A Year of Impact, Resilience, and Hope
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Photos by Amy Snyder, © Exploratorium except where noted. Photos of Amy Snyder (p. 8) and After Dark (pp. 17–19) by Lisa Strong, © Exploratorium.
Our Mission, Vision, and Values

Why we do what we do

The Exploratorium is a public learning laboratory exploring the world through science, art, and human perception.

Our mission is to create inquiry-based experiences that transform learning worldwide.

Our vision is a world where people think for themselves and can confidently ask questions, question answers, and understand the world around them.

We value lifelong learning and teaching, curiosity and inquiry, our community, iteration and evidence, integrity and authenticity, sustainability, and inclusion and respect.
Welcome from the Executive Director

Dear Exploratorium community,

At this time last year, we were uncertain when, or even if, we could reopen. Still, it felt wonderful to know how many people cared about the Exploratorium. You donated, watched our virtual events, did Science Snacks at home, and learned with us. I wish I could thank each one of you individually for your critical support.

Today, finally, the museum is open again. The Giant Mirror is reflecting children and families. The Listening Vessels are filled with conversation. Visitors are exploring the galleries and rediscovering that science is exciting, and that science can be understood. In the museum, in our programs for educators, in everything we do, we are making science come alive. Your support helps us inspire curiosity and empower people of all ages to seek answers.

The Exploratorium’s mission is to help people ask questions and think critically. In the past year, we have also turned those questions inward. Questions such as: whose voices are often excluded from scientific conversations? And what can we do to change this?

We don’t have all the answers, but we do have ideas and prototypes—some of which are highlighted in the following pages. I invite you to look through this Impact Report and reflect on all the work you helped us achieve. Thank you for being part of our circle of Exploratorium friends and believers.

With gratitude,

Chris Flink
CEO & Sakurako and William Fisher Executive Director
Stories of Impact, Resilience, and Hope
Stories of Change

In the Exploratorium’s Osher Gallery 1, you’ll find that you are the exhibit. It’s a place to explore human phenomena—such as emotion, memory, language, how we help others, and how we behave in groups—through the lenses of social science and art.
2020 felt at times like a global social science experiment, showing that people have an amazing capacity to cope with and adapt to change. Widespread demonstrations for racial justice, record-breaking wildfires, the COVID-19 pandemic, and an intense and turbulent 2020 election year all brought dramatic changes to our society—many of them unwanted, but others welcomed and long overdue.

The mini-exhibition Stories of Change transformed part of Osher Gallery 1 into an invitation to reflect on these changes, and to share your own narrative of change. Local artists Bianca Rivera and Mark Harris created two vibrant centerpiece murals. Photographer Amy Snyder, our Director of Photography, captured how major events of 2020 manifested right in our neighborhoods. And a digital memory wall displayed photos from the past year, shared by our community, of “flashbulb moments,” those moments that sear themselves into memory.

How have the events of this past year changed the ways you think, feel, and behave? Have you observed people in our community changing, for better or worse? What change would you like to make in the future? These are important questions we are asking ourselves at the Exploratorium, as well; and we look forward to sharing some of our answers and ideas with you in the coming year.
**STORIES OF CHANGE  →  MEET THE ARTISTS**

**Bianca Marie Rivera** is a Black Puerto Rican illustrator and muralist currently based in San Francisco, California. Her practice utilizes bold, crisp lines and a vibrant color palette to visually explore themes of community; mental health; and all of the moments of joy, quiet, and contemplation in between. You can follow her work on Instagram @biancabonk.ai.

**Mark Harris** is an award-winning artist, activist, and educator. His artwork examines critical issues facing America today. A native of Durham, North Carolina, Harris grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, and now lives in San Francisco, California. You can follow his work on Instagram @markharrisart.

**Amy Snyder** is the Exploratorium’s Director of Photography. Her work has been widely published in newspapers (such as the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post*), magazines, and textbooks, and has been exhibited nationally and internationally. She has received numerous awards for her photography, including being selected for Sotheby’s International Artist Program.
Tinkering Afterschool

Tinkering at the Exploratorium is both a hands-on learning process and a mindset. We believe tinkering helps people make sense of the world on their own terms—approaching new ideas and projects with confidence in their own ability to investigate playfully until they find a solution.

“What is tinkering? It’s big,” says senior Exploratorium educator Jake Montano. “It’s very hands-on. It requires that you tussle with materials, with tools, in a very embodied way, not only to figure out the concepts in the projects, but also yourself and how you relate to these things.”
Montano leads our Tinkering Afterschool partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of San Francisco, whose clubhouses serve children, especially those from historically excluded backgrounds and communities, in first through eighth grades. He co-facilitates and co-designs the program alongside young educators, primarily diasporic/youth of color, who themselves took part in Tinkering Afterschool.

In this after-school setting, educators can really get to know the kids. Experiences can span multiple weeks; curricula can develop over the course of months. Tinkering introduces science and technology concepts to participants in an approachable way, activating new ways of learning they may not experience sitting in classrooms. And facilitators can foster inclusivity by structuring their approach in ways that value the students’ knowledge, backgrounds, and home cultures.

This year, without being able to share physical space in the clubhouses, afterschool tinkering over Zoom became the ultimate creative challenge for our educators. How could kids make the day’s activity work for them, wherever they were, with whatever materials they happened to have on hand?

Yet going online also offered a huge opportunity. The virtual format allowed us to go from serving just two clubhouses and 60 kids a semester, to opening up our afterschool tinkering programs to all 14 San Francisco clubhouses, and seeing a threefold increase in participating kids.

Tinkering projects are often creative and playful, but it goes deeper than that. “I hope what [kids] get isn’t just a souvenir—I want to develop a curiosity about how things work,” facilitator Wai-Kirn Macaraeg explains. “It helps them see the world in a different way, that I think more people should be conscious of, because the world is pretty cool, I think. There’s a lot of stuff out there, and it would be a shame to not explore it.”

Tinkering Afterschool is funded through a grant by the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families.
During the Exploratorium’s 15-month closure, our staff grappled with many questions. Such as: How do we center equity? And how could we move that work forward, with no visitors and no exhibits? Out of these questions an idea was born: “STARS” at the Exploratorium (Striving for Trans Inclusion and Anti-Racism in Science Learning).

Taking the Explainer program’s youth development goals as inspiration, STARS manager Sal Bell Alper devised a six-month paid Exploratorium internship, which met primarily online. A cohort of thirteen young people (ages 18–24) was recruited, centering transgender and queer people and people of color.

Alper’s vision was to expand inclusion and belonging in informal science learning, with a strong focus on addressing inequities based on gender, sexuality, and race. For these young people, their love for museums, science, and art has often gone hand in hand with grappling with some level of exclusion. In counterpoint, the STARS program aimed to intentionally create an expansive space for professional development that welcomed their identities and perspectives.

“This dedicated group of Generation Zers has expanded my thinking about museum educators in so many ways,” Alper says. In just six months, the thirteen interns tackled a host of innovative projects and were active and creative members of the
Exploratorium community. They examined how STEM fields tie into gender and gender expression, incorporating this exploration into an After Dark Online program celebrating Trans Day of Visibility. They interviewed LGBTQ+ science professionals; updated a curriculum for museum employees about transgender acceptance; suggested more inclusive language for museum docents to use when speaking about the natural world; and spoke up in staff meetings with passion and insight.

“Working alongside other people of color and LGBTQ+ people has been instrumental to us in developing and creating programs that lead toward our end goal,” intern Eli Ramos writes on the Exploratorium blog. (Read the full post here.) “It’s one hundred times easier to create programming with people when they share your experiences. Not having to explain the basics of my identity and justify my personhood was a relief.”

“Striving for Trans Inclusion and Anti-Racism in Science Learning is funded by General Motors.

“The museum field needs voices like ours, and we want to be here,” Ramos says. “With our time here, we’re striving toward our own professional development to carry with us, and hopefully leaving a framework of inclusive practices for the Exploratorium to build on.”

Striving for Trans Inclusion and Anti-Racism in Science Learning is funded by General Motors.
Sensor Fusion with Waymo

You may have seen self-driving cars passing you on the streets of San Francisco. Have you ever wondered how these vehicles can "see" the world around them? To demonstrate to our visitors the science behind this feat of technology, the Exploratorium partnered...
with autonomous car company Waymo to create a new exhibit that was featured during our reopening.

Waymo worked closely with the Exploratorium design team to create Sensor Fusion, a stripped-down, interactive exhibit that demystifies LIDAR (light detection and ranging) technology, which is becoming increasingly common. This technology may someday soon be a part of daily life, with the potential to change not just transportation, but also surveying, archaeology, geology, forestry, and more. Sensor Fusion made a playful addition to the Exploratorium’s seeing and perception exhibits in Bechtel Gallery 3.

“Our mission at the Exploratorium is to create learning experiences that enable people to actively explore, ask questions, and understand the world around them,” says Phoebe White, the Exploratorium’s managing director. “The world around us is becoming increasingly technologically advanced. We were delighted to work with Waymo to share experiences that help us all understand the kinds of technologies that may someday soon be a part of our everyday lives.”

Waymo joined the Exploratorium as the Presenting Sponsor of our July 2021 reopening. Waymo is an autonomous driving technology company with a mission to make it safe and easy for people and things to get where they’re going.

Sensor fusion could become part of everyday life.
Learning Toolbox Brings Science Home

Online projects for teachers and families that spark curiosity

From Science Snacks in Spanish to videos on food science, from Tinkering @ Home to understanding the pandemic's effects upon us as a worldwide community, our online Learning Toolbox has become a crucial strand of the Exploratorium's education work, leading the way in finding creative methods to support hands-on learning, wherever you are.
With schools across the country closed during 2020 and 2021, education leaders within the Exploratorium responded quickly to the urgent problem of how to teach and learn science while sheltering in place.

The Learning Toolbox features hands-on projects geared to support teachers, parents, and PreK–12 students. Learners are encouraged to explore the science of natural phenomena in their own homes, fueled by curiosity and asking questions. These adaptable science activities intentionally use inexpensive, easily available materials; offer detailed instructions and images; and provide accessible explanations of what’s going on.

Perhaps even more critically, the Learning Toolbox spotlights an ongoing content series designed by Exploratorium educators to help people understand the science of COVID-19, so they can better understand what’s happening with the pandemic. Engaging videos and hands-on activities model virus behavior, explain why soap inactivates certain viruses, demonstrate how vaccines protect your body, and more.

The Learning Toolbox has continued to evolve and adapt, and it continues to be a go-to resource for teachers and learners in all kinds of classrooms and homes.
After Dark Keeps It Fun—and Meaningful

Curiosity can roam free in person again on Thursday nights.

Leading up to the Exploratorium’s reopening, we updated and reimagined our six spacious galleries with thoughtful enhancements (guided by science) designed to keep staff and visitors safe. And on Thursday, July 1, we were ready to welcome After Dark visitors back to Pier 15 for a joyful Thursday night out of exploration, music, and cocktails by the Bay.

After Dark never stopped during our closure, of course—with resilience and hard work, staff transformed it into After Dark Online.

“We wanted to be able to stay connected to our loyal audiences, while reaching new learners who may have never even been to our physical museum,” explains Exploratorium program developer Samuel Sharkland.
“It was important to share the joy and wonder of learning while maintaining relevance for our audience and their everyday lives.”

After Dark staff knew that time spent on screen was a precious resource during shelter in place, and so it was crucial for these online programs to deliver meaningful experiences. “Every installment was fun to produce,” Sharkland says, “but we are most proud of the programs that were co-developed with communities around topics relevant to them, and by extension, relevant to audiences curious about where science, art, and human perception intersect outside of laboratories or galleries.”

An example is the Exploratorium’s celebration of Pride Month, honoring LGBTQ+ heritage and culture. In June 2021, three After Dark programs—500 Queer Scientists, Queering the Future, and Pride—featured a galvanizing mix of artists, historians, and thinkers
whose work centers self-affirmation, freedom of expression, and the essential need for representation.

At the June 24 Pride celebration, the After Dark community joined musician and teaching artist Eli Conley as he shared ways that people, in particular the trans community, can use their voices, and led participants in vocal exercises. We danced with Jocquesé “Sir JoQ” Whitfield, a pillar of the Bay Area voguing community, and in a conversation with STARS intern Kayla Walker, heard about voguing’s history. And we immersed our hearts and minds in short films from Alex Bohs and KQED’s series If Cities Could Dance.

The Exploratorium’s After Dark Thursday Nights started in 2009. These weekly programs explore diverse themes, ranging from the science behind our food to immersive art installations. As an adults-only (18+) event, After Dark is able to feature contemporary and challenging topics, each grounded in the scientific study of that evening’s theme. These leading-edge, at times subversive programs provide a fun and highly engaging forum for the public to engage directly with artists, scientists, policymakers, educators, and tinkerers, and to explore and engage with the world around them.

“We are most proud of the programs co-developed with communities around topics relevant to them.”

— Sam Sharkland

Coup de Foudre’s Plasmatica and Mark Lottor’s Cubatron Core dazzle After Dark visitors in Bechtel Gallery 3.
How Party at the Piers came to you

A Gala Like No Other

The past year has required us to adapt to new ways of doing so many things—including how we celebrate together. **Party at the Piers**, the museum's largest and most impactful fundraising event, took “thinking outside the box” to a whole new level in 2021. Since our generous supporters couldn't gather with us at Pier 15, we brought the gala to them.

We worked with McCalls Catering & Events to deliver 200 meals and cocktail kits to supporters in all nine Bay Area counties, and we created a dynamic, powerful virtual program that could be enjoyed from home. **Party at the Piers: Emergence** showcased fascinating artists, from the puppetry collective Facing West Shadows to renowned light artist Leonardo Villareal, and highlighted the museum's impact on science education both locally and globally.

Hosted by KGO-TV news anchor and reporter Kumasi Aaron, the event raised over $900,000 to support the Exploratorium's educational mission—an extraordinary lift from our community in a very challenging year.

We look forward to welcoming you back to the museum in person for our next **Party at the Piers**, on May 6, 2022.
Meet Our Global Collaborations

Developing exhibits for The Science Center of Kuwait in Pier 17.
Global Collaborations:
Kiewit Luminarium

Full-Body Learning in Omaha

The Kiewit Luminarium (KL), a new interactive science center in Omaha, Nebraska—co-designed by the Exploratorium and opening in 2023—will offer visitors the chance to learn in a variety of ways, including with their bodies.
In a gallery devoted to geometry, finance, and other aspects of applied mathematics, visitors can wind their way up, over, and through a multilevel and immersive climbing structure. This iconic feature includes a 10-foot-tall gyroid, a wildly complex geometric shape, discovered by NASA researchers, that occurs in nature. A climbing-net experience leads the visitor to a bridge, which ends at the Triamond, a honeycomb-like structure with views out of the Luminarium’s south curtain wall.

The climber development process involved the Exploratorium’s 3-D designers, production team, and project leadership in close collaboration with playground experience designers Landscape Structures Inc. and architecture firm HDR. Accessibility was of paramount importance to the design team—visitors of all ages and abilities will be able to experience the climber’s intriguing geometries, whether by walking, climbing, rolling into, or transferring from a wheelchair into its various components.

Visitors of all ages and abilities will be able to experience the climber’s intriguing geometries.
Partnering with Artists in Brasília

SESI Lab, a collaboration between the Exploratorium and SESI (Social Service of Industry), an educational and cultural branch of CNI (National Confederation of Industry), will be the first major art, science, and technology experience in Brasília when it opens in the spring of 2022.

Situated on the central esplanade of Brazil’s capital, its location is special: the historic Touring Club do Brasil building, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, and renovated by Gustavo Penna Architect and Associates.
An innovation for the Exploratorium on this project has been to partner with multiple artists, nearly all from Brazil, to integrate their artwork into the exhibit environment. Lucia Koch intrigued us with her installations *Conversion* and *Conversation* at the 11th Sharjah Biennale in the United Arab Emirates (2013). For SESI Lab, she’ll create *Brasília RGB*, a collection of movable RGB panels that allow visitors to filter and remix the light and views in a corner of the landmark building.

João Wilbert caught our attention with his installation *Assembly of Youth*, created for the 2015 United Nations General Assembly in New York in collaboration with Google Creative Lab. For SESI Lab, his *TimePiece* will combine screens, voices, and sculptural totems into an installation that samples views about the future from a diverse selection of people, in Brazil and elsewhere.
Angélica Dass’s *Humanæ* featured in our 2019 exhibition *Self, Made*, and a new version will appear at SESI Lab. This iterative photo installation matches people’s faces with the Pantone color of their skin, in an ever-growing representation of human diversity and connection. For SESI Lab’s opening, new local portraits will be added—plus blank white squares, inviting visitors to pose for their own photos and be part of this evolving experience.

SESI Lab will also feature the artwork of Feco Hamburger, Guto Lacaz, Todd McLellan, Paulo Nenflidio, and Cássio Vasconcellos.

Global Collaborations:
The Scientific Center, Kuwait

Designing and Developing Exhibits from Lockdown for Kuwait

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we were in the middle of designing and developing more than 70 exhibits for our partners at The Scientific Center, Kuwait (TSCK). Practically overnight, the TSCK team had to transition to a radically transformed work environment and figure out how to continue making progress during lockdown.
Kaitlin McArdle, one of the new exhibit developers on the team, had recently started prototyping an exhibit called Exoplanet Detection. This exhibit is an interactive model that teaches visitors how astronomers use anomalies in the brightness of stars to detect planets in distant solar systems. Visitors can create their own exoplanet systems by arranging wooden balls (representing planets) on plates that rotate around a glowing orb (representing a star). On a nearby monitor, the visitor can see a graph generated with real-time data from their model star system.

Working out of her apartment, and with a little help from her cat Lyra, McArdle assembled a fully functional prototype to demonstrate that this astronomical-scale phenomena could be successfully exhibited on TSCK’s gallery floor. The completed exhibit—built, now, not out of cardboard, but out of Corian, steel, and wood—is sure to be a highlight in Kuwait when the gallery opens next fall.
Our Impact
by the Numbers
3,000+ donors gave to the Exploratorium during the pandemic and continue to support us today!

500* teacher-leaders in the Bay Area used our online professional learning opportunities and resources during COVID closure.

80% of Exploratorium exhibit work was done from home in FY21. We are still here, working hard every day—throughout the pandemic and beyond.

3,000+ educators everywhere were directly served—via workshops, conferences, meetups, mentoring, and more—during COVID closure.

4 massive international and U.S. projects have been underway in Brazil, Kuwait, Singapore, and Nebraska.

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* Approximately
<table>
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<th>Tinkering</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
<td><strong>800</strong>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>After Dark Online Programs</td>
<td>kids served online</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>100,000+</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,500</strong>*</td>
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<td>digital visitors</td>
<td>educators served online</td>
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Social Media Followers

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<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>2.14M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
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<td>Twitter</td>
<td>100.2K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>81K</td>
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Our collection of online Science Snacks offer engaging, hands-on science activities, such as how to convert your cell phone into a portable microscope.

Approximately
# Operations and Expenses: Year-End Estimate

## Total Revenue

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<td>Program Restricted, Endowment, Federal</td>
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<td>$12.5M</td>
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<td>General Operating Support, Special Events</td>
<td>$6.64M</td>
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## Total Expenses

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<td>$4.3M</td>
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<td>Marketing</td>
<td>$1.69M</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
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</table>
Thank You to Our Supporters
Individual Giving

Our thanks to the friends who helped support the Exploratorium with gifts made July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. Their generosity provided much-needed resources to help deepen our impact on science education and interactive learning worldwide.

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Aaron Bastian
and Catherine Foo
The Brahm Family
Linda Branagan and John Sweet
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Visitors gaze into the curved mirrors of Kirsten Berg’s Compound Eye/I.
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The flamenco band Duendes, performing in the Fisher Bay Observatory, provided a rousing finale to our virtual Party at the Piers.
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