



VERMONT MOUNTAIN BIKE ASSOC.
SINCE  1997

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Photo credit: Mark Clement

VISION

For mountain biking to be at the center of healthy, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable communities throughout Vermont, with well-planned, accessible, and progressive trail systems state-wide.

MISSION

To ensure the sustainability of mountain biking in Vermont and thoughtfully promote exceptional riding experiences for all through advocacy, education, and community-driven stewardship.



WHO WE ARE

Founded in 1997, VMBA was originally created in response to threats to access to ride on private and public land. Over time, VMBA developed partnerships with land management agencies and ultimately grew beyond a pure advocacy group to the parent organization of local Chapters throughout Vermont.

VMBA operates in a 'hub and spoke' model, with a small central office responsible for advocacy, education, and administrative support for our Chapters, who in turn are responsible for trail stewardship, community engagement, and program execution.

Over time, VMBA has increasingly centralized operational responsibilities that are common across Chapters, enabling Chapters to focus their time, energy, and volunteers on building and maintaining both trails and community.

ONE CENTRAL OFFICE



Advocacy



Education



Membership



Chapter Support



Insurance



Grants & Fundraising

28 LOCAL CHAPTERS



Trail Stewardship



Community Engagement



Programs



Landowner Relationships



Volunteering



Events



2023 IN NUMBERS

920+ miles of public-access singletrack

9,600+ Members

28 Chapters

25,000+ volunteer hours

~40 miles of new trails

170+ miles of upgraded/repaired trails

2023 IN WORDS

By any measure, 2023 was a challenging year – not just for VMBA, but for all of Vermont. The historic storms and flooding this past summer left our Chapters struggling to protect and repair the systems they steward for much of the year as many of us turned to our communities to help them rebuild. VMBA was able to scale up our existing **Major Storm Recovery Fund**, raising over **\$20,000** to help our Chapters restore beleaguered trail systems and awarding much of those funds before the summer was out and bring trails back online for fall riding season.

In addition to weathering literal storms this past summer, 2023 saw a continued search for a new post-pandemic normal. Much of the outdoor industry, in particular, continues to struggle financially, leading to a significant shortfall in our expected sponsorship revenue. And while our membership continued to grow, the relatively modest increase was below expectations and further contributed to a net operating loss for VMBA on the year, the first in recent memory.

Despite these challenges, we did have plenty to celebrate in 2023. We released our first-ever **5-Year Strategic Plan**, added over **40 miles of new trail**, and dispersed more than \$82,000 in funding through our Trail, Naming, and Adaptive Upgrade Grant Programs. We grew to **over 9,600 members** and now steward **over 922 miles** of singletrack, 90% of all public-access, MTB-optimized trails in Vermont.

And in addition to developing new riding opportunities, our Chapters mobilized **over 25,000 volunteer hours** to help repair and significantly upgrade **over 170 miles** of existing trail, underscoring our stewardship role. We also launched the **VMBA app**, the first of its kind for a trail stewardship and advocacy organization, which will serve as the foundation for providing Members better information and access to a growing suite of Member Benefits.

2023 undoubtedly tested our organization, yet it was one that we not only passed but that underscored our strength and resilience. As we look ahead, we hope to continue the success in advancing our mission to make 2024 our best season yet.

Nick Bennette, Executive Director

5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

In February, VMBA published our first-ever long-term Strategic Plan, led by our Board of Directors and rooted in guidance from our Chapters, partners, and members. Mountain biking has emerged as a major force shaping the communities, economy, and landscape of Vermont, and this plan was developed to lay out how we aim to secure the sustainable future of mountain biking in Vermont while achieving our vision for progressive, well-planned, and accessible trail systems statewide.

Development of the Plan began with a modernization of our Mission and Vision statements to reflect the current challenges and opportunities we face, followed by an assessment of our Chapters needs and our organizational capacity. Our Staff and Board then distilled this input into a set **trail, advocacy, community,** and **organizational** goals and major milestones, which were subsequently refined and finalized based on feedback from our Chapters and major partners.

Moving forward, these **'TACO' goals** will serve as a north star for our annual planning, budgeting, and the initiatives we pursue. They will influence the interim goals we set each year and allow us to evaluate our progress. Lastly, this Plan provides a clear picture for our Chapters and partners as to where VMBA is headed and how we intend to get there, facilitating collaboration, planning, and impact.



MAJOR GOALS – THE TACO



TRAILS

- 1 Steward a statewide network of accessible, well-planned, progressive, and sustainable trails

ADVOCACY

- 2 Move public-access recreational trails out of Act 250 and into an appropriate oversight model
- 3 Acknowledge landowners by incorporating public-access trails into the Current Use program

COMMUNITY

- 4 Establish an informed ridership that knows where, when, and how to ride
- 5 Count the majority of those who regularly use our trails as active VMBA members
- 6 Significantly increase youth, non-male, BIPOC, and adaptive representation in MTB ridership

ORGANIZATION

- 7 Run a thriving, sustainable organization that attracts and retains talent and develops our Chapters

PROGRESS TOWARDS OUR MAJOR GOALS

» TRAILS

This past year, we modestly expanded the trails we manage by 40 miles while implementing repairs or major upgrades to 170+ miles of trail. This aligns with our focus on improving what we have, first and foremost, before building anew.

We've strengthened our partnerships with state and federal land managers, leading to the incorporation of mountain bike trail development in major public land projects, specifically the Worcester Range Management Unit Long-Range Management Plan and Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Plan. And at the close of 2023, we launched a project to better define and articulate our Best Management Practices to more effectively promote high-value, sustainable trails throughout our region.

» ADVOCACY

Advocacy is the cornerstone of our work. Our focus remains on preserving access and protecting private landowners, who host the majority of our trail systems, from undue regulation. We mainly pursue these efforts through the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council, which VMBA continued to co-Chair in 2023.

Our work through the Council saw the introduction of H.673, an Act concerning the outdoor recreation economy, which would fund a comprehensive economic impact study and resources for the VTGC and FPR to make critical steps to improve trail regulation on private lands and recognize private landowners who host high-quality, public-access trails, the two major goals of our advocacy work.

» COMMUNITY

VMBA is committed to making Vermont's mountain biking community more welcoming and inclusive, a goal we pursue through a dedicated DEI Committee. We launched multiple DEI initiatives last year, including the Try-a-Trail program for historically underrepresented groups, Learn-to-Bike Month, and Adaptive Demo Days. We also completed ten (10) Adaptive Assessments of Chapters' trail system and designated over 60 miles of trail as adaptive-friendly.

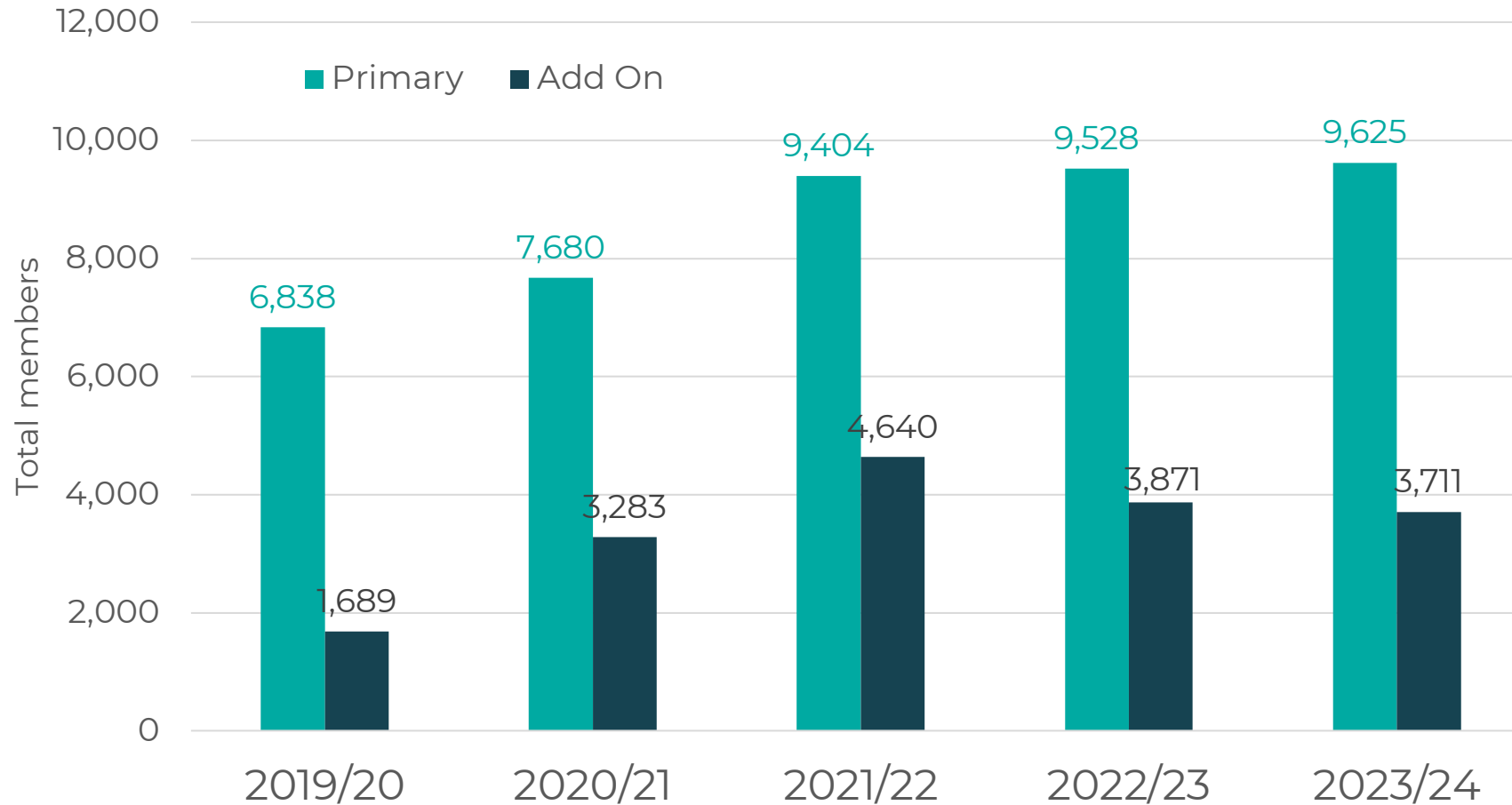
Capturing a greater share of the ridership as members is critical to both our ability to engage with our community and for our organizational sustainability. We now have a target for what we believe is the majority of active riders in Vermont – 25,000 – and continued to expand our Member Benefits program and membership messaging in the hope of attracting new members.

Lastly, we successfully launched the VMBA App, the first of its kind for a trail stewardship organization, which will serve as the foundation for providing information, resources, and Benefits.

» ORGANIZATION

Ensuring VMBA is sustainable, resilient, and led by highly capable people is critical to our long-term success. Despite a challenging year financially, we were able to maintain our level of Chapter support services and funding, stabilize our central office staff, and expand the resources in our Chapter Resource Library. Chapters reported a high level of satisfaction with the office in their annual survey, and we look to grow our capacity as we return to positive net income.

MEMBERSHIP GROWTH



Summary

As with each of the past five seasons, overall Membership again grew in 2023/24, albeit by a relatively modest 1%. The double-digit growth leading up to and through the pandemic appears to have slowed, though data from the UVM Center for Rural Studies indicates that 50,000+ Vermonters are out riding the trails regularly during peak season and suggests we have plenty of room to grow in our Membership.

A few interesting **highlights** from our Membership data

- **84%** of 2022/23 Members renewed for 2023/24
- U25 membership up **16%**
- Canadian membership grew by **364%** (though remains small at 232 in total)
- Only **17%** of Memberships have one or more Add-ons

MEMBER SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Over 70% of respondents approved of their Chapter's trail work with more than half strongly approving of projects in 2023.

Support for **stewardship and advocacy** were the dominant reasons those surveyed joined or renewed their VMBA membership.

90% rated the **quality and quantity of trails** as good or better, though less than half said they had an overall excellent experience out on the trail

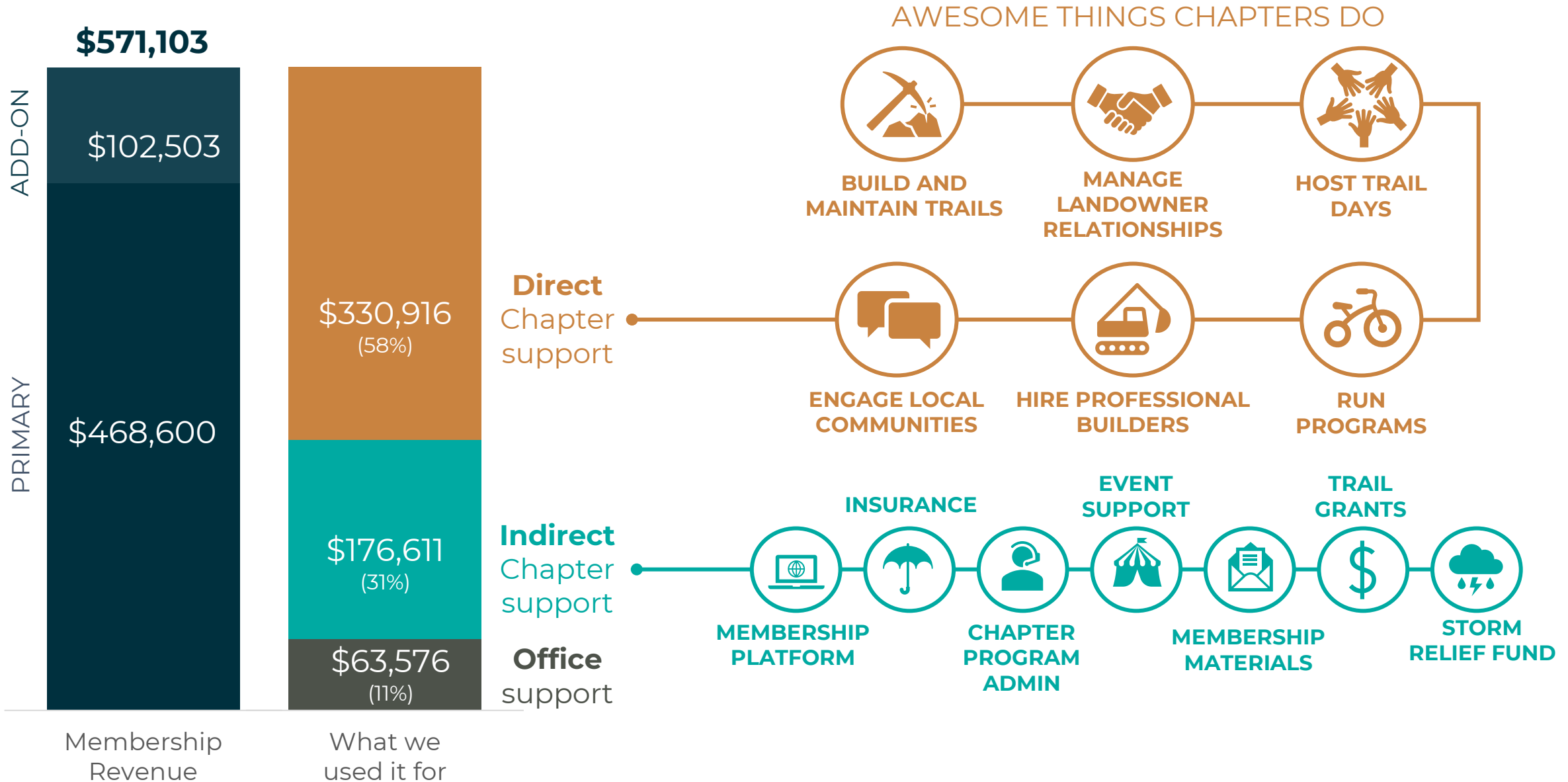
More than 75% of the sample felt **well-informed by the VMBA office**, though there is room for Chapters to improve in communicating at the local level

Three quarters of respondents **redeemed at least one Member Benefit**, with more than half using at least one complimentary DH ticket and bike shop deal/discount

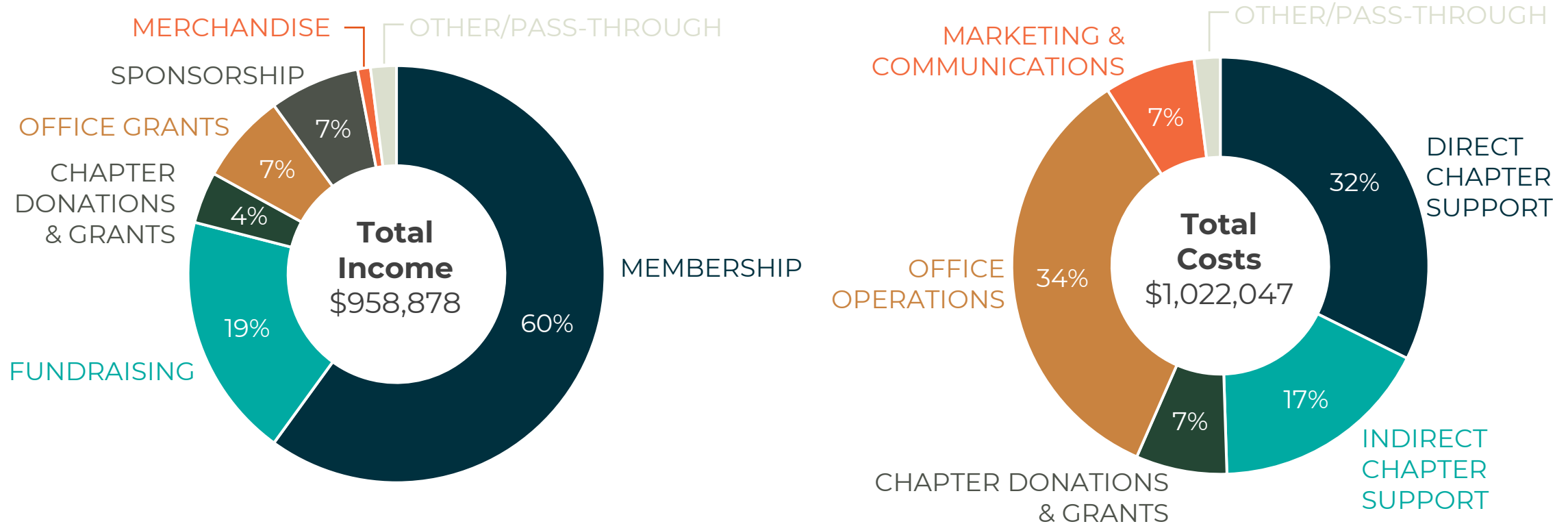
More than half of respondents felt **DEI efforts should be at or among our top priorities** as a riding community, with very few (7%) feeling DEI should not be a major focus.

80% of those surveyed felt there were **ample opportunities** for new riders to get into the sport, while ~90% felt advanced riders had sufficient opportunities to challenge themselves.

HOW MEMBERSHIP DOLLARS WERE SPENT IN 2023



OVERALL FINANCIALS



Summary

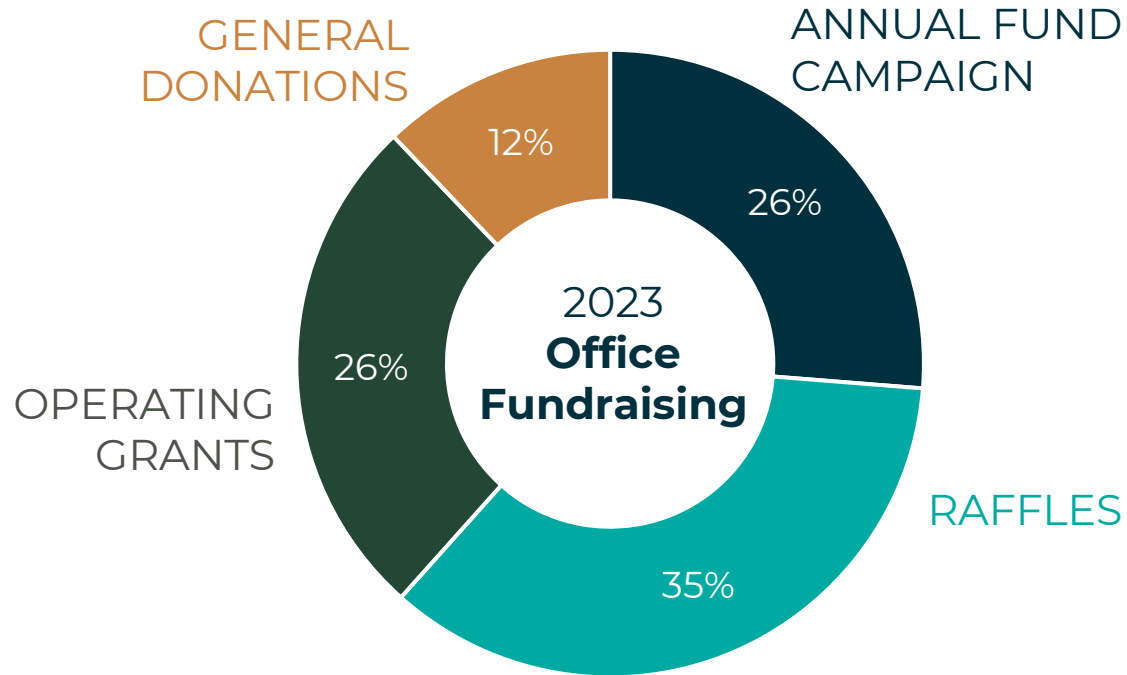
As mentioned in the Annual Report introduction, 2023 was a challenging year for VMBA financially. Due to lower-than-expected Sponsorship income and relatively small growth in Membership revenue, as well as increases in projected costs and the summer floods, we posted a ~\$60,000 loss for the year.

On the revenue side of things, our income streams remain relatively diverse though still largely dependent on Membership. Our organizational ability to grow and more aggressively pursue our Trails, Advocacy, Community, and Organizational goals is largely tied to our ability to capture a larger share of the 50,000+ active Vermont mountain bikers and unknown numbers of those who travel to Vermont to ride and who presently make up ~25% of Members.

In terms of costs, Chapters make up over half of organizational expenses in the form of Direct and Indirect Support and Chapter Donations & Grants. Roughly a third of costs go to support our small central office team of four, with the remainder directed at marketing and communication efforts.

FUNDRAISING

Grants, charitable giving, and raffles provide critical support for our central office and allow us to keep nearly 90% of membership dollars flowing to Chapters.



This past year, we raised **over \$200,000** thanks to the generosity of our Supporters.

THANK YOU!

VMBA 2023 ANNUAL FUND

Join the Mission. Back our Vision.
Support our **TACO**—Our 5-year Strategic Plan Goals

- TRAILS.** Steward a statewide network of accessible, well-planned, progressive, and sustainable trails
- ADVOCACY.** Establish a more suitable regulatory environment for trails that better secures access, especially on private land
- COMMUNITY.** Continue to grow and educate our membership community, with an emphasis on underrepresented groups
- ORGANIZATION.** Run a thriving, sustainable organization that attracts & retains talent and develops our Chapters

Learn more at vmba.org.

VMBA
VERMONT MOUNTAIN BIKE ASSOC.
SINCE 1997

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vmba.org/donate →

**WIN A TRIP FOR TWO
TO MOAB, UTAH
SUPPORT VMBA**

VMBA DREAM BIKE RAFFLE

WHAT WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

NAMING GRANTS

This year, we worked with seven trails-loving companies to award \$20,000 in grants targeted to their philanthropic interests.

Royal Group » Richmond Mountain Trails
\$10,000 towards construction of the Boulder DH trail at The Driving Range

Darn Tough » Waterbury Area Trail Alliance
\$2,500 for trail improvements at Little River

Fuse Marketing » Fellowship of the Wheel
\$2,500 towards new trail development at Bombardier Park

MTBVT » Upper Valley Mountain Bike Assoc.
\$2,500 to support a new machine-built trail at the Landmark Trail System

VBT Bicycling Vacations » Velomont
\$2,500 for drainage improvements to the Catamount Trail in Somerset



Is your outdoor-minded company interested in participating? **Contact** joe@vmba.org

Learn more at vmba.org/2023-naming-grant-projects

INTERNAL GRANT PROGRAMS

TRAIL GRANTS

Each year, our Trail Grant committee of Chapter representatives selects worthy Chapter projects to support through the Trail Grant program. This year we awarded \$48,654 to seven Chapter projects:

- RMT : Driving Range Parking Area
- BATS: Wayfinding & Kiosk at Mt. Anthony
- MTA: New signage throughout Millstone
- JAMBA: New trail build at Ball Mtn Dam
- SoVTA: Access trail at Stratton Town Forest
- RIPM: Maps, Kiosks, and Signage
- BRMBA: All-user trail at Underhill Central

The Trail Grant program also provided critical match fund for the Northern Forest Center Sustainable VT Trails Grant program:

- FOTW: Improvements to Eagles Trail
- BATS: Erosion mitigation at Mt. Anthony
- VTC: Catamount Trail summarization

*Learn more about all these projects at :
vmba.org/2023-trail-grants/*

MAJOR STORM RECOVERY FUND GRANTS

In 2017, VMBA established the Major Storm Recovery Fund (MSRF) to rapidly assist Chapters in restoring and reopening trails in the wake of a catastrophic weather event. This summer’s widespread flooding caused us to rapidly scale up the Fund, raising an additional \$20,000 and awarding \$13,825 to four Chapters before the end of the summer:

- MTA : New culvert in Barre Town Forest
- WAMBA: Additional Trail Crew capacity to respond to ongoing storm damage
- SoVTA: Repairs from washouts in Stratton Town Forest and Crosstown Trails
- Ridgeline: Repairs and upgrades to Bobo-link and Valley of the Ferns in Rochester

We anticipate an additional \$45,000+ in awards in Spring of 2024.

*Learn more at :
vmba.org/major-storm-recovery-fund/*

ADAPTIVE UPGRADE GRANTS

Thanks to partnerships with Vermont Adaptive and the Kelly Brush Foundation, we have conducted Adaptive Assessments at 15 Chapter networks over the past two seasons. These Assessments determine the extent to which networks are presently suitable for adaptive mountain bikes (aMTBs) and identify upgrade opportunities to make trails more ‘adaptive-friendly.’

This season, we now provide grants to Chapters to implement upgrades, thanks to seed funding from KBF, and ultimately awarded \$15,000 to four chapters:

- STP: Improve Charlie’s climb switchbacks
- RMT: Modify Driving Range bridge designs
- SoVTA: Improve aMTB flow throughout trails in the Stratton Town Forest
- FOTW: Trail modifications across Sunny Hollow, Mud Pond, and Saxon Hill

*Learn more at:
<https://vmba.org/adaptive-riding/>*

OUR SUPPORTERS

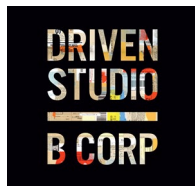
» SUMMIT



» RIDGELINE



» SWITCHBACK



» ZIP TIE



OUR TEAM

» OFFICE STAFF

Nick Bennette
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Amy Potter
OPERATIONS MANAGER

Joe Gaynor
PROGRAMS & PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER

Kenzie Brunner
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

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» and **9,600+ MEMBERS!**

