BUILDING A FUTURE FOR THE OCEAN
The Year in Review

Monterey County boasts superb natural beauty and many inspiring, charming and historical places to visit. As one of the world’s top vacation spots, people have long been drawn to our area.

The Aquarium’s attendance remained on projection with a total of 1.9 million visitors, despite the closure of California’s Highway 1 until July, and the perception that large wildfires in northern and southern California were impacting the whole state.

We celebrated achievements in our key program areas of live exhibits, education and ocean conservation and research:

• We completed major construction on our new Bechtel Family Center for Ocean Education and Leadership – allowing hands-on experiences for all visiting school groups and doubling the number of teens and teachers we serve.

• We brought ocean issues to the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, and committed to the Aquarium reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2025.

• We partnered with Red Lobster – the world’s largest seafood restaurant company – to make better purchasing choices for a healthier ocean.
THE YEAR IN REVIEW

• Our new Juli Plant Grainger Animal Care Center lets us learn more about and do more for ocean animals.
• We’re unraveling the mysteries of the White Shark Café, working with the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute and other partners.
• Our Underwater Explorers surface scuba program for children celebrated 40,000 participants and 17 years of inspiration.
• We supported California’s “Straws On Request” bill, reducing a common source of ocean plastic pollution.
• To raise awareness of the plastic pollution issue, we installed an 82-foot-long blue whale made entirely out of recycled plastic waste on Crissy Field in San Francisco. The colorful creature educated visitors to the fact that every nine minutes, plastic trash weighing as much as Earth’s largest animal (about 300,000 pounds) ends up in the ocean.

We’re proud to report on these achievements and the many ways we’re working together with our community. Here are key facts and trends from our 2018 market research data and social media metrics that we hope you can use.

Thank you to our community partners that make so much of what we do possible.
Attendance, Demographics & Visitation Information

Our national, digital search-based advertising campaign has helped us successfully increase visitation from people with incomes of $300,000 or more. At the same time, we want to ensure that the Aquarium is accessible for all audiences. Our robust affordable access programs have allowed us to maintain strong attendance by visitors with incomes of $50,000 or less. Each year, we offer free admission to more than 90,000 people who wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford to visit.
We’re successfully attracting young people.

More than 55% of visitors were between the ages of 18 and 34.
**Guest Satisfaction**

The Aquarium usually scores high on guest satisfaction surveys. Our data suggest that visitors to the Aquarium experience a significantly higher (nearly double) number of unscheduled interactions with staff and volunteers than do visitors to other U.S. aquariums. Visitors tend to rate places where they have these “personal facilitated experiences” higher in perceived value and satisfaction, and say they contribute to a more meaningful overall experience.

Our national, digital search-based advertising campaign* achieved these results in Monterey County:

- 254K room nights
- $59 million spent on lodging
- $31 million spent on retail
- $33 million spent on food and beverage
- $123 million overall tourism dollars
- $11.5 million in tax revenues (sales tax and TOT)

*Launched in 2011; runs year-round.
Where are they coming from?

9% Monterey County
31% San Francisco Bay Area
29% Other California
32% Other United States

Percent of adult domestic visitors to the Monterey Bay Aquarium
Hispanic Visitation

In 2018, 26 percent of all adult California guests were Hispanic; 40 percent were white non-Hispanic; 16 percent were Asian; 18 percent were other. Of all adult guests, 54 percent were white non-Hispanic; 20 percent were Hispanic; 11 percent were Asian; 15 percent were other.

We continue to successfully attract a diverse audience and are making progress toward our goal of mirroring the state of California’s ethnic makeup.
Social Media Trends and Metrics

Between our stunning location and an array of incredible animals, we’re fortunate to have a deep supply of great visual stories to share on social media. We continue to find that a “gift-giving” mindset works well to generate social media engagement — we create beautiful things for our followers to enjoy on a daily basis. This strategy builds strong affinity and trust with our audiences, who then respond when we strategically ask them to take action.
OUR OUTREACH

Sharing the Monterey experience near and far

What resonated most with our followers in 2018 was sharing images and video of our location and exhibits, fun and fascinating facts about animals and increasingly, messages combining those visuals with ocean conservation topics. Live video streams on Periscope, Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube also brought the Monterey experience to audiences near and far, and our metrics show that, for most videos, just as many people view the recorded video as participate in the live sessions.
Social Care Is Crucial

Social media was the top information source for our audiences in planning their visit to the Aquarium, followed by accessing our website on their mobile devices and then on desktop computers. In contrast, visitors were the least likely to have used direct mail or periodicals and newspapers to get information for their visit.

Social care – responding to comments and questions on our feeds – continued to be a critical part of our commitment to customer service. New data shows that the public’s engagement with us on our social media channels before visiting may improve the quality of their onsite experience, as those guests reported higher ratings in key categories, from parking to overall satisfaction.
Use Across Income and Age

People from all economic backgrounds followed and engaged with us on social media. Our visitor data showed that 59 percent of those with a household income of less than $25,000 and 52 percent with incomes between $25,000 and $35,000 engaged with us on social media.

While all age groups engage with us on social media, the largest percentages are 18 to 44 years old. But nearly 30 percent of those 75 and older also engage with us. The Aquarium’s followers on Facebook skew older, our Instagram fans are largely millennials, and Tumblr provides the largest percentage of young people of any platform we participate in.

Social media extends our reach

Social media enables us to engage with audiences near and far, allowing us to connect with people regardless of their proximity to the Aquarium. Interestingly, the further away from the Aquarium you go, the more people are using social media to connect with us.
Community Impacts at a Glance

We’re proud to collaborate with and support our local community.

We employed 575 people, with a payroll of $34 million.

We admitted 89K people in our community free of charge.

122,301 students, teachers and chaperones visited on free field trips.

38% of our staff used alternative transportation to get to work.
Education

Education for schoolchildren is a top priority. On average, 79,000 students participate in field trips each year – 30 percent from Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties.

We completed major construction on our Bechtel Family Center for Ocean Education and Leadership, and are on track to welcome students starting in summer 2019. The new center will allow us to provide our in-depth programs to most visiting school groups, double the number of teens participating in multi-year leadership training programs, and double the number of teachers receiving professional development – all free of charge.

Since 1984, more than 2.5 million students have visited for free.
Funding Local Conservation Projects

Aquarium employees, in partnership with employees from the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, make voluntary payroll donations to the Employee Conservation Action Fund, which supports local conservation projects focused on native species and terrestrial habitats that benefit our regional watersheds.

In 2018, we granted about $10,500 to five projects, including the Coastal Watershed Council to continue its San Lorenzo River Health Days, the Big Sur Land Trust for eucalyptus removal and native habitat restoration on Glen Deven Ranch and Groundswell Coastal Ecology for coastal habitat enhancement at Seabright Beach.

Supporting Local, Sustainable Fisheries

The Aquarium and other local partners collaborated with the Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust to inaugurate Get Hooked Restaurant Week by featuring sustainably caught groundfish on the menus of 15 restaurants in Monterey.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation gave us a grant to work with commercial fishermen to test technology that will keep abundant, deep-water species alive for delivery to live fish markets. The Aquarium is collaborating with the Trust to assess the market viability of these species in this particular trade.
Reducing Our Carbon Footprint

To combat climate change and reduce its harmful effects on the ocean, the Aquarium is working to cut carbon from our operations.

In 2017, we supported the creation of Monterey Bay Community Power (MBCP) to accelerate bringing renewable energy to our region. In March 2018, the Aquarium’s electricity became carbon-free when MBCP began providing electricity to businesses in the region. Then we aimed even higher, and championed the creation of a new premium service: MB Prime, which sources electricity exclusively from wind and solar sources – avoiding the environmental impacts of hydroelectric energy. The Aquarium became the first commercial customer to enroll.

At Gov. Jerry Brown’s Global Climate Action Summit in September, we made a public commitment to achieve net-zero carbon emissions and transition 100 percent of our vehicle fleet to renewable power by 2025.

Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

Scientists estimate that around 9 million tons of plastic makes its way from land to sea every year. That’s like dumping a garbage truck full of plastic into the ocean every minute. As that plastic pollution builds up – and breaks up – it harms marine wildlife from turtles to seabirds.

We commend the cities of Carmel and Monterey for leading the way to reduce unnecessary disposable plastic. In December 2018, with the Aquarium’s support, Monterey passed an ordinance prohibiting disposable plastic utensils, coffee cup lids and take-out containers. Monterey’s policy also eliminates plastic straws, with an important exemption for those who need one as an assistive technology they depend on to eat and drink. That’s why we reached out to advocates of people with disabilities, and worked together to shape an inclusive straw policy for Monterey and provide a model for other jurisdictions.
Ocean Heroes

In 2018, we launched the Ocean Heroes campaign to recognize local leaders who are acting on behalf of our mission of ocean conservation. Everyday, people are making extraordinary efforts to protect Monterey Bay and they deserve our thanks!

Ocean Heroes below left to right: Shelby O’Neil, San Juan Bautista, high school student; the Gonzalez Youth Council, Gonzalez; Nicole Tiffany, Carmel, 5th grade teacher; the City of Pacific Grove municipal administrators.

NAME | Soerke Peters
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HQ | Carmel, CA
BY DAY | Chef & Restaurateur
BY NIGHT | Protecting the environment, one sustainable meal at a time

LEARN MORE AT MONTEREYBAYAQUARIUM.ORG/HEROES

TOGETHER, WE'RE INSPIRING CONSERVATION OF THE OCEAN
For More Information
The Monterey Bay Aquarium conducts ongoing market research to better understand how we can improve the experience for our visitors, to inform our marketing and communications strategies, and to identify the Aquarium’s economic and social contributions to the region.

We are happy to share our audience research data when appropriate, particularly with our partners in the hospitality industry, and the community at large.

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