Olivewood™
Gardens & Learning Center

2025-2026 IMPACT REPORT



A MESSAGE FROM OLIVEWOOD

We are excited to share our 2025-26 Annual Impact Report, highlighting Olivewood's growing impact, strong partnerships, and continued commitment to our values.

We are proud to work alongside a community deeply committed to health, equitable access to resources, safe and caring spaces, and leading with love and courage. These have been challenging years, marked by threats to safety and sovereignty, funding disruptions, reductions in critical safety-net programs, and growing levels of burnout and fear. And, as we do in times of crisis, the nonprofit sector continues to show up and care for our communities.

Olivewood is a place for learning, connection, and access. **We are also a critical community infrastructure—a third space, an employer, and a model of what's possible when green spaces, nourishing food, and compassionate, creative people come together.** As one community member says, "Olivewood is always vibing." It's not just what we do, but how we do it. **What grows at Olivewood goes far beyond the garden.**

This year, we deepened our **16-year partnership with National School District**, expanded youth learning and parent nutrition education, and **strengthened high school internships** that build life, college, and career readiness. **We celebrated our 700th Kitchenista** graduate and **piloted a Kitchenista Catering Training Program**. We stepped up to **manage the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden**, expanded **food access through our donation-based produce stand**, and **stood alongside community** members to protect National City from a major polluter.

Through a challenging funding environment and shifting community needs, our team continued to adapt, grow, and evolve together. Olivewood is made up of incredible team members, supporters, partners, and participants. **Together, we are creating and sustaining the community we need—rooted in care, committed to justice, celebrating culture, and caring for the earth.**

With gratitude,
The Olivewood Team

OUR MISSION & VALUES

Olivewood's **mission** is to nourish communities and cultivate a deep connection to the environment through nutrition education, sustainable urban agriculture, collective advocacy, and intergenerational leadership.

Olivewood's **values** are: Equity, Community, Health. Integrity, & Transformation

OUR STAFF TEAM

Jacqueline Ante*, *Kitchenista Outreach Coordinator*
Jeni Barajas*, *Director of Youth Programs*
Ellyse Briand*, *Events & Culinary Program Manager*
Patty Corona*, *Director of Kitchenista Engagement & Cooking for Salud*
Angelica Gastelum*, *Communications & Marketing Manager*
Claire Groebner, *Associate Director*
Morgan Harris*, *Nutrition Program Lead*
Sabrina Heimer, *School Garden Specialist*
Cecilia Jordan, *Environmental Education Specialist*
Pablo Kelly, *Garden Support Specialist*
Exavier King, *Youth Program Coordinator*
Monica Lim*, *Kitchenista Program Manager*
Rocina Lizarraga*, *Garden Support Specialist*
Maya Markillie, *School-Based Environmental Education Specialist*
Jen Nation, *Executive Director*
Carlos Olvera, *Social Media Content Creator*
Paola Orjuela*, *Accounting Coordinator*
Isaac Ramos, *Garden Support Specialist*
Joey Reyes, *Community Garden Coordinator*
Birdy Rivera*, *Garden & Nutrition Education Specialist*
Jorge Robledo, *Facilities Manager*
Teddy Routsis, *Volunteer Coordinator*
Miah Tatola, *School-Based Environmental Education Specialist*
Adan Teposte, *Garden Support Specialist*
Leonard Vargas, *Director of Gardens & Facilities*
Jennifer Walker*, *Development Manager*
Alyssa Zurita, *Garden Support Specialist - Tree Care*

OUR FY2026 BOARD

Rita De la Fuente, *Board Chair*
Blanca Meléndrez, *Board Vice Chair*
Angela Elo-Rivera, *Board Secretary*
Krupa Asher, *Board Treasurer*
Sabrina Falquier, *Board Member*
Amelia Porras*, *Board Member*
Marisa Aurora Quiroz, *Board Member*
Garry Rollins, *Board Member*
Nancy Sasaki, *Board Member*

**Kitchenista*

YOUTH AND FAMILY PROGRAMS

FIELD TRIPS

Students learned about plant parts, biodiversity, ecosystems & adaptability, MyPlate, resources, recycling, & composting, pollination & fruit production, eating the rainbow, the digestive system, and more.

590 NSD students engaged in a three-part field trip series







223 Afterschool Lessons using hydroponic gardens & cooking carts

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

This new program provided two 7-week sessions offered at each of the 10 NSD schools. Students reported increases in adventurous eating, consuming fruits/vegetables, enjoying cooking, talking about eating fruits/vegetables with their families, and knowing how to grow plants.

SCHOOL GARDENS



TK - 3rd grade students received four consecutive garden-based learning experiences, building STEAM knowledge and skills in their school gardens.

2,071 students engaged in **396** school-garden lessons



"I love Olivewood Gardens & Learning Center! They are such a great community partner that I can lean on for support."
- Central Elementary Teacher

This year marked 16 years of partnership with National School District (NSD).

Golden Bell Award in the category of Climate Change Innovation from the CA School Board Associations. Our program provides students with meaningful & robust STEAM education.

NSD was awarded the **CA Green Ribbon Schools Award**, a highly respected honor acknowledging the district's work on sustainability. Olivewood's partnership providing environmental science education was a key contributor to this award.



700+ pounds of produce grown in the 10 school gardens & **600** bags of produce distributed to families

YOUTH AND FAMILY PROGRAMS

3,653 Youth & Adults engaged in Olivewood Family Programs



246

youth and adults participated in family-style programming focused on seasonal cooking, healthy eating, and gardening



104

children joined us for a variety of day camps



568

youth and adults participated in hands-on STEAM focused activities with 20 community partners at our annual Day of Play event



179

Chefcitos and Garden Explorers participated in hands-on cooking, adventurous eating, and garden learning



1073

community members walked the family-friendly spooky gardens, spent time at the Dia de los Muertos altar, and grabbed a nutritous fruit at our Halloween Healthy Haunted Garden



163

adults and toddlers explored the garden together in Talls and Smalls



458

students from non-NSD schools visited for experiential garden and nutrition education field trips



HIGH SCHOOL INTERNSHIPS

105
YOUTH LEADERS

YOUTH COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

"Through my time spent here at Olivewood Gardens...I have found learning about food systems, the importance of a healthy diet, and the impact of community involvement very insightful. ***What really drives my inspiration to be part of this program is my appreciation for the welcoming environment Olivewood creates and the opportunity to work alongside likeminded students and individuals who are just as interested in pushing towards a better future.*** *I hope to expand my knowledge, develop more meaningful connections, and become more involved in creating positive change in my community."* - YCLP, Sustainable Urban Ag, and Garden 2 Kitchen Intern







90% of Youth Community Leadership Program interns reported understanding their community issues, food systems, leadership, and civic engagement post-internship.

CULINARY ARTS

100% interns reported feeling MORE confident in preparing a seasonal meal post-internship.







SUSTAINABLE URBAN AGRICULTURE

Through a 20-session hands-on internship, students learned the foundation of urgan agriculture, from propagation to pest management to soil health. **Students planned and facilitated two plant sales, raising over $1300** and gaining additional experience in budgeting, sales, and marketing.

GARDEN 2 KITCHEN

"I learned the role we play in our food system and how important it is to know the privilege of being able to eat three nutritious meals a day. I learned how much hard work it really takes from workers to get produce or meat in a grocery store. ***Being in the garden seeing all the vegetables and fruit has taught me that food should be accessible for all and we should all have the education on knowing how easy it is to garden."*** - Garden 2 Kitchen Intern



INTERNSHIPS & VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

469 VOLUNTEERS & INTERNS CONTRIBUTED 10,000+ HOURS

COMMUNITY SERVICE DAYS

- Community mural installation on our garage in the North Garden designed and led by Zara Murphy, Artist & Founder of Groovy Palletes
- Creek to Bay Clean up in partnership with I Love at Clean San Diego and the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden community
- Seedling Soirée preparation of the Gardens





INTERN PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Interns provide critical support for Olivewood's programs and operations - from Dietetic interns completing their community rotation to Sustainable Urban Agriculture students supporting garden production to Youth Program Interns facilitating garden and nutrition education to Marketing & Resource Generation interns supporting Olivewood's fundraising and events.



Intern projects this year included:

- Farm to Table social media cooking video series
- Recipe development and tasting activities at the produce stand
- Analysis of Olivewood's social media outreach & strategy recommendations



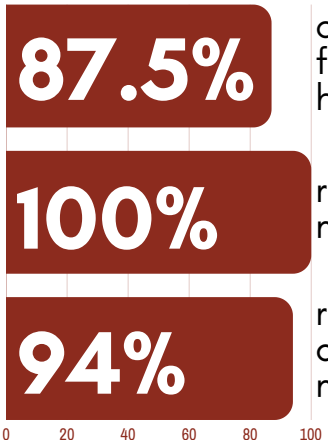
"Olivewood...is peaceful, grounded, and full of kindness. It's one ***of the few places where I can really relax and let my guard down. When I say it's a safe space, I mean that in the truest sense like being around family you actually feel safe with.*** *That's rare, and I don't take it lightly."*
- Josh, Volunteer



COOKING FOR SALUD & KITCHENISTAS

34 GENERATIONS & 54 NEW KITCHENISTAS

After completing Cooking for Salud...



87.5% of participants report feeling happier & healthier

100% report eating healthier & making new friends

94% report feeling fairly or very confident cooking healthy meals





CLUBS & ACTIVITIES

Kitchenista year-round activities included:

- Composting Club
- Knitting Club
- Entrepreneurs Group
- Letters to Juiliet Club
- Wellness Practitioners Group
- Monthly meetings & Kitchenista-to-Kitchenista classes
- Cultivating relationships, public speaking, technology, caregiving, & interpretation workshops
- Cooking with Kitchenistas new video series

KITCHENISTA OUTREACH TEAM



Kitchenistas led nutrition presentations and cooking demonstrations for all 10 National School District school 2x annually, and presented for various community groups.

633 community members educated through Kitchenista-led nutrition presentations

122 Kitchenista personal & professional development activities

70% *of participants shared that after the presentation on "whole grains" they feel more confident to cook and incorporate whole grains in their family meals.*

KITCHENISTA CATERING TRAINING PROGRAM

12 Kitchenistas participated in this pilot, developed with support from the San Diego Food System Alliance Pollinator Program. Through 16 sessions Kitchenistas learned **food safety basics, event logistics and planning, menu development,** and more. **Kitchenistas will complete a 50-hour apprenticeship**, gaining hands-on experience in Olivewood's catering company and will have the **opportunity to continue as catering team staff members.**



ADULT PROGRAMS AND EVENTS



BUILDING COMMUNITY AROUND THE TABLE

Garden Dinner at Dusk Series featuring:
bica - Chefs Charlie Knowles and Manny da Luz, Oddish Winery
Animae & Le Coq - Chefs Tara Monsod & Aidan Owens, Oddish Winery
Valentine's Dinner with Super Cocina
Quixote - Chef Raymundo Mendoza with the Catering Kitchenistas, Valentina Vineyards

Cooking Classes: Local Fish, Mushroom Grilling, Cocineras Tradicionales, Pasta Making







PRIVATE PROGRAMS & CATERING

32 private events including Olivewood catering, facility rentals, and cooking and gardening activities

UPLIFTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Open Gardens: This year our monthly Open Gardens incorporated a Kitchenistas Market, Plant Sale, and Coffee and Pastry Pop-up in partnership with One of One Coffee - now Magnaye Coffee & Goods and local vendors
Holiday Bazaar: Featured 25 small businesses including Kitchenista entrepreneurs and a meal prepared by the Culinary Arts high school interns.



MEAL DISTRIBUTIONS

This new program provided nutritious meals for community in partnership with Mundo Gardens, Rainbow Spaces, and Kitchenistas



SEEDLING SOIRÉE

- 14 food booths and 9 drink booths
- 282 tickets sold
- 90 volunteers
- Over $140k raised to support Olivewood's food & environmental education, access, and advocacy programs

200 community members served through meal distribution program



GROWING AND CULTIVATING

10,550+ pounds of food harvested

DONATION-BASED PRODUCE STAND

Our team works passionately to **cultivate food for our community, sustain robust ecosystems that support native pollinators and plants, build healthy soil, utilize integrative pest management practices to reduce chemicals entering our earth and food system, and steward peaceful and grounded spaces.** As our food system experiences huge challenges with the impacts of climate change, rising costs, loss of agricultural land, and labor disruptions - strengthening our local food system is more important than ever.

1120 community member visits to our weekly produce stand

2070 fruit, vegetable, & herb seedlings distributed at the produce stand



1461 pounds of dried goods, including beans & rice, distributed





PROPERTY IMPROVEMENTS

Improvements this year included:

- Handrails throughout the garden & Noyes House ramp to improve safety & accessibility
- Recreation of front facing pool fence
- Lighting around property
- Shade for Kitchenistas composting
- Ongoing historic home preservation







TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY GARDEN



210

⅛ acre community garden plots & 10 ¼ acre small farm plots

In 2025, Olivewood stepped in to take on the County of San Diego lease to ensure that the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden remained open. This critical resource supports **food access, economic security, mental and physical health, and the local ecosystem.**



FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY

HEALTHY CULTURAS COALITION



After years of advocacy in partnership with community members and organizations including the Environmental Health Coalition and Mundo Gardens, the Coalition effectively organized to get the City of National City to deny the permit for a large polluting business. This is a huge win and represents a new precedent for the City - saying 'no' to more pollution. **In the years to come, we will work collectively to deepen this commitment and build towards a cleaner and healthier community.**









KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are critical to our advocacy work, collective impact, and developing regional strategies and solutions.

- Business for Good
- Environmental Educator Leaders Network members & Stewardship Committee
- Environmental Health Coalition
- HEAL Food Alliance - participated in the School of Political Leadership with partners from Mundo Gardens & UC Cooperative Extension
- KPBS
- Mundo Gardens
- National City STEAM Collaborative
- Paradise Creek Family Garden - partnership with Mundo Gardens, Community HousingWorks, & the City of National City
- Place-Based Learning and Teaching Network
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Reframe & Rise Cohort in partnership with Mundo Gardens
- San Diego Food System Alliance Stewardship Committee Member
- Thrive Outside
- San Diego Solidarity Network - provided fiscal sponsorship
- SUHSD Community Schools CoP
- Teaching Kitchen Collaborative
- 1% for the Planet



OUR COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

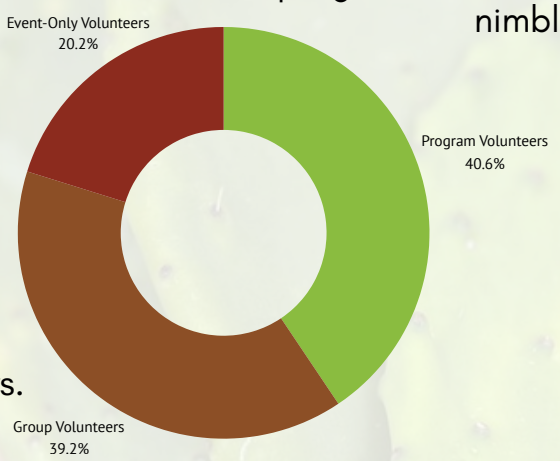
During another year of funding uncertainty - federal grant program dismantling, reductions in funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, changes in philanthropic priorities - our team worked hard to sustain our programs and our community of ongoing supporters showed up. Guided by Community Centric Fundraising Principles we:

- **leaned into partnerships** to strengthen our collective impact
- **utilized ethical storytelling** to ensure we do not perpetuate saviorism
- **had honest conversations** with supporters about the state of the sector
- **advocated for general operating & multi-year funding**
- developed strategies to build awareness of how **we all benefit from the work of social justice**

VOLUNTEERS

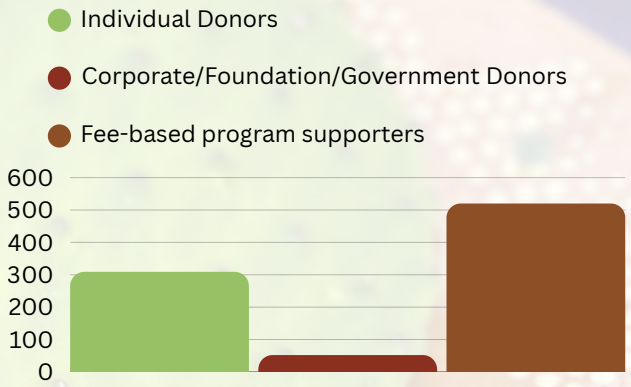
Volunteers provided over 10,000 hours of support this year. Volunteers support Olivewood's garden and facilities maintenance, educational programs, and events.

Volunteer groups this year completed larger scale projects and included San Diego Women's Foundation, student groups from SDSU and PLNU, and Empower Pathways.



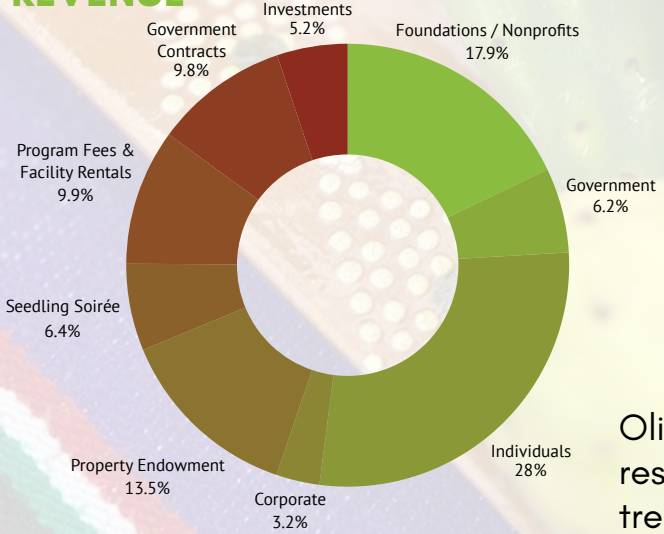
DONORS

Our donors include multi-year and long-term partners, new supporters, foundation, corporate, and government funders and sponsors, and fee-based program participants. Our diverse fundraising mix helps us to be nimble and effective.

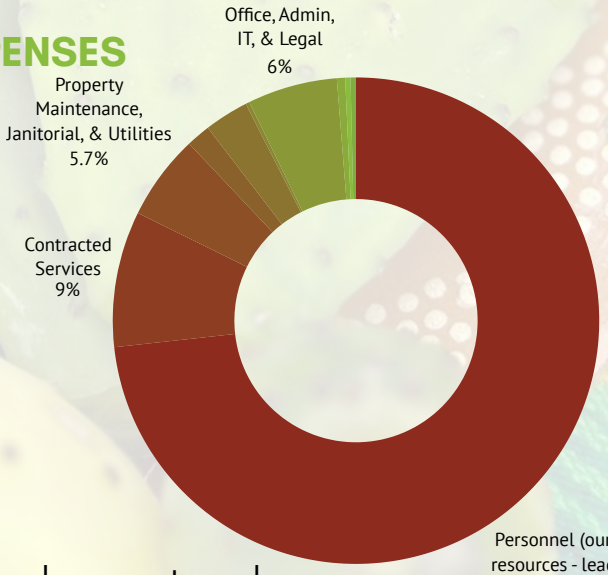


FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

REVENUE



EXPENSES



Annual 990

FY26 990 available in spring 2027

Olivewood supporters share resources of time, talent, and treasure. **Thank you for being a part of our community of support, we hope to continue growing and building together!**

LOOKING AHEAD

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

We collaborate with a variety of organizations that **work together to build a more just, sustainable, and resilient society.** We will deepen these partnerships including with National School District – seeking to create sustained impact for students and families, the County of San Diego and members of the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden – ensuring this space meets community needs through long-term management; and with Mundo Gardens, Environmental Health Coalition, and the National City Healthy Culturas Coalition – advocating for food and environmental justice.

COMMERCIAL KITCHEN

We will break ground on our new commercial kitchen. This **multi-purpose space will provide opportunities for revenue growth and small business development.** The Olivewood Catering business, an employment social enterprise, will use this space for Kitchenista training and employment, and catering services. As we grow into the kitchen, we will be able to offer a low-cost facility for small food businesses, food business incubation, and other activities such as a pop-up cafe, value-added products, events, and more.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT

The FY2027 year we passed an ambitious budget with a commitment to improving staff salaries. This means we enter the year with an anticipated deficit and resolve to work strategically to close this gap in the next couple of years. Our team consists of highly qualified individuals with lived experience and education in a range of critical areas including strategic planning, program development and facilitation, farm and facilities management, community building, fundraising, and more. **Ensuring our team is cared for with competitive benefits, as well as professional development are critical to Olivewood's long-term impact and success.**

THANK YOU

BUILD COMMUNITY WITH US

Cultivate: Stay up-to-date on all things Olivewood through social media and our e-newsletter!
Grow: Share wth others about Olivewood and invite them to visit with you!
Harvest: Join us for a program or event!
Nurture: Share your time, talent and/or treasure!

DONATE TODAY

https://olivewoodgardens.org/ways-to-give/donate/

STAY CONNECTED

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UPCOMING EVENTS

olivewoodgardens.org/upcoming-events





