



TELLURIDE
ACADEMY

2026 Annual Report

*Connecting youth with nature through outdoor adventure,
creativity, and environmental stewardship.*



RESILIENCE
CURIOSITY
RESPONSIBILITY
CONNECTION

Letter from the Executive Director

Summer 2026 asked us to live every one of our values, and our team did.

This year we served 691 kids, and over our ten-week summer season, campers enrolled for 1,162 camper weeks. We did it through weeks of wildfire smoke and a July flash flood that pushed us out of our headquarters mid-season. When the water came through the high school, our staff, a board member, and TA families showed up to haul gear out by hand. By the next morning we had a new home, and we never had a gap in programming.

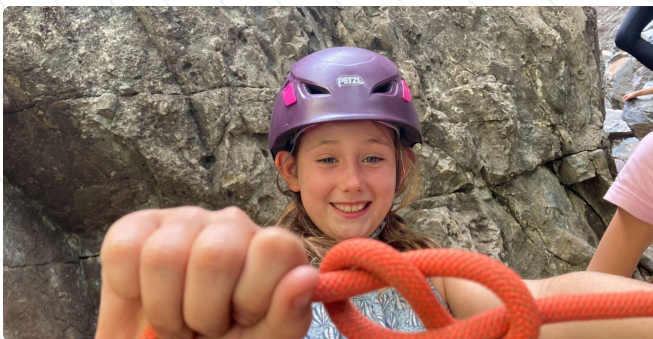
Access stayed at the center of the work. We awarded \$268,285 in tuition assistance to 201 kids. Sixteen students joined us on Wendy Brooks Memorial Scholarships and two on Chason P. Russell Memorial Scholarships, carrying our founder's vision into another generation.

We also started something new. With a planning grant from the American Camp Association's Character at Camp initiative, we developed and piloted character development strategies, systems, and metrics, with a focus on confidence, resilience, and responsibility. Then we trained our staff to develop it, model it, and look for it, and our instructors' notes from the field show it working.

None of this happens without people. Fifty-six summer staff, 18 of them former campers. Partner schools that gave us a roof. Donors and sponsors who believe a kid on a trail is a kid growing up well.

Thank you for walking this trail with us.

Jason Merritt
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





THE YEAR BY THE NUMBERS

2026 at a glance

691

Kids served this year

1,162

Summer camper weeks over a ten-week season

46

Summers on the trail since 1981

\$268,285

Tuition assistance awarded to 201 kids

~19%

Of tuition, against our 20% goal

16 + 2

Wendy Brooks and Chason P. Russell Memorial Scholarships

56

Summer seasonal staff

18

Staff who are former TA campers

25

Staff returning from last year

Access for every kid

We gave \$268,285 in tuition assistance to 201 kids this year, about 19% of tuition against our goal of 20%.

~19% of tuition

Goal: 20%



Tuition assistance as a share of summer tuition

We reached further into our region, too. Dedicated outreach, including a bilingual enrollment event, supported 34 Latinx students and 22 kids from the West End.

34

Latinx students supported through outreach

22

Kids in West End based programs



Honoring the legacy of Wendy Brooks

Telluride Academy began in 1981 in Wendy Brooks' backyard, as a summer option for her friends' kids and her own. She led it for 25 years.

Wendy Brooks Memorial Scholarships

Today the Wendy Brooks Legacy Fund sustains tuition assistance and the scholarship program in her name, which sent 16 students to camp this year.

Chason P. Russell Memorial Scholarship

This scholarship helps West End students take on advanced programs like the Outdoor Leadership Challenge. This year, two students received it.



“

Looking back, that summer camp was such a special chapter for our daughter. I can still see her standing by the calendar, asking how many days were left until it started. It gave her independence. With gentle encouragement, she finally mastered her bike, from perfect braking to parking like a pro. Now she wants to bike everywhere.

TELLURIDE ACADEMY PARENT

Character at Camp



In 2026 we received a \$50,000 planning grant through the American Camp Association's Character at Camp initiative.

We chose three traits to focus on in campers and staff: **confidence, resilience, and responsibility**. We wrote program goals around them, added them to our instructor evaluations, and trained every staff member before the season. Then we asked instructors to tell us what they saw.

Resilience

"Campers said that climbing outside was really hard compared to in the gym, but that it was their favorite part of the camp! They talked openly in our closing circle about how doing hard things, even if they're scary, can help us grow."

ROCK RASCALS INSTRUCTOR

Confidence

A camper "who was really nervous and crying at the beginning of the trip really came out of her bubble and said she loved backpacking and wanted to do it again."

OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE INSTRUCTOR

Responsibility

"Campers reflected that they loved taking care of their llama at our closing circle, so much so that they would go and tend to them during down times."

LLAMA LAND INSTRUCTOR

We piloted these tools in 2026, and many are already part of how we run programs. Next, we report our results to the ACA and apply for an implementation grant, the project's second phase.



SUMMER 2026

Program highlights

Outdoor Leadership Challenge

Our flagship teen program ran multi-day backpacking and river expeditions that build real skills and real grit.

Rimrock Wranglers

A new horseback riding program, with strong early feedback.

Moab River Runners

A progressive whitewater trip that raised the bar for older campers.

Early childhood

Strong enrollment across programs like Trail Tykes, Mud Monsters, Farm Frenzy, and Footloose, whose end-of-week dance performance was a highlight of the summer.

Backcountry Express

Our toughest backpacking trip for 11–14 year olds sold out with a waitlist.

High Camp and Opus Hut

Hut trips and our High Camp series were among our best-reviewed programs.

Rock climbing

A new crag on the Galloping Goose, slab improvements at Ophir, and a growing after-school climbing program.



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Outdoor Leadership Challenge

Our flagship Outdoor Leadership Challenge (OLC) continued to shape confident, capable, and connected young leaders in 2026. Through multi-day backcountry expeditions, team challenges, and self-reflection, participants build practical outdoor skills and deeper lessons in collaboration and resilience.

“OLC is the culmination of what we do here at TA. Students live outside for 11 days, work together as a team and learn a variety of outdoor skills. The growth that I see in OLC students is why I keep coming back to guide this program. I have seen shy students learn to lead a group. I have seen students who have never slept outside cowboy camping by the end of the trip. I have seen students begin to plan their own solo backpacking trips using the skills they learn at OLC. No one student has the same takeaway from this trip, but they all seem to learn something about themselves by being a part of such a unique, challenging and supportive environment.”

OLC INSTRUCTOR, SUMMER 2026

Tested and unbroken

Two hard weeks defined our summer, and both times our community carried us through without a gap in programming.

Wildfire smoke

In July, fires burned around us at once: southern Utah, Fruita, Dove Creek, and Gold Mountain near Ouray. Our staff tracked air quality all day, moved Wakeboarding and Ruby Rafters to an area with better air quality, and shifted other activities away from Ridgway and Ouray.

When the Gold Mountain fire forced Second Chance Humane Society to evacuate, we rebuilt our Furry Friends camp around three other partners on short notice. It became one of our best-reviewed programs of the year.

The July 17 flood

A monsoon storm flooded Telluride Intermediate and Telluride High School, our home base, in little more than an hour. Our team brought three field groups in early, and every camper was picked up safely before the water reached the cafeteria.

That evening, staff who weren't even on shift, a board member, and even parents loaded our gear into trailers and their own cars. They even helped save a local florist's wedding flowers.

“ Thank you to all three schools for giving us a roof when we needed one.

By the next day we had moved into the east wing of Telluride Intermediate. We finished the season at Telluride Mountain School.





THE PEOPLE BEHIND EVERY ADVENTURE

Our team

Fifty-six seasonal staff led our summer programs, and 18 of them grew up as TA campers. Twenty-five staff came back from last year. For the first time, we built a seasonal leadership team that gave our most experienced staff a seat at the table. Every Friday, the whole staff checked in on wellness and performance.

When we asked departing staff to describe TA, the same words kept coming back: *supportive, inclusive, fun, approachable*.

2026 seasonal staff

Field Instructors	22
Junior Field Instructors	10
Field Instructors in Training	6
Specialists	7
Interns	11
Volunteers	5+

Specialists lead boating, climbing, student support, art, and program coordination.

Board of Directors

Trisha Cowart Westfall, President	
Lisa Cabrera, Vice President & Secretary	
Austin Collins, Treasurer	
Nathan Frerichs	Ericka de Maquera
Zoe Gillett	Jill Masters
Heather Boucher	Emily Shoff

Administrative staff

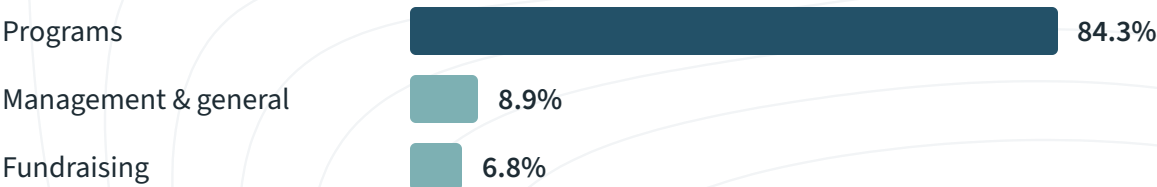
Jason Merritt, Executive Director
Sonja Ames, Communications & Enrollment Director
Ross Perrot, Program Director
Brian Meyer, Program Manager

Financial overview

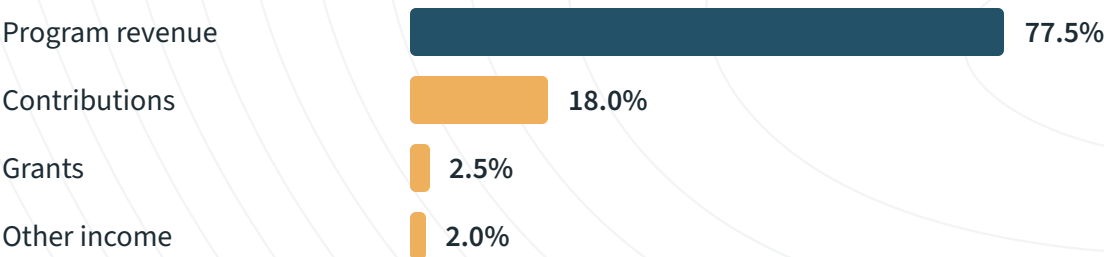
Our fiscal year follows the calendar year, so 2025 is our most recent closed year. These figures come from our 2025 financial statements, reviewed by an independent CPA firm. As in last year’s report, revenue reflects our operating income and does not include investment returns on our endowment.

84¢ of every dollar went directly to programs for kids.

How we used our resources



Where our operating revenue came from



Our board-designated endowment, started in 1997, helps keep Telluride Academy on steady footing for the long term.

Source: 2025 reviewed financial statements (Statements of Activities and Functional Expenses). Our full reviewed financial statements and IRS Form 990 are available on request.

Looking ahead to 2027

Our focus for 2027 is keeping kids with us as they grow, and keeping the staff who make that possible.

Keep campers longer

Build programs that keep our 10–12 year olds coming back as they grow into teens.

Grow our team

Promote staff retention through professional development and expand our team of specialists.

Training and mentorship

Continue to develop our mentorship structure and leadership roles within the seasonal staff.

Open new ground

Explore land access through land trusts, private owners and management agencies.

Deepen Character at Camp

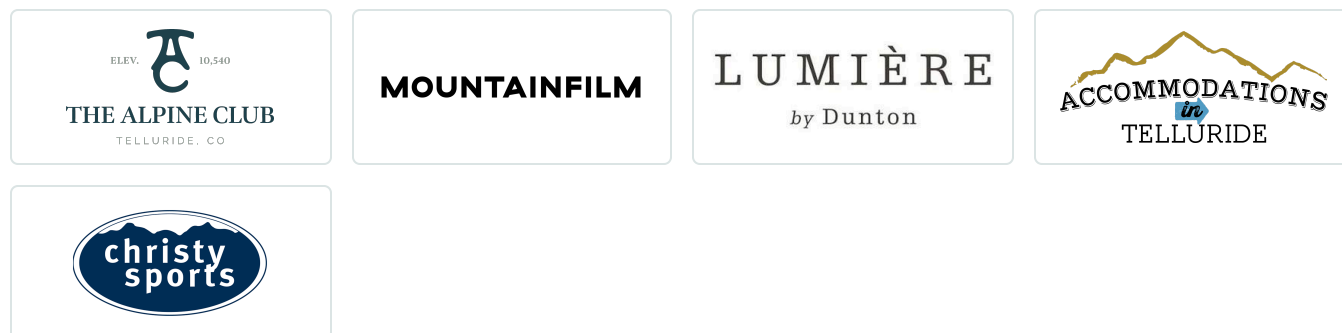
Continue our work with the American Camp Association and further develop our Character at Camp initiative piloted in 2026.

Grantors, sponsors and partners

GRANTORS



SPONSORS



Thank you

To our outreach partners

Telluride School District · Wilkinson Public Library · Lone Cone Library · True North · Prime Time Learning Center · One to One Mentoring

To the families, landowners and agencies who support our land access

Including the U.S. Forest Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Bureau of Land Management, San Miguel County, and the Town of Telluride.

Our donors

Thank you to the individuals, families and foundations who made our 2026 season possible.

Visionaries

Kathryn Tanner
Caroline Gogolak & Jess Bolkcom

Patrons

Lisa & Marc Cabrera
Lara Zibners & Rob Pinate
LDB Foundation

Trailblazers

Aela Morgan
Brooke & Bobby Renkes
Cate White
Darrah Healey
Edward & Darendra Sheridan
Foundation
Erin & John Gogolak
Gang Family Foundation
Gary Cantor
Grant Wilbeck

Halle & Casey Cane
Hilary & Steve Ybarra
Jackie Soffer & Craig Robins
Jill Soffer
Katherine Borsecnik & Gene Weil
Kelly & Paul Moser
Lauren & Scott Woodward
Nicholas & Ashley Barnett
Foundation
Peiper & John Kirkendoll

Pilar & Jay Henry
Sarah & Thomas Cyphers
Shari & Luke Ledbetter
sille Backward Family Fund
The Hogan Family
The Perutz Family Fund
Tracy & Scott Lee
Truesdale Family Foundation
Whitney & Andrew Keene
Anonymous

Pathfinders

4031nins, LLC
Allison & Matt Templin
Amanda Morcos
Anna Rotman & Bryan Sanchez
Ashley & John Mowrey
Austin & Katie Collins
Bill Schurtz
Bree Alban
Brittany & Steven Douglas
Caroline & Chris McCoach
Carolyn Kavanagh
Cathe Dyer
Chrissy & TJ Murphy
Claire & Jeremy Weil
Dana & Jon Switzer
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Jordana Kier
Kara & Mike Gerardi
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Kimberly Tate
Krista Glaser
Kyle & Sally Smith
Laura & Jonathon Epstein
Leslie & Bobby Hempfling
Loyola Gressot & Jarrett Ganer
Luis Elizondo-Thomson
Maggie Wolfson
Manuel Ramos & Rocio Vasquez
Margaret Lang

Maryelaine Sotos
Matt & Doraliza Raglin
Melanie & Zac Reynolds
Melanie Savitz
Melissa Galli
Morgan Garrett
Peter Boumenot
Rachel & Aaron Berkowitz
Safdi-Ugander Family
Sally & David Dornaus
Sara & Paul Steinfeld
Shannon Spellman & Joel Cantor
Spencer Jackman
Stephanie & Thomas S Messervy
Tara Kelly
Thomas & Josie Preston
Wendy & Zac Hampton
William Wilhelm & Alexandra Moe
Anonymous (4)

Thru-Hikers

Bob Gutermuth	Hannah Richman & Jason Slosberg	Sally Puff Courtney
Brooke Mallette & Dave Rothermel	Jim Lincoln	Shoff Family
Don Rosenthal & Joanie Schwarz	Lindsay Riley	

Day Hikers

Amanda & James Naprawa	Jane & Gary Hickcox	Marilyn & Sam Siegel
Brittany & Ross Perrot	Jason Brown	Matthew Falcone
Casey & Erik Waldin	Jay & Rebecca Markley	Meg Taylor
Christopher Goslau	Jennifer & Pancho Winter	Molly Herbert
Claire Watson	Jessica Lockwood	Patricia Cornejo
Conner Hogan	Jill & Bill Masters	Peggy & Jay Raible
Courtney McEleney	Jin Kim	Quinn Hogan
Craig Hesse	John Lindley	Rachel Weller
Danny Craft	Karla & Joe Basham	Rachel Zimmerman
Dawn Davis & Dylan Brooks	Kate Hogan	Samantha & Jeff Simon
Debbie & Larry Robbins	Kathleen & Jason Merritt	Sara McCue
Elaine & Damon Demas	Kathy Green	Sarah & Andrew Tyler
Elisabeth Gick	Lane Masters	Siobhan Montoya Lavender
Emily Bordogna	Laya Barak	Skyla & Nicholas Patterson
Fred & Gail Kittler	Leslie Wilson	Sophie Fabrizio
Glennnda & Louie Campos	Lindsey & Mark Hanna	Stuart Crosby
Gloria, Joe & Ricky Miller-Czajka	Lisa & Victor Neneroff	Tali Cohen
Jacob Rainey	Lucero Escandon & Antoine Delapree	Zoe Gillett

Nature Lovers

Alejandro Moreno	Kathryn Bergmann	Ray Dahlstrom & Jason Merritt
Anastasia & Adrian Kawa	Kelly Kopecky	Rebecca Bachman
Britt Jens	Lisa & Jeff Owen	Scott & Lea Richards
Catherine Lake	Michelle Maughan	Sonja & Jake Ames
Daniel Francis	Rainer & Thomas Madigan	Ximena Rebolledo Leon
Haley Edwards	Rachel Reed	Anonymous

We make every effort to list names accurately. If we missed or misspelled your name, please let us know so we can make it right.

Every gift, at every level, keeps kids on the trail.

JOIN US ON THE TRAIL AHEAD

Thank you

Smoke and a flood couldn't keep kids off the trail this year,
and that's because of you.

To our staff, board, families, donors, sponsors, and partners: thank you. Every gift keeps tuition assistance and the Wendy Brooks Legacy Fund growing, so more kids get their first summit, first river, or first night under the stars.

Give or learn more at tellurideacademy.org



Telluride Academy · PO Box 2255, Telluride, CO 81435

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