
Installation



Pomegranate Harvest



# Program Impacts

Liz is pretty amazing. She's basically a one woman show. She does everything in the office. Resources that help everyone with rent, rec hall that is rented for events, in the plaza coordinating close to 500 people from start to finish, head coordinator for VITA training every year. She's been here so long she can do it all in her sleep. -Vicki Tapp, Outreach Coordinator



Liz Yon, Support Services,  
15 Years with ISDA

228  
VITA Tax  
Returns at  
\$417,560

8  
Home  
Repair  
Projects

\$101,390  
in Utility  
Assistance

3,000 lbs  
Garbage Collected  
& 3 Community  
Cleanup Events

## Welcome to the Team



Tito - Maintenance Support

His positive attitude and work ethic is a great addition to the maintenance staff. -Bucky Sandoval, Maintenance Manager

## 10 years strong

### Apprentice-to-Journeyman Program

Other than myself, we have an all new apprenticeship crew this year. There have been many challenges as well as many breakthroughs during the year. Overall, we are close to returning to pre pandemic form as an apprenticeship. -Joshua Manual, Program Coordinator/Head Instructor



3 Current Apprentices  
Graduated ISDA GED

2 New Female  
Apprentices



Proud Mom - 7 years  
Running & Head  
Housekeeper with SDCC

- 1 son as apprentice graduate & assistant instructor
- 1 son as new apprentice

Papa Josh is a wise man. He is patient, reassuring, very knowledgeable, and is full of insight. He knows when to crack a joke but also knows when to tell you to double check your work. -Current Apprentices: Kyle, Morgan, Anthony, Ashley, Sierra

## GED/Learning Center Program



Congratulations to MJ, our first GED graduate since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, who was also the first graduate among the students in GuVo District.

Selena is the Director of the Native American Advancement Foundation. She does so many things it would take an essay to describe all of her roles! She is very pleasant and supportive of the needs of the people of the Gu Vo District.

Our first two Work/Study program participants since the beginning of COVID began working with local businesses, and their jobs fit their future academic goals. One works at Curley Coffee, and one works with the folks of Ajo Pie; both are interested in studying Culinary Arts after earning their GEDs. -Rodney Hopkins, Program Director



Jaiden has been a wonderful addition to our staff at Curley Coffee. She has been the friendly face taking orders at the cafe window and at Saturday market, stamped and packaged seemingly endless bags of coffee, and even learned the art of making great espresso drinks.

She has been a joy to work with... we only wish she could stay longer! -Curley Coffee Team; Annelise, Kimmie, & Bobby

## Curley School Artisan Apartments & Ajo Plaza

### 19th Annual International Day of Peace



In January 2022, Curley School Artisan Housing transitioned from a 3rd party management structure to a property self-managed by the International Sonoran Desert Alliance.

In December, we completed a transfer of interest with the initial investment partner. This transition will open the door to resources, like grants, not previously available for direct property support.

The Curley School had strong occupancy numbers with a healthy waitlist throughout the year.

Welcomed 2 new businesses to the Ajo Plaza.

Hosted more than 30 community events in the Plaza Green and the Rec Hall - many for the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Completed a series of focus group sessions toward redevelopment of the 2nd floor of the South Business Block.

Secured \$650,000 to develop 2nd Floor of the South Business Block into a Business Support Center, Co-working Space and shared facilities for Sonoran Desert Biosphere Region Partners.



## Business Support Center

### Shout-out to our 25 Kickstart Ajo Business Awardees in 2022

Staff and community members tell me the popular monthly business mixers are the biggest highlight of the center's 2022 year. I'm glad our rural town has a networking asset like this now and I'm happy to bring a bit more of a night life to Ajo.

My personal biggest highlight though was assisting Ashley of Nina's Taqueria through the competitive process for Project Dreamcatcher. She was one of over 200 applicants and selected for the week-long business training for American Indian women offered by ASU Thunderbird and Freeport McMoRan. -Cristal Franco, Business Center Manager



Local Pomegranates, Local Products

## Sonoran Desert Inn & Conference Center

In 2022, the Business Support Center & SDCC collaborated to reestablish Pomegranate Festival in Ajo and create the Night Of Lights Holiday Market. Both included artists, food vendors, a children's area and live music. They were well attended and received by the community and there are plans to do both of these events in 2023.

The SDCC gift shop features over 20 local artists & in 2022 brought in over \$29,000

2022 NCCCs!



Ajo Pie Launches Pizza Thursday at SDCC



Linda Del Rosario Promoted to Assistant Kitchen Manager

"While we will greatly miss having J on the team and are thankful for everything he contributed to the Inn, we are also excited to bring on a fresh energy and vision for the next phase of development at the Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference Center. Bringing Kat on board has added a wealth of industry knowledge and a fresh perspective on the operation. With her at the helm, the future looks bright! -Aaron Cooper, Executive Director

On Trip Advisor the Sonoran Desert Inn continues to get the highest marks possible. The two top things mentioned are the cleanliness of the rooms and the friendliness of the staff. Way to go Housekeeping team and front office staff!

## 2023 ISDA Area of Focus: Expanding the Small Footprint Work

While ISDA's convening mission has always stretched throughout the core of the Sonoran Desert (bounded to the south by Caborca, to the north by Gila Bend and the Sonoran Desert National Monument, to the east by the reach of the Tohono O'odham Nation and to the west by Yuma and San Luis), its 'small footprint' work on community development and revitalization has primarily been focused on Ajo, Arizona and the immediately surrounding region. In 2023, we plan to build on the successful brand development work of the Sonoran Desert Biosphere Region toward expanding the small footprint impacts and lessons learned in Ajo into the larger organizational footprint. We understand that the expansion of the Ajo-based work into the surrounding region will depend on capacity building, on engaging regional partners, and will play out differently in every community, village, and ejido. The work will be time consuming, challenging, and, in our opinion, completely worth it.

Personally I always try and look at projects from an O'odham perspective just because it makes it easier for me to understand and explain to the people. So my reflection took me to the O'odham basket weaver who beforehand needs to make sure that the materials or resources needed are available. Once all the materials are gathered, then the basket weaver can begin creating a piece of art work that is recognized or reflects the person, environment, and uniqueness of the people. You are the basket weaver and we are the resources that in unison can create the vision of the people. -Stanley Cruz, Pisinemo District Chairman, ISDA Board Member, & SDBR Partner



Gila Bend & Regional Branding Tour



7th Bi-Annual Tri-National Sonoran Desert Symposium



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