

Funds Distribution Report

Recipient Organization:

South Sound Estuary Association

Address:

309 State Ave NE
Olympia, WA 98507

8802 27th Ave NE
Tulalip, WA 98271

TulalipCares.org

Mailing Address:

PO Box 2182
Olympia, WA 98507

Contact:

(360) 918-8412
<https://pugetsoundestuarium.org>

Organization's General Goals:

Our mission is to foster learning opportunities that inspire people of all ages to connect with, protect, and enjoy the unique estuary environment of Puget Sound.

Date of Award:

2024 Q3

Level:

\$2,500 to \$5,000

For more information, please read the attached report from South Sound Estuary Association.

Disclaimer: This report may be a summary of content provided by the recipient, not always complete quoted material.



Project: Accessibility-Focused Visitor Center and Exhibit Enhancements

Reporting Period: January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025

Contact: Hap Clemons, Executive Director (hap@pugetsoundestuarium.org)

Project Summary

The Puget Sound Estuarium is strengthening facility and exhibit accessibility so all visitors, including people with mobility and cognitive disabilities, can fully participate in an immersive, welcoming estuary learning experience.

Use of Funds

In 2025, Tulalip funds supported Payton Kammerer's project coordination for accessibility improvements, exhibit updates, and facility planning. Beginning in January 2025, Payton increased to 160 hours/month to support visitor experience operations and accessibility design implementation.

Activities and Outputs for 2025

During the reporting period, the Estuarium completed the following accessibility and exhibit improvements:

- Improved exhibit flow and visitor movement to support maneuverability, clearer navigation, and reduced bottlenecks.
- Reduced information-dense permanent exhibit content to better support comprehension and reduce cognitive overload.
- Aligned exhibit content more directly with aquaria so visitors can connect labels, stories, and live animals in a clearer learning arc.
- Built and installed rotating exhibits using accessibility-informed design practices (readable text size, clear hierarchy, and improved wayfinding), informed in part by exhibit labeling best practices (including *Exhibit Labels* by Beverly Serrell). See photos of exhibit pieces at end of report.
- Adjusted label placement for improved readability across heights, including wheelchair users and younger learners.
- Increased the use of larger visuals and tangible elements to support scale, observation, and multi-age understanding.

Evaluation and Observation

We tracked progress through (1) completion of specific accessibility deliverables and (2) observational feedback from visitors and staff.

- **Visitor engagement:** Staff observed visitors spending more time at tanks and exhibits when labels were simplified and better aligned to the aquaria.
- **Accessibility observations:** Lower label placement and improved circulation, supported easier viewing, and reduced physical barriers.
- **Visitor feedback highlights:** Visitors consistently cited live interpretation and staff interaction as a key factor in better understanding Puget Sound species and exhibit content.

Challenges and Lessons

- Simplifying exhibits while maintaining scientific integrity required careful timely rewriting, testing, and iteration.
- Increased time devoted to exhibit and facility projects created strain on cross-department role clarity and scheduling.
- Rotating exhibit development carries ongoing materials and labor costs. We learned that some accessibility gains can be achieved more sustainably by improving core interpretive infrastructure (labels, layout, and animal-centered storytelling) rather than frequent rebuilds.

What's Next

In 2026, we will continue the accessibility redesign with increased focus on animal wellbeing and habitat conditions that shape both learning quality and aquaria maintenance (light, heat, and visitor flow). We anticipate reducing rotating exhibit builds and prioritizing a mission-aligned permanent exhibit focused on the Deschutes Restoration Project, with interactive components that help the public understand complex topics such as dredging, dam removal, and species recovery.

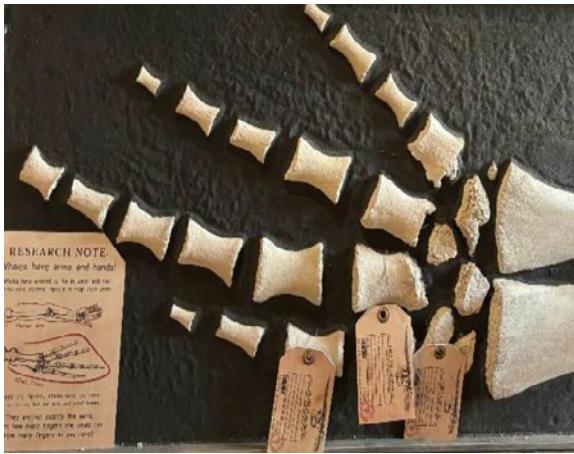
We look forward to submitting an application in the first quarter of 2026.

Thank you to Tulalip Cares and the Tulalip Tribes Charitable Contributions program for investing in accessibility and inclusion at the Puget Sound Estuarium. Your support helps ensure all visitors can explore, connect, and be inspired by the South Puget Sound ecosystem.



Photos from rotating exhibits 2025

Example showing tags on Gray Whale Flipper Bones exhibit.



Sharks of Washington Exhibit photo showing a more lean display to focus attention.



Marvelous Marine Mammals Exhibit orca skull.



Marvelous Marine Mammals Exhibit sea lion skull.

