

ADVOCACY



RESOURCES



ANNUAL REPORT 2023: **DRIVING DIGITAL INCLUSION**

**WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT**



RESEARCH





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MISSION:

To create a world of
no limits for people
who are blind
or have low vision.

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Driving Digital Inclusion

The following annual report from the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) offers an overview of programs, operations, and finances for the fiscal year (FY) ending June 30, 2023. Key areas of focus include advocacy and research, consulting services, workforce development, and other key programs undertaken throughout the year.

AFB's mission is to create a world of no limits for people who are blind or have low vision. Through a team of highly motivated professionals and leaders in the blindness field, many with lived experience, AFB mobilizes leaders, advances understanding, and champions policies and practices to drive systemic change using research and data.

AFB has continued to provide **impactful and meaningful** programs and advocacy for over a century.

Through the generous support of its donors, benefactors, and partners from the corporate and private sectors, AFB has continued to provide impactful and meaningful programs and advocacy for over a century. This past year has been no exception, as demonstrated through the following articles that spotlight key achievements AFB has undertaken. This success came at a pivotal time in AFB's history as the organization underwent a national search for its new President & CEO. On April 12th, AFB welcomed Eric Bridges to lead the organization. Having spent two decades in Washington, D.C., advocating for greater opportunity and independence for people who are blind and low vision, Bridges exemplifies AFB's mission, vision, and core values.

For FY2023, AFB significantly reduced its operating deficit. Measures were also set into motion to realign key program areas to designate resources and reduce outlays more strategically. These changes lay the groundwork for FY2024, when AFB will undertake strategic planning to steer the organization through the foreseeable future with a focus on fostering sustainable growth. As such, AFB closed out FY2023 ready to lead far into its second century.

From AFB's President & CEO

Listening to AFB's people and the field to chart a successful path forward.

Since taking on the role of AFB's President & CEO, I've done a lot of listening to understand the organization's strengths and where we can improve in making the lives of people who are blind or low vision better.

During the 2023 AFB Leadership Conference — my first week on the job — I sat down with about 22 CEOs and Executive Directors and asked them two questions: What's your relationship to AFB and what would you like to see us do in the future?

I also offered to meet one-on-one with every member of AFB's staff and Board of Trustees, and my questions to them were similar: What's one thing you think is going really well at AFB and what's the one thing you think isn't going well — and what do you think is the reason for each?

The feedback, especially from employees, was valuable as we began drafting a new strategic plan to ensure our success. Soon we'll have a roadmap for the next three to five years and I'm excited about it.

I realize I stepped into my role at a time when AFB was facing some challenges, especially with our finances and a workforce reduction. But people kept coming to work every day with a purpose, so we have a strong foundation to build on.

One of our hallmarks as AFB moves into our second century is the work we've done on digital inclusion. I often say to people, "All I want is everything." It's going to take time before people who are blind like me have access to everything, but through meaningful dialogue and diligent teamwork we can make that change happen.

ERIC BRIDGES

AFB PRESIDENT & CEO

"I've been a great admirer of AFB for my entire career. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be part of an organization that's a recognized leader as we reshape how we'll address the needs of our field even better than we have before."

From the Chair of AFB's Board of Trustees

During a challenging year, a team effort helped AFB maintain its mission.

As I end my tenure as Chair of AFB's Board of Trustees, I've been reflecting on how committed the organization is to driving change, even during challenging times.

As we approached our centennial year in 2021, it was amazing to think what a unique opportunity it was to be the Chair of the Board of a 100-year-old organization that's had an impact for that many years. But it was also a huge responsibility to sit in that seat during a period of transition within the organization, including a change in leadership. I was fortunate to be surrounded by many talented people on the Board and at AFB, and everything we accomplished was a team effort.

My term as Chair was extended to provide some continuity, and I'm excited about the future of AFB with Eric Bridges as its President & CEO. Plus, two programs AFB launched while I was Chair – the Blind Leaders Development Program and AFB Talent Lab – have great promise to make sure people who are blind or low vision can live up to their full potential in the workplace.

I had the chance to preview AFB's upcoming documentary, *Possibilities*, which shares the message of Helen Keller's journey and how AFB continues to be the north star of her vision for the world. It shows the progress we've made — and the progress we have yet to make. I have no doubt AFB is up to the task.

I will always be a supporter of and advocate for AFB. Serving on the Board has been an amazing learning opportunity for me and I wouldn't trade the experience for anything.

DEBBIE DENNIS

CHAIR, AFB BOARD OF TRUSTEES

"I'm grateful I had the chance to work with so many people on the Board and at AFB who have a passion for the mission, and making sure that AFB is here for another 100 years, making a difference."



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB)

Over the past century, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) has served as stewards of the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*. And thanks to the generous support of the Marilyn and Francine Gruder Trust in 2023, AFB will continue to shepherd this vital publication in the field of blindness and low vision.

Marilyn Gruder developed a deeper understanding of the needs faced by those with vision loss after years of caring for her sister Francine, who was blind. Ms. Gruder never married and dedicated herself to supporting her sister. It was through this relationship that it was decided after Marilyn's death, the Gruder estate would be used to support organizations serving the blindness community. Marilyn Gruder passed in September 2021, and it was determined AFB would become one of the beneficiaries of the Gruder estate, which is in excess of \$2.2 million.



First published in 1907 under the moniker *Outlook for the Blind*, *JVIB* is the international, peer-reviewed journal of record in the field of blindness and low vision.





“Because of this generous gift from Marilyn and Francine Gruder, *JVIB* will continue to be able to serve as the uninterrupted archive of the literature of the field of visual impairment,” said Rebecca Burrichter, senior editor of *JVIB*. “Their memory will forever be enshrined in the pages of *JVIB*, to be witnessed by current and future generations of researchers, practitioners, administrators, and policymakers.”

First published in 1907 under the moniker *Outlook for the Blind*, *JVIB* is the international, peer-reviewed journal of record in the field of blindness and low vision. *JVIB* delivers current research and best practice information, and commentary from authoritative experts on critical topics.

*“Because of this generous gift from Marilyn and Francine Gruder, *JVIB* will continue to be able to serve as the uninterrupted archive of the literature of the field of visual impairment.”*

—REBECCA BURRICHTER

JVIB SENIOR EDITOR



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

AccessWorld

Since 2000, the American Foundation for the Blind's *AccessWorld* magazine has been the premier source for information on the intersection of blindness, low vision, and technology. Throughout its 23-year history, *AccessWorld* has covered a wide range of topics.

At first, the magazine focused on product reviews but also has included instructional pieces, interviews, employment-related content, and other articles relating to access technology. During this time, *AccessWorld* primarily produced content for people with a direct experience of blindness or low vision.

AccessWorld **publishes interviews** with people who are blind or have low vision with a focus on their **employment journeys.**

In recent years, to create a greater impact on the lives of people who are blind or have low vision, AFB has focused on systems change. This means that instead of primarily providing information for people who are blind or have low vision themselves, the magazine aims to provide information to those who have the tools to make sweeping, positive changes in the world of digital accessibility. This includes many people in various industries, such as lawmakers and the decision-makers who can promote software accessibility.

The reworking of *AccessWorld* was completed in collaboration with AFB's Talent Lab program, the expanded successor to AFB's consulting department, and where its accessibility expertise is concentrated. With their assistance, AFB took a methodical approach to *AccessWorld's* refocus, to be sure AFB would be producing content that would best serve the broadened audience. AFB first performed research to determine where gaps existed in the currently produced digital inclusion content, and how those gaps could best be filled using AFB's expertise.

As digital inclusion is a large field, AFB was thorough in designing new article categories to be of interest to a wide range of audience segments. Their interest varies widely: content relevant to accessibility professionals could also hold value for developers themselves, but information for those employed in Human Resources or hiring managers will be entirely different. In addition to general product reviews and the expert accessibility commentary that can be expected from a digital inclusion publication, *AccessWorld* also publishes interviews with people who are blind or have low vision with a focus on their employment journeys, as well as research on the state of accessibility, to better inform decision-makers.

AFB's Talent Lab program includes a detailed set of learning tools that has been successfully used to train its interns and apprentices. AFB offers this learning content free to the public, and part of the goal of refocusing *AccessWorld* is to inform readers of its availability and quality. Alongside these changes, AFB will continue to provide useful information to *AccessWorld's* traditional readers. AFB completed these changes in the spring of 2023, and had a successful launch of the first issue in May.



Since 2000, The American Foundation for the Blind's *AccessWorld* magazine has been the premier source for information on the intersection of blindness, low vision, and technology.





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Using research to drive action in improving laws and policies.

Creating a world of no limits requires action — and there was no shortage of the kind of action that can result in meaningful change at AFB's Public Policy & Research Institute (PPRI) this year.

Much of this action comes in the form of research used to inform policymakers and others about the needs of people who are blind or low vision. PPRI's *Barriers to Digital Inclusion Survey* (BDIS), for example, revealed that there were barriers “across the board” in using websites and mobile apps, said Arielle Silverman, Ph.D., AFB's Director of Research.

“People reported that this limited their independence or the services and goods they could use online, because they had to use the app that's most accessible,” she said. “There's also a loss of privacy when they have to ask someone to help them with things like bank passwords or medical records online.”

There are additional phases of the BDIS in progress, and the data will be used to demonstrate the barriers people encounter in an effort to push for greater digital inclusion. You can read the report here:

<https://www.afb.org/barriers-digital-inclusion-survey>

AFB also took action in response to its findings from 2021's *Workplace Technology Survey*. According to Dr. Silverman, the results from the survey showed that many employers aren't following the legal requirements in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or other laws that promote inclusion.



AFB's Public Policy & Research Institute (PPRI) *Barriers to Digital Inclusion Survey* (BDIS) revealed that there were barriers “across the board” in using websites and mobile apps.





In 2023, AFB released a toolkit for hiring managers and Human Resources professionals, with guidance to prevent barriers to opportunity in the workplace. The toolkit is available for download here: <https://www.afb.org/Hr-manager-inclusion-toolkit>

In terms of advocacy, AFB continues working with the Biden administration to strengthen rulemaking and enforcement under several laws that require digital accessibility, including the ADA. According to Stephanie Enyart,



Playing to its strength as a convener, AFB hosted a panel at the 2023 AFB Leadership Conference, which involved people engaged in disability rights from across the beltway, including former White House officials.



AFB's Chief Public Policy and Research Officer, multiple meetings at the White House and relevant government agencies have resulted in the administration publishing a proposed rule to better define website and application accessibility under the ADA. Moving forward, AFB is working to improve the rule. Many of AFB's research studies have been used by AFB's allies, such as Hon. Tony Coelho — considered the father of the ADA — in pushing for stronger rulemaking.

AFB also worked in coalition to draft and advocate for introduction of the Websites and Software Applications Accessibility Act. This proposed legislation would improve enforcement of digital accessibility regulations and provide guidance and support for businesses implementing the law. Led by AFB, 52 organizations signed a statement for digital inclusion policies on Global Accessibility Awareness Day.

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Throughout the year, AFB also brought together representatives from big technology companies, disability rights advocates, other advocacy organizations, and key Congressional staffers for a series of dialogues about accessibility.

“We had a handful of meetings throughout the year to share our perspectives on the problems and solutions in terms of legislative or regulatory fixes,” Enyart said. “It was a dynamic conversation series that was helpful in understanding where influential players in the industry are, in addition to what our community needs. This type of mutual understanding is essential for effective policymaking. I think it really opened some doors.”



The Honorable Tony Coelho speaks at the 2023 Helen Keller Achievement Awards in Arlington, Virginia.

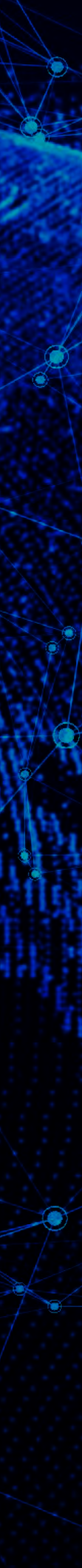


President & CEO Eric Bridges stands with his guide dog Trent preparing for opening remarks at the Helen Keller Achievement Awards.



“AFB is instrumental in bringing together diverse voices — both in our community and in the government — to make changes that bring rules and regulations around digital accessibility up to date with the modern age.”

—STEPHANIE ENYART
*AFB Chief Public Policy
and Research Officer*





WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Third Cohort of Blind Leaders Grows Network to 100+ Strong

On May 2, 2023, the AFB Blind Leaders Development Program completed its third cohort of 21 fellows during a virtual celebration, growing its network to 101 empowered blind and low vision mid-career professionals and mentors.

The AFB Blind Leaders Development Program offers a unique training model that includes leadership training, mentoring, and strategies to successfully work and lead with blindness or low vision. There are many leadership programs, as well as mentor programs; however, no program exists that includes the rigor or specific blindness focus for individuals who are already working and are blind or have low vision.

“Our blind leaders demonstrate the true power that comes when we are able to face our challenges head-on and use it as a means to empower ourselves toward excellence,” said AFB President & CEO Eric Bridges.

Launched in 2020, the Blind Leaders Development Program was created by AFB to increase upward mobility and create meaningful leadership experiences for individuals who are blind or have low vision, and who are already employed and in the early stages of their careers.

“Our blind leaders demonstrate the **true power** that comes when we are able to face our challenges head-on and use it as a means to **empower ourselves** toward excellence.”

—ERIC BRIDGES • AFB PRESIDENT & CEO



While in the program, participants receive extensive training in leadership, networking, communication, and other key skills for advancing in their careers and improving their effectiveness as they achieve higher levels of responsibility and influence. Other facets of the program include following the “*Leadership Challenge*” curriculum, attending a series of webinars, and being paired with a successful blind or low vision mentor who provides honest advice and feedback about what it takes to succeed in the workforce. Their success helps close the significant gap for upward mobility experienced by many people with disabilities.

Bridges added, “All of our Blind Leaders not only cultivate the confidence to lead both at work and in the community, but also break down the misconceptions of people with disabilities who live and work alongside us each day.”

Recognizing the potential within this growing network of rising leaders to bring about real systemic change toward creating upward mobility for professionals who are blind or have low vision, AFB began undertaking an in-depth program review following completion of the third cohort, in order to identify ways the program can scale up across business sectors and create a sustainable funding model to assure its longevity for future cohorts. Updates for the next cohort will be announced in FY2024.

“All of our Blind Leaders not only cultivate the confidence to lead both at work and in the community, but also break down the misconceptions of people with disabilities who live and work alongside us each day.”

—ERIC BRIDGES

AFB PRESIDENT & CEO



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

AFB Talent Lab Cultivates Future Generation of Accessibility Leaders

The AFB Talent Lab is an innovative workforce development program aiming to close the gap on digital inclusion by growing the number of future designers and developers with practical accessibility skills. It also upskills people with disabilities as accessibility specialists who can make an impact on an organization's digital products, processes, and workplace.

Since its launch in the summer of 2022, the AFB Talent Lab has engaged 21 participants, including 16 college students seeking to integrate and promote accessibility best practices in their careers through the program's internship program while also graduating four registered apprentices as project managers specializing in accessibility through the Virginia Department of Labor. All of AFB Talent Lab's apprentices are assistive technology users who aim to further their careers specifically to impact the digital inclusion landscape for the disability community. The interns and apprentices learn and work alongside each other, guided by AFB's in-house accessibility experts as they solve real-world problems through AFB's digital inclusion consulting practice. With clients ranging from multinational corporations to small businesses, this hands-on learning experience allows participants the opportunity to deepen their individual knowledge and skills while also contributing to AFB's work in helping organizations meet their digital inclusion goals.

“What's been **wonderful** about the program is the **unique pairing** of our apprentices with our interns during the learning process.”

—**MATTHEW JANUSAUSKAS** • AFB CHIEF TECHNOLOGY & WORKPLACE PROGRAMS OFFICER



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**Did you know that over 70% of websites
are not accessible to people with disabilities?**

**In the pursuit of change,
the AFB Talent Lab aims to meet the
accessibility needs of the tech industry.**

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“What’s been wonderful about the program is the unique pairing of our apprentices with our interns during the learning process,” said Matthew Janusauskas, AFB’s Chief Technology & Workforce Programs Officer. “The collaboration between the apprentices, who bring lived experiences as software engineers with a disability, and the interns, who advance their knowledge on the latest best practices for digital accessibility, creates a unique learning experience that benefits AFB’s clients along with the larger software and web development community.”

Throughout their participation in the Talent Lab, apprentices and interns are mentored by AFB’s accessibility experts while completing learning activities, assessments, and projects, including client work, research, and content contributions for advocacy efforts, earning AFB’s digital credentials affirming their growth in the field of digital inclusion. Additionally, apprentices fulfill the necessary training requirements to earn their professional credentials in project management while working as full-time staff at AFB.

**American Foundation for the Blind, Inc. and Subsidiary and AFB Special Fund, Inc.
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION**

JUNE 30, 2023 AND 2022
(Amounts expressed in thousands)

	2023	2022
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$1,240	\$1,805
Accounts receivable, net	38	136
Pledges and grants receivable, net	140	882
Other receivables	442	45
Prepaid expenses and other assets	101	190
Total Current Assets	1,961	3,058
Noncurrent Assets		
Investments, at fair value	27,541	22,781
Property and equipment, net	100	80
Total Noncurrent Assets	27,641	22,861
Total Assets	\$29,602	\$25,919
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$971	\$587
Deferred revenue	85	55
Total Current Liabilities	1,056	642
Noncurrent Liabilities		
Deferred rent obligation	-	8
Accrued postretirement benefit liability	80	96
Total Noncurrent Liabilities	80	104
Net Assets		
Without donor restrictions	10,207	9,340
With donor restrictions	18,259	15,833
Total Net Assets	28,466	25,173
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$29,602	\$25,919

American Foundation for the Blind, Inc. and Subsidiary and AFB Special Fund, Inc.
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES AND CHANGES IN NET ASSET
FOR THE YEARS ENDED JUNE 30, 2023 AND 2022

(Amounts expressed in thousands)

	Without Donor Restrictions			With Donor Restrictions			Eliminating Entries	2023	2022
	AFB	AFBSF	HKDA	AFB	AFBSF	HKDA			
REVENUES, GAINS AND OTHER SUPPORT:									
Public support	\$ 1,018	\$ —	\$ —	\$ 1,885	—	\$ —	\$ —	\$ 2,903	\$ 5,286
Legacies and bequests	1,871	—	—	2,990	—	—	—	4,861	8,958
Grants from government agencies	273	—	—	5	—	—	—	278	51
Contributed services, media time	2,592	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,592	3,318
Total public support	5,754	—	—	4,880	—	—	—	10,634	17,613
Other revenue:									
Sales	141	—	—	164	—	—	(101)	204	662
Investment activity	1,170	324	—	1,304	—	—	—	2,798	(2,423)
Royalty and other income	342	—	—	—	—	—	(250)	92	25
Miscellaneous revenue	8	—	—	1	—	—	—	9	18
Total other revenue	1,661	324	—	1,469	—	—	(351)	3,103	(1,718)
Net assets released from restrictions	3,506	—	417	(3,506)	—	(417)	—	—	—
Total revenues, gains and other support	10,921	324	417	2,843	—	(417)	(351)	13,737	15,895
EXPENSES:									
Program services:									
Knowledge building and information dissemination	\$ 2,326	\$ —	\$ 417	\$ —	\$ —	\$ —	\$ (36)	\$ 2,707	\$4,389
Technology solutions	3,698	—	—	—	—	—	(42)	3,656	3,023
Advocacy and public policy	1,867	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,867	1,781
Total program services	7,891	—	417	—	—	—	(78)	8,230	9,193
SUPPORTING SERVICES:									
Management and general	1,178	302	—	—	—	—	(273)	1,207	1,324
Fundraising	1,004	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,004	2,021
Cost of direct benefits to donors	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	413
Total supporting services	2,182	302	—	—	—	—	(273)	2,211	3,758
Total expenses	10,073	302	417	—	—	—	(351)	10,441	12,951
Change in net assets before postretirement related changes	848	22	—	2,843	—	(417)	—	3,296	2,944
Postretirement related changes other than net periodic costs	(3)	—	—	—	—	—	—	(3)	1
Changes in net assets	845	22	—	2,843	—	(417)	—	3,293	2,945
Net assets, beginning of year	8,519	821	—	15,812	—	21	—	25,173	22,228
Net assets, end of year	\$ 9,364	\$ 843	\$ —	\$ 18,655	\$ —	\$ (396)	\$ —	\$ 28,466	\$ 25,173



AFB American Foundation[®]
for the Blind

www.afb.org

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