



Annual Report 2023–2024



From the Executive Director



In a world increasingly marked by division and uncertainty, VIA's work has never felt more vital. Now more than ever, our core values of empathy, compassion, and collaboration are essential not only for personal growth, but also for building resilient communities and a more peaceful global society. That is why we are deepening our commitment to cultivating

the next generation of social impact leaders—those who lead with understanding, act with humility, and are equipped to collaborate across differences.

I'm very excited to share two recent developments that reflect this commitment. First, we are expanding our Global Community Fellowship program this year with two new posts. With the generous support of Friends Foundation International, one fellow will join the Education for Friendship Foundation (EFF) in Mae Sot, Thailand—near the Myanmar border—to support education programs for Burmese refugee and migrant children. Another fellow will work with the Suwandi Foundation in a rural village in northern Bali, leading volunteer cohorts and facilitating interactive learning experiences. These new placements reflect both our commitment to supporting grassroots organizations in diverse communities and our belief in the power of immersive, reciprocal learning.

Second, we have been broadening our reach to younger generations in the post-COVID era, as highlighted on pages 3–4 of this report. I am especially grateful for our decade-long partnership with Fukuoka Futaba High School and thrilled that we expanded our collaboration last year through the Nichibei (Japan-US) Girls Collaborative, generously supported by the United States-Japan Foundation. These early experiences help youth build cross-cultural understanding and inspire a sense of purpose that can shape their academic and personal trajectories for years to come.

As we look ahead, I continue to be inspired by the energy and resolve of our participants and alumni. Their stories remind me that the path to change often begins with a single connection or a moment of reflection. The story of VIA alumnus Kazuharu Omata, featured on p. 5, is one such example. And as someone whose own journey with VIA began more than 30 years ago as a participant from Japan, I know firsthand how transformative these experiences can be.

None of this would be possible without our extraordinary community. I am deeply grateful to our staff, board, donors, funders, alumni, and friends who continue to invest in our vision. Your belief in VIA not only sustains our programs but encourages us to keep growing and evolving in meaningful ways.

I invite you to continue this journey with us, with renewed purpose and shared hope. The need is great—but so is our collective potential.

June 2025

Kazutoh Ishida, PhD
Executive Director

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Empowering Youth, Building Futures



The summer of 2023 marked a joyful return to in-person programming for VIA. Students from across Asia gathered in the San Francisco Bay Area to learn, grow, and connect. Among the many highlights for this summer were the programs welcoming our youngest participants, students from the Masason Foundation and Fukuoka Futaba High School, whose experiences showed the power of early engagement in leadership and cross-cultural exploration between Asia and the US.

Innovation in Action

In July 2023, VIA welcomed a dynamic cohort of young changemakers from the Masason Foundation as part of their North America Summer Program. Ranging from ages 8 to 19, these students came to Silicon Valley ready to explore the intersection of technology, creativity, and global impact. Their week included a thought-provoking lecture from Dr. Richard Dasher, Director of the US-Asia Technology Management Center at Stanford University, where students engaged in conversations about innovation and their role in shaping the future.

It was especially moving to witness such young learners, some just beginning middle school, share bold ideas about the future of AI, environmental sustainability, and social equity. Their curiosity and confidence reflect the Masason Foundation's commitment to nurturing high-potential youth and align deeply with VIA's mission to cultivate the next generation of global leaders.



Hong Kong, and beyond for deeply immersive, hands-on learning experiences.



The same spirit of exploration and discovery echoed throughout VIA's Exploring Social Innovation (ESI) and Exploring Health Care (EHC) programs as well. In the summers of 2023 and 2024, ESI and EHC welcomed university students from Japan, Myanmar, Thailand, China, the Philippines,

ESI participants visited social enterprises tackling critical challenges like food insecurity and housing, and engaged in design-thinking workshops to prototype their own solutions. They also heard firsthand from

(continued on next page)

Empowering Youth, Building Futures (cont'd)

local changemakers who are reimagining systems in the Bay Area and around the world. Meanwhile, EHC students explored public health topics ranging from organ transplantation and palliative care to healthcare access and cultural stigma. Visits to Stanford Medical Center and local community organizations like Project Open Hand deepened their understanding of the healthcare landscape, while cross-cultural discussions fostered empathy and global perspective.



A Growing Partnership: Futaba High School and the Girls Collaborative

Since 2016, VIA has partnered with Fukuoka Futaba High School to provide students with immersive learning experiences through our Exploring Silicon Valley (ESV) program. In 2023, our fifth year together, Futaba students joined ESI participants for a dynamic week that included design-thinking workshops, meetings with Japanese social innovators, and a scavenger hunt to build an innovator's mindset. Their time in the Bay Area also included meaningful educational moments — visiting the Center for Independent Living, touring the Castro neighborhood, and engaging in discussions about marriage equality.



In 2024, our collaboration with Futaba High School grew with the launch of the Nichibei Girls Collaborative—a new seven-month leadership and cultural exchange program connecting girls from Futaba High School in Fukuoka and two partner high schools in Salinas, California. Supported by the United States-Japan Foundation, students from Salinas visited Japan to learn more about Japanese culture and society, while students from Futaba traveled to the US to participate in workshops and cultural activities. In between the in-person exchanges, the students connected virtually for online workshops, discussions, and collaborative projects. Through these shared experiences, the students are building lasting cross-cultural friendships and exploring how they can create meaningful change in their communities and beyond.



Looking Ahead

Reuniting in person has reminded us of something profound: learning is most powerful when it's shared. The return of our youth-focused programs, alongside the ESI and EHC programs, has reignited a sense of purpose and possibility for participants and staff alike. As we look to the future, VIA is more committed than ever to creating spaces where young people can explore, connect, and lead together.

My VIA Journey as a Social Impact Leader



Kazuharu (right) at the clinic he supports together with VIA AUSL program alumnus Masanori Tanaka (left) who works as a doctor at the clinic, and VIA Executive Director, Kazutoh Ishida (middle)

Kazuharu Omata, a longtime member of the VIA community, first joined the organization as a university student in 2007. Since then, his journey has evolved into a lifelong pursuit of social impact, shaped by VIA's experiential learning programs and a single question that changed his perspective. In his own words, Kazuharu shares how his VIA experiences laid the foundation for his work in social innovation and healthcare in Japan:

I joined VIA's Serving American Community (SAC) program in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2007, during my freshman year of university. Being deeply

impacted by the program experience and eager to develop my leadership skills, I returned to VIA to serve as a student program coordinator to support the SAC program in 2008 and 2009, the Asia-US Service Learning (AUSL) program in 2011, and the Exploring Social Innovation (ESI) program in 2012.

One of the most impactful and life-changing experiences I had during the SAC program was participating in an activity called the Faithful Fools Street Retreat. Through that activity, we spent an entire day in San Francisco's Tenderloin district—an area with a large unhoused population—without money or communication devices. We immersed ourselves in this community, not as people who serve, but as people who are open to being served. I still clearly remember having lunch at the soup kitchen. The person next to me started talking to me. He noticed that I wasn't a local and asked where I was from. I said, "I'm from Japan." Then he asked, "Why are you here?" At that moment, I couldn't give him a clear answer. This was partially because I was poor at English, but also because I didn't have a clear answer for myself. Yet, he kindly talked to me a little bit about his life. His question, "Why are you here?" became a personal mantra.

This question "Why am I here?" has guided me to deeply reflect on my values and pursue a career in social impact and innovation. After completing my master's degree, where I focused on the homelessness issue in Japan, I worked in business development for

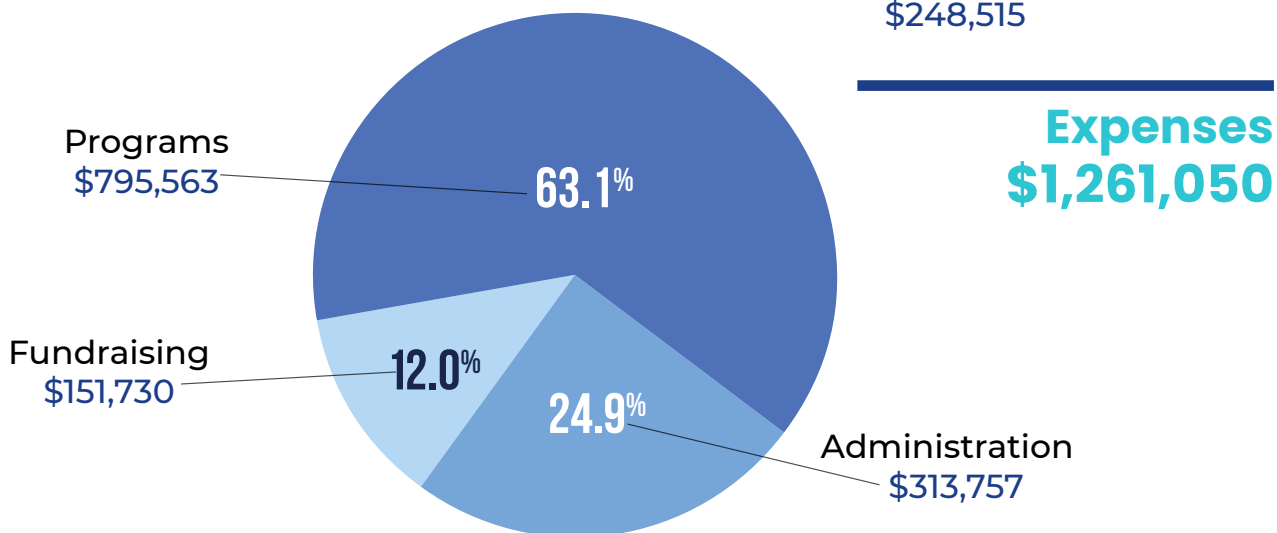
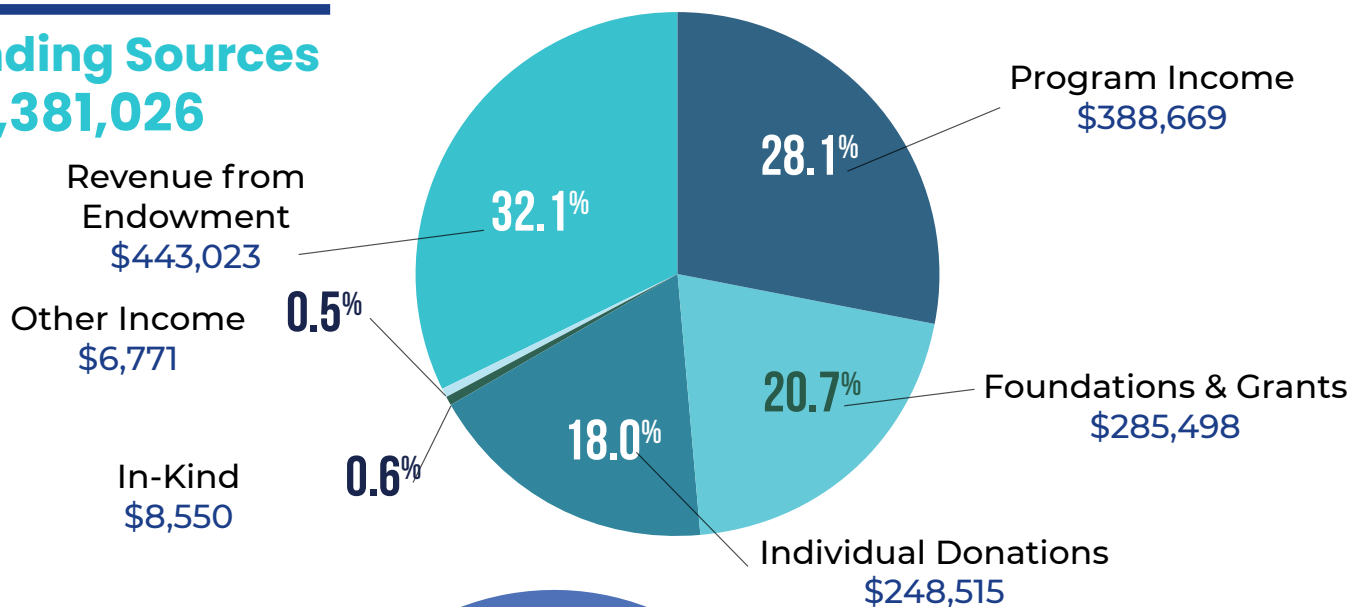
social enterprises. I now serve as a hands-on consultant for hospitals and elderly care centers, which face critical challenges in Japan's rapidly aging society. With a deep appreciation for VIA's experiential learning approach and recognizing potential synergies with my current work, I am in the process of co-creating a new project with VIA focusing on community-based medical care in Japan. Through this project, VIA participants will have the opportunity to collaborate with a local clinic in Tokyo and engage in a design-thinking initiative. More specifically, we will begin by conducting empathy interviews to better understand the needs of the community, and then propose innovative ideas for how the clinic can address some of those needs.

I am incredibly excited to continue my VIA journey as a social impact leader, and I warmly welcome anyone interested in joining us on this meaningful project!



2023–2024 By The Numbers

Funding Sources \$ 1,381,026



Creating Your VIA Legacy

We would like to thank and honor all of those who have made a legacy gift promise to VIA.

Planned giving can be an advantageous way to provide a future gift to VIA. By including VIA for any amount in your estate plans, you ensure the continuation of rich, immersive cross-cultural learning experiences that transform lives and strengthen our global community.

There are several ways to create your legacy for VIA:

- *Bequest in Your Will or Trust*
- *Life insurance*
- *Individual Retirement Accounts*
- *Life Income Gifts*
- *Personal Property*

If you have included VIA in your will or trust, please inform us so that we can thank you for your special commitment. For more information, please contact VIA Strategic Relationships Director Wallace Wong at wallace@viaprograms.org.

Thank you

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*Your contributions add miles to each participant's journey.
For that, we sincerely thank you.*

July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

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How to Support

As we reflect on a year of growth and impact, we're excited to announce the launch of two new VIA Global Community Fellowship posts that will support transformative educational initiatives in Southeast Asia. These fellowships, at the Education for Friendship Foundation (EFF) in Mae Sot, Thailand, and the Suwandi Foundation in Bali, Indonesia, will create educational opportunities for underserved youth and empower them to build brighter futures.

Your support is essential to sustaining this important work. By donating to VIA, you help fund our transformative programs and fellowships that reach thousands of students, educators, and communities each year. You can also make an impact by volunteering or partnering with VIA to further our mission.

If you're interested in getting involved, please reach out to VIA's Strategic Relationships Director, Wallace Wong, at wallace@viaprograms.org.

Every contribution, big or small, makes a difference. Donate today at viaprograms.org/donate.

Together, we can make a lasting impact!



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