

A black and white photograph of a rugged coastline. The foreground shows dark, choppy ocean water with several large, dark rock formations protruding from the surface. The middle ground features a steep, rocky cliff face overlooking the sea. The background consists of more hills and mountains, some with patches of snow or ice on their peaks, under a cloudy sky.

ESALEN

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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This publication is produced by the Esalen Institute Community & Advancement and Marketing & Communications Teams. More information about Esalen can be found at esalen.org.

Esalen Institute is a 501(c)(3) organization.







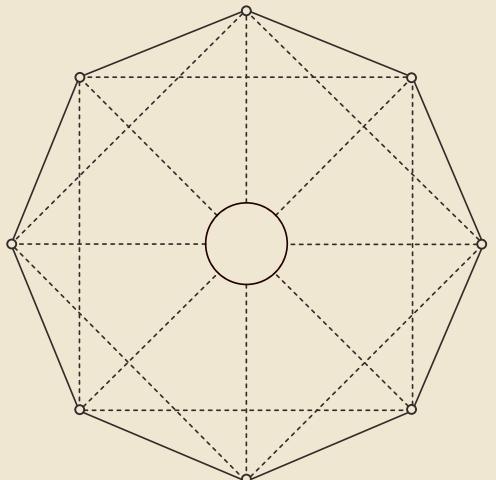
Welcome

2020 was a year of challenge and adaptation for the whole world. On both the individual and institutional levels, Esalen faced roadblocks — sometimes literal ones — to our physical and emotional well-being. Thanks to the support of our generous donors, global community, and dedicated staff, we parried and shifted and evolved to find new ways of staying connected to one another and focusing on our mission.

The specifics might look different: online meetups instead of in-person workshops, sunset cams instead of shared evenings on the lawn. But we're always guided by our core values — transformation, connection, curiosity, service, and diversity — and Esalen always remains Esalen. And so we grab these challenges and shifts with both hands, knowing that each first is an opportunity to expand the boundaries of the possible, and we thank you for being a part of that journey.

At Esalen we value

Transformation
Connection
Curiosity
Service
Diversity

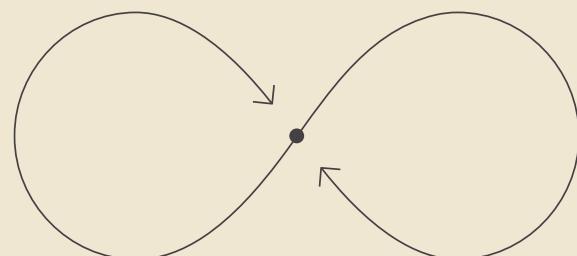


We envision a world where...

Esalen is a major catalyst in the transformation of humankind, working with individuals and institutions to integrate body, mind, heart, spirit, and community in a nurturing relationship with the environment.

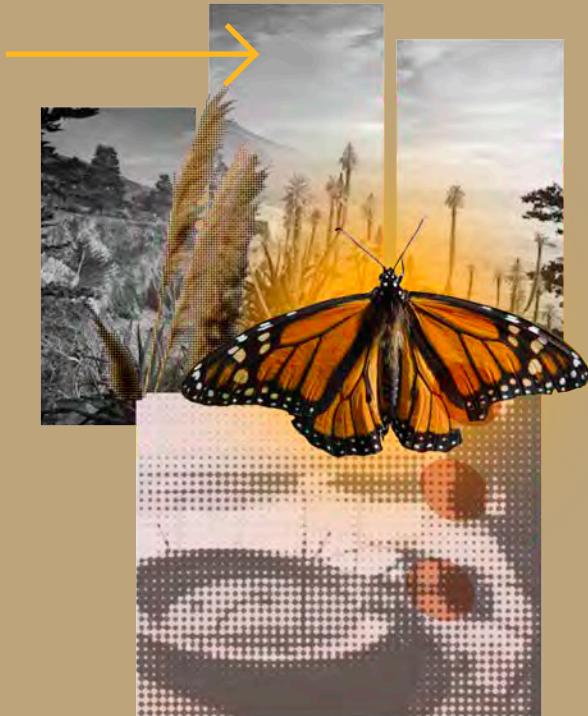
Our Mission is to...

- Be a leading center for exploring and realizing human potential through experience, education, and research.
- Work toward the realization of a more just, creative, and sustainable world, seeking answers to questions unlikely to be explored by traditional universities and religions.
- Sponsor pioneering initiatives and offer personal, spiritual, and social transformation programs for residents, interns, and workshop participants.



Transformation

(n) a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance.



2020 saw the first time we evacuated campus completely as the Dolan Fire cleared Big Sur of Esalen staff with no caretakers left behind, followed

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
1	2	3	4	5	6
JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
7	8	9	10	11	12

205 days of closure
due to Covid-19 and the Dolan Fire

The Dolan Fire necessitated

\$225,000+

in repair and forced

24 staff

to evacuate for a month.

closely by another evacuation due to flash floods. Covid-19 closures bookended the natural disasters. Not only did we have the place to ourselves a lot of the time, missing the life and energy of our guests, but the ensuing financial challenges required staff layoffs and furloughs. But as winter leads to spring, hardship and destruction lead to transformation and rebirth, and to many exciting firsts that will expand Esalen's impact for years to come.



Updating the Esalen Baths

An integral component of the Esalen Experience, the baths have reopened as a sanctuary for our guests and staff. A group of appointed bath attendants to support guests with bathing inquiries, social distancing protocols, and individual bath/massage reservations allow us to

safely reopen under current pandemic stipulations. An educational-based healing arts program is also underway, adding bathing salts and garden-to-bath experiences that enhance the bath experience.



Creating Community With the Rituals of Esalen

At its core, it's a self-guided week (or weekend) of rest and relaxation with an open invitation to reflect. Our natural and beautiful setting, thoughtfully prepared meals, and hot springs tubs are vital elements of this rich self-care experience. Guests are also gifted a journal with

thought-provoking prompts and a special *Rituals of Esalen Deck* to encourage intention-setting and open discussion. Complimentary yoga, meditation, and movement classes offer daily opportunities to drop in and be present.

Connection

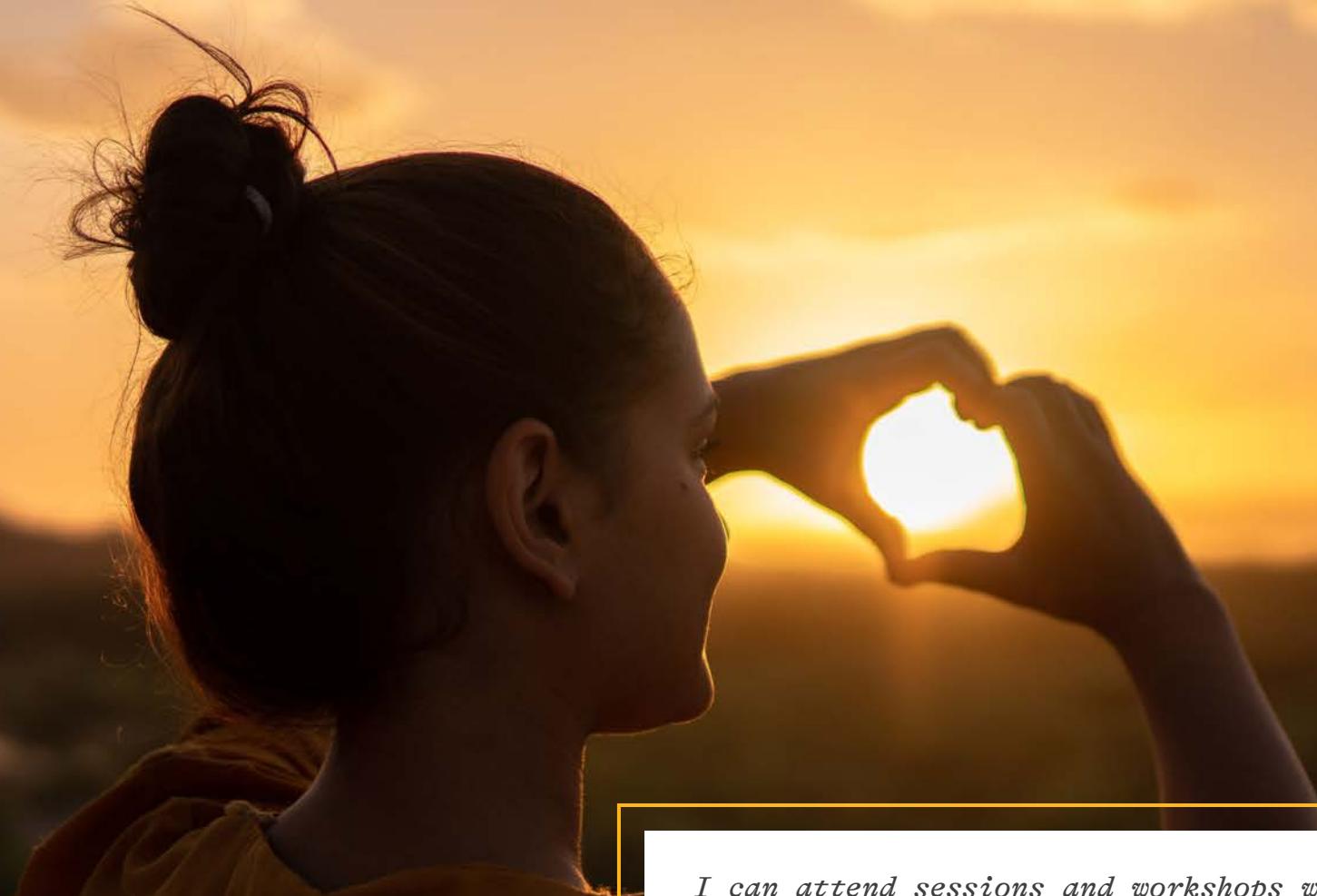
(n) a relation of personal intimacy, coherence, or continuity.

We always do better when we're together — we support each other and push each other. Connection has always been central to everything Esalen does. In response to the realities of this year, in support of our global community, and in an ongoing effort to deepen our impact, Esalen took bold steps in 2020 to make our content and network available digitally. Our physical home nestled on the Big Sur coast will always be

Esalen's heart and soul, but digital outreach and storytelling let us reach beyond geographical boundaries, making the transformational power of Esalen accessible to more people, in more places, more of the time. Our real power comes from the people who have been transformed here. Helping their collective work ripple out into the world increases our impact.



Screenshot of a weekly All Staff meeting, held over Zoom.



I can attend sessions and workshops with fellow travelers at or near the same place on the ‘awareness curve’ to increase my insight and build my resolve, but what has become obvious, especially in the last few years, is that people are only farther apart and we need to increase awareness and gain the attention of more people if change is to happen.

— Chris Altizer, *Building Bridges of Belonging* participant

Check-Ins

A time-honored tradition for staff, residential scholars, and guests alike, Check-Ins are simple and profound. They're a time to sit in community and share the truth of what is present for you in body, mind, and spirit. They are windows of opportunity to get close to yourself, which over time reveal the mercurial nature of being human. They remind us that change is constant and that our current reality is not our permanent reality.

Beginning in November, we began virtual Check-Ins as a collective weekly practice. Participants express deep appreciation for the intimacy, connection, and chance to experience

Esalen synchronicities, albeit online — and for a space where they can simply come as themselves; nothing more, nothing less.

As a creative, I have felt stuck in the quagmire many days of late. The Check-Ins have given me a moment that helps spark my Self and my Heart back into rhythm like a spiritual defibrillator.

— Tracy Leighton

Archive Portal

While in quarantine, we've been able to uncover and digitize thousands of documents, photos, and audiocassettes and set up a pilot website featuring the discovered materials. In-person teaching may have been absent during campus closures, but this cache of resources is accessible from anywhere. While

individuals cannot dive in yet, this is a digital beginning that will connect global community members to Esalen's roots.



Please consider joining us at a Check-In if it sounds supportive. You can view upcoming dates on our [Friends of Esalen portal](#).





Voices of Esalen earned a
4.5 out of 5 (118 ratings) on
Apple podcasts and scored over
200,000 listens
in 2020

ESALEN Live!

episodes were organically
viewed almost
35,000 times
and overall Facebook
engagement increased **31%**
between 2019 and 2020

The Esalen Archive made major
headway and inventoried a
record number of historical
pieces, including nearly

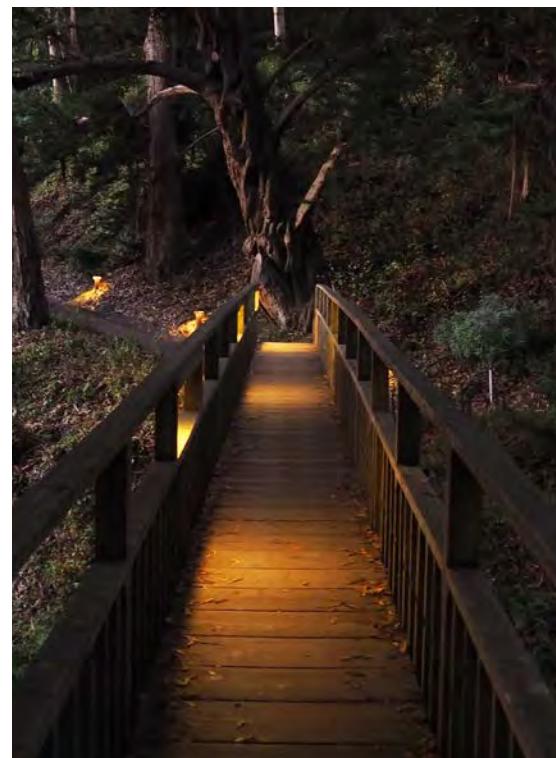
1,900 audio files

1,500 video files

over **500 documents**

1,500 photos

Building Bridges of Belonging



The *Building Bridges of Belonging* online workshop was co-led by University of San Francisco law professor Rhonda V. Magee and mental health therapist Kamilah Majied. Free of charge, it explored systemic racism and implicit biases. Through storytelling, gentle awareness practices, and guided self-reflection, the weekend workshop was an opportunity to continue working towards racial justice in the era of Covid-19, connecting to ourselves so that we can better connect with others.

Curiosity

(n) interest leading to inquiry.





“Storytelling” doesn’t always mean “words.” We can tell stories with music, with movement — and with art. The Artist in Residence program is a multidisciplinary residency merging creative self-expression with the nurturing power of the Esalen campus. It gives artists an opportunity to step outside of their daily realities, nourish their souls, and see what arises when basic needs are met and imaginations are set free to create without constraint.



Artist in Residence

This is the first time in my adult life when I have had everything taken care of, and have had the space to just think about what I was doing and creating without force or pressure.



Justin Michael Williams

AUTHOR, MUSICIAN, AND
TRANSFORMATIONAL SPEAKER



The only obstacle I had was me, and that was perfect — that's exactly what I needed.



Susan Olesek

FOUNDER AND
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR,
ENNEAGRAM
PRISON PROJECT

To learn more about the Artist in Residence Program, including how to apply, visit friends.esalen.org/AIR.

Being on campus is an instant reset of the nervous system. That's been a real gift of being here — experiencing a true opening and release of creativity.



Erika Gagnon

CEREMONIAL LEADER,
VISUAL ARTIST,
AND AUTHOR

The magical land unfolded and I discovered my own meditative process, not just walking a labyrinth but actually building one as a process to regain balance. The building of a labyrinth became my own heroine's journey, a reconnection to earth and feminine, bringing my own creative psyche back into balance.



Sharon Virtue

COMMUNITY ARTIST,
FACILITATOR, DANCER



Partnership with Harvard

The Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School, in collaboration with Esalen, the RiverStyx Foundation, and the Chacruna Institute for Psychedelic Plant Medicines, has launched a year-long lecture series on psychedelics and the future of religion. This “second wave” of psychedelic research, largely inspired by scientists at Johns Hopkins

University and New York University, expands research into the therapeutic uses of psychedelic medicines. *Psychedelics and the Future of Religion* builds on that, inquiring into the role that religion and spirituality play in the reality and rhetoric of psychedelics, from antiquity to the present day to the future.



Indigenous Healing and Reconciliation

Esalen is preparing to sit in a listening circle with the Esselen Tribe of Monterey County, on whose ancestral land our campus sits — but before we can do that, we have some work



to do on ourselves. The Healing and Reconciliation Institute has created a structured journey to guide us as we name harms, reflect on our own ancestral stories, connect through our shared humanity, and learn to act in a way that doesn't repeat past injury. Topics include apologies and forgiveness, neuroscience and healing, blood memory, and inherited identity. Training piloted with key staff and board members, and all Esalen staff will have access to it in 2021, prior to the first scheduled listening circle.

Service

*(n) the work performed by one who serves;
contribution to the welfare of others.*



From our artists and teachers in residence to our facilities staff to the Board of Trustees and each and every donor, people are part of Esalen because they believe that human potential is far greater than we know. Because they want to unlock that potential. Because people living lives of fullness and power in a symbiotic relationship with the environment make the world a better place. Ultimately, everything Esalen does and everyone who is a part of it is in service to the world we all want to see.



*Esalen exists to serve the
world — not as a refuge from it.*

Donor Profiles

Bryan and Tara Meehan

\$100,000 PLEDGE



Bryan and Tara Meehan have been members of the Esalen community for 23 years. They have turned to Esalen for interpersonal connection as well as connection to the natural world. Longtime yoga practitioners and supporters of various global sustainability ventures, their pledge to Esalen's Patron Circle

Sustainability Fund is an investment to ensure that the Esalen Institute survives and thrives in a nurturing relationship with the environment for years to come.

Mac and Leslie McQuown

\$100,000 GIFT



In keeping with their long-standing generosity, Mac and Leslie donated \$100,000 to Esalen in 2020 to help us come back from the Dolan Fire and long months of closure. Mac and Leslie have donated \$2,700,000 to Esalen since 2003 and have been deeply woven into the Esalen community for decades. Says Mac:

“I got my undergraduate degree from Northwestern, my master’s from Harvard, and my Ph.D. in Transformation at Esalen. And the first two are not anywhere near as important as the last.”



Learn more about our Patron Circle funds at esalen.org/give.

Board of Trustees

Sravana Borkataky-Varma

William Donius

Bill James

Mary Ellen Klee

Jeff Kripal

Nancy Lunney-Wheeler

Board Advisor

Anisa Mehdi

Dave Morin

Michael Murphy

Charles Stang

Annabel Teal

Gordon Wheeler

As 2020 came to a close, Jeff Kripal transitioned out of his role as Chair of the Board as Dave Morin stepped in.

Jeff's calm confidence brought Esalen through the 2017 mudslide closure and 2020 pandemic closures, requiring an unprecedented three evacuations. His gentle and generative partnership helped us make skillful decisions during difficult times. But his impact hasn't just been reaction — he helps us grow. As board member, Anisa Mehdi explains,

"There is always room to grow in Jeff Kripal's presence: he values input and nudges it forward to improve the common commitment, wherever he is."

We are thankful Jeff will continue to serve on our Board and to lead the Center for Theory & Research (CTR). His powerful consensus-generating leadership, his presence and depth as a conversation partner, and his intrinsic drive to help us all recognize our shared humanity are welcomed and precious assets for Esalen and CTR.

We were also lucky to welcome Charles Stang and Sravana Borkataky-Varma to the board this year; both bring deep academic roots and multi-disciplinary network-building skills to the board.

Nourishing our Community



Our fields were abundant with delicious vegetables and herbs come late spring and summer 2020 — but our guest rooms were empty. So we shared this bounty with our local Big Sur community, creating a “FreeSA” that delivered weekly truckloads of fresh, organic produce to more than fifty families. These acts of service connected us with our neighbors and enriched our Farm & Garden team’s experience as they brought the fruits of their labor to the dinner tables of both long-time and new friends. The distribution meetings also became beautiful points of connection and safe socializing.

Later in the fall and winter, we supported the Big Sur Big Share, a local community-based effort to bring fresh food to Big Sur, and contributed what we could from our fields to their flourishing project.



Donated over
5,000 lbs
of food to the Big Sur
community through our
CSA and **The Big Share**

Diversity

(n) the condition of having or being composed of differing elements.

Esalen's commitment to working toward the realization of a more just, creative, and sustainable world starts with making Esalen a more just, creative, and sustainable place.

After the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, [we made a commitment](#) “to account for our inactions and to look inward to see the changes that we now need to make.” In digesting and pursuing those commitments, we found a deep well of organizational and internal work to be done.

To do this work effectively — and without asking for more labor from communities already marginalized — we sought experts and approached their ideas with gratitude and humility. We've now partnered with multiple DEI

professionals, each representing a unique discipline and point of view. With their support, we've revised the onboarding materials we use to train staff, updated the entire Esalen website, held organization-wide classes on unconscious bias and microaggressions, and explored how identities and systems play a role in perpetuating racism.

Perhaps the most meaningful process we are committed to is our engagement with the Healing and Reconciliation Institute. Guided by Indigenous-centered healing, they help us create opportunities to take responsibility for historical and ongoing traumas. This is a multiple-year commitment, during which each member of the Esalen team digs deep to learn how to engage in this work without causing

more harm. Everyone is committed to 6+ hours of learning on topics including Integrated Leadership Practices, Apologies & Forgiveness, Neuroscience & Healing, Blood Memory & Epigenetics, Inherited Identities, Indigenous Allyship, and Reconciliation. More than half the staff have completed at least six hours of training, and leadership has engaged in more than 20 hours of deep work.



We understand and acknowledge that this work will never be complete, and every part of Esalen plays a role in and is dedicated to realizing four commitments:

- 1** The Board has resolved to change the composition of its Trustees by nominating new Black colleagues and other people of color to assist us in our journey forward until we reach a percentage of at least 20 percent in 2021.
- 2** As the campus reopens and Esalen begins ramping up programming again, Esalen will actively recruit more Black colleagues and other people of color as staff members within the parameters of California and federal labor law.
- 3** Esalen will actively recruit more Black colleagues and other people of color as teachers until we reach a percentage of at least 20 percent in 2022.
- 4** The Center for Theory & Research will fund and host a multi-year series on “Race, Racism and Human Potential” designed and led by our Black colleagues.

Financials

(n) the finances or financial situation of an organization or individual.



Numbers tell stories, too.

We brought in less revenue last year than we have in twenty-plus years, and we modified our expenses and costs to help respond. Our relatively strong financial standing going into the extended closures of 2020 and early 2021 has been key in our ability to navigate this time.

Including our 2020 financials in this report was never a question. These figures are not yet audited, but even though we anticipate changes, we offer you the numbers as a guide to what we know so far. And while our 2020 numbers are instrumental to understanding where we are right

now, they tell a uniquely time-bound story that doesn't provide insight into our usual financial footing or a good benchmark for future years. For this reason we also include some high-level figures from 2019, which are fully audited and will not change.

It cost approximately \$1,000,000 per month to keep Esalen operating during the closures.

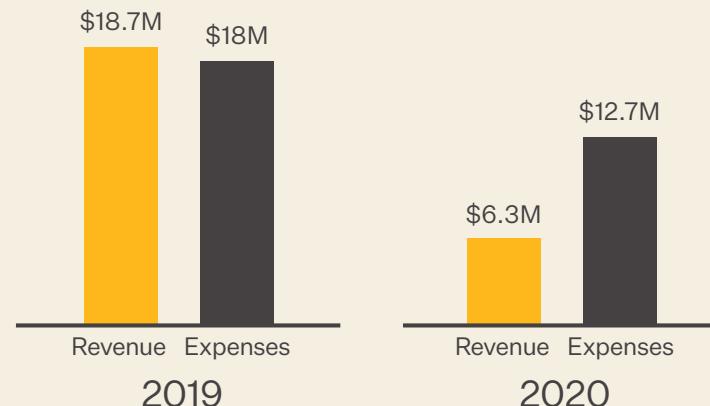


In 2020, Esalen had **205 days of closure**, due to Covid-19, the Dolan Fire, and flood and mudslide evacuations.

Esalen saw a 16% increase in donations from 2019 to 2020.

Esalen received over **\$1,000,000** in donations in 2020.

Revenue and Expenses

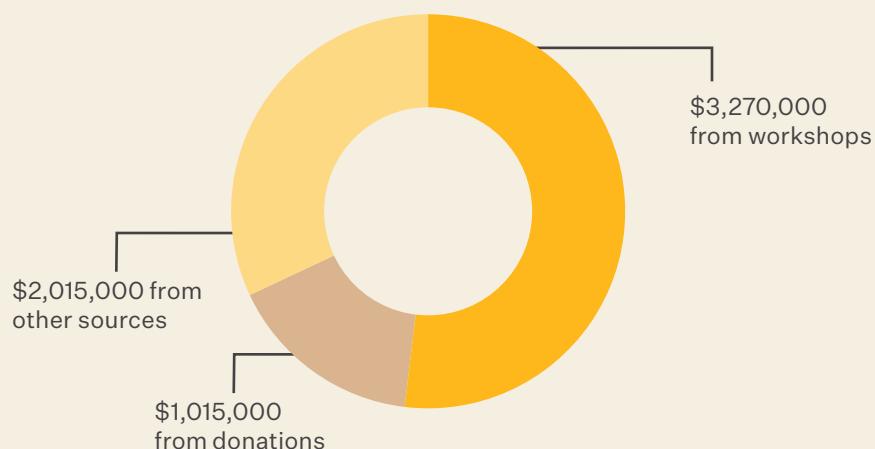


In 2019, we reinvested the surplus into institutional capacity, campus maintenance, and reserves that will ensure that Esalen remains Esalen, no matter what comes.

In 2020, Esalen reduced staffing and expenses as much as feasible while remaining operational through closures and reduced capacity.

2020 Revenue Sources

Total revenue = \$6.3M



All of the content on this page is from unaudited financial data.

We are actively working to grow our impact exponentially by leaning into our six

Strategic Priorities:

- 1** Maintain Esalen's long-term financial viability.
- 2** Foster greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Esalen community.
- 3** Create a thriving global community that supports Esalen and human potential.
- 4** Drive sustainability and reduce negative environmental impact on the Big Sur campus.
- 5** Design a guest experience that supports personal transformation.
- 6** Support Esalen staff in exploring and fulfilling their own potential.





“What we seem to be seeking are more ways to reconnect: to ourselves, to others, and to our shared humanity. As the birthplace of the human potential movement, Esalen is in a unique position to remind us of our potential of being human again.”

Esalen CEO Terry Gilbey

A Future
of Endless
Possibility





2020 was a challenging year for us, and we mean all of us. But the future looks better and brighter. What Esalen has to offer — new and proven ways of reconnecting to ourselves, to others, to nature, and to our shared humanity — is needed now more than ever. And we're here for it. We're here for you.

ESALEN

A 501(c)(3) organization.