

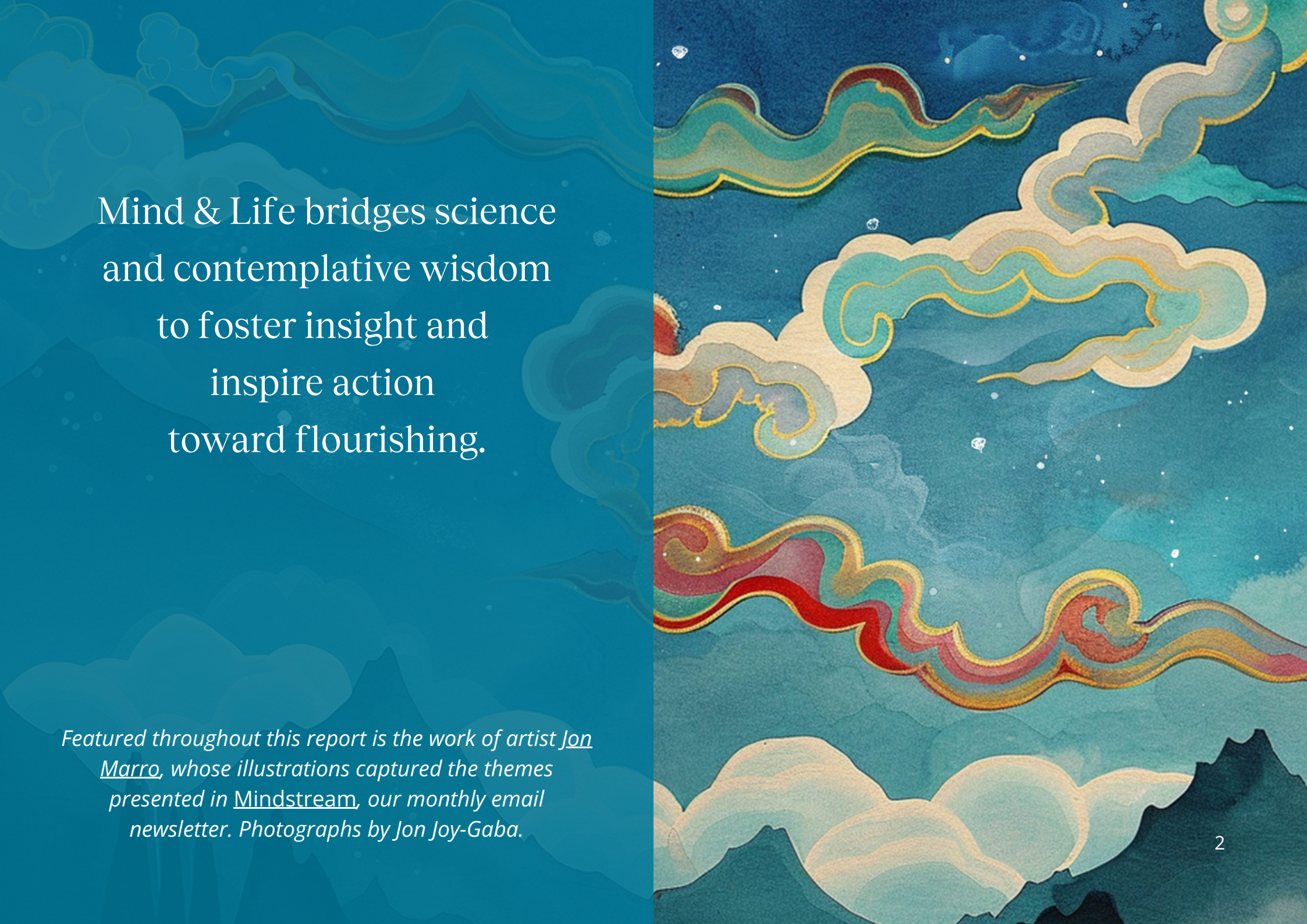


MIND & LIFE  
INSTITUTE

# Shaping Tomorrow, Together

2024 ANNUAL REPORT





Mind & Life bridges science  
and contemplative wisdom  
to foster insight and  
inspire action  
toward flourishing.

*Featured throughout this report is the work of artist Jon Marro, whose illustrations captured the themes presented in Mindstream, our monthly email newsletter. Photographs by Jon Joy-Gaba.*





## A Letter from the President

In 2024, the Mind & Life Institute stood at a threshold—grounded in nearly four decades of pioneering work, and reaching toward an urgent and inspiring future. This was a year of asking essential questions: What is uniquely ours to do? How can we best translate contemplative research into real-world impact? And how do we meet the challenges of our time and best support the inner transformation needed to shape a more compassionate and resilient world?

We turned first to you—our community. Through dedicated listening sessions, surveys, and hundreds of 1:1 conversations, you told us what matters most: Mind & Life's unique ability to bridge science and contemplative wisdom, seed new research, engage multi-disciplinary perspectives, and nurture an inclusive, global community. Grantees affirmed our greatest strength lies in connecting research to practice, fostering collaboration, and supporting the next generation of leaders in the field.

In November, our Board approved a bold new strategy built on this feedback. The strategy prioritizes a renewed commitment to deepening and scaling the impact of our signature programs—the Mind & Life Dialogues, Summer Research Institute, and our grantmaking to contemplative researchers. Alongside this, we are embracing exploration in frontier areas including ethics and AI, interconnectedness and climate change, polarization, and systems-level change.

This dual focus captures both our roots and our responsibility to be agile and responsive in the face of today's challenges. It carries forward His Holiness the Dalai Lama's founding vision—and calls us to meet this moment with joy, a steadfast dedication to academic integrity, and a bold commitment to maximizing our impact in the world.

This report reflects what we accomplished in 2024—and the vision that now illuminates our path forward. Most importantly, it reflects you. Our progress and promise rest on this extraordinary community, and I look forward to creating the future—together.

With gratitude and excitement for what's to come,



**SUZANNE BOND**  
PRESIDENT

# A Year of Listening

## Listening Deeply. Learning Together. Shaping the Future.

Mind & Life's new strategic direction was shaped through deep listening and research. Beginning in spring 2024, we engaged hundreds of voices across our global community—researchers, contemplatives, donors, scholars, practitioners, and staff—to imagine, together, how Mind & Life can best contribute to human flourishing in the critical years ahead.

Over the course of seven months, we conducted:

- **200+ one-on-one interviews** with thought leaders, Board and Steering Council members, donors, and Fellows.
- **Listening sessions** at the Summer Research Institute and community gatherings, and with staff, emerging scholars, and partner organizations.
- **A survey** reaching more than 300 grant recipients.

This collective wisdom affirmed Mind & Life's unique role as a convener and catalyst—bringing scientific inquiry into dialogue with contemplative traditions, and supporting research that bridges discovery with real-world impact.



## What We Heard From Grantees

Grantees affirmed that Mind & Life's greatest strengths lie in:

- **Bridging research and contemplative practice.**
- **Fostering collaboration** across disciplines and geographies.
- **Providing catalytic funding** that launches careers and advances the field.

They called for stronger support in translating research into solutions for urgent global challenges.

## What We Heard From the Field

Stakeholders underscored the importance of:

- Strengthening the impact of our **core activities**, including the Mind & Life Dialogues, Summer Research Institute, and grantmaking.
- Nurturing the **next generation** of contemplative researchers
- Exploring **new frontiers** such as artificial intelligence, polarization, and our interconnection with nature.
- Investing in **systems-level change**, scaling interventions, and influencing policy.



## Looking Ahead: From Insight to Impact

At the close of 2024, our Board of Directors approved a bold, new, three-year transitional strategy to guide Mind & Life into the future. Rooted in our core strengths—**convening, grantmaking, and communicating insights**—this vision builds on decades of field leadership while strengthening our ability to catalyze meaningful change at scale. In short, we'll be shifting our focus upstream, ensuring that in our next chapter we are partnering to leverage research, data, convenings, and alliances to make evidence-based contemplative approaches globally available and universally accessible.

While grounded in our commitment to advancing contemplative research and science, we will also seek out the edges of what is known—and often unfunded—exploring new frontiers with profound implications for humanity and the planet. These include:

- **AI & Technology.** We are convening scientists, contemplative practitioners, ethicists, and technologists to shape the future of AI in alignment with human flourishing and ethical responsibility.
- **Interconnectedness & Climate Change.** We are funding and elevating research on the role of contemplative practices in cultivating a felt sense of interconnection—and in helping people respond constructively to the climate crisis.
- **Polarization.** We are advancing scientific understanding of polarization at the level of the mind and body with the aim of fostering reconciliation and collective healing in a fractured world.
- **Systems Change.** We'll be working to strengthen the contemplative research field's capacity for systemic impact—through better impact measurement, implementation science, and policy translation.



Above all, this strategy affirms what our community made clear: **Mind & Life's greatest impact lies in listening deeply, learning together, and translating insight into action.**







## Convening and Catalyzing: Dialogue for a Divided World

For 38 years, Mind & Life has brought people together to better understand the mind and the potential for contemplative practices to transform lives. In 2024, we carried that legacy forward while also exploring the future of contemplative research—and where the field needs to go next to best meet the challenges of our time.



### Summer Research Institute 2024: Awakening Compassion in Times of Division

In June, Mind & Life gathered over 140 scholars, scientists, contemplatives, and changemakers from 19 countries at the Garrison Institute for our 21st Summer Research Institute. Through the theme "Awakening Compassion in Times of Division," participants explored how compassion can bridge personal, interpersonal, and societal divides. In a world fractured by polarization and disconnection, we sought to understand what compassion looks like—not just as a personal virtue, but as a social force.

Over five days, participants engaged in dialogue and contemplative practice, while plenary presentations and panel discussions framed the collective inquiry. The program brought together diverse faculty, including social psychologist Buju Dasgupta, psychologist Dave DeSteno, cognitive scientist Molly Crockett, neuroscientist Sará King, and contemplative teachers Larry Ward and Peggy Rowe Ward. The experience was deeply enriched by the presence of five Tibetan monastics, who shared perspectives on science and Buddhism, deepening the conversation on compassion in action.

In a follow-up survey, participant reflections underscored the transformational nature of the gathering. One attendee called it "the single most transformative conference experience of my lifetime."





## Envisioning the Future of Contemplative Research

In the fall, Mind & Life convened over 60 global leaders in contemplative research and practice to imagine the future of the field. Held over three days, this first-time gathering—built around 15 key themes identified by our community—explored how contemplative research could further illuminate the path to inner, relational, and systemic change. These included:

- The possibilities for contemplative research to interface with emerging trends in technology and artificial intelligence and explore our interconnection with nature;
- Challenges and opportunities involved in scaling promising interventions and leveraging contemplative research into systems change;
- Challenges and opportunities for expanding contemplative research to include other spiritual traditions; and
- The challenge of measuring the impact of our collective work and defining standards as contemplative research expands into broader domains.

What emerged was a shared sense of urgency and possibility. Participants expressed a hunger for greater collaboration, affirmed the urgency of applying contemplative insights to societal challenges, and highlighted the need for a broader, more inclusive field that embraces multiple wisdom traditions.





# Grantmaking: Supporting Pioneering Research

Mind & Life's grant programs have long served as a springboard for bold new ideas. In 2024, we revisited our grantmaking priorities with a long-term view to deepening our impact and influencing systems-level change.

## Celebrating 20 Years of Francisco J. Varela Grants

2024 marked the 20th anniversary of the Francisco J. Varela Grant program, with grantees having helped lay the foundations for the field of contemplative research, leading to groundbreaking applications in such areas as education and mental health. To date, Varela grants have seeded over \$8 million in research across 28 countries, with a remarkable 4,500% return on investment (ROI) and an annualized ROI of 21%.

In celebrating this milestone, we paid special tribute to all the Varela grantees whose work has shaped the field of contemplative research and to our visionary founding donor, Barry Hershey, whose inspiration and support made this program possible.

In 2024, we awarded 10 new Varela grants totaling \$222,900 to early-career researchers exploring topics from measuring the effectiveness of compassion-focused therapy in managing distress among Latine communities to integrating Indigenous contemplative science in Ecuador.



*"The Varela Awards demonstrate the possibilities that arise from seeding a field. The results of investing in the young scholars who are doing the deep investigations between science and contemplative practices have been profound. We have never supported any endeavor that has had more of an impact per dollar."*



**BARRY HERSHEY**  
FILMMAKER, DONOR



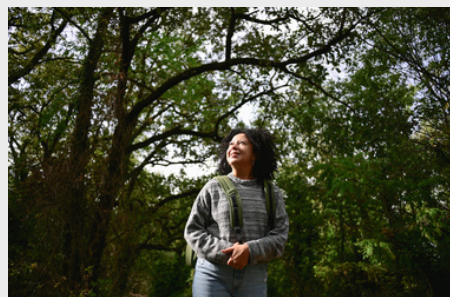


## Expanding the Edges: PEACE and Changemaking Grants

Building on our commitment to deepening understanding of wholesome mental qualities related to prosociality, empathy, altruism, compassion, and ethics (PEACE), we awarded two new PEACE Grants to support research investigating how these qualities can drive meaningful change. Projects in 2024 studied compassion fatigue mitigation in conflict zones and explored mindfulness-based leadership interventions in education. We also highlighted the work of grantees like Carrie James, whose research investigates the impacts of digital immersion and technology use on teens, and how mindfulness can support healthier relationships with technology—an area of growing relevance for young people and society at large.

Our Contemplative Changemaking Grants continued to uplift grassroots projects applying contemplative approaches to achieve real-world impact—including art therapy for adolescents in Colombia and contemplative gardening for climate action in Kenya. We also convened two online gatherings for our changemaking grantees—spaces that allowed project leaders to learn from one another, exchange experiences, and seed future collaborations.

These grant programs not only fuel research but tell powerful stories of how contemplative approaches can address urgent real-world needs—stories we shared through our blog and convenings.



[In Chile, One Contemplative Researcher Hopes to Learn About Strengthening Our Connection to Nature](#)



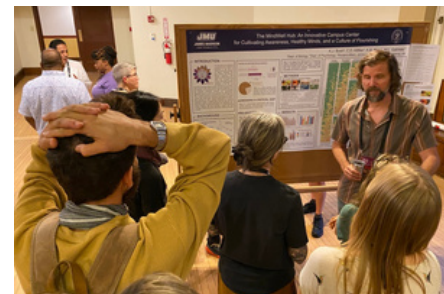
[Bridging Divides: Can Loving-Kindness Meditation Help Ease Political Polarization?](#)



[A Social Affair: How Meditation Benefits Ripple Through Romantic Relationships](#)



[Teaching Yoga in Africa: The Silent Revolution](#)





# 2024 Grantees

## PEACE Grants



Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) for Educational Leaders  
**SEBRINA DOYLE FOSCO**  
PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY



Mitigating Compassion Fatigue and Promoting Resilience and Healing  
**LIAT SHKLARSKI, Yael LATZER**  
HUNTER COLLEGE, HAIFA UNIVERSITY

## Varela Grants



Measuring the Immeasurables: Feasibility of Digital Biomarkers to Detect Shifts In Compassion within an Online Group-based Intervention for Trauma Survivors  
**DILARA ALLY**  
CAMBRIDGE HEALTH ALLIANCE, HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL



How Racial Context Mediates the Effects of Contemplative Practice on In-Group and Out-Group Empathy  
**JOSH BRAHINSKY**  
MCGILL UNIVERSITY



The Urgent Need for Research in Indigenous Contemplative Science in Ecuador  
**AMAYA CARRASCO-TORRONTegUI, CARLOS ANDRES GALLEGOS-RIOFRÍO**  
UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT



Cultivating Awareness and Racial Empowerment (CARE) for Families  
**MARISSA FERRY**  
PACIFIC UNIVERSITY



Engaging Parents in Mindfulness Interventions for Children and Adolescents  
**JOANNA GUAN**  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA—DAVIS



Mindfulness as a Defense Against False Realization Experiences  
**JUENSUNG KIM**  
UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN



Identifying Needs and Preferences for an mHealth Intervention to Support MBCT for Pain in Multiple Sclerosis  
**ERIN MISTRETTA**  
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON



Integrating Tibetan Dream Yoga and Western Techniques for Lucid Dream Induction  
**DANIEL MORRIS**  
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY



Compassionate Design Approaches: Co-Developing Digital Therapeutics with Emerging Adults  
**DENISE QUESNEL**  
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY



Exploring the Effectiveness of Compassion-Focused Therapy for Managing Distress and Substance use in Latine Individuals  
**CAMILA TIRADO**  
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY



Cultivating Transformation: The Role of Contemplative Practices in Sustainability Advocacy  
**JOHANN-JUSTUS WACHS**  
MCGILL UNIVERSITY





## Digital Education: Amplifying Insights

The Mind & Life community spans continents, disciplines, and generations. Through our digital platforms, we make our work accessible to all who could benefit—whether they are researchers, practitioners, or lifelong learners curious about the mind and contemplative practices.

### Mind & Life Podcast

Hosted by Mind & Life Science Director Wendy Hasenkamp, the podcast released 12 new episodes in 2024, surpassing one million lifetime downloads. Guests included psychologist and author Daniel Goleman; neuroscientist and mental health researcher Jyoti Mishra; and educational leader, writer, and climate activist Diana Chapman Walsh. These and other guests offered insights into emotional intelligence, climate trauma, ethical leadership, the integration of mindfulness into health care, and the possibilities of AI to support meditation practice.



*"Thank you for providing me with such a space of refuge through difficult times...The Mind & Life podcast has been instrumental in my understanding of the importance of mindfulness in our day-to-day lives."*

—Mind & Life podcast listener



## Digital Library

Launched in 2023, the Mind & Life Digital Library explores vital questions at the heart of the human experience. What is the nature of our emotions? What role do altruism and compassion play in economic systems? How can an understanding of our interdependence inform ecological action? Featuring video recordings of Mind & Life Dialogues with the Dalai Lama and leading scientists, philosophers, and contemplatives, the library invites visitors into a decades-long exploration of the human mind, compassion, and our shared humanity.

In 2024, we expanded the Library to include select presentations from the Summer Research Institute (SRI), “Awakening Compassion in Times of Division.” With 12 Dialogues and events now available—and more to come—the platform offers a rich resource for students, scholars, scientists, and changemakers across the globe.

Free and open to all, the Digital Library is a living legacy project—honoring His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s vision and the hundreds of presenters who have helped shape contemplative research into a field of global significance. With over 9,500 unique visitors to date, it is helping a new generation experience the power of dialogue to illuminate, inspire, and transform.



Artwork by Sirin Thada

## Insights

The *Insights* web platform is a growing digital anthology of essays that trace the arc of contemplative research—where it’s been, what it has uncovered, and promising areas for future discovery. Since its launch in 2022, *Insights* has welcomed over 50,600 readers from more than 100 countries, becoming a destination for reflection, scholarship, and storytelling.

In 2024, we added two new essays:

[The Senses: A Pathway to Well-being](#) by Norm Farb and Zindel Siegal  
[Mindfulness, Indigenous Wisdom, and Community Well-being](#) by Jeffrey Proulx

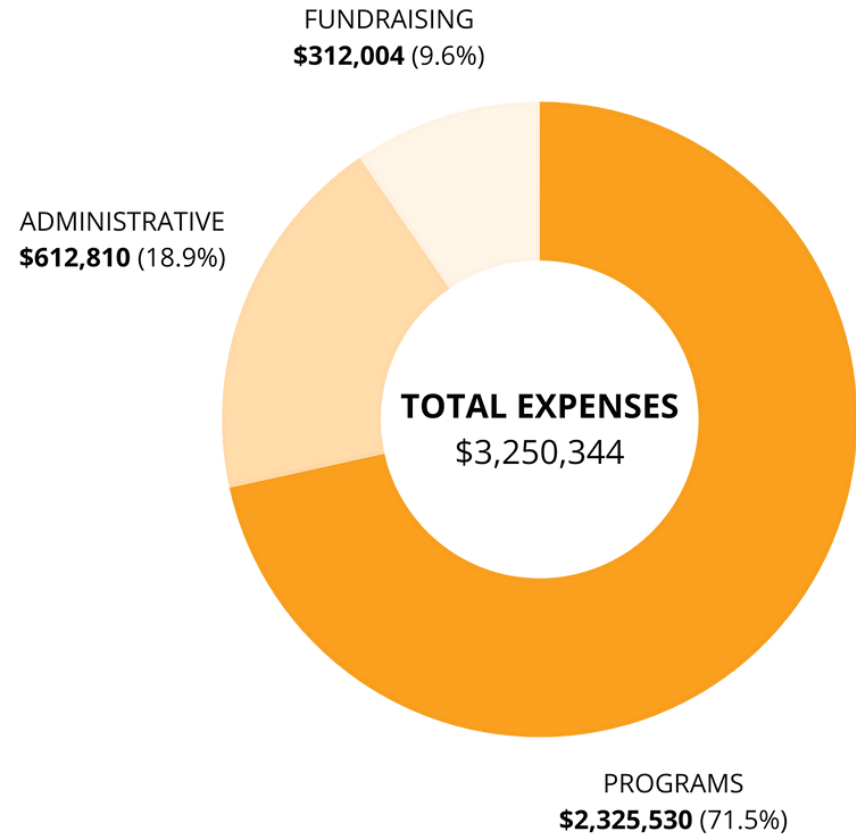
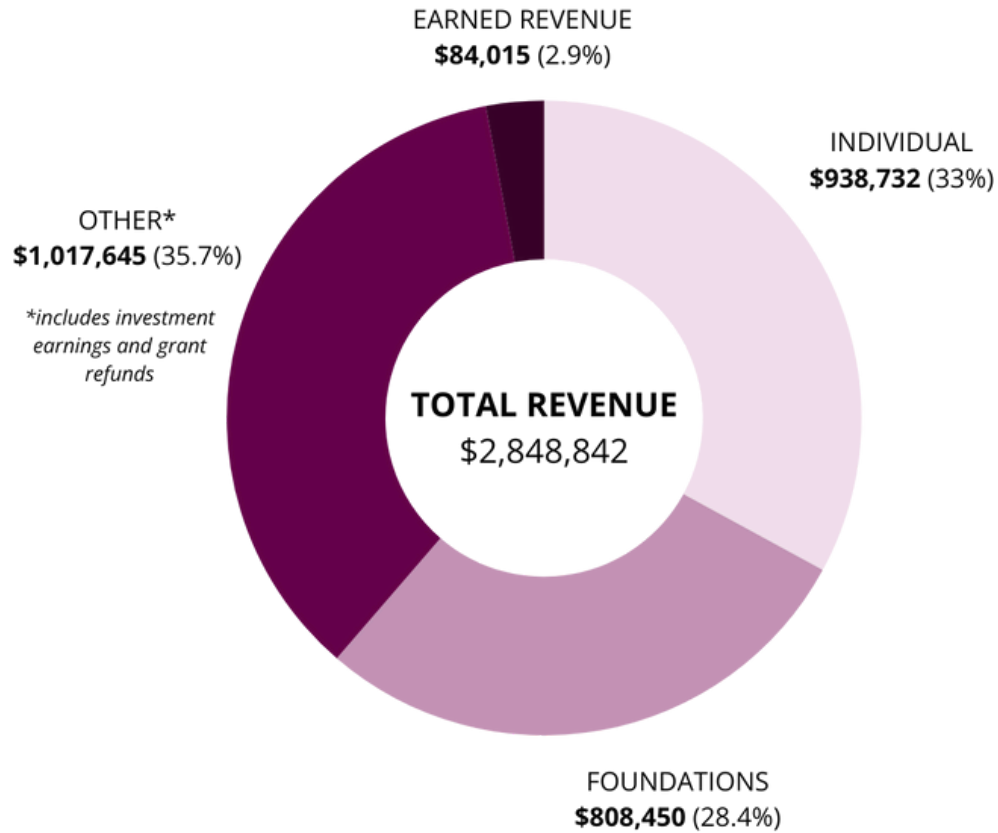
Together, these pieces deepen our understanding of how embodied awareness and Indigenous knowledge systems can shape more inclusive approaches to mental and community health.

By weaving narrative, research, and lived experience, *Insights* chronicles the evolving field of contemplative research, illuminating new findings and the transformative possibilities they open for our world.





# Financial Summary



[VIEW 2024 FINANCIAL AUDIT REPORT](#)





## Together in Gratitude

Mind & Life closed 2024 **more deeply rooted in our mission, more connected, and more aligned** as we strive to maximize our impact at a time of sweeping global change. What we heard from you—our community—has become our compass. What we've learned from decades of research and dialogue is now being distilled into action.



This shared work is possible because of the **dedication and generosity of our expanding global community**. To our donors, whose belief in our mission sustains and propels us—thank you. To our staff, whose creativity and care bring our programs to life, and to our Board of Directors, whose wisdom and stewardship guide our path forward—we are deeply grateful.

As we look ahead, we invite you to continue with us. To participate. To co-create. **To imagine a world where compassion is not an exception, but the norm.**

Because building a flourishing future takes all of us. **Join us.**







**MIND & LIFE**  
**INSTITUTE**

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