



**AFB** American Foundation<sup>®</sup>  
for the Blind

**2024 ANNUAL REPORT**

# **BUILDING OPPORTUNITY**

## FROM AFB'S PRESIDENT & CEO



This annual report shares the successes and progress of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. At AFB, we envision a world that is built for everyone. This is why the theme for the FY2024 Annual Report is **“Building Opportunity.”**

The image of building this past year captures the essence of what we achieved.

The year began with us developing a new strategic plan to serve as our blueprint for the next five years. This plan builds on our legacy of thought leadership and advocacy in the field of blindness and low vision, further anchored by our long-standing partnerships and a renewed commitment to our financial stewardship. When our Board of Trustees voted in November 2023 to adopt the new strategic plan, we all hit the ground running, eager to build from this blueprint and map out our next five years.

The plan will carry us through 2029 and centers on five core strategic goals. The first three goals are programmatic, each leveraging a pillar of AFB that has been the benchmark of our success for the past century. The first goal is to generate knowledge that drives change. The second goal is to expand possibilities through workforce programs and community engagement. The third programmatic goal is to build a national narrative on blindness. The remaining two goals will help create a solid foundation capable of lifting these three pillars: fostering a high-performance workplace and achieving financial stability.

To help ensure this strategic plan is effectively executed, we implemented a new business operating system in preparation for the strategic plan launch. This new management paradigm is called System & Soul, and it seeks to harmonize business units across the organization, breaking down silos and cultivating a culture that works together on shared company objectives. These objectives are comprised of milestones that each department leads. These milestones are the bricks that will build our dream house. With our new blueprint spread out to us, each member of the AFB team plays a key role in building our success.

The following pages in this annual report look at our past year's work and how we began to build out our new strategic plan: dream by dream, goal by goal, and brick by brick.

Sincerely,

**ERIC BRIDGES**

PRESIDENT & CEO



## FROM AFB'S CO-CHAIRS

On behalf of the AFB Board of Trustees, we want to thank you for taking the time to read through our 2024 AFB Annual Report. In this report, you will find valuable information on the programs, operations, and financial standing of the nation's leading research, advocacy, and convening organization committed to creating equal opportunity and expanding possibilities for blind and low-vision people living in the United States today.

When we took the helm of AFB's Board of Trustees in October 2023, we sensed challenges and incredible opportunities. Working together, the Trustees and staff leadership conceptualized changes to secure AFB's financial sustainability for future generations. Under the direction of our President and CEO, Eric Bridges, the staff led the implementation of the changes and updates we envisioned as a leadership team.

With so much on the table, the AFB Board of Trustees felt we would be best served by having joint leadership on deck to ensure we can effectively implement our new strategic plan. It has been an honor and privilege to support Eric and the AFB staff and see many of our hopes and plans come to fruition.

The past year has been quite exciting, and we have witnessed how quickly the AFB team gained traction on the core goals spelled out in the new strategic plan, and their work is having an impact across the country and beyond. We saw success from many angles, from wins in the regulatory space around accessibility to the launch of our newly revamped digital accessibility internship program. We also made great strides toward making the world more inclusive and accessible in the digital age. We celebrated changing the narrative on blindness following the release of our award-winning documentary film *Possibilities* and honoring global media titans for inclusion at our annual Helen Keller Achievement Awards in Los Angeles. Last but not least, we continued to make significant gains in establishing financial sustainability while empowering our employees through workforce improvements.

All of this work could not have been done without the leadership of our Trustees, the sweat equity of our staff, and the support of each and every individual who gave to AFB this past year. Through the time, talent, and resources we secured in FY2024, we laid the foundation that has already yielded strength and impact throughout our community. In light of this, we look forward to what the future holds and hope you will join us as we continue to build up opportunities for people who are blind or have low vision.

Sincerely,

**DIANE FAZZI**

CO-CHAIR, AFB BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**MELANIE LOCKWOOD HERMAN**

CO-CHAIR, AFB BOARD OF TRUSTEES



## BUILDING A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

To reach AFB's full potential and move our mission forward, the AFB Trustees and leadership team recognized in FY2024 that our pathway to success would come through leveraging the diverse range of talent and skills distributed across the organization. This talent would be the building blocks for our success, and the mortar that would fuse everything together would be found in the process improvements introduced and implemented during FY2024.

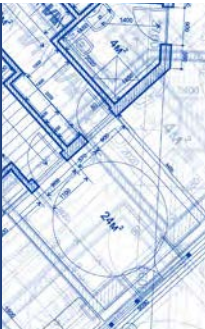

The blueprint for process and workplace improvements was extremely timely, as AFB was entering the strategic planning process at the start of the fiscal year.

"Our last strategic plan was over six years old," said Eric Bridges, AFB president and CEO. "A lot has happened at AFB during that time, and it was clear that amidst the changes in programs, there would need to be a major focus placed on our internal operations."

Identifying a key goal centered on workplace improvements comprised one of the two non-programmatic goals in the newly adopted AFB strategic plan. While this new goal will be carried out primarily behind the scenes, it will play a critical role in all the external projects and programs that will serve as the remaining pillars for the newly updated plan. These ambitious goals will require continuously evaluating our processes, tools, systems, and project teams so we can efficiently and effectively collaborate, share knowledge, and advance our objectives across a distributed workforce.

"A key question we asked ourselves was how could we shape new ways of working in order to better leverage our staff's deep knowledge, skills, and dedication to mission," said Sonya Shiflet, AFB's chief operating officer. "By transforming our tools, systems, and processes, we have accomplished so much more in far less time than we would have previously."

Focusing on AFB's core values of leadership, excellence, collaboration, and impact, the leadership team at AFB mapped out a blueprint to guide the newly adopted business operating system, which was rolled out in tandem with the strategic plan development.



Identifying a key goal centered on workplace improvements comprised one of the two non-programmatic goals in the newly adopted AFB strategic plan.

In FY2024, AFB adopted a management system called System & Soul (S2), which is popular among entrepreneurs and start-ups that often have substantial goals with limited bandwidth. S2 has significantly helped AFB's leadership team clearly articulate the long-range goals spelled out in the strategic plan and establish a set of directions capable of achieving these goals through realistic milestones that span the entire organization.

The AFB leadership team was restructured to focus heavily on operations to foster momentum across the organization. In the fourth quarter of FY2024, the Business Services, Communications, and Human Resources departments were brought under the umbrella of Operations, which also established a Project Management office. The latter ensures that projects will not be siloed within the organization. In addition, rigorous project planning, transparency, and improved tracking, documentation, and cross-organizational communications will keep projects on track and enable us to work through the bottlenecks often found in nonprofits with limited resources and bandwidth.

During the fourth quarter of FY2024, Sonya Shiflet transitioned from Chief People and Planning Officer to Chief Operations Officer.

“With over 30 years managing human capital at AFB, her experience was just what we needed to make sure that collaboration and knowledge-sharing could be deployed in ways that empower each and every member of AFB,” said Bridges.

Shiflet added, “Our new direction is exciting, and I’m inspired every day by the impact we are able to make with our small but mighty team.”

Access the new strategic plan at [www.afb.org/strategic-plan](http://www.afb.org/strategic-plan).



## RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY DRIVE NOTABLE PROGRESS IN ACCESSIBILITY

AFB's Public Policy and Research Institute (PPRI) remained diligent in its efforts to support AFB's strategic goal of generating knowledge that drives change through advocacy and research.

In spring 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice created a regulation for Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act pertaining to website and application accessibility requirements for state and local governments. Before issuing the rule, the agency took public comments from AFB regarding ways to strengthen the rulemaking to better protect the interests of blind and low-vision K-12 and higher education students. When the agency issued its final rule, it cited AFB education research explicitly and made reference to many key issues highlighted in AFB advocacy as a rationale for dropping provisions to strengthen the rule for blind people.

"We have waited so long to have binding regulations in the web and app space," said Stephanie Enyart, chief public policy and research officer. "This is meaningful because it's how we connect with many essential aspects of public life, such as voting, local utilities, educational environments, and more. It will be game-changing to have the autonomy and privacy to interact independently with every state and local entity, and we believe it creates a foundation for our future efforts to further expand accessibility."

Moreover, AFB's persistent advocacy led to the reintroduction of the Websites and Software Applications Accessibility Act in September 2023, which has bipartisan support. The proposed legislation works alongside the ADA to ensure that employers, governments, and businesses follow the best standards for producing accessible applications and online content. It also requires companies that design websites and applications to make them accessible, since entities large and small rely heavily on third parties to build the digital products they deploy.

As for research, the second phase of AFB's Barriers to Digital Inclusion Survey (BDIS) was released in May 2024, revealing more details on the challenges people who are blind or low vision face in using websites and mobile apps.



**AFB's research demonstrating barriers to digital accessibility for people who are blind or have low vision was a powerful tool in a significant achievement for the field.**



**“We have waited so long to have binding regulations in the web and app space.”**

**STEPHANIE ENYART**

CHIEF PUBLIC POLICY AND  
RESEARCH OFFICER

AFB asked 20 participants who are blind or low vision to keep daily diaries of their experiences for 10 days. On average, people reported 12 barriers per week — elements of websites or apps that were not easily accessible. The participants reported spending about 20 minutes per barrier resolving the issue. About one-quarter of the time, people needed sighted assistance, which took approximately 12 minutes per barrier. The study engaged the most demographically diverse sample to date for AFB in terms of race, gender, and age.

“We did this diary study to get more detailed insights into what people experience day to day,” said Arielle Silverman, Ph.D., director of research. “Learning more about barriers is valuable data, as is the information we received on good experiences, which demonstrate what happens when you remove barriers.”

AFB’s researchers also embarked on the first phase of research on artificial intelligence (AI), which will continue in FY2025 and beyond. The goal is to understand the potential benefits and risks of AI for people who are blind and have low vision.

Another accomplishment in FY2024 was the creation of fact sheets and summaries of AFB’s research studies to date. These brief overviews are designed to make AFB’s research more reader-friendly for a broader audience.

“These summaries should give people a quick, easy way to identify what we found in each study,” Dr. Silverman said, “and help us share our findings with people who have the power to implement systems change.”

These materials, along with research-based toolkits AFB created to guide the creation of more inclusive, accessible public environments, are available at [afb.org/research](https://afb.org/research).

## AFB TALENT LAB DRIVES DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY WORKFORCE FORWARD

At the start of FY2024, AFB underwent review of our workforce development programs. The review coincided with the development of our new strategic plan, which aimed to expand possibilities for people who are blind or have low vision through our workforce programs and community engagement.

As the strategic plan took shape, it was clear that the *AFB Talent Lab* had the capability to significantly impact expanding digital accessibility and inclusion. Success was demonstrated during the first quarter of FY2024 when four *Talent Lab* apprentices received Journeyman accreditation for project management through the Commonwealth of Virginia, with a focus on accessibility and digital inclusion. Made possible through the generous support of philanthropist Gordon Gund, each apprentice brings a unique lived experience of blindness to their respective fields in software development and engineering.



It was clear that *AFB Talent Lab* had the capability to significantly impact expanding digital accessibility and inclusion.

The AFB Digital Accessibility Internship Program was the first to complete its internal review during FY2024, and the program was strengthened to focus on summer learning opportunities that would allow for scaling up instruction to accommodate greater student participation. The revamped program launched in June 2024, introducing the newly established Digital Accessibility Bootcamp.

This three-month summer program is available to graduate and undergraduate students as well as recent graduates. It is dedicated to expanding the pool of skilled digital engineers and designers who are committed to advancing accessibility and inclusion in technology. By providing hands-on learning and mentorship, this program prepares participants to create inclusive digital environments and help organizations meet their accessibility goals, contributing to a more inclusive digital landscape.



“Our goal is to empower the next generation of digital professionals to champion accessibility,” said Matthew Janusauskas, AFB’s chief technology and programs officer.

The program launched with 19 participants from across the country. Each participant gained hands-on training and mentoring from professionals who are blind or have low vision.

“The accessibility skills acquired through this bootcamp are the perfect starting point to prepare us for a promising future,” said Ashraf Shaikh Mohammed, a student at Iowa State University. “Best of all, we get to work with amazing, helpful, and talented people who are incredibly skilled in the field of digital accessibility.”

“This bootcamp has been a wonderful experience, and I can confidently say that it is creating the people who will shape the future of digital accessibility,” said Adara Noble, a student at West Colorado University.

Those completing the Digital Accessibility Bootcamp will have the opportunity to gain further training as additional *Talent Lab* programs, such as the digital accessibility residency program, take flight. Two of the inaugural bootcamp interns stayed on in this capacity to further their education. The apprenticeship program, which focuses on training developers and engineers with disabilities, is also queued up for roll-out over the coming year.



“This bootcamp has been a wonderful experience, and I can confidently say that it is creating the people who will shape the future of digital accessibility.”

**ADARA NOBLE**  
STUDENT AT WEST  
COLORADO UNIVERSITY

## DOCUMENTARY FILM *POSSIBILITIES* RELEASED, GAINS TRACTION IN FESTIVAL CIRCUIT

After several years in the making, 2024 heralded the arrival of AFB's documentary film *Possibilities*. The film, which captures the impact of Helen Keller's life through contemporary blind voices, aims to break down misconceptions and build a more positive narrative around blindness.

Keller, who joined AFB in 1924, worked with the organization until her death in 1968. During her time at AFB, she traveled the globe as not just a voice for the inclusion of people with disabilities but also an ambassador for peace on behalf of the United States government. Having visited over 30 nations and authored multiple best-selling books, Keller left a lasting legacy that still resonates with people around the world a century after she joined AFB.

The film captures the stories of 33 individuals who, in reflecting on Keller's impact, paint a vivid portrait of life as someone who is blind, deafblind, or has low vision. From the voices of those who have found success to those still struggling each day to gain full inclusion and independence in society, the film offers an authentic portrayal of blindness in the 21st century.

Following a handful of private screenings for donors in the fall of 2023, the film held its world premiere at the Golden State Film Festival in February 2024, where it was screened at the world-famous TCL "Grauman's" Chinese Theater in the heart of Hollywood. The week before its premiere, *Possibilities* received the Impact DOCS Award for independent documentary filmmaking. At the time of the writing of this report, it has been accepted into 10 other festivals across the United States and in five international festivals in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.



The film captures the stories of 33 individuals who, in reflecting on Keller's impact, paint a vivid portrait of life as someone who is blind, deafblind, or has low vision.



Private screening at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, Texas.



AFB's 2024 Helen Keller Achievement Award Honorees with AFB President & CEO Eric Bridges.



Executive Producer Scott Tenant and AFB's Melody Goodspeed stand with Bill and Doug Sarine of Beachglass Films at the Hollywood premiere of *Possibilities*.

The energy harnessed through the film is firmly rooted in the third programmatic goal AFB mapped out in our newly adopted strategic plan. This goal seeks to change the perception around blindness, breaking down misconceptions and building up a more positive narrative encompassing people who are blind across the globe. This goal took center stage at AFB's annual Helen Keller Achievement Awards, held in tandem with a special public screening of *Possibilities* at the Tateuchi Center for Democracy at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. The Tateuchi Foundation was a major funder for the film, making it possible to capture Keller's impact across the Pacific in Japan, where she is still greatly admired to this day.

The theme for this year's Helen Keller Achievement Award focused on the inclusion of people with disabilities in entertainment and the arts. Honorees for this year's ceremony included filmmaker Shawn Levy, actor and advocate Marilee Talkington, and Lucasfilm. Throughout the evening, accolades were given out to those leading the way to change the perception of blind people through the arts and making the world more inclusive. The evening culminated with a special introduction to *Possibilities* from past Helen Keller Achievement Award recipient and 25-time Grammy winner Stevie Wonder.

*Possibilities* will continue circulating through the festival circuit in FY2025 as AFB seeks options for broader distribution and integration into educational settings.





## AFB SENIOR STAFF

### **ERIC BRIDGES**

President & CEO

### **PATSY CARVACHE**

Vice President,  
Finance & Business Services

### **STEPHANIE ENYART**

Chief Public Policy &  
Research Officer

### **MATTHEW JANUSAUSKAS**

Chief Technology &  
Programs Officer

### **SONYA SHIFLET**

Chief Operating Officer

### **ANTHONY STEPHENS**

Assistant Vice President,  
Communications

## AFB TEAM

Sarahelizabeth Baguhn

Autumn Bice

Rebecca Burrichter

Riki Burton

Darren Burton

Breean Cox

Neva Fairchild

Hanna Fugulin

April Gardner

Kelly Gasque

Melody Goodspeed

Minh Ha

Syed Hassan

Daniel Hawkins

Aziz Kabulniyazov

Breanna Kerr

John Lilly

Haley Linville

Sarah Malaier

Timothy Meadows

Brooklyn Moore

Ronak Patel

Aaron Preece

Kristin Reuschel

Carlie Rhoads

Pris Rogers

Lisa Santamarina

Stephanie Sauer

Arielle Silverman

Phil So

Stacy Sporie

Judith Szabo

Eric Ulbrich

Andrew Worley

Diane Wright

“At AFB, we envision a world that is built for everyone. This is why the theme for the FY2024 Annual Report is ‘**Building Opportunity.**’

“The image of building this past year captures the essence of what we achieved.”

**ERIC BRIDGES**

PRESIDENT & CEO

***BUILDING  
OPPORTUNITY***

“We look forward to what the future holds and hope you will join us as we continue to build up opportunities for people who are blind or have low vision.”

**DIANE FAZZI**

CO-CHAIR,  
AFB BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**MELANIE LOCKWOOD HERMAN**

CO-CHAIR,  
AFB BOARD OF TRUSTEES



# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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**BOT Co-Chair**

Executive Director  
Nonprofit Risk Management Center

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**BOT Vice Chair**

Director, Accessibility Policy & Initiatives  
Apple

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**BOT Treasurer**

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**BOT Secretary**

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Head of ESG/Impact Investing  
Clearbrook Global Advisors

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California's 15th District, Retired

**JAMIE DEAN**

Sr. Corporate Counsel – Accessibility  
Regulation  
Microsoft

**LOUIS FOX**

Sr. VP, Retired  
Gerald Metals, Inc.

**GRANT DOSTER**

CEO  
Doster Training

**KATIE FREDERICK**

Digital Content Manager, VisionAware  
American Printing House for the Blind (APH)

**SHARON GIOVINAZZO**

President and CEO  
Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**JAMES HANDS**

Chief Financial and Operating Officer  
The Seeing Eye

**MACY LAMB**

Regulatory Sr. Manager  
Oncor

**JANNI LEHRER-STEIN**

Attorney, Retired

**MATTHEW SHERWOOD**

Chief Executive Officer  
WeVidIt Media, Inc.

**HARSHIL VED**

Accessibility Product Support Manager  
Google

**VICTORIA WATTS**

Founder and CEO  
CyR.U.S.

**MELISSA WEISSE**

President & Chief Executive Officer  
Leader Dogs for the Blind

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is pleased to share our audited financials for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. Questions regarding these financials may be directed to [communications@afb.org](mailto:communications@afb.org).

**AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND, INC. AND SUBSIDIARY  
AND AFB SPECIAL FUND, INC.**

**CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION**

**JUNE 30, 2024 AND 2023**

(Amounts expressed in thousands)

	<b>2024</b>	2023
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	<b>\$693</b>	\$1,182
Accounts receivable, net	<b>57</b>	141
Contributions receivable, net	<b>165</b>	119
Interest and dividend receivable	<b>61</b>	-
Investments	<b>35,285</b>	27,541
Prepaid expenses and other assets	<b>193</b>	101
Property and equipment, net	<b>59</b>	100
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b><u>\$36,513</u></b>	<u>\$29,184</u>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>		
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	<b>\$366</b>	\$553
Deferred revenue	<b>93</b>	77
Refundable advances	<b>45</b>	8
Accrued postretirement benefit liability	<b>64</b>	80
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b><u>568</u></b>	<u>718</u>
<b>Net Assets</b>		
Without donor restrictions	<b>15,663</b>	10,207
With donor restrictions		
Purpose restrictions	<b>6,370</b>	5,195
Perpetual in nature	<b>13,912</b>	13,064
Total with donor restrictions	<b><u>20,282</u></b>	<u>18,259</u>
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>35,945</b>	28,466
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b><u>\$36,513</u></b>	<u>\$29,184</u>



**AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND, INC. AND SUBSIDIARY  
AND AFB SPECIAL FUND, INC.**

**CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES**

**FOR THE YEARS ENDED JUNE 30, 2024 AND 2023**

(Amounts expressed in thousands)

	<b>2024</b>			<b>2023</b>
	<b>Without Donor Restrictions</b>	<b>With Donor Restrictions</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Revenue and Support</b>				
Legacy and bequest	\$4,495	\$1,400	<b>\$5,895</b>	\$4,861
Contributions	1,103	742	<b>1,845</b>	2,819
Contributed media time	1,796	-	<b>1,796</b>	2,592
Program service revenue	148	-	<b>148</b>	130
Special event:				
Special event: revenue	120	-	<b>120</b>	84
Less: Direct donor benefit cost	(49)	-	<b>(49)</b>	(65)
Special event revenue, net	71	-	<b>71</b>	19
Royalty income	48	-	<b>48</b>	92
Grants from government agencies	0	-	<b>0</b>	278
Other income	42	-	<b>42</b>	83
Investment earnings, net	3,386	1,768	<b>5,154</b>	2,722
Net assets released from restrictions:				
Satisfaction of purpose restrictions	1,887	(1,887)	<b>-</b>	-
<b>Total revenue and support</b>	<b>12,976</b>	<b>2,023</b>	<b>14,999</b>	<b>13,596</b>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Program services	5,534	-	<b>5,534</b>	8,190
Supporting services:				
Management and general	1,279	-	<b>1,279</b>	1,174
Fundraising	707	-	<b>707</b>	939
Total supporting services	1,986	-	<b>1,986</b>	2,113
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>7,520</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>7,520</b>	<b>10,303</b>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>5,456</b>	<b>2,023</b>	<b>7,479</b>	<b>3,293</b>
<b>Net Assets, beginning of year</b>	<b>10,207</b>	<b>18,259</b>	<b>28,466</b>	<b>25,173</b>
<b>Net Assets, end of year</b>	<b>\$15,663</b>	<b>\$20,282</b>	<b>\$35,945</b>	<b>\$28,466</b>



***BUILDING  
OPPORTUNITY***



**[www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)**

 **American Foundation for the Blind**

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 **American Foundation for the Blind**

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 **AFBOrg**

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