



## **OBFS Annual Report 2024**

**Report developed by Beth Norman: (OBFS Secretary), September 2025**

**Edited by Jessica Malisch (OBFS Vice President)**

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# Letter from the President

The Organization of Biological Field Stations (OBFS) finished 2024 strong financially and reached several key strategic goals. Using the the 2021-2026 OBFS Strategic Plan: *Adapting to a Changing Climate and Supporting Resilient Stations Today and Tomorrow* as a guide, OBFS leadership prioritized key initiatives and hit several milestones:

## **Strategic Plan Priority Area 1: Collaborations**

- Initiated a new partnership with [the Climate Toolkit](#)
- Initiated a new partnership with the [Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation](#) to offer a new grant: The OBFS-Maxwell/Hanrahan Research Experience Grant
- Maintained and expanded our relationship with the American Institute of Biological Sciences by supported Congressional Visit Days and contributing monies for stations to host a government representative visit (which also helps with Priority Area 4: Raising Awareness and Advocacy)

## **Strategic Plan Priority Area 2: Human Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

- Instead of one award, the IDEA+ committee granted two to recognize diversity achievements within a field station community, as well as with the local community
- We began offering quarterly, bilingual (Spanish - English) Virtual Cafés to OBFS members as well as to the general public
- Started a Latin America Region WhatsApp group (OLA! OBFS Latin America Region) to share region-specific events and opportunities

## **Strategic Plan Priority Area 3: Membership Support, Recruitment, and Retention**

- Launched a new, member-oriented website (<http://www.obfs.org>)
- Hired a Website Coordinator, the organization's first part-time employee
- Developed an OBFS Annual Meeting Registration process through the new website

## **Strategic Plan Priority Area 4: Raising Awareness and Advocacy**

- [Created a recommendations guide](#) to help field stations become more visible to the academic community as well as the general public
- Hired an intern to compile and organize all OBFS legacy documents and photos, as well as write a summary of the organization's history and highlight accomplishments (this was presented to membership at the 2024 annual meeting)
- Expanded our presence on Instagram and with the [OBFS YouTube Channel](#) (where all Virtual Cafés can be seen)

## **Strategic Plan Priority Area 5: Governance and Sustainability**

- Updated the Bylaws
- Created a voting form template for voting online on issues between board meetings
- Created a schedule for updating the Policies and Procedures document

None of these accomplishments would be possible without the dedication of volunteer committee leaders and members. In the next year we plan to continue implementing the strategic plan, grow our membership, and expand our programming. It is an honor to be a part of this community.

Respectfully, Rhonda Struminger, OBFS President

# 2024 OBFS Board of Directors

<b>President</b>	Rhonda Struminger	<b>Annual Meeting Committee Chair</b>	Tom Bansak
<b>Past President</b>	Lara Roketenetz	<b>Membership Committee Co-Chairs</b>	Lara Roketenetz Megan Napoli
<b>Vice President</b>	Skip Van Bloem	<b>Development Committee Co-Chairs</b>	Brian Kloepel Sarah Oktay
<b>Treasurer</b>	Paul Wetzel	<b>Governance and Sustainability Chair</b>	Shane Waddell
<b>Secretary</b>	Beth Norman	<b>IDEA+ Co-Chairs</b>	Phoebe Jekielek Tori McDermott
<b>Member at Large</b>	Sonia Nobrega	<b>International Committee Chair</b>	David Maneli
<b>Member at Large</b>	Megan Napoli	<b>Outreach and Communications Committee Chair</b>	Conner Philson
<b>Early Career Member at Large</b>	Sofia Rodriguez	<b>Collaborations Committee Chair</b>	Itchung Cheung
<b>Editor</b>	Stacy McNulty	<b>AIBS Liaison</b>	Paul Foster
<b>Network Coordinator</b>	Sarah Oktay	<b>Historian</b>	Mary Hufty

## Committee Reports

### 2024 Annual Meeting Committee Report – Chair: Skip Van Bloem

The 2024 OBFS Annual Meeting was jointly hosted by the Clemson Baruch Institute of Coastal Ecology & Forest Science & University of South Carolina Baruch Institute for Marine & Coastal Sciences, Pawley's Island, South Carolina USA. Many thanks to the hosting staff and the planning committee. The meeting included 134 in-person attendees and 18 virtual attendees. The theme was *"Rising Tides and Winds of Change: A New Generation for Field Stations"*.

Throughout the planning process, the committee focused on building a strong foundation of documentation to facilitate planning future meetings.

The 2024 meeting debuted several new features including registration through the OBFS website, workshops held before and after the meeting, a QR code for auction items, and a November date, which was ideal for its southeast USA location.

**OBFS award recipients honored at the 2024 Annual Meeting:**

- OBFS Award for Distinguished Service to Field Science: **Phillippe Cohen**
- Advancing Equity Award: **Toolik Field Station**
- IDEA+ Innovation Advancing Equity and Community Connections: **Baruch Marine Field Laboratory**
- Mary Hufty Local Hero Award: **Amy Armstrong**

**Membership Committee Report** – Co-chairs: Lara Roketenetz and Megan Napoli

The Membership Committee has new co-chairs focused on member recruitment and retention. The committee will discuss membership incentives and benefits, ramp up the Membership page on the new website, and will explore developing regional group meetings.

This committee will take over management of the mini-grant program from the Governance Committee. This includes promoting the award, receiving and reviewing applications, and awarding funds.

The committee is also exploring OBFS swag to offer at meetings and other venues.

**Development Committee Report** – Co-Chairs: Brian Kloepel and Sarah Oktay

The Development Committee is a collaborative committee that is looking for more members to help us build our group of external field station friends.

The committee, with support from the OBFS Board and many member stations, have hosted friend- and fund-raising events in San Francisco, Nantucket, New York, a sail boat ride on Lake Michigan, and hosted an event in Georgetown, SC following the 2024 Annual Meeting with approximately 30 attendees.

The committee meets monthly via Zoom on the first Wednesday afternoon of the month. We recognize and award exemplary OBFS members and friends of OBFS who have gone above and beyond to spread our positive field station impact and to increase our OBFS resources.

**Governance and Sustainability Committee Report** – Chair: Shane Waddell

The Governance and Sustainability Committee's role is to provide efficient operational procedures and documentation to support sound governance and transparency. The Committee supports organizational leadership in review of Bylaws and the development of organizational policies and procedures. The Committee develops and reviews internal documents, assists with

new Board member onboarding, oversees nominations for elected positions, and acts as parliamentarian during Board Meetings.

During 2024, the Governance Committee revised the Bylaws, updated the Policies and Procedures, including establishing policies on spending limits of Committees and the Board Members, it managed the OBFS mini-grants, and it began to revise the Code of Conduct.

Moving forward, the Governance Committee will continue to keep OBFS in compliance with its bylaws, policies, and procedures; it plans to integrate an updated Code of Conduct; it will work with other committees towards their sustainability goals; and it will begin scoping the next strategic planning process.

The committee awarded a mini grant to UC Merced to fund the 1st Cliff Ecology Conference at Yosemite Field Station.

#### **IDEA+ Committee Report – Co-Chairs: Phoebe Jekielek and Tori McDermott**

The OBFS IDEA+ committee continued to work to implement and meet the goals set forth by the strategic plan. The committee recruited new members and completed several activities in 2024.

*Advancing Equity Award* - The committee revised the award rubric based on feedback from the 2023 round of Advancing Equity Award review and developed a new submission platform to streamline the process for applicants and the award coordinator. The 2024 Advancing Equity Award was awarded to Toolik Field Station. The committee also received board approval for a standing second award to be given if the Advancing Equity Award review committee would like to award a second award when completing Advancing Equity Award reviews. In 2024, the committee awarded the “IDEA+ Innovation Advancing Equity and Community Connections along with a \$500 honorarium to Baruch Marine Field Laboratory.

*Annual Meeting* - Members of the IDEA+ committee presented a variety of concurrent sessions at the annual meeting. The committee also made donations after the annual meeting to two local communities: The Waccamaw Indian People and the Gullah Museum of Georgetown.

*Other products* - The committee continued submitting IDEA+ Spotlights in the quarterly newsletter and explored the idea of starting affinity groups with OBFS members. Members of the committee started developing an NSF BIO-LEAPS grant to be submitted in the upcoming award cycle

*Ongoing and Upcoming Tasks* - The committee is pursuing several other initiatives, including reviewing OBFS materials (policies, outreach, marketing, and communications, etc.) for inclusive language and practices with input from a diverse group including individuals from underrepresented groups, starting a running resource list BMPs on DEIJ initiatives, developing an OBFS statement on DEIJ and code of ethics for all occasions (Governance Committee

completed this task with a Code of Conduct), exploring strategies to create an endowment within OBFS to support DEIJ, and proposing the “gratitude project” to showcase the value, importance, and history of field stations and marine laboratories aimed at a variety of potential audiences (e.g., students, administrators, funders, etc.).

**International Committee Report** – Chair: David Maneli

The International Committee met on the first Friday of every month, with a pause during the summer field season.

In 2024, The International Committee hosted three (3) Virtual Cafés. A recording of each is available at the OBFS YouTube Channel (click on the links below to access the videos):

[\*\*April 2- Virtual Café - Role of field stations in conservation efforts\*\*](#)

[\*\*May 6- Virtual Café: Fire Management at Field Stations\*\*](#)

[\*\*September 17- Virtual Café: el papel de las estaciones de campo y el esfuerzo científico – Virtual Café: The Role of Field Stations in Scientific Research\*\*](#)

The Matching Program is underway with 4 active groups: Green, Yellow, Blue and Brown groups.

Green Group (Canada, France, USA) — Working to communicate field station activities to the public through social media initiatives that focus on climate change and cultural history, including Indigenous knowledge.

Yellow Group (Belgium, Canada, Peru) — Focusing on sharing experiences and developing new projects to boost the impact of their work studying and protecting biodiversity and natural areas across the globe.

Blue Group (Barbados, Mexico, USA) — Developing, evaluating, and implementing engaging biomimicry outreach across habitats and cultures to promote scientific curiosity and literacy, conservation, and nature-inspired innovation.

Brown Group (USA, Brazil, and France) — This group initially focused on data sharing. Due to group attrition, the two remaining groups from Iowa Lakeside Laboratory Regents Resource Center & the University of Iowa Geographical & Sustainability Sciences and University of Texas Austin Department of Integrative Biology’s Brackenridge Field Laboratory, developed resources for helping stations code in R. Their work culminated in a 2024 workshop session: [Developing Workflows for Field Station Data Using R and GIS Tools](#).

Gold Group (Tanzania, Cameroon, and Kenya) — this group formed to explore ways to bring African stations together.

## **Outreach and Communications Committee Report – Chair: Conner Philson**

The O&C Committee focused on several initiatives in 2024:

*Newsletter* - the committee works with the Editor to solicit material for the OBFS newsletter.

*FSML recognition* - In recognition that keeping track of and reporting on research output from FSMLs is important but difficult, OBFS has developed some prose for FSMLs to use to require users to recognize your FSML in their papers by (1) claiming the FSML as an affiliation or by mentioning the FSML in the methods or acknowledgements section or (2) by requiring the user to report directly to your FSML when a publication comes out. If communicated clearly and accessibly, this will increase FSML visibility and track research output. However, scientist's incentive structures aren't necessarily reporting to FSMLs. Therefore, OBFS has been contacting journals asking that they require FSMLs to be recognized in the methods or acknowledgements section of papers. We've emailed 52 journals in the last 3 weeks and have already had great success in getting individual journals and entire publishing portfolios to amend their editorial policies to require authors to recognize the FSMLs where research was conducted or whose data/resources were used. Two dozen journals and publishers are actively considering our request and we still have 50+ journals to contact.

*NSF-BIO LEAPS* - OBFS is working on a proposal aimed at fostering belongingness at FSMLs for both users and managers to be submitted to the NSF Leading Cultural Change Through Professional Societies of Biology program (BIO-LEAPS). To do so we've partnered with some great organizations to help provide specialized training for FSML managers and users to facilitate safety, cultural awareness, and other elements that underpin belongingness. The writing process is underway and the proposal will be submitted by the June 2025 deadline.

*Local, state, and federal advocacy* - Building off of the specific mention of FSMLs in the CHIPS and Science Act, OBFS continues to sponsor our members participating in the AIBS Congressional Visit Days where we pay for a couple of our members to visit Washington DC and talk to lawmakers and their staff every April. Additionally, this year OBFS sponsored the AIBS District Visit Program in which AIBS helped FSMLs host their State and US Representatives at their station to highlight the importance of FSMLs for American science, conservation, education, and global competitiveness. These visits happen in the Fall Recess. Participants for both programs are recruited via the OBFS listserv. Finally, the FSML Advocacy Toolkit is available via the website to help FSMLs engage with local, state, and federal policy makers.

## **Collaborations Committee Report – Chair: Itchung Cheung**

The Collaborations Committee focused on several initiatives in 2024:

*Station Exchange Program (SXP)* – This program has had 12 applicants since 2022, with 6 awardees in 2024, all of which were reciprocal exchanges. These include Art Benavidez (Sevilleta Field Station) and Marie Stone (UCO Selman Living Lab), Katie Harper (Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory) and Mélissa Filion (Gault Nature Reserve), and Katie Lawn (Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory) and Isabelle Pouliot (Gault Nature Reserve). The program has an updated online application, new post-exchange reporting guidelines, and a list of applicants and hosts interested in future exchanges.

*American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS)* – OBFS supported two members Brian Kloeppe & Sarah Oktay to attend the AIBS Congressional Visits Day.

*The Virtual Field NSF RCN-UBE* - The program continues to highlight field stations and marine labs, field experiences, and research. The program has included 10 FMSL participants, including 3 supported by OBFS: Paul Foster (Bijagual Ecological Reserve), Haley Dunleavy, (Toolik Field Station), and Sheena Parsons (Kansas Biological Survey/Field Station).

## Financials

The general membership is asked to vote on the proposed 2024 budget and the following is a summary narrative of that proposed budget.

Turning first to revenues, the proposed 2024 revenues—dues, donations, dividends, and auction proceeds—are conservatively estimated to be \$56,000, with an operating budget of \$39,500. Station and individual memberships are expected to grow slightly, especially from new international members. Note that there is a new revenue line, “Endowment Fund/Lifetime Membership”. The OBFS Board implemented a life-time membership category. Members may contribute \$1,000 and become a life-time member of the OBFS.

The OBFS Board, with recommendations of the OBFS Investment Committee, also established an OBFS Endowment. Life-time memberships, estate contributions, and specified donations will go into the endowment. The Board voted to move \$50,000 from the Cash Money Market Fund to the OBFS Endowment as a base investment for the Endowment. The Endowment investment structure will be completed in 2024. Annual earnings from the OBFS Endowment are not expected for at least five years.

Traditional expense categories (bank & transaction fees, website management, administration, annual meeting, contingency, etc.) increased about \$15,000 from 2022 levels. This increase can be traced back to OBFS getting its own ZOOM account, increased travel reimbursements associated with the annual meeting and Congressional Visits Day (CVD) travel. It is unclear what the maintenance costs of the new website will be, but \$8,000 was budgeted for 2024.

This is the *third* year that the OBFS Board proposes to spend funds on Strategic Plan initiatives, a 5-year plan whose projects are expected to be funded internally by OBFS and through outside grants. Many new initiatives were started over the last two years.

The costliest initiatives in 2024 include the OBFS website redesign (\$25,000; the website is nearly complete, the final contract payment (\$18,333) will be made in 2024), an International Committee program of matching two stations with each other to encourage idea and training exchange (\$36,441; all money carried over from past two years), and the OBFS mini-grants program (\$20,000). The inclusion of the Strategic Plan initiatives in the proposed 2024 budget creates an estimated operating cost of \$144,000 with a budget deficit of \$104,241. These expenses were anticipated by the Board and will be financed with donations and mutual fund investment earnings from the past 12 years.

OBFS assets in September 2023 totaled \$686,412. About 59% of these assets are invested in mutual fund instruments. Investments are anticipated to change in 2024 as the Endowment Fund is established and more cash funds are invested into stocks.

Please send any budget questions to Paul Wetzel [pwetzel@smith.edu; 413.268.3115], I am happy to answer them.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul R. Wetzel, Treasurer

OBFS Proposed 2024 Budget									
General Budget Categories	Fiscal Year = Calendar Year starting 1 January								
	2017-18 Budget Actuals	2018-19 Budget Actuals	2019 Sept.- Dec. Budget Actuals	2020 Budget Actuals	2021 Budget Actuals	2022 Budget Actuals	2023 Year to Date (September) Total	2024 Proposed Budget	Notes
<b>I. Income</b>									
Membership dues	33,450	42,495	21,550	37,750	37,200	36,450	23,500	35,000	Slightly less than mean 2020-2022
Investment dividends, capital gains, and interest	4,990	5,999	3,575	4,864	3,393	5,947	9,398	6,000	Money market interest higher
Auction (revenue goes to Board Restricted Fund)	10,566	11,449	1,352	8,890	8,145	13,184	0	10,500	Mean of last 10 years
Endowment Fund/Lifetime Membership	--	--	--	--	--	--	1,000	2,000	Estimate--no history
Development event revenue	0	(1,045)	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Donations	4,200	0	1,200	2,714	2,260	4,250	200	2,500	Very stable amount over years
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>53,205</b>	<b>58,898</b>	<b>27,677</b>	<b>54,218</b>	<b>50,998</b>	<b>59,831</b>	<b>34,098</b>	<b>56,000</b>	
<b>Total Operating Income</b>	<b>37,718</b>	<b>41,496</b>	<b>22,750</b>	<b>40,464</b>	<b>39,460</b>	<b>40,700</b>	<b>24,700</b>	<b>39,500</b>	
<b>II. Expenses</b>									
Other Organization Membership Dues	5,400	0	0	2,700	2,700	2,700	3,450	3,500	AIBS Dues; Congressional Visits Day Contribution
Bank and transaction expenses	2,176	2,155	446	2,323	2,296	1,723	1,705	2,300	
Travel (CVD, Awards, AIBS collaborations, Board travel to annual mtng, etc.)	10,412	13,841	0	1,602	1,630	4,325	7,882	8,000	AIBS Boot Camp (3 participants), CVD
Administration (ZOOM, Postage, etc.)	317	403	116	546	552	2,928	300	3,000	Mostly ZOOM expenses
Communications & Outreach (ESA Booth, newsletter, Survey Monkey, Virtual Field, etc.)	0	5,650		3,466	3,166	1,467	3,000	3,500	Stable amount
Website and data management	5,625	5,540	1,806	9,231	4,862	8,419	3,574	8,000	New website fees will decline, but pay a website caretaker
Annual Meeting (travel, awards, expenses, & contingency)	3,846	259	3,989	9,773	8,256	9,823	637	14,500	Travel Reimbursement for 2024 mtng
Contingency	-		0	0	0	0	0	3,000	
Committee & Organizational Projects	0	5,326	0	0	0	0	0	0	Old category--replaced by strategic plan categories
<i>Strategic Plan--Year 3</i>									
Collaborations Committee -- professional development // Station exchange & Virtual Field Research Coordination Programs					6,500	4,941	5,000		Virtual Field Equipment; Station Exchange for two people
Development Committee					2,706	0	500		
Governance Committee -- New board member orientation					0	3,600	20,000		Mini grants program
IDEA+ Committee -- Speaker fees for annual meeting and a workshop					0	0	6,000		
International Committee -- Station matching program expenses					3,559	1,215	36,441		Station matching program; workshops/virtual mtng. All funds encumbered from previous years.
Member Support/Services Committee -- Website overhaul					18,333	21,433	25,000		Final website build payments
Outreach & Communications Strategic Plan Initiatives					0	300	2,000		Translation services
<b>Operating Expense Total</b>	<b>27,776</b>	<b>33,175</b>	<b>6,357</b>	<b>29,640</b>	<b>23,462</b>	<b>62,483</b>	<b>52,037</b>	<b>143,741</b>	
<b>Expense Variance (Operating Income-Expenses)</b>	<b>9,942</b>	<b>8,321</b>	<b>16,393</b>	<b>10,824</b>	<b>15,998</b>	<b>(21,783)</b>	<b>(27,337)</b>	<b>(104,241)</b>	
<b>III. Assets</b>									
Vanguard Social Investment Fund	364,518	391,266	435,897	277,202	365,794	286,112	356,732		
Vanguard Federal Money Mkt Fund	3,253	3,321	3,346	235,283	235,307	238,860	196,608		
Vanguard US Corp Bond Fund (Edmt)	-	-	-	-	-	-	50,408		
Checking & Savings (UMASS Five College FCU)	80,019	87,181	91,698	118,615	136,665	118,468	82,665		
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>447,790</b>	<b>481,767</b>	<b>530,941</b>	<b>631,100</b>	<b>737,766</b>	<b>643,440</b>	<b>\$ 686,412</b>		
Amount of money invested into Vanguard Fund									
							6,400		

# Looking Ahead – 2025

Newly elected Board members (terms start January 2025) and newly appointed Committee Chairs

<b>Vice President</b>	Jessica Malisch	<b>Annual Meeting Co-Chairs</b>	Brett Biebuyck Hannah Webber
<b>Treasurer</b>	Paul Wetzel	<b>IDEA+ Committee Chair:</b>	Stefanie Whitmire
<b>Member at Large</b>	Sheena Parsons		

The 2025 OBFS Annual Meeting will be held at Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory in Gothic Colorado USA (<https://www.rmbi.org/>)

