



*Published May 4, 2020*

As an organization, Sierra Service Project values each person we interact with and seeks to maintain long-term investment in collaborative relationships with communities and individuals. In order to most prudently protect the vulnerable communities and volunteers we work with and prevent any potential for a second wave spread of the virus, we have closely reviewed recommendations from the CDC and local government officials to determine our course of action for summer 2020.

With tears, we share SSP's 45th summer will not be spent working side by side together in person. The safety of each person SSP encounters is of the utmost importance – every volunteer, employee, homeowner, and community partner. While it pains us to be physically apart this summer, we simply cannot risk public health in order to gather in the ways we are accustomed to. It is so difficult for us to say this, because building together is at the heart of Sierra Service Project's mission - which so often happens via in-person settings.

### **What will SSP summer 2020 look like?**

To that end, we have decided to run four weeks of online programs in June and July, in place of the traditional in-person SSP summer experience we all cherish. These programs will be carried out thanks to the creative hard work of young adult staff, who we extended hiring invitations to prior to the global spread of the virus. Over the years we have become keenly aware that SSP summer staff are the hands, feet, and heart of our programs - the ones who bring all our work to life, resulting in the "magic of SSP."

Since 1975, our staff and volunteers have valued being scrappy, flexible, and invested in serving however, whenever, and wherever we are called to do so. In that regard, SSP summer 2020 will be no different. We are grateful to the young adult staff who pour their hearts into this work, as well as the youth volunteers who are the leaders of tomorrow.

As we pivot our typical programs to meet the ever-present needs of young people and vulnerable communities through this digital format, we thank you for your partnership and patience. This will be a journey filled with rocks and rubies, failures and successes, and opportunities for individual and communal growth. We have yet to know exactly what awaits us in this new endeavor, but invite you to journey alongside us in the work of service in a changing world.

We are especially heart-broken for our high school seniors. To care for their needs as an age cohort, we will be offering senior-only components in our online programs. In addition, 2020 seniors are invited to join in 2021 as a young adult volunteer alongside their group, where we will create work teams specifically for 2020 seniors. We also want to note that there is no longer such a thing as "aging out" of SSP's programs, as young adults are invited to participate in all intergenerational sessions as volunteers.

While it is bittersweet, we approach this new season with a spirit of curiosity, adaptability, resilience, and hope for the future. As SSP's theology statement has expressed for many years:

*“We respond to God’s invitation to open ourselves up to the possibility of a transformational experience. In community, we begin to recognize our dependence on God and interdependence with each other.”*

All online programming for summer 2020 will be at no additional cost to groups that are already registered. Groups scheduled for Weeks 1 through 4 are already registered for the online program. Groups scheduled for Weeks 5 through 7 will need to be scheduled earlier in the summer to fit within our online program window.

Groups may choose to opt out of participating in this new online program, but we hope youth will take a risk to try a new way of experiencing the spirit of SSP: building faith and strengthening community together.

### **Why is SSP summer 2020 not happening in-person?**

The last six weeks have highlighted the numerous factors which increasingly made planning for an in-person program not viable for summer 2020. These include:

- The limitations of our typical host facilities which are no longer able to accommodate volunteer groups;
- The extension of Shelter-in-Place orders throughout California and bordering states;
- The travel involved to make site visits and program preparations;
- The logistics necessary to ensure social distancing practices during an overnight SSP experience;
- The need for testing of individuals from all over the Western United States prior to their week of service, and the current lack of access to accurate tests;
- A commitment to ensuring SSP does not serve as a conduit for spreading the virus in any way. Even one emergent case of COVID-19 resulting from SSP activities would be unacceptable.

The above factors are just a few of the many reasons SSP has identified that an in-person program, although desirable, is simply not an option we can consider for this season. We are, however, committed to living out our mission in creative new ways in a changing global landscape, starting with online opportunities to grow as a community while safely distancing.

### **When can we serve in-person again?**

SSP will use CDC, state, and local government guidelines regarding stay-at-home and gathering restrictions to determine when it is safe to resume scheduling in-person volunteer days. This will take shape as Days of Service in the first phase, before overnight programs are reestablished in a second phase of Weekends of Service during the school year.

We thank you for your patience as we navigate a new normal for our program activities; we anticipate a series of changes to elevate our existing protocols that promote the extra health and safety precautions required.

### **What about SSP's partner communities?**

SSP works in various rural and urban regions throughout the West, and we are committed to ensuring the public health of these communities. This year, that unfortunately looks like keeping a physical distance and avoiding travel whenever possible. We are saddened SSP will not be safely able to provide life-changing home repairs to families in need this summer, as we have done since 1975. In place of our typical hands-on service work, we are in communication with our community partners now to identify how SSP volunteers can remotely support the ongoing local efforts within each community. These needs will shape the activities of our online program.

Many Adventure Wednesday community leaders have graciously agreed to virtually share with SSP participants about their local work, how we can be good stewards of the earth and our resources, and encourage us all to take action wherever we are this summer. This learning will deepen connections between SSP participants at home and SSP's partner communities.

In addition, we are working with our major grant funders to release restricted donations SSP has received for building materials. This would allow SSP to give portions of this funding to local nonprofits working in our partner communities that provide food and other highly sought-after items to families in need during this health and economic crisis.

### **What do SSP's finances look like during this time?**

Donors provide half of SSP's annual operating budget - thank you for your investment in youth and the communities we partner with. In former years, SSP relied more heavily on participant fees for our operating income, and our steady increase of financial supporters has allowed for a more balanced income model. We aspire to further reduce dependence on participant fees in future years; this is part of our long-range plan as an organization.

SSP has been approved for a forgivable loan through the CARES Act's Paycheck Protection Program. This covers an eight-week period of payroll and rent expenses, which starts the day the loan funding is delivered which we expect to be by May 5. This is important to note because this loan will fund summer staff positions, filled by young leaders who are critical to the success of our new online program.

With the PPP's eight-week timeline, the funding will unfortunately not cover the end of the SSP summer. Receiving a PPP loan has made a significant impact on SSP's ability to increase the amount of credits we are able to offer volunteer groups. Our goal is to be generous, and work with liaisons in a one-on-one manner to address specific needs of each.

While many of our expenses take place during the summer and are able to be cut now that we are moving to an online program, the costs of preparing for the summer last throughout the entire year. SSP has a team of six full-time employees who work behind the scenes to make your week of service meaningful. As an office team, we know all groups have unique financial needs, there is no one size fits all approach.

## **What is SSP's approach to volunteer fees for summer 2020?**

SSP's Board of Directors has approved a range of credits that apply to the second payment (the portion each registered group pays March 1). Thanks to the approval of PPP loan funds, we are able to increase our range of credits to 50%, rather than the 40% we previously anticipated. This range of credits includes:

- Opting to fully donate all summer 2020 fees paid to SSP
- Crediting 20% of second payment fees paid to a future SSP trip
- Crediting 30% of second payment fees paid to a future SSP trip
- Crediting 40% of second payment fees paid to a future SSP trip
- Crediting 50% of second payment fees paid to a future SSP trip

Of course, we are also open to other percentages not listed above (5%, 10%, 25%, etc.), up to 50%, should your volunteer group wish to opt for a different credit amount. We are also aware you may have a range of financial needs within your volunteer group, and will work with liaisons on a one-on-one basis to address these needs.

While this is a temporary departure from our normal fee policies to honor the new realities of our world, we understand the financial situation of volunteers and groups vary widely. If possible, we ask you to consider foregoing a request for credits or refunds for summer 2020. We have done due diligence to carefully model SSP's financial position, and how the organization will be impacted by a significant loss of volunteer participant fee income. In all scenarios, SSP will take a substantial hit to our reserves.

At this time, any credits beyond 50% of the second payment (or discussion of refunds) are dependent on additional significant support from major family foundations, or the unrestricting of currently restricted grants. We understand this is not an ideal scenario for any volunteer groups, and hope you will be patient with us as we take a measured approach to sustaining our collaborative work for years to come. We hope with the receipt of the additional support listed above, we will be able to be more generous with groups in need of additional credits beyond the listed 50%.

To that end, SSP will not be invoicing for any final payments (typically due June 1), or any second payment balances still outstanding. Summer 2020 credits will be carried forward for use within two program years, which you may use towards participation in any type of SSP program up to September 2022. Participation in the summer online program is not contingent on volunteer group's fee decisions or the current number of people already signed up in each group.

Groups currently registered for summer 2020 will be offered the same fee rate in 2021, in order to keep your cost of participation as low as possible, whether or not general participation fees increase. We are grateful for the partnership of SSP volunteer groups, and are committed to making this experience accessible to you.

## **What about scholarships?**

An integral component of SSP's mission has always been to make our programs accessible to anyone who wants to participate. Our commitment is that no youth should be excluded from participating due to lack of finances. One way we live this out is through our scholarship fund for volunteers.

Scholarship awards, which come from restricted funds, will be released from the 2020 season to be used toward scholarships for SSP's future in-person programs. Our entire scholarship fund will carry over to support groups in 2021, as we anticipate the needs may be greater moving forward.

If you were awarded scholarships for summer 2020 programs, we are not expecting you to pay this difference in your balance, but you will also only receive percentage credits for money paid by your group. Looking forward to summer 2021, we will prioritize scholarship awards for 2020 recipients, but will ask everyone to submit updated scholarship requests at that time, knowing financial needs for individuals and groups will have changed.

## **How do our participation fees turn into a donation to SSP?**

We would like to express our utmost gratitude to the groups choosing to donate all or a portion of their participation fees to SSP. About 20% of registered groups have already indicated they would like to support our work in this way. Thank you!

We can document the donation of fees as a gift from the church or group, or enter individual fee amounts as a donation from each family within a group. This can now be a tax-deductible donation from an individual, as it will no longer be considered a fee paid for a service (for example, attending SSP's in-person summer program).

## **How else can I support?**

Below are some of the ways you can support SSP communities:

- **Donations:**
  - Donate this week to SSP's Big Day of Giving campaign where we hope to raise \$23,000
  - Host a facebook fundraiser or Big Day of Giving fundraiser for SSP
  - Contribute to SSP's Leadership Development Fund
  - Sponsor "SSP in a Box" including SSP journals, 2020 theme stickers, and other critical materials for the online program
  - Become a 12xSSP monthly donor
- **Program support:**
  - Write a Spiritual Sandwich, to be shared on SSP's blog
  - Draw SSP-inspired coloring pages
  - Add to SSP's joke book
  - Suggest new songs for the songbook

- **Site support:**
  - Sew cloth masks for community partners
  - Donate to the Navajo Nation Department of Health's Official Covid-19 Relief Fund
  - Stay tuned for more ways to remotely support SSP host communities
- **Staff support:**
  - Be a summer staff mentor
  - Are you a mental health professional or chaplain? Donate some of your time and expertise to support the emotional needs of the SSP community.

We are always open to creative ideas and feedback for ways to enhance our program's impact.

### **How do I follow up with additional questions?**

The SSP office, comprised of a small staff team, anticipates a substantial surge in communications, and will respond to your questions as soon as we are able. To support a quicker response time, we have spread out communications between several members of the SSP office staff. Please direct your inquiries using the following guidelines:

**Community site partners:** [Megan.Walsh@SierraServiceProject.org](mailto:Megan.Walsh@SierraServiceProject.org)

**Volunteer groups:** *Depending on the location your group is signed up for, liaisons should contact...*

**San Diego or Chiloquin:** [Veronica.Russell@SierraServiceProject.org](mailto:Veronica.Russell@SierraServiceProject.org)

**Smith River or Tsai:** [Sarah.Reynolds@SierraServiceProject.org](mailto:Sarah.Reynolds@SierraServiceProject.org)

**Lake County:** [Megan.Walsh@SierraServiceProject.org](mailto:Megan.Walsh@SierraServiceProject.org)

**Donors:** [Adam.Vargyas@SierraServiceProject.org](mailto:Adam.Vargyas@SierraServiceProject.org)

If necessary, your message will be forwarded to the appropriate person on our team using the list above, to ensure we can respond as soon as possible.

In addition to email correspondence, our staff is reachable on our main office phone during normal business hours: (916) 488-6441. While we may be slower to respond than usual, you are welcome to leave a message for the appropriate staff person, and we will get back to you as soon as we are able.

### **In conclusion...**

As we collectively enter this unfathomable landscape of a world, SSP has enduring hope for the creativity of service-minded individuals who make our programs possible - our youth volunteers, adult leaders, young adult seasonal staff, full time headquarters staff, board of directors, community partners, and financial supporters. We have been blown away at the resilience in our communities as we explore new ways of connecting safely from afar, and hold immense gratitude for the commitment of the SSP

family to live out our mission in new ways during this time. As John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, says:

*“Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.”*

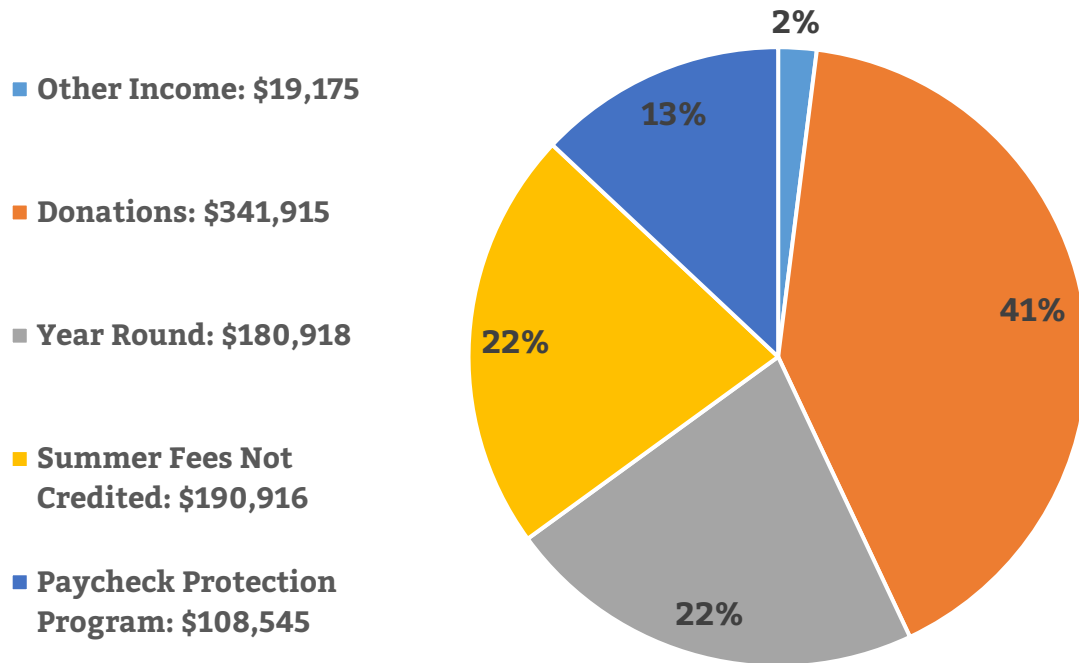
We thank you for working with us to reimagine new ways of service in our world - in all the ways we can - and for your ongoing support in this time.

**With hope,**

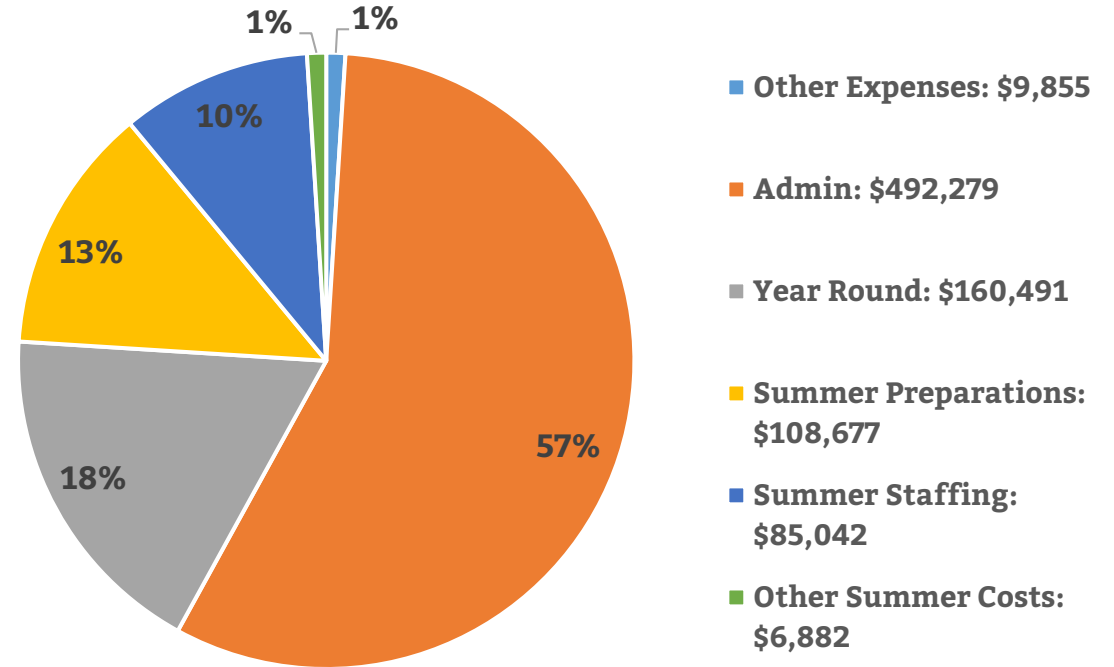
**SSP Staff and Board**

# SSP's 2020 Projected Finances:

**Total Income: \$841,469**



**Total Expenses: \$863,226**



**Other Income and Expenses includes:** 1518 Rent, Online Store, and Interest

**Admin includes:** Board Expenses, Outreach Expenses, Fundraising Expenses, HQ Staff, Office Expenses (rent, utilities, phones, etc.), Audit Expenses

**Year-Round Includes:** Rancho Cordova and North Sac Programs, Alternative Breaks, Weekends of Service, Leadership Academy

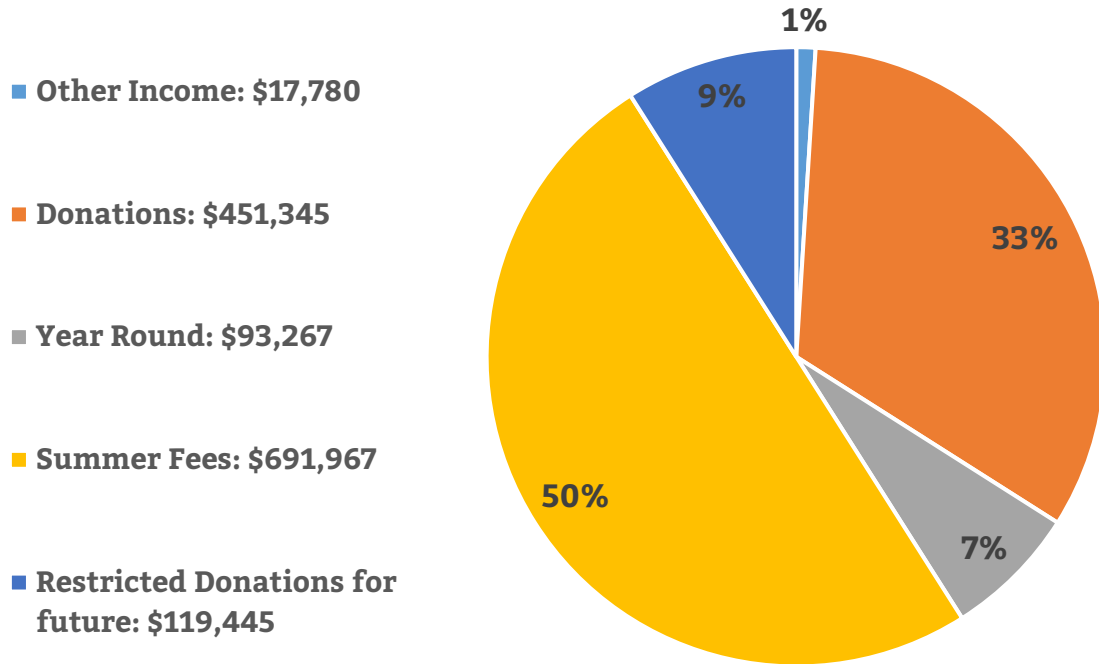
**Summer Preparations Includes:** Site Visits, SSP's Vehicles (insurance, depreciation, storage costs), Worker's Comp, Credit Card Processing Fees, Tools, Software, Journals

**Other Summer Costs Includes:** Zoom, SSP in a Box

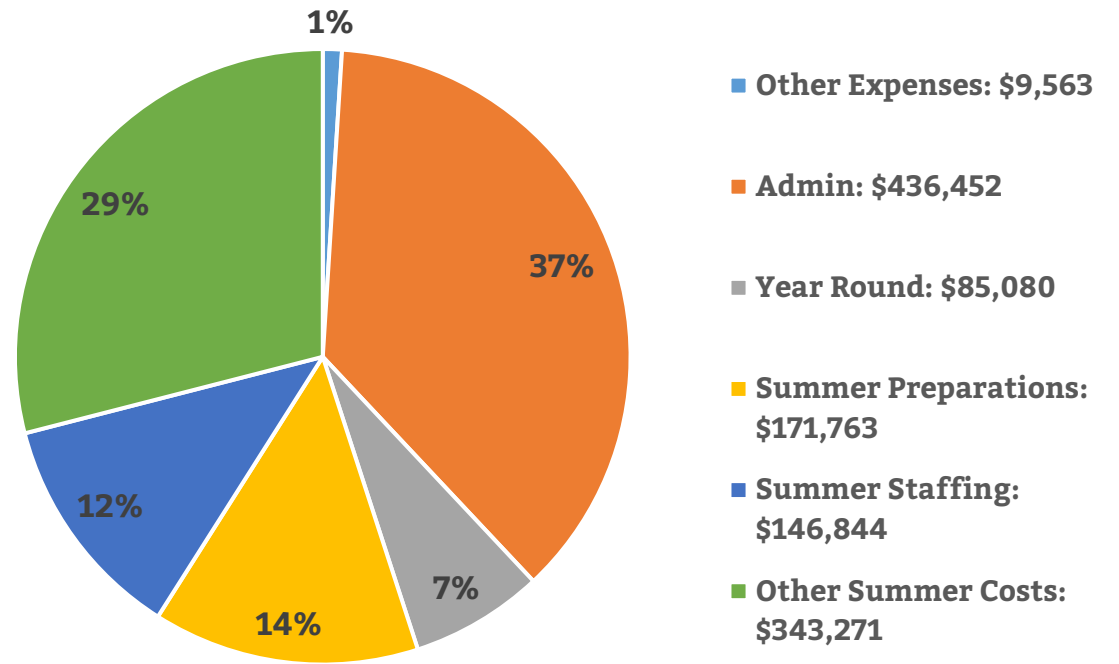


# SSP's 2019 Finances:

**Total Income: \$1,373,804**



**Total Expenses: \$1,192,793**



**Other Income and Expenses includes:** 1518 Rent, Online Store, and Interest

**Admin includes:** Board Expenses, Outreach Expenses, Fundraising Expenses, HQ Staff, Office Expenses (rent, utilities, phones, etc.), Audit Expenses

**Year-Round Includes:** Rancho Cordova and North Sac Programs, Alternative Breaks, Weekends of Service, Leadership Academy

**Summer Preparations Includes:** Site Visits, SSP's Vehicles (insurance, depreciation, storage costs), Worker's Comp, Credit Card Processing Fees, Tools, Software, Journals

**Other Summer Costs Includes:** Transportation Expenses, Tools, Building Materials, Food, T-shirts, Scholarships, Facilities

# Takeaways

- SSP's income will drop over **\$500k** from 2019
- While SSP had a large surplus in 2019, that was mostly due to **restricted funding**
  - Scholarship funds primarily, but also for building materials and summer staffing costs in Tsaile
  - Cannot be used to cover things outside of their purpose without donor approval
- **Year-Round Programs** cover their own expenses
  - Contribute towards admin costs
- **Summer expenses** have been reduced as much as possible by more than \$456k:
  - Summer Preparations reduced by \$60k
  - Summer Staffing reduced by \$60k
  - Other Summer Costs reduced by \$336k
- **Paycheck Protection Program** forgivable loan fully covers the expense of running an online program and a portion of the admin expenses