

Ridván 2023 Annual Report

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States







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Annual Report

National Spiritual Assembly of the
Bahá'ís of the United States

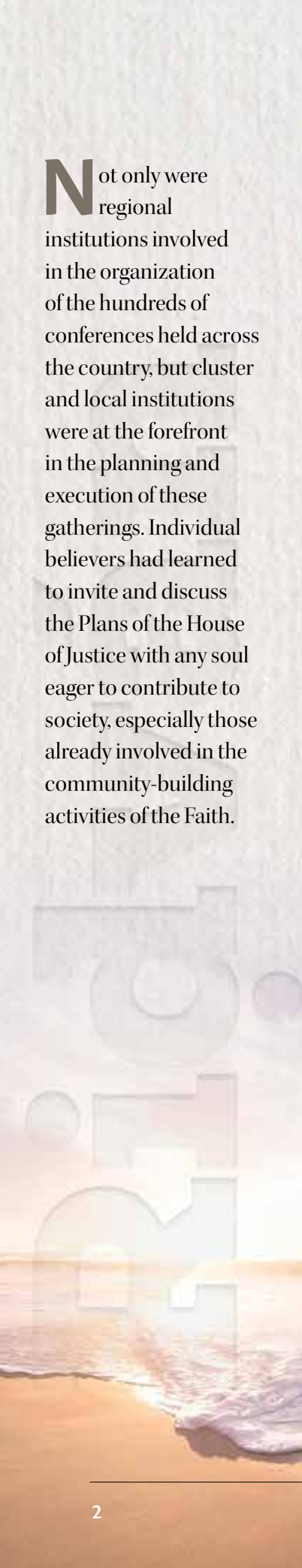
Dear loved Friends and Co-workers,

The past year offered abundant evidence of the ongoing process of social disintegration and spiritual deterioration foreseen by Bahá'u'lláh as the inevitable consequence of humanity's rejection of His divine Message. The forces released into the world by His advent will, through world-encompassing tests and trials, gradually prepare the people to accept that it is only through His teachings that they can find true peace and prosperity.

As the forces of decay rage around us, the task of the followers of the Blessed Beauty is to build communities that can serve as a refuge for our brethren. We were memorably reminded of this by the Universal House of Justice in its December 30, 2021 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors, in which the aims of the Nine Year Plan were described:

The civilization of today, for all its material prowess, has been found wanting, and the verdict has been issued by the Supreme Pen: "Know ye not that We have rolled up that which the people possessed, and have unfolded a new order in its place?" The establishment of Divine Civilization is, in the words of the Guardian, "the primary mission of the Bahá'í Faith". It is to be built upon the





Not only were regional institutions involved in the organization of the hundreds of conferences held across the country, but cluster and local institutions were at the forefront in the planning and execution of these gatherings. Individual believers had learned to invite and discuss the Plans of the House of Justice with any soul eager to contribute to society, especially those already involved in the community-building activities of the Faith.

most foundational qualities, ones for which the world stands in great need: unity, trustworthiness, mutual support, collaboration, fellow feeling, selflessness, commitment to truth, a sense of responsibility, a thirst to learn, the love of an all-embracing heart.

In that same message, the House of Justice announced that during this series of Plans, “the Bahá’í world will be focused on a single aim: the release of the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. The pursuit of this overall aim will require a further rise in the capacity of the individual believer, the local community, and the institutions of the Faith.” In the first year of the Nine Year Plan, the second year in this quarter century to be traversed, this rise in capacity was required from the outset. The House of Justice issued a call for worldwide conferences to launch the Plan, announced a goal for international pioneers, and requested projections for the advancement of clusters throughout the world reflecting the prospect of unprecedented levels of achievement.

As the Plan got underway last Ridván, there could be little doubt that the coming years would indeed bring forth ever higher levels of capacity in its three protagonists. Also implied in the House of Justice’s vision was attainment of a far more profound understanding of the manner in which they must evolve together:

These three constant protagonists of the Plan each have a part to play, and each one has capacities and qualities that must be developed. However, each is incapable of manifesting its full potential on its own. It is by strengthening their dynamic relationships with one another that their powers are combined and

multiplied. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that the more the qualities of cooperation and mutual assistance are manifested by a people, “the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity”; in the Faith, this principle distinguishes and shapes the interactions of individuals, institutions, and communities, and it endows the body of the Cause with moral vigour and spiritual health.

Those dynamics were on full display in the series of conferences at the very outset of the Plan. These were designed to build upon patterns of activity established in recent years, related especially to the observances of the Births of the Twin Manifestations of God and the centenary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Ascension. Their aim was to welcome unprecedented numbers of participants, not only Bahá’ís, “but many other well-wishers of humanity who share with them a longing to foster unity and better the world.” Worldwide, more than 10,000 conferences were held. The United States contributed nearly 500 conferences to this global effort. The perspective of recent years highlights this achievement: in 2008, the United States held five of the 41 regional conferences called for worldwide, in which 80,000 people participated across the globe. In 2013, with 114 youth conferences called for, this country hosted 13 conferences. These were virtually entirely planned at the national level, and only a few attended who were not formally registered as Bahá’ís. Now, only a decade later, not only were regional institutions involved in the organization of the hundreds of conferences held across the country, but cluster and local institutions were at the forefront in the planning and execution of these gatherings. Individual believers had learned to invite and discuss the

Plans of the House of Justice with any soul eager to contribute to society, especially those already involved in the community-building activities of the Faith. The community as a whole supported these efforts, forming a united body to ensure the successful launch of the Plan. As a result, an estimated 25,000 people in this country participated, about a third of whom were not registered Bahá'ís. The inclusive spirit of the conferences invited everyone to commit themselves to efforts to contribute to the progress of their communities. The result was a community of believers and their friends, eager to embark on the challenging road ahead.

Yet another advance in capacity was seen as the country began to raise up the 52 international pioneers we have been called on by the House of Justice to send to 24 countries. The institutions have in place structures for the orientation and training of these friends, various communities at the forefront of activity have arisen to support them in their efforts to gain experience before being deployed, and, of course, individuals have arisen to fulfill this momentous goal. In this first year of the Plan, four orientations were held—in the Atlantic, California, and Heartland regions—and 21 pioneers have committed to going to (or already arrived in) Alaska, Bosnia, Latvia, Lebanon, the Mariana Islands, Mexico, Morocco, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Tunisia.

On the home front, the projections for growth are formidable. The country has 788 clusters, of which only 34 are not expected to have a program of growth by the end of this Nine Year Plan, meaning that 150 clusters that currently have no program of growth will have advanced past the first

milestone. Over 300 are projected to have reached the third milestone of growth in that same time period, more than quadrupling the current numbers. As of March 2023, six clusters had advanced in the first year of the Plan from one stage of growth to the next.

During the past year, Regional Bahá'í Councils have also developed plans to strengthen their administrative and financial systems in order to support growth at the grass roots. This included learning about the development of a regional office, including a regional secretariat and regional treasury office; raising awareness among friends about particular financial needs related to the plans of their communities and providing them with opportunities to feel greater ownership of the activities taking place in their cluster; identifying strategies for the dissemination and study of guidance; and developing properties to support the needs of growth. And, very significantly, this past year saw the establishment of a new Regional Bahá'í Council for the State of Florida.

The past year also saw a development that was no less than historic—the inauguration of two-stage elections in three communities: Los Angeles, New York, and San Diego. They will be joined this Ridván by two more communities, Chicago and Phoenix, marking a significant step forward in the development of the Administrative Order in this country, and highlighting the importance of these divinely ordained institutions for the future progress of the Cause of God.

It is easy to imagine that the successful achievement of the goals on the home front will entail a level of growth unlike anything we have ever seen. Hundreds of clusters, each with hundreds or thousands of participants, will exist.

There will be a seemingly infinite spectrum of individual and local initiatives, each of which must be wisely guided, and each of which must contribute meaningfully to our collective learning. To do so successfully is not merely a matter of increasing the number of activities. It will demand new levels of discipline and understanding in adherence to spiritual principle.

We hope you will pay particular attention to the strategies by which the Regional Councils and regional training institutes are, in their respective areas of service, advancing the development of clusters.

Local Spiritual Assemblies will be involved as never before in guiding the friends in the work of expansion and consolidation, social action, and participation in the discourses of society. There will be a seemingly infinite spectrum of individual and local initiatives, each of which must be wisely guided, and each of which must contribute meaningfully to our collective learning. To do so successfully is not merely a matter of increasing the number of activities. It will demand new levels of discipline and understanding in adherence to spiritual principle. As the House of Justice stated:

Bahá'u'lláh states that "the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony." He has revealed teachings that make this possible. Building a society that consciously pursues this collective purpose is the work of not only this generation, but of many generations to come, and Bahá'u'lláh's followers welcome all who labour alongside them in this undertaking. It means learning how to raise up vibrant, outward-looking communities; it means those communities learning how to bring about spiritual and material progress; it means learning how to contribute to the discourses that influence the direction of that progress.

Nor should we forget that the spirit of teaching must infuse all our efforts, as we have been abundantly reminded:

Souls who have been given the blessing of faith have a natural wish to share this gift through conversations with relatives, friends, classmates,

co-workers, and those previously unmet, seeking in every place and at every moment a hearing ear. Different settings and circumstances lend themselves to different approaches, and the friends should be occupied in an ongoing process of learning about what is most effective in the place where they are.

And finally, we should not forget that the aim of it all is to create communities characterized by love, unity, and justice, in which all people are seen as contributors to an "ever-advancing civilization":

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is concerned with the transformation of both humanity's inner life and social environment. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi describes how the social environment provides the "atmosphere" in which souls can "grow spiritually and reflect in full the light of God" shining through the Revelation. A clear sign that the society-building power of the Cause is being released in a cluster is that efforts are being made by a growing band of its inhabitants, inspired by the teachings of the Faith, to help improve the spiritual character and social conditions of the wider community to which they belong. The contribution made by Bahá'ís is distinguished by its focus on building capacity for service; it is an approach founded on faith in the ability of a population to become the protagonists of their own development.

The following pages chronicle the principal lines of action undertaken by this Assembly and its subsidiaries over the course of the past year. In the broad range of these diverse endeavors, you will see our community's continuing

efforts to foster patterns of activity at every level to apply Bahá'u'lláh's life-giving teachings to the many needs of our time. We hope you will pay particular attention to the strategies by which the Regional Councils and Regional Training Institutes are, in their respective areas of service, advancing the development of clusters.

You will also note the considerable progress being made by various national agencies, such as the Office of Public Affairs, which is steadily gaining capacity to advance national discourse on such vital issues as race, women, economic justice, and the environment; the Wilmette Institute, which is now offering for-credit courses on the Faith at various institutions of higher education; and at the permanent Bahá'í schools, which are increasingly the scenes of important outreach endeavors. And you will see the notable achievements of such affiliated organizations as the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, which this year celebrated its 30th anniversary and which is most certainly fulfilling the hopes of the House of Justice in making a significant impact in advancing the application of Bahá'í principles in the world of academia.

We wish to express the abiding love and warm appreciation we feel for the members of the Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas and their Auxiliaries—as well as for the members of our 13 Regional Councils and Regional Training Institutes, and for those who serve with great devotion in our various offices and agencies. Their tireless services contribute beyond measure to the success and well-being of this community and, taken together with the efforts of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the nation, have helped to set the stage for wondrous achievements in the new Nine Year Plan.

Finally, we again call your attention to the magnificent statement of the Universal House of Justice that unveils to us the immense possibilities now opening before us—but also reminds us of the spirit of sacrifice and devotion that must attend our efforts for the advancement of the Cause:

The Plan that will shortly commence—the first major undertaking in a sacred twenty-five-year venture, generational in its scope and significance—will make demands of the individual believer, the community, and the institutions reminiscent of the demands that the Guardian made of the Bahá'í world at the outset of the Ten Year Crusade. If, by the grace of Almighty God, the friends should succeed in reaching the heights of heroism to which they are now summoned, history will assuredly pay tribute to their actions in terms no less glowing than those with which it honours the glorious deeds that decorate the annals of the first century of the Formative Age.

Be certain our boundless love, our admiration and deepest gratitude, and our unceasing prayers for great success in the heroic endeavors to which we have all been summoned accompanies each and every one of you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

We wish to express the abiding love and warm appreciation we feel for the members of the Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas and their Auxiliaries—as well as for the members of our 13 Regional Councils and Regional Training Institutes, and for those who serve with great devotion in our various offices and agencies. Their tireless services contribute beyond measure to the success and well-being of this community.

Conferences to launch the Nine Year Plan

swept every US region from spring through fall 2022—just as they did throughout the world.

Through study, fellowship, reflection, and commitment to action across all ages, these gatherings offered Bahá'ís and their friends a refreshed sense of Bahá'u'lláh's vision, the history of the Faith's efforts, the building of vibrant communities, the promotion of educational endeavors, and engagement in social action.

Nearly 500 conferences attracted an estimated 25,000 souls from coast to coast, organized by local teams at the initiative of the Regional Bahá'í Councils. Most served a handful of clusters or a single cluster; a number were focused on a single neighborhood; and a few spanned entire states. They were a reading of where our national Bahá'í community has been and where we stand.

After the Universal House of Justice issued the call to hold these conferences, a flurry of institutional gatherings read the reality of many areas, involving Counselors, Auxiliary Board members, Spiritual Assemblies, cluster and institute agencies, and nuclei of friends engaged in local community building. These institutions and agencies assessed how many people from each cluster or neighborhood would likely attend, and they encouraged systematic invitation.



Planning teams stretched their capacities to organize in a relatively short time. They worked to incorporate joyful and meaningful experiences. Many gatherings were held simultaneously in person and by teleconference, requiring teams to put thought into equipment and staging. Inclusivity in program planning and invitations was a special focus, and, in some cases, conferences were designed for the needs of African American, Indigenous, immigrant, or youth populations.

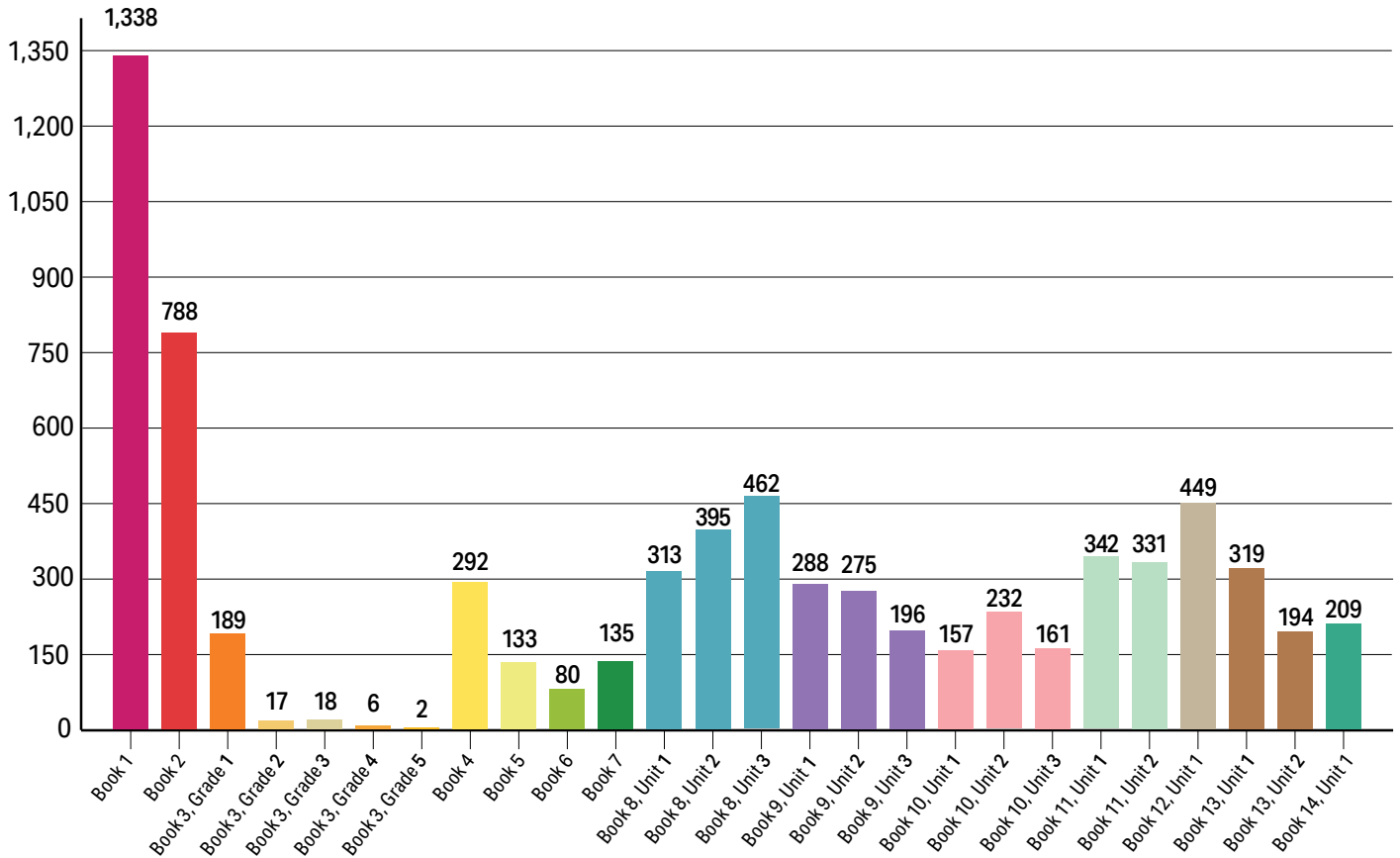
Each conference brought out insights from believers, and often their neighbors, to help unearth the gems of many people's spiritual capacities. Friendships grew as people reflected together, in large and small groups, on topics arising from suggestions by the International Teaching Center. They sang, played, and drummed together, and collaborated to create artistic projects.

Countless participants identified specific ways of becoming stronger protagonists in their individual and community transformation—to invite more people to discover the Revelation, to develop the devotional character of their neighborhoods, to support spiritual education for all ages, and generally to engage in community building, social action, and discourse. Some communities have staged follow-up conferences to channel such commitments by Bahá'ís and their friends as they put the teachings into action in society. **Many details and an abundance of additional photos can be found in the reports of Regional Bahá'í Councils in this volume.**

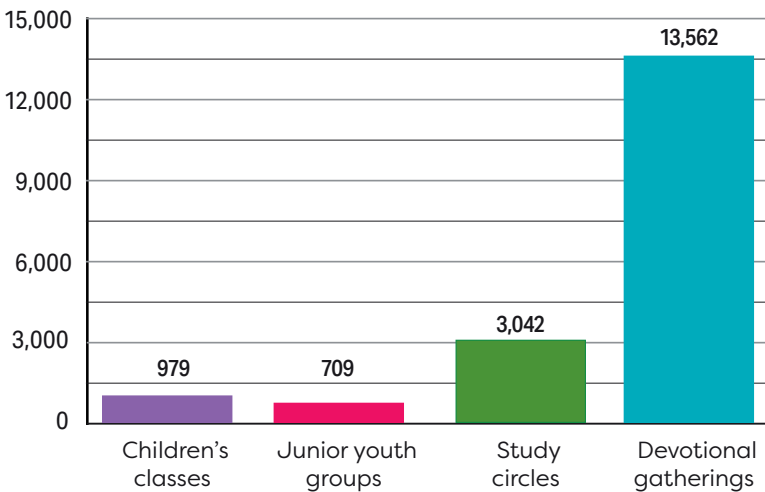


NATIONAL STATISTICS OVERVIEW

7,321 books of the Ruhi Institute completed during 12 months between November 1, 2021, and October 31, 2022

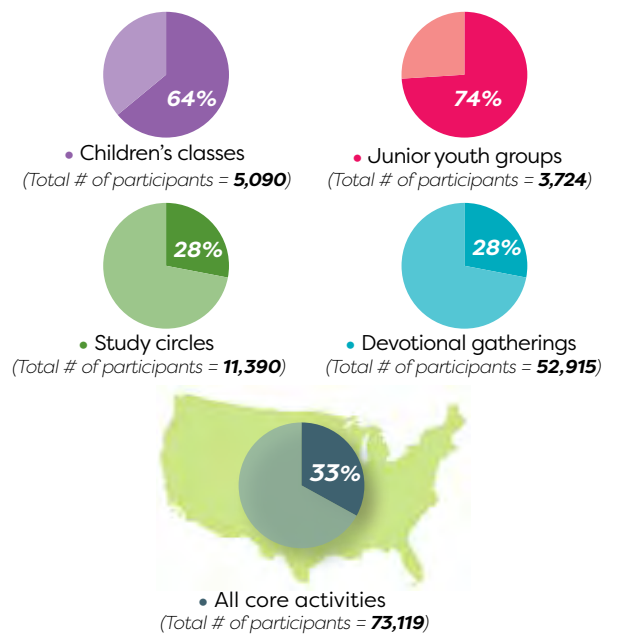


18,292 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022

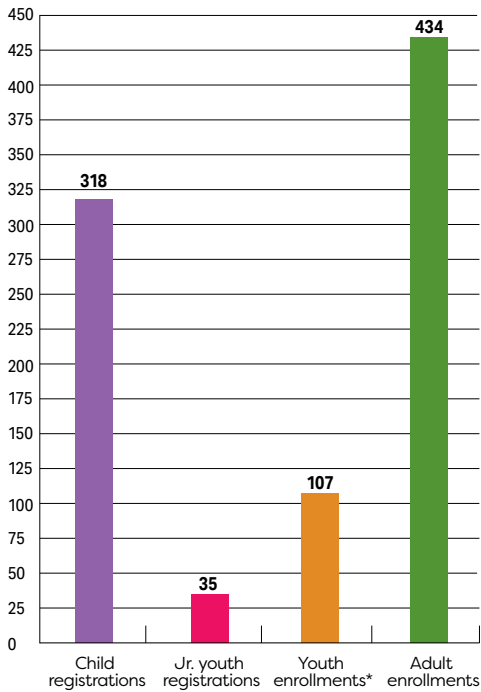


Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP) as of October 31, 2022

Friends of the Faith in core activities



894 new Bahá'ís in 12 months



* Does not include several hundred Bahá'ís who were registered as children and turned 15 during the year. Source: UnityWeb, for the 12-month period ending March 1, 2023

Selected membership statistics in 12 months

Deaths reported*	617
Withdrawals	315
Transfers out of USA	296
New USA arrivals	289
Returning to USA	177
Membership reinstatements	49

* Reported deaths that took place during the 12-month period were 423. A campaign to track Bahá'ís without good addresses confirmed 194 additional deaths from earlier years. Source: UnityWeb, for the 12-month period ending March 1, 2023

USA locality types

Isolated centers (1 adult Bahá'í)	2,373
Groups with fewer than 9 adult Bahá'ís	3,053
Groups with 9 or more adult Bahá'ís	505
Local Spiritual Assemblies	922
Localities without Bahá'ís	25,763
Total localities	32,616

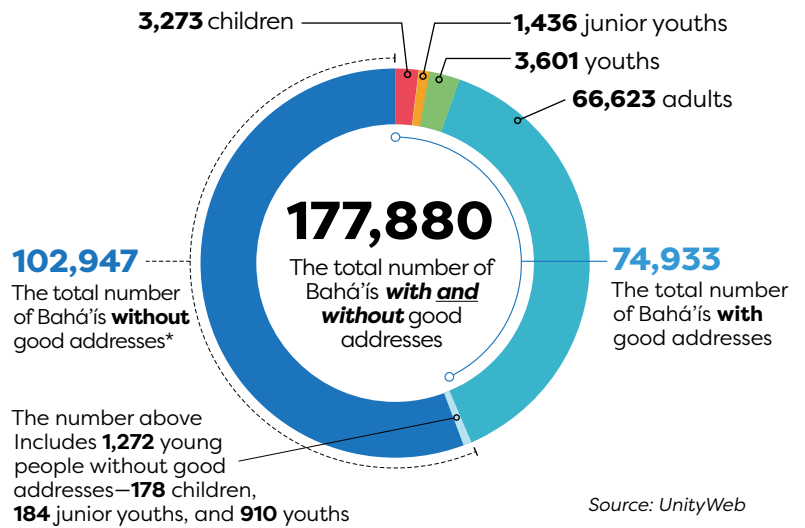
Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

Number of Local Spiritual Assemblies by region

Appalachian States	19	Northeastern States	78
Atlantic States	82	Northern Plains States	23
State of California	194	Northwestern States	112
State of Florida	62	Prairie States	25
Four Corners States	90	South Central States	81
Heartland States	54	Southeastern States	65
Midwestern States	37	US TOTAL	922

Source: National database, as of March 1, 2023

US Bahá'í population on March 1, 2023



* Believers without good residential addresses are unable to receive direct mailed communications from the National Spiritual Assembly and, with few exceptions, cannot be invited to engage in community-building activities.

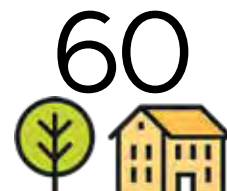
ENDEAVORS IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL ACTION

Activities of fixed duration	9,367
Sustained endeavors by category	184
Advancement of women	6
Arts and media	24
Agriculture	15
Economic life of communities	42
Education	15
Eliminating racial prejudice	45
Environment	9
Health	20
Language	3
Multiple or other	5

Source: Prepared by the Social Action Desk, April 2022

HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

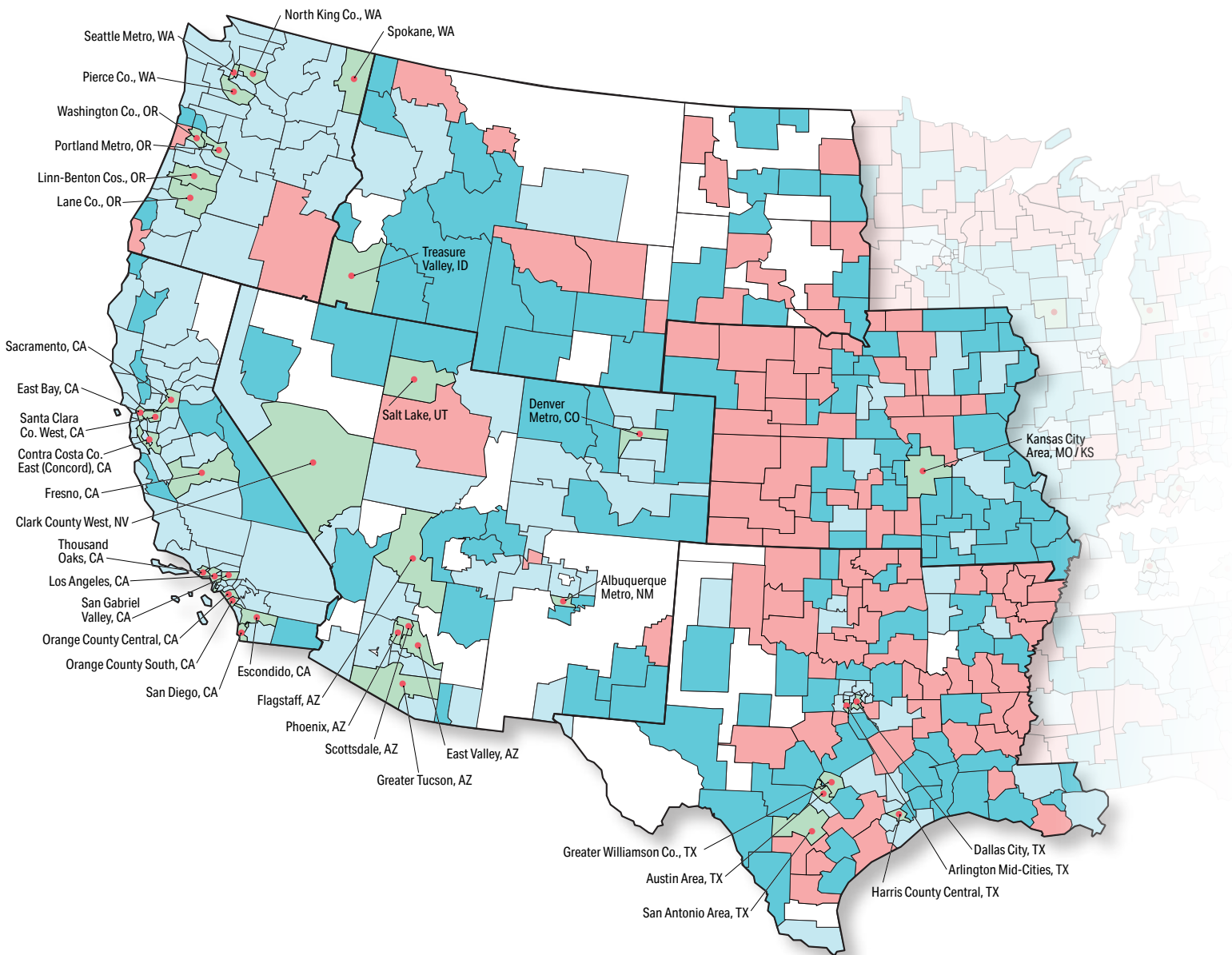


See the Regional Bahá'í Council reports for region-by-region numbers.

The assistance of the National Statistics Office, which provided all statistics presented on these pages, is gratefully acknowledged. Data reported by local and regional agencies in the Statistical Report Program, with reports generated biannually, are the basis for all statistics presented elsewhere in this Annual Report.

604 PROGRAMS OF GROWTH

357 ARE INTENSIVE



75 Milestone 3 clusters

Appalachian States

Greater Louisville, KY
Knoxville Area, TN
Nashville Area, TN

Atlantic States

Washington, DC
Baltimore Area, MD
Germantown Area, MD
Howard County-Laurel, MD
Central Mountains, NC
Charlotte Area, NC
Triad, NC
Triangle, NC
Fairfax County, VA
Herndon-Reston, VA
NoVA East, VA
Loudoun County, VA
Prince William County, VA
Roanoke, VA
South Hampton Roads, VA

State of California

Contra Costa County East (Concord), CA
East Bay, CA
Escondido, CA
Fresno, CA
Los Angeles, CA
Orange County Central, CA
Orange County South, CA
Sacramento, CA
San Diego, CA
San Gabriel Valley, CA
Santa Clara Co. West, CA
Thousand Oaks, CA

State of Florida

Broward, FL

Four Corners States

East Valley, AZ
Flagstaff, AZ
Greater Tucson, AZ

Phoenix, AZ
Scottsdale, AZ
Denver Metro, CO
Clark County West, NV
Albuquerque Metro, NM
Salt Lake, UT

Heartland States

Chicago, IL
Madison, WI

Midwestern States

Grand Rapids Area, MI
Washtenaw Co. (Ann Arbor), MI
Franklin Co. (Columbus), OH

Northeastern States

Upper Maine, ME
Piscataqua, ME / NH
Boston Area, MA
MetroWest, MA
Northwest MA / Southern VT

North Jersey, NJ / Rockland, NY
Buffalo Area, NY
Long Island, NY
New York City, NY
Rochester Area, NY
Westchester County, NY
Philadelphia Area, PA

Northern Plains States

Treasure Valley, ID

Northwestern States

Lane County, OR
Linn-Benton Counties, OR
Portland Metro, OR
Washington Co., OR
North King County, WA
Pierce County, WA
Seattle Metro, WA
Spokane, WA

Prairie States

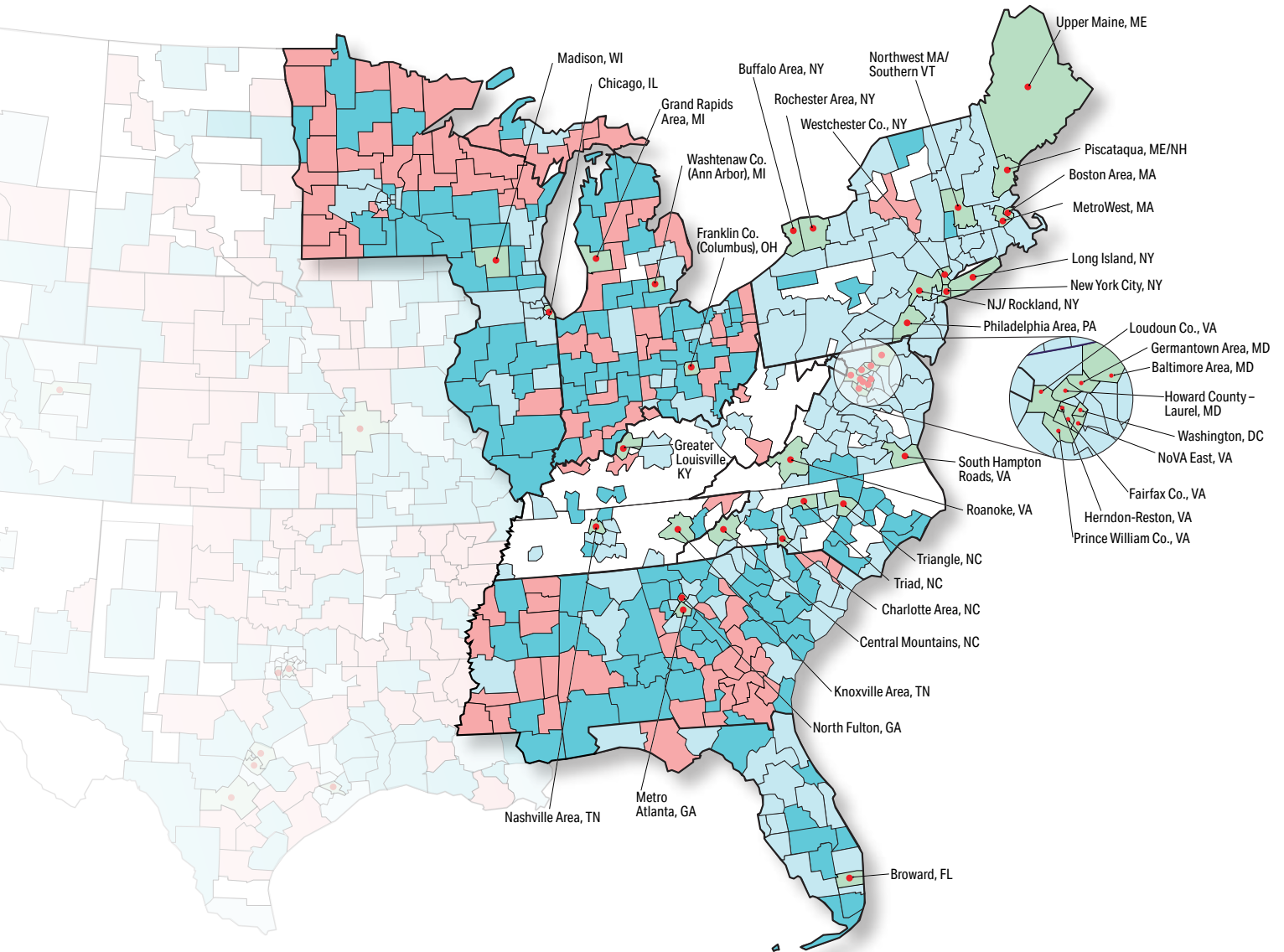
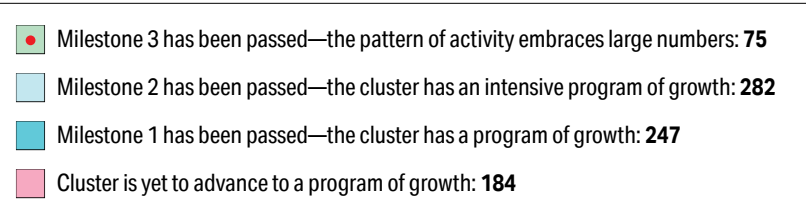
Kansas City Area, MO / KS

South Central States

Arlington Mid-Cities, TX
Austin Area, TX
Dallas City, TX
Greater Williamson County, TX
Harris County Central, TX
San Antonio Area, TX

Southeastern States

Metro Atlanta, GA
North Fulton, GA



Region	Yet to advance	Milestone 1	Milestone 2	● Milestone 3	Total clusters	Programs of growth	M2 + M3 = Intensive POG
Appalachian States	6	5	13	3	27	21	16
Atlantic States	0	11	34	15	60	60	49
State of California	0	8	43	12	63	63	55
Florida	1	8	14	1	24	23	15
Four Corners States	4	18	25	9	56	52	34
Heartland States	26	28	22	2	78	52	24
Midwestern States	26	33	13	3	75	49	16
Northeastern States	1	4	32	12	49	48	44
Northern Plains States	14	22	3	1	40	26	4
Northwestern States	3	3	29	8	43	40	37
Prairie States	30	35	9	1	75	45	10
South Central States	44	34	28	6	112	68	34
Southeastern States	29	38	17	2	86	57	19
Totals	184	247	282	75	788	604	357



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Regional Bahá'í Council of the Appalachian States

REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCILS

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Expanding the circle of friends

During this first year of the Nine Year Plan, the Regional Council focused on increasing capacity among clusters that have passed the third milestone on the continuum of growth to act as reservoirs of

resources and experience for other Bahá'í communities in the area; it sought to support stronger second-milestone clusters in the same way. One strategy centered on encouraging the friends each to see themselves as belonging to an expanding nucleus. To that end, a working group for the Council, as part of a Ruhi Book 10.3 study circle with Area Teaching Committees (ATCs) and collaborators, encouraged the friends to pursue a series of home visits with Bahá'ís across the clusters. In one cluster, through the initiative of the ATC, the friends met collectively each week to explore the concept of an expanding nucleus and reflect on their efforts.

The Council has also initiated targeted media campaign teams in three third-milestone clusters. At the same time, it established a regional coordinating team to facilitate learning, accompany the teams, and establish campaigns in new clusters.

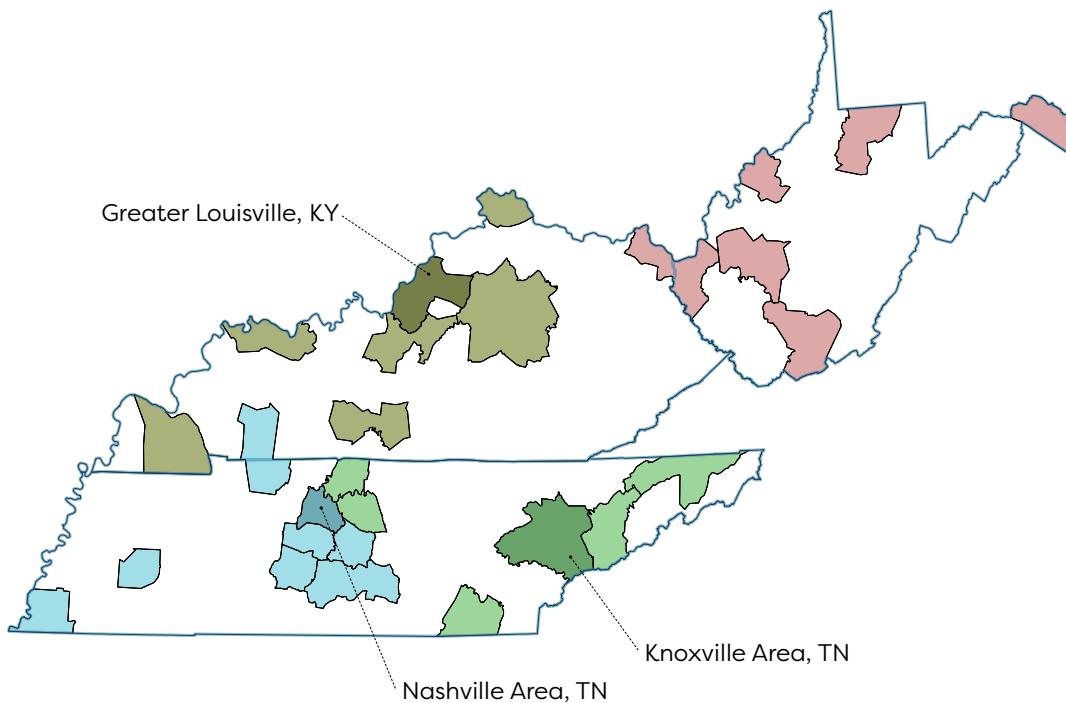
Outreach to historically significant populations occurred largely in the focus neighborhoods in six clusters. Most of the local participants, many of them youth engaged in the community-building work, are drawn from African American and immigrant populations.

Advancing the institute process

This year the institute has continued to offer new editions of the Ruhi Institute books via institute seminars. Other virtual spaces have allowed neighborhood teams and junior youth group animators from across the region to gather and reflect. The friends in the Appalachian States have also gained experience using short, narrative readings from the books of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program to introduce and develop an understanding of the program among potential participants.

One of the most significant advances in strengthening the institute process has been the return to in-person youth camps and summer-of-service activities. The global conferences lent a special impetus to these initiatives, and the sustained level of intense activity maintained throughout the conferences, camps, and fieldwork resulted in the enrollments of at least 11 new believers in the past year. Two objects of learning have emerged: building

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



4 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

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capacity for communities to host youth camps, and accompanying youth in the period between camps, including in the continuation of study.

Cluster advancement through shared learning

The Council was grateful this year to return to in-person regional interinstitutional meetings. It observed with joy the first such meeting at the cluster level, organized by members of the Auxiliary Boards. The region also benefited from in-person visits from teams and institution members. A team of youth from a more-advanced neighborhood traveled to another cluster to help the friends there launch neighborhood activities. An Auxiliary Board member and a member of the Regional Council each traveled to neighboring subregions to visit communities and study guidance.

Beyond the in-person meetings, the region maintained virtual spaces for reflection and study among ATCs, neighborhood teams, and animators. The Council held its first mini-interinstitutional meeting to follow up on efforts being made since the regional interinstitutional gathering. Other platforms used to share learning include WhatsApp groups and email.

The learning surrounding the Nine Year Plan conferences also deserves special mention. The Council sent a letter to the region calling for special reflections among the conference planning teams and the Nineteen Day Feasts to capture the experience and insights of the friends. It is worth noting that the effort to host the wave of conferences constitutes the largest mobilization of resources carried out across the region to date.

A working group for the Council encouraged the friends to pursue a series of home visits with Bahá'ís across the clusters. In one cluster, through the initiative of the ATC, the friends met collectively each week to explore the concept of an expanding nucleus and reflect on their efforts.



Pioneering

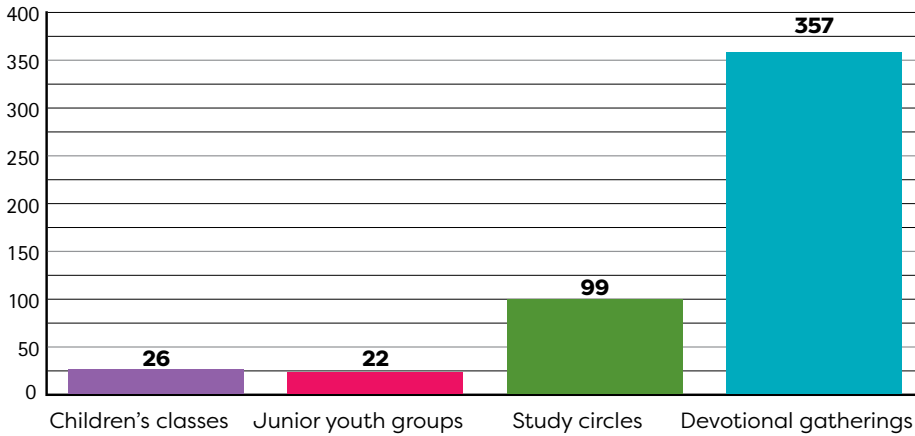
To manage and support pioneering, the Council formed a working group of two of its members, a first step toward establishing a regional coordinating team. The working group followed up on offers from friends inside and outside the region. This resulted in a series of conversations with these friends to explore their reality and consider regional goals. Over the past year, two pioneers have settled in the region, and conversations continue with another four friends. The focus of the working group in the coming year will include expanding efforts to raise awareness of this service, particularly among college-age youth, and the active recruitment of homefront pioneers.

Social action and contributing to the discourses of society

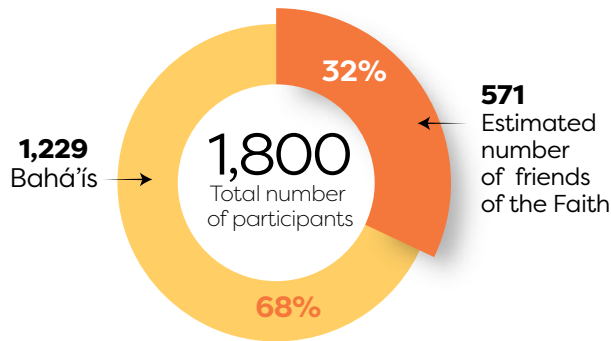
Regarding social action and discourse, efforts across the region varied widely, and the Council has not performed a systematic assessment of their scope and number. Many endeavors are individual initiatives, including the work of professionals and academics in their fields. Others fall more within the context of community conversations and mutual support among neighbors and friends. In a handful of cases, efforts have emerged within a focus neighborhood where young people have been engaged in study and action over the course of months or years. The discourse on race deserves special mention as it has been promoted by a number of groups working together over the course of years, garnering attention even beyond the boundaries of the region.



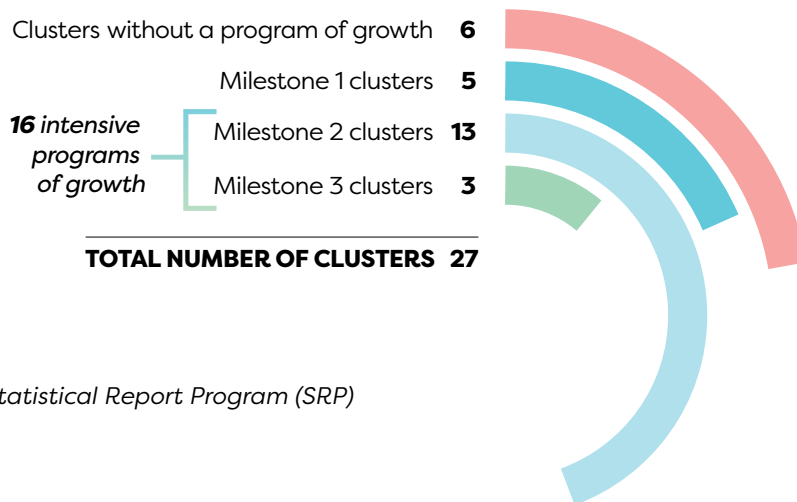
504 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



21 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

The Council sent a letter to the region calling for special reflections among the conference planning teams and the Nineteen Day Feasts to capture the experience and insights of the friends. It is worth noting that the effort to host the wave of conferences constitutes the largest mobilization of resources carried out across the region to date.

Regional Bahá'í Council of the **Atlantic States**

All efforts, especially those employed at the neighborhood level, are executed with an eye toward responding to the National Spiritual Assembly's 2021 "Call to Action," prioritizing outreach to African Americans, Indigenous peoples, and immigrant communities. It is worth noting that one neighborhood in North Carolina is hosting over 200 activities, in nine pockets—each with a nucleus of friends expanding among diverse populations.



Expanding the circle of friends

Clusters across the region are mobilizing believers and friends of the Faith through home visiting campaigns. Teams, which typically visit individuals and families in focus neighborhoods as well as among the generality of believers, strive to establish activities that will help create new expanding nuclei. All efforts, especially those

employed at the neighborhood level, are executed with an eye toward responding to the National Spiritual Assembly's 2021 "Call to Action," prioritizing outreach to African Americans, Indigenous peoples, and immigrant communities. It is worth noting that one neighborhood in North Carolina is hosting over 200 activities, in nine pockets—each with a nucleus of friends expanding among diverse populations.

In November 2022, regional growth facilitators from the Appalachian, Northeastern, and Atlantic regions gathered at the Triangle Bahá'í Institute to strengthen systems that can bolster programs of growth in clusters that have achieved the third milestone on the continuum of growth. Similar gatherings are expected to be held twice a year.

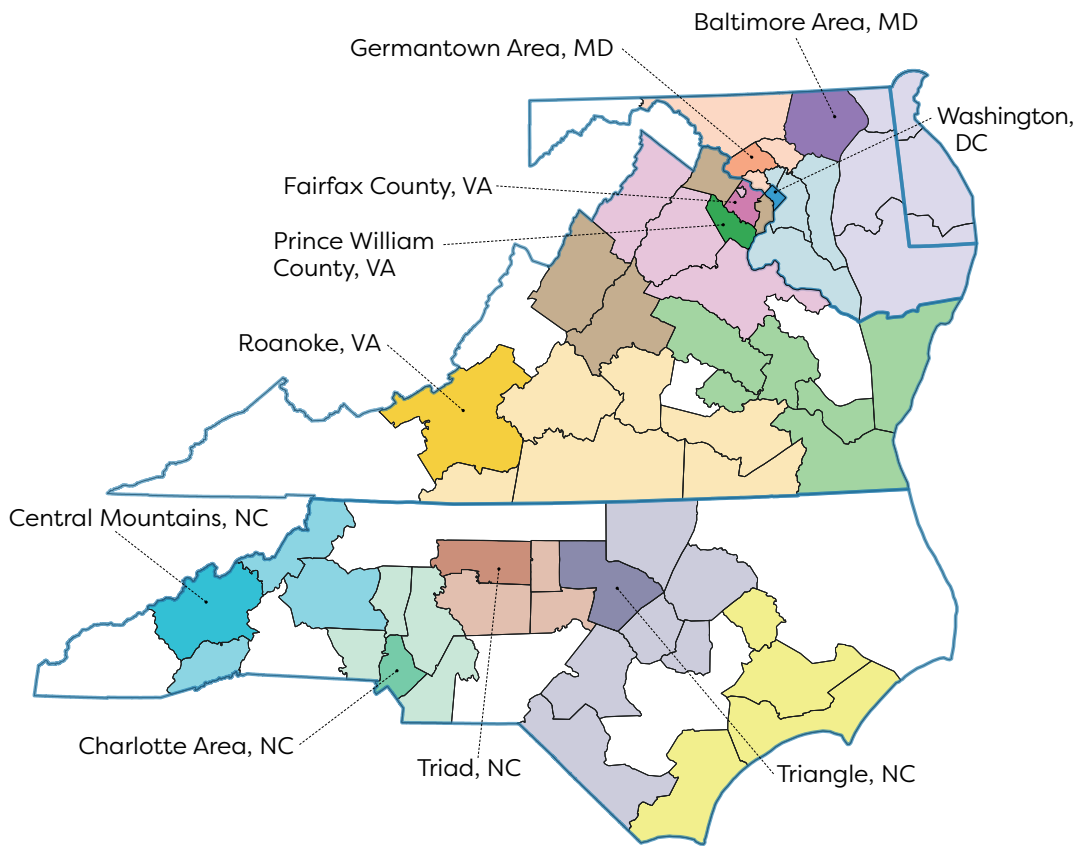
Advancing the institute process

The training institute continues to encourage the study of new editions of Ruhi Institute Books 1–4 through participation in formal seminars. These have helped strengthen tutor capacity to elevate conversations with families on the nature of the community-building process; to engage with study circle participants in a process of study, consultation, planning, action, and reflection; to invite souls to enter a path of service; to deepen knowledge on the Persons of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh; to disseminate learning; and to build capacity to invite individuals to embrace the Faith.

Collaborative groups have formed for study circles, junior youth groups, and children's classes, establishing a rhythm of regular meetings that will include coming together with the Counselor to share the latest learning. There is potential for two additional teams to follow Bahá'í youth, and to follow learning about inviting devotional participants into the training institute.

Last summer 40 youths helped strengthen neighborhoods in the region's advanced clusters. Most of them now facilitate activities, and some serve as institute coordinators. Preparations are underway for youth to serve intensively in July 2023. The Triangle Bahá'í Institute is attracting youth to join intensives each cycle, while regular junior youth camps and children's festivals are increasingly being organized.

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



6 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

Cluster advancement through shared learning

In July 2022, in response to the National Assembly’s request, the Regional Council initiated a learning process concerning the flow of guidance and information in the region. A Council working group was created to draft and then implement a regional plan, until an individual could be appointed to take over this role. Two clusters—Washington, DC, and Howard County-Laurel, Maryland—are engaged in a pilot project to learn about enhancing the flow of guidance at the cluster level. The Council plans to share what is being learned to improve communication systems across the region. This approach of accompanying selected clusters in their efforts to develop and implement their own plans will be replicated twice a year.

Content seminars of the training institute have also facilitated learning between clusters and even among the Atlantic, Appalachian, and Northeastern regions.

Pioneering

In response to the National Assembly’s request for assistance meeting the Nine Year Plan’s pioneering goals, a pioneering task force was appointed to oversee a process of orienting prospective international and homefront pioneers. The task force, in collaboration with the Continental Board of Counselors and the National Assembly, provided its first orientation in December 2022 for a dozen participants from across the country. In early 2023, the task force was restructured to draw heavily on human resources in the Triangle cluster, also the site of future orientations. The Council’s homefront pioneering learning team was also re-formed and given a more specific focus: to follow learning about recruitment.

Last summer 40 youths helped strengthen neighborhoods in the region's advanced clusters. Most of them now facilitate activities, and some serve as institute coordinators. Preparations are underway for youth to serve intensively in July 2023. The Triangle Bahá'í Institute is attracting youth to join intensives each cycle, while regular junior youth camps and children's festivals are increasingly being organized.



Social action

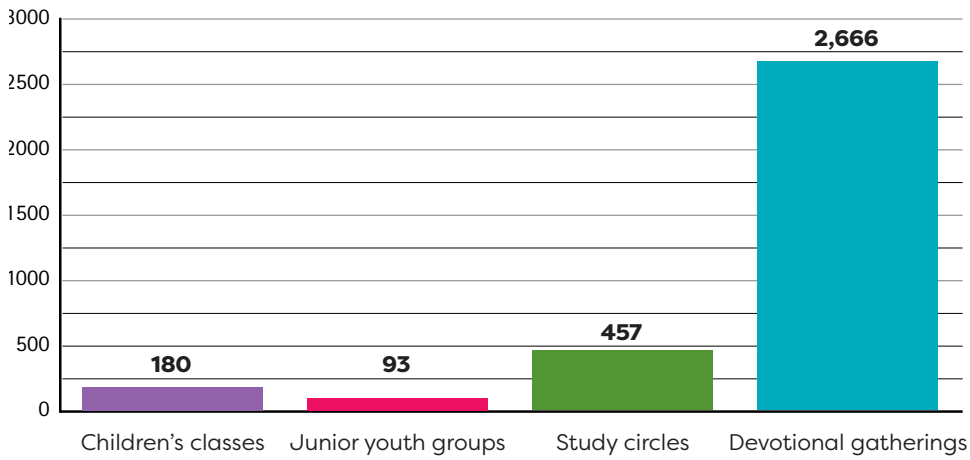
Capacities to connect institute activities to social action continue to advance across the region. Glimpses of this advancement include the following:

- Spaces emerged to offer homework help for schoolchildren prior to their weekly children's classes.
- Through shared engagement in children's classes and study circles, members of different immigrant populations in the same housing complex overcame a deep sense of distrust for each other.
- Participants benefited, during study of *Wellsprings of Joy*, from viewing all activity associated with a junior youth group through a persistently joyful lens.

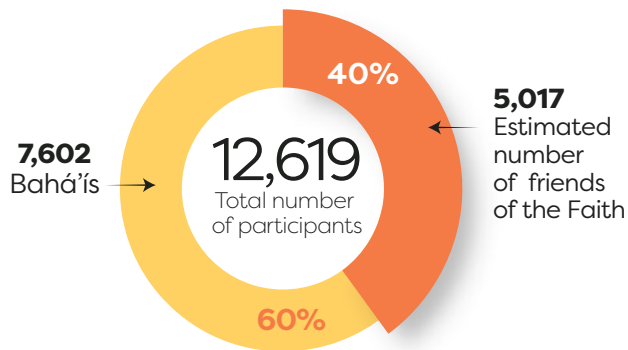
Contributing to the discourses of society

Consciousness that elevated conversations lie at the foundation of the framework for action is steadily increasing, especially as the region experiences continuing qualitative growth. The more experience the friends gain as protagonists in the community-building process and in accompanying friends of the Faith into the training institute, the more learning is captured about initiating and sustaining these conversations. Even while studying the first unit of Ruhi Book 1, participants are invited to articulate newfound ways of thinking about reality and purpose. As participants advance through the sequence of courses, these patterns of thinking grow in complexity and find expression through an increasingly outward orientation. Examples of questions explored as a consequence of this development include: How does the twofold moral purpose transform our understanding of education? How does knowledge of our spiritual reality transform our approach to service? How do the implications of the oneness of humanity shape our relationships?

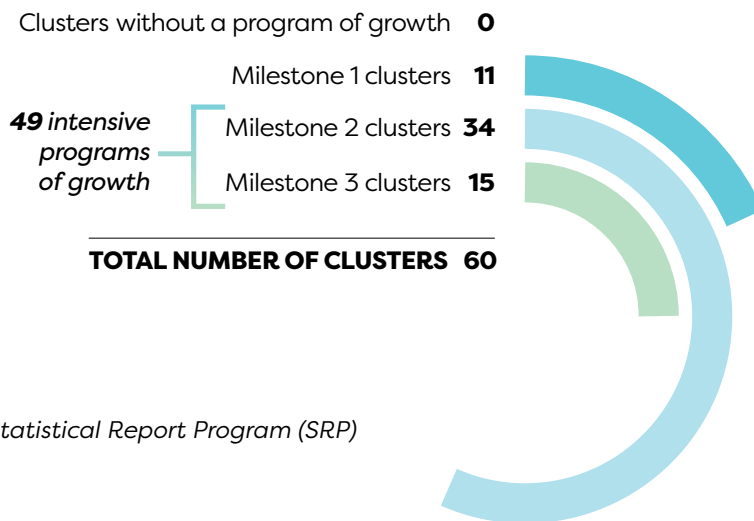
3,396 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



60 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023

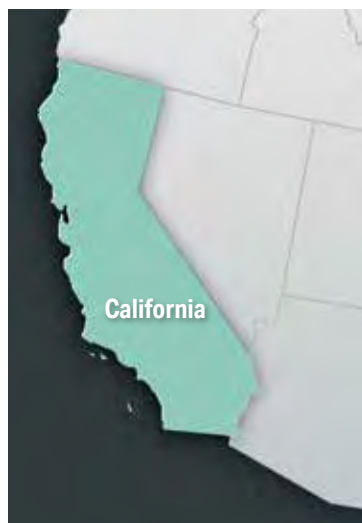


Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

Through shared engagement in children's classes and study circles, members of different immigrant populations in the same housing complex overcame a deep sense of distrust for each other.

Regional Bahá'í Council of the State of California

Conferences serving some neighborhoods with about 30 Bahá'ís attracted as many as 300 friends. One conference brought in almost 170 people in a cluster where 15 people would normally attend reflection gatherings. Conference sessions were carried out, and study materials made available, in English, Spanish, Persian, Mandarin, or other languages as participants required.



The first year of the Nine Year Plan was joyous for California Bahá'ís and their friends from the wider community. To launch the new Plan, friends gathered in large numbers at 51 springtime conferences at both neighborhood and cluster levels. Initially, when the Universal House of Justice called for these conferences to be held worldwide, some friends assumed they could wait for national or regional institutions to hire venues, provide food, and, generally, act as hosts. Once they realized that, aside from study materials, local friends would be responsible for the arrangements, a great sense of empowerment became evident in the region. Individuals, communities, and institutions, including nearly all Local Spiritual Assemblies and Area Teaching Committees, joined hands to do what was needed.

Teachers and animators from neighboring clusters volunteered to hold classes for children and provide activities for junior youth, allowing youth and adults to freely participate in their own conferences. This support for adjoining conferences was yet another manifestation of the mutual assistance and cooperation demonstrated across the region. Finally, the remarkable expression of the arts at the conferences, both individual and collective, cannot be adequately described in words.

Expanding the circle of friends

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Even as the conferences unfolded, neighborhood-level progress continued in reaching out to receptive populations of historical significance and to immigrant populations. Friends worked to involve their newly found friends in all aspects of community building, helped to raise their capacity through home visits, deepened the bonds of friendship, and performed acts of worship and service within the framework for action.

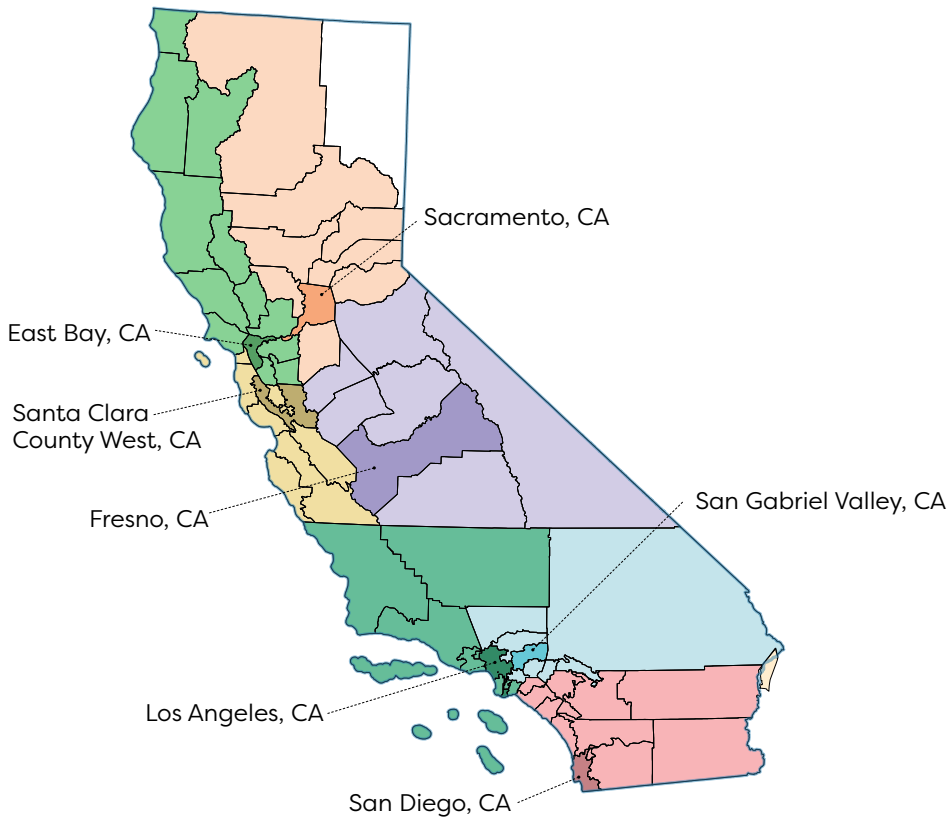
Advancing the institute process

The training institute also made significant advances during the year. An expanded collaborative group has been helping it focus on all aspects of the community's educational efforts, and learning objectives have been defined for four distinct teams.

For example, the children's class team is learning where in the region each of the four grades are taught, how many children are moving from one grade to the next, and which clusters are regularly holding festivals where children use the arts to present what they have learned to their parents.

The stability of junior youth groups is another area of interest, and the team focusing on this subject is learning from clusters that have had junior youth progress through

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



4 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

a substantial number of texts. It has also examined how the service component has inspired not only junior youths but also parents and others in the cluster or neighborhood.

Finally, two teams have been learning about the Ruhi Institute sequence of courses. Youths and adults who have been tutoring the upper sequence of books joined large, region-wide reflection gatherings to learn from and share learning with other tutors.

The training institute also strengthened the youth-year-of-service program. The number of participants giving a full year of consecrated service remained almost steady, with an observable increase in quality. These youths are studying Ruhi Institute books and serving in selected neighborhoods, while also deepening their own knowledge of the history and teachings of the Faith.

All Area Teaching Committee members are being accompanied by a total of 10 dedicated regional growth facilitators, and they have gathered regularly to study, plan, and learn from more experienced colleagues. Significant learning has revolved around the formation, growth, and development of nuclei in almost every cluster in the region. Finally, reports from many clusters show that greater numbers of friends are participating in dynamic and joyful reflection gatherings.

Cluster advancement through shared learning

The region also derives strength from two complementary processes; namely, deep and reflective study of the flow of guidance from the Universal House of Justice, and generous sharing of the learning that takes place in neighborhoods of intense activity. This is especially true of the seven clusters that serve as resource reservoirs for adjoining clusters and neighborhoods.

The stability of junior youth groups is another area of interest, and the team focusing on this subject is learning from clusters that have had junior youth progress through a substantial number of texts. It has also examined how the service component has inspired not only junior youths but also parents and others in the cluster or neighborhood.



Additionally, two nine-day orientations have been held to sharpen the skills of prospective international pioneers.

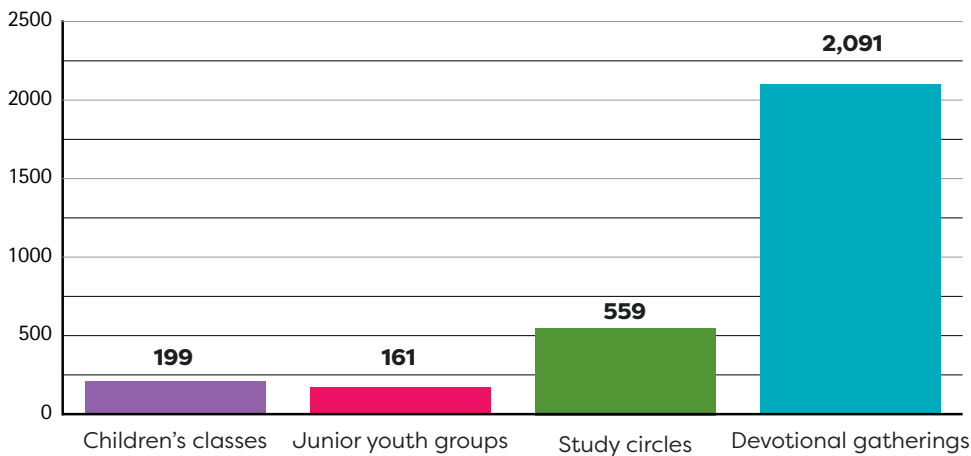
Additional areas of growth

During the year, several working groups assisted the Council to draft documents that give expression to learning related to four areas of endeavor:

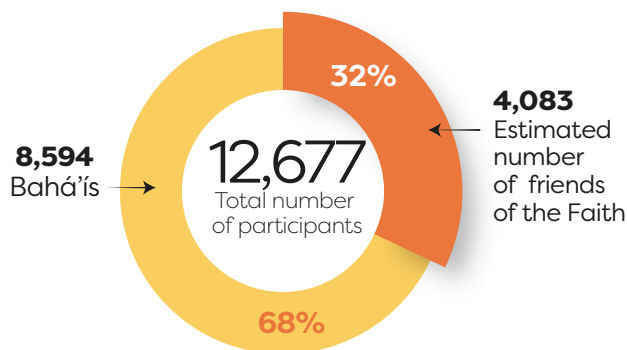
- The region's financial systems
- The acquisition, use, beautification, and maintenance of six properties that will provide space for the operation of the training institute
- The flow of guidance and information between and among neighborhoods and clusters
- The spiritual health of populations working to advance and implement the vision of Bahá'u'lláh for humanity

In two of these areas—properties and financial systems—the Council has appointed individuals to serve at respective Council desks. These friends will interact with selected individuals, communities, and institutions in the coming months as they seek to read current realities, consult widely, capture and document lessons learned, and advance these processes along sound principles.

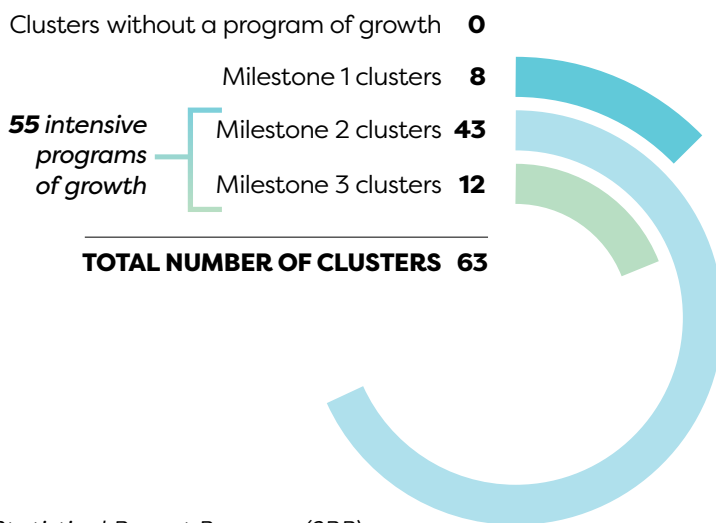
3,010 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



63 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

In the areas of properties and financial systems, the Council has appointed individuals to serve at respective Council desks. These friends will interact with selected individuals, communities, and institutions in the coming months as they seek to read current realities, consult widely, capture and document lessons learned, and advance these processes along sound principles.

Regional Bahá'í Council of the State of Florida

The Council agreed it would focus initially on learning about the process of growth in Florida's four most-advanced clusters, paying attention to four key areas: strengthening nuclei within neighborhoods comprising receptive populations, strengthening nuclei within the generality of believers, compiling the names and qualities of active and capable tutors in each cluster, and the development and functioning of Area Teaching Committees.



Editor's note: The contribution to the Ridván 2023 Annual Report from the Regional Bahá'í Council of the State of Florida is more general in nature given the Council's very recent formation.

The Council held its inaugural meeting in December 2022, with Counselor Farah Guchani-Rosenberg, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly, and all five Council members. Grounded in guidance from the Universal House of Justice, the friends reflected on the way growth unfolds in clusters, considering such factors as the formation of a nucleus of friends, the quality of tutoring in the courses of the Ruhi Institute, the nature of accompaniment, and the appointment

of institute coordinators and Area Teaching Committees. A cohort of institute collaborators will serve until a Regional Training Institute Board can be appointed. Additionally, plans are being developed to systematically accompany young people into the field of service in larger numbers.

The Council agreed it would focus initially on learning about the process of growth in Florida's four most-advanced clusters, paying attention to four key areas: strengthening nuclei within neighborhoods comprising receptive populations, strengthening nuclei within the generality of believers, compiling the names and qualities of active and capable tutors in each cluster, and the development and functioning of Area Teaching Committees.

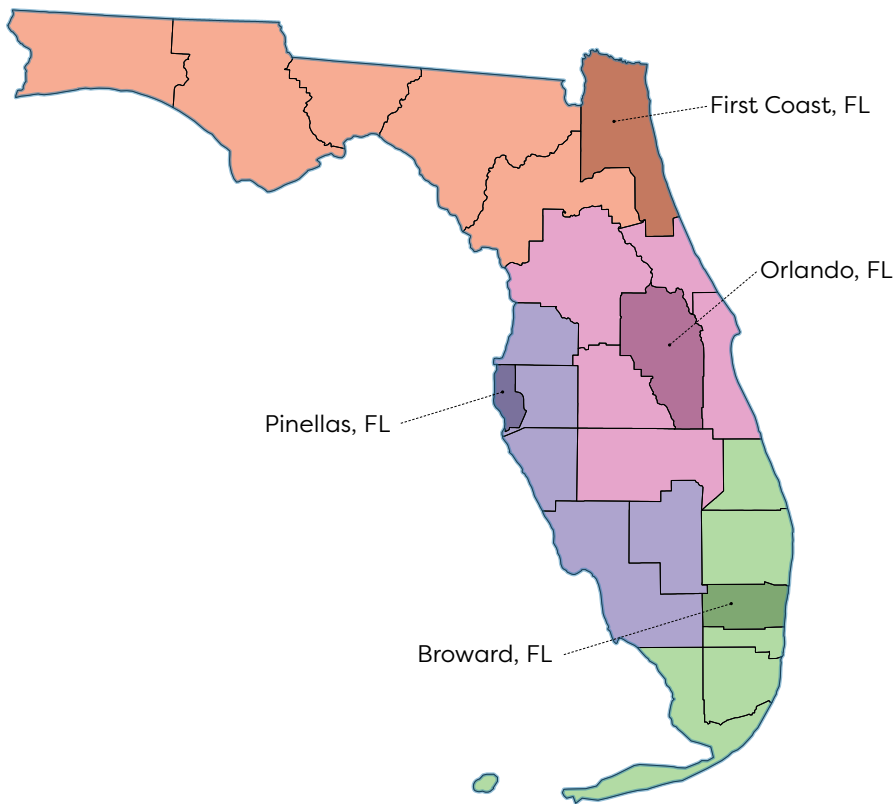
A brief description of what has been learned, as described by the friends at the grass roots, follows.

Broward cluster

Friends in this cluster, which has reached the third milestone on the continuum of growth, are striving to identify and support groups that could become expanding nuclei. A recent cluster reflection gathering focused on how to welcome families into the institute process, and friends were invited to share what was learned from the last two cycles, including how they maintain momentum and participation in core activities.

In June 2022, youth were strongly encouraged to attend intensive institute camps in the Southeastern region. Many returned full of enthusiasm, and preparations are underway for the first cluster-wide minicamp, which will help these young people launch their next study circle. Similar camps will follow during school breaks with the goal of helping the youth complete the full sequence of Ruhi Institute courses by Ridván 2024. Additionally, one youth currently serves as a homefront pioneer with the support of the Spiritual Assembly of Weston; another is devoting a year to service with the support of the Spiritual Assembly of Plantation.

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

Throughout the cluster, Spiritual Assemblies, youth groups, and expanding nuclei are gathering to read their reality and discern the needs of their immediate communities. They are discovering new ways to serve such as supporting the learning of English as a second language for recent immigrants, holding a women's support group, helping to tutor adults preparing to take the GED test, calling community meetings with police and local government to discuss the treatment of youth and families in the African American community, curating art that helps elevate conversations about racial justice, and participating in meaningful conversations.

During last summer's regional inter-institutional meeting, surrounding clusters had an opportunity to share what they had learned, and in the fall, space was created for four surrounding clusters to consult about efforts to address racial justice in the region. Young people in these four clusters have been meeting since the summer to share, plan, and reflect together. A need remains for more of these reflective spaces.

Pinellas cluster

Pinellas, a second-milestone cluster, has identified Crest Lake Park as a receptive neighborhood, in which a number of activities have recently been formed with the support of a newly declared Bahá'í. A children's class, somewhat unstructured initially, now has a team to aid in its organization. A small group of youth is studying Ruhi Books 3 and 5, and home visits to more neighborhood families will be starting.

Devotionals throughout the cluster are ongoing, with the goal to double their number in the coming cycle. There are four regularly occurring firesides and up to nine nuclei engaged in devotionals, study circles, and home visits.

In the Broward cluster, the friends are finding new ways to serve such as supporting the learning of English as a second language for recent immigrants, holding a women's support group, helping to tutor adults preparing to take the GED test, calling community meetings with police and local government to discuss the treatment of youth and families in the African American community, curating art that helps elevate conversations about racial justice, and participating in meaningful conversations.



Orlando cluster

Friends in this cluster, which has passed the second milestone, have identified two focus neighborhoods—Baldwin Park and Oasis—and anticipate others. Families in Baldwin Park gather once a week to hold children's classes, junior youth groups, youth study circles, and adult study sessions with friends of the Faith. This vibrant pattern of community life naturally incorporates the arts across the various groups, most notably with children and youth.



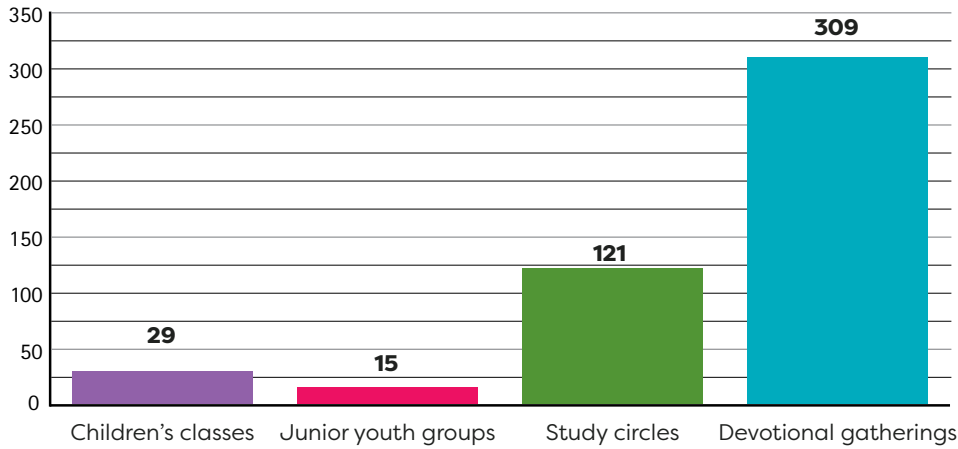
At a recent cluster reflection gathering, the friends shared insights and suggestions on the following: holding meaningful conversations, opportunities for families to learn about the spiritual education of their children, the review of relevant data, and young people's studies of the Ruhi Institute materials. A pattern of learning is apparent among participants in this space.



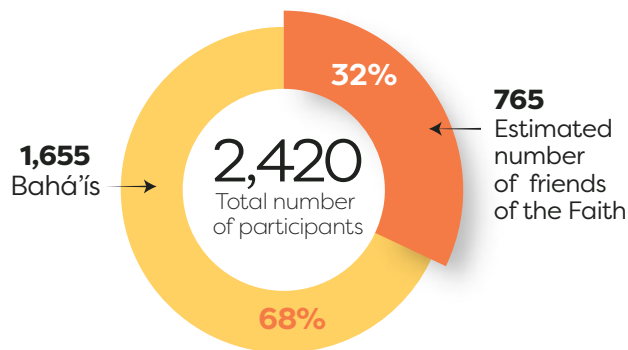
First Coast cluster

While more time is needed to learn about the reality of this second-milestone cluster, core activities include six children's classes, one junior youth group, 13 study circles, and 40 devotional gatherings. Two active Ruhi Institute tutors are accompanied by a third in the field of service. Some 13 friends attend a Ruhi Book 1 seminar, and 10 families see themselves as nuclei making efforts to start core activities.

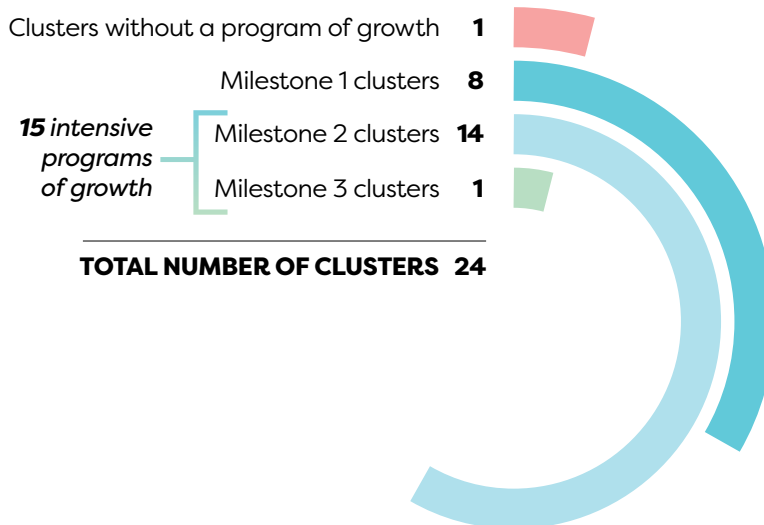
474 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



23 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

A cohort of institute collaborators will serve until a Regional Training Institute Board can be appointed. Additionally, plans are being developed to systematically accompany young people into the field of service in larger numbers.

Regional Bahá'í Council of the **Four Corners** States



Expanding the circle of friends

The concept of an expanding nucleus has helped fuel growth in almost every cluster in the region. The number of expanding nuclei has increased from 71 to 207 in the past year. With 1,847 families connected to the community-building process, human resources involved in spiritual conversations—including 1,251 people who see themselves as protagonists and friends—have multiplied

As this growth has occurred, the Phoenix, Fort Defiance Agency, East Valley, Denver, Salt Lake, Greater Tucson, and Albuquerque clusters have increased their capacity to support camps for children, junior youth, and youth throughout the year. The camps bring friends together to study, consult, and reflect on their service, leaving them invigorated and ready to increase their participation. Community-building activities have also intensified in neighborhoods in the Phoenix, Albuquerque, Flagstaff, Greater Tucson, and East Valley clusters, requiring more institute facilities. Three such facilities were newly established—in Flagstaff, the Phoenix area, and Tucson—with each supported by local and regional funds.

Advancing the institute process

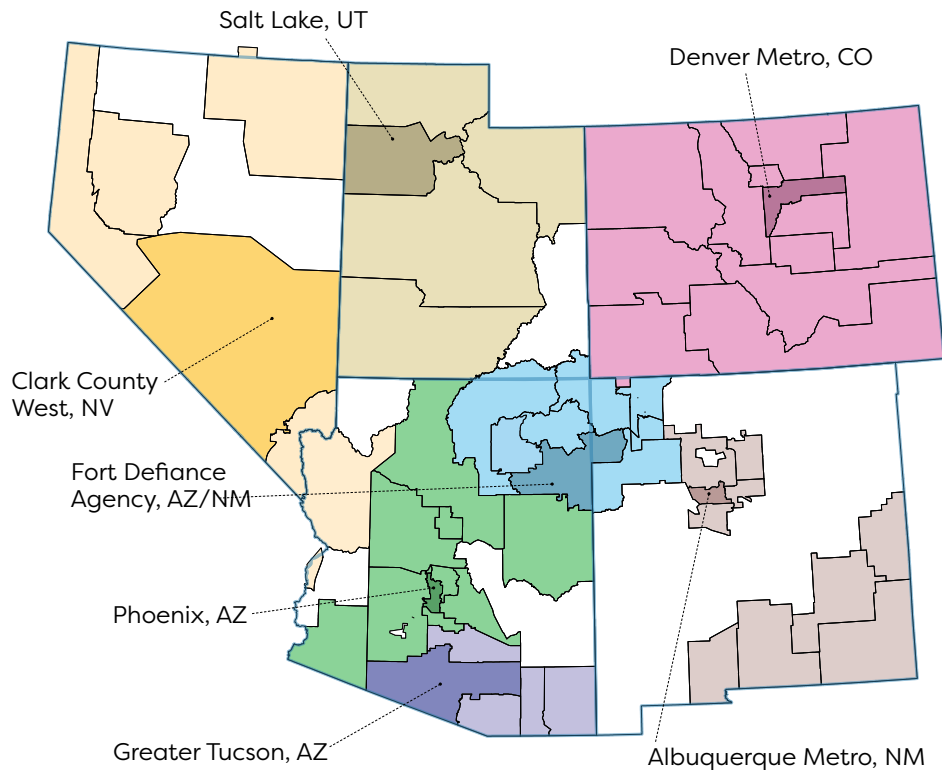
Efforts to systematize learning about the strengths of the institute process involve a collaborative group working as four teams that focus, respectively, on children's classes; youth and junior youth; the main sequence of courses in the Ruhi Institute, starting with Book 1; and the higher-level Ruhi books. These teams have analyzed the strengths in each area over the past three years. Meeting weekly, they have developed objects of learning drawing from *Training Institutes: Attaining a Higher Level of Function*, a publication of the International Teaching Center. The teams are also making plans that will improve the mechanisms through which learning can flow: seminars and spaces for reflection, visits to more-advanced clusters, and accompaniment.

To support the work of the institute at the levels of clusters and groupings, the region hosts a Strengthening of the Institute gathering twice a year to gain insights from the work in clusters and centers of intense activity. Moving forward, each cluster grouping will host a similar gathering prior to the regional space to draw more on insights gained at the grass roots.

Meanwhile, several youths from the region have arisen to serve either during the summer months or for a couple of years; this includes those who have committed to homefront pioneering to a neighborhood in their cluster. Many were initially introduced to the institute process as children and have advanced through the sequence of courses to become animators and tutors. With the Council's support, a regional youth service coordinator is working to recruit, train, and nurture young people who arise to serve. Regular spaces for reflection and consultation are provided throughout the year.

The concept of an expanding nucleus has helped fuel growth in almost every cluster in the region. The number of expanding nuclei has increased from 71 to 207 in the past year. With 1,847 families connected to the community-building process, human resources involved in spiritual conversations—including 1,251 people who see themselves as protagonists and friends—have multiplied.

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



1 HOMEFRONT PIONEER

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

Cluster advancement through shared learning

As reservoir clusters continue to develop their capacities to foster community building, a helpful strategy for advancing others along the continuum of growth has emerged: namely engagement between reservoir clusters and the clusters in their groupings and beyond. For example, when friends from other clusters visited Phoenix, they not only gained firsthand experience serving and reflecting alongside those who belong to an expanding nucleus or who serve in centers of intense activity, but they also applied what they learned from those experiences in their home clusters. This resulted in measurable growth afterward. Additionally, in preparation for the visits, the Phoenix cluster gained volunteers to host and reflect with visitors, and the cluster agencies were able to clearly share their strengths and areas of learning.

Social action

Social action is stirring in many of the region's clusters. As part of the path to transforming society, friends have initiated service in their communities as an extension of participating in the institute process. Activities have included planting gardens to provide fresh food in Salt Lake, Fort Defiance, Farmington, and Phoenix; providing educational support in East Valley, Tucson, and Fort Defiance; and assisting with the transition of immigrants in Tucson and Albuquerque.

Other initiatives

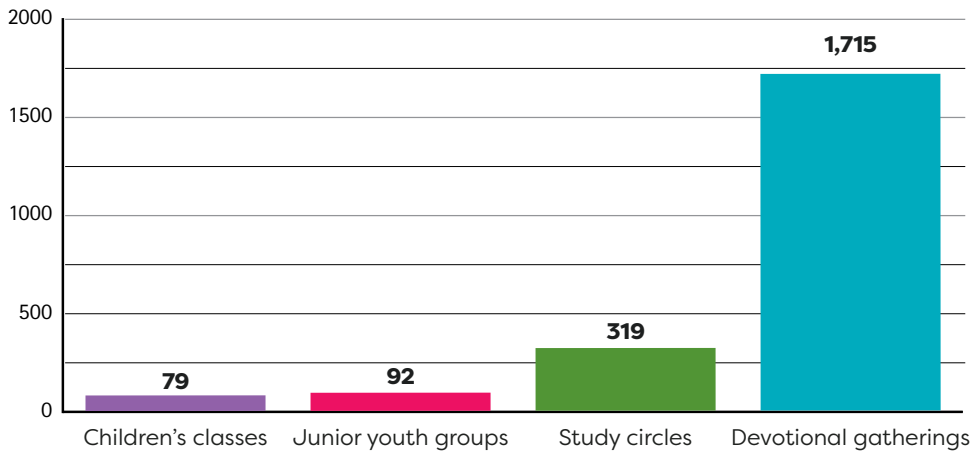
Following a seminar on financial systems with the National Spiritual Assembly, the Council developed a financial systems document. One part of its approach will be to enlist the support of cluster agencies and Local Spiritual Assemblies in the creation of plans and budgets for their local expansion and consolidation efforts. To that end, the Council held its first gathering with a few clusters this year and plans to extend the process next year.

In addition, the Council hosted a gathering of Spiritual Assemblies in Arizona for the purpose of fund education. The friends there reflected and learned about the spiritual nature of giving, as well as increased their awareness of the region's financial needs, such as secure funding for regular camps and intensives and the acquisition of institute properties. Consultation about the major role Spiritual Assemblies play in helping the region become financially self-sufficient led to plans by Assemblies to increase their contributions dedicated to growth in their own localities and to the Regional Fund. Plans are being developed to offer such gatherings for all Assemblies across the region and to strive for universal participation.

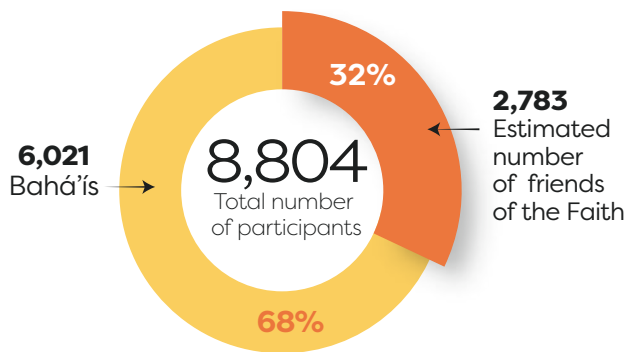
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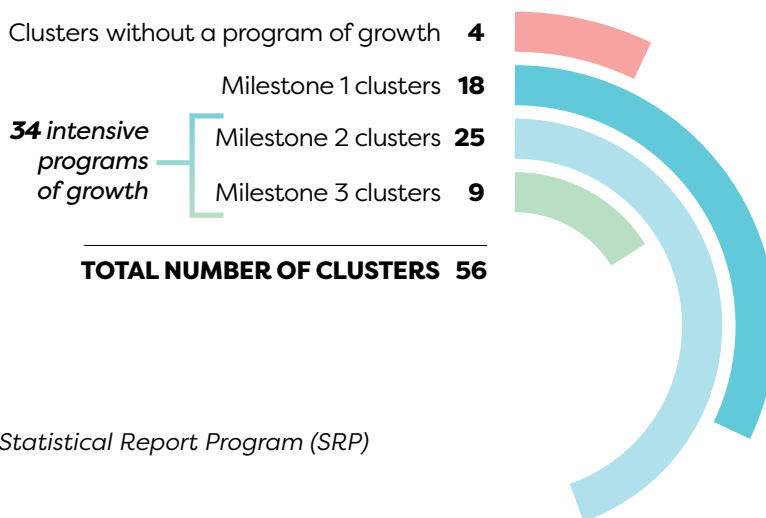
2,205 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



52 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

Friends have initiated service in their communities as an extension of participating in the institute process. Activities have included planting gardens to provide fresh food; providing educational support; and assisting with the transition of immigrants.

Native American Bahá'í Institute

Houck, Arizona

A summer children's camp, organically initiated and conducted by local community members and NABI staff members, was well received, and participants requested continued gatherings. As a result, friends serving at NABI have provided a follow-up gathering with the intention of providing a monthly space for a children's day camp.



As the community gradually emerged from pandemic restrictions, those serving at the Native American Bahá'í Institute (NABI) were both excited and cautious at the prospect of resuming normal activities. The Navajo Nation protocol guided the efforts at NABI, as it stipulated that spiritual institutions operate at 75 percent capacity. And, as of January 2023, the Navajo Nation lifted its mask mandate. Operating within these circumstances, during the past year NABI has wrapped up lines of action begun during the One Year Plan and moved forward with initiatives to support the Nine Year Plan, as encouraged by the National Spiritual Assembly.

Staff members have continued to reinforce the institute process by participating in children's classes, junior youth groups, and study circles, as well as being of service in the community. The friends at NABI have also participated in and encouraged devotionals among individuals on campus and throughout the surrounding communities, whether in person or through other means such as phone conference calls, Zoom meetings, etc. Some of these efforts have led to the study of the Holy Writings and interest and participation in study circles through the institute process.

During various programs held on campus, staff provided classes for children focusing on the study of the Holy Figures and the memorization of prayers. The summer children's camp was organically initiated and conducted by local community members and NABI staff members. The camp was well received, and participants requested continued gatherings. As a result, friends serving at NABI have provided a follow-up gathering with the intention of providing a monthly space for a children's day camp. Staff members also supported a junior youth camp that was held during the summer and have continued to nurture it on a weekly basis by providing meals and transportation.

Study circles have continued on campus, and elders have met weekly to deepen on the Nine Year Plan and to study Ruhi Institute Book 1.

The video *Glimpses of a Hundred Years of Endeavour* was translated into the Diné language by several community members on campus. After its release, many of the translated versions were distributed throughout the community. This video, as well as *Exemplar*—which celebrated the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and was also translated into the Diné language—have been very well received by community members and have sparked an interest and provided opportunities for many conversations about the Bahá’í Faith.

NABI has also served the surrounding area by helping to address the lack of running water in various community members’ homes. In addition to allowing residents to get water from the campus well, NABI staff members have responded to the need for individuals to use campus facilities for showers. Those living nearby who come regularly to campus have expressed great appreciation for the availability of this service.

In addition, the NABI staff has responded to various individuals’ and organizations’ requests for assistance. For example, it helped provide food to people who were in isolation due to health concerns or other emergency situations.

The NABI staff, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Houck Chapter, the Regional Bahá’í Council of the Four Corners States, and Auxiliary Board members for Protection and Propagation are working together to facilitate NABI’s smooth transition from being a national school to an institute space. As this transition unfolds, the Regional Council is confident that the friends in the community will arise to increase the community-building efforts in the cluster and be able to use the NABI campus as a space to host many core activities, camps, and intensives.



The NABI staff has responded to various individuals’ and organizations’ requests for assistance. For example, it helped provide food to people who were in isolation due to health concerns or other emergency situations.

Regional Bahá'í Council of the **Heartland States**

Preparations for some of the conferences at the outset of the Plan highlighted how segregation and racism could serve as barriers to participation. However, through concerted effort, the conferences were successful in inviting and engaging diverse populations, including prominent contributions from those belonging to Indigenous communities.



Last year began with a burst of 29 local conferences, shedding the rays of Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity across the Heartland region. These historic gatherings, paired with successive waves of region-wide Ruhi Institute Book 1 and 2 seminars, have contributed to a growing, collective awareness of how the framework of the Nine Year Plan empowers individuals and communities to contribute to the betterment of society. Clusters throughout the region have made both quantitative and qualitative progress, and the Madison cluster in Wisconsin has become the second to achieve the third milestone on the continuum of growth, showing considerable progress in interinstitutional collaboration and an intensification of activity in focus neighborhoods.

Preparations for some of the conferences at the outset of the Plan highlighted how segregation and racism could serve as barriers to participation. However, through concerted effort, the conferences were successful in inviting and engaging diverse populations, including prominent contributions from those belonging to Indigenous communities.

Expanding the circle of friends

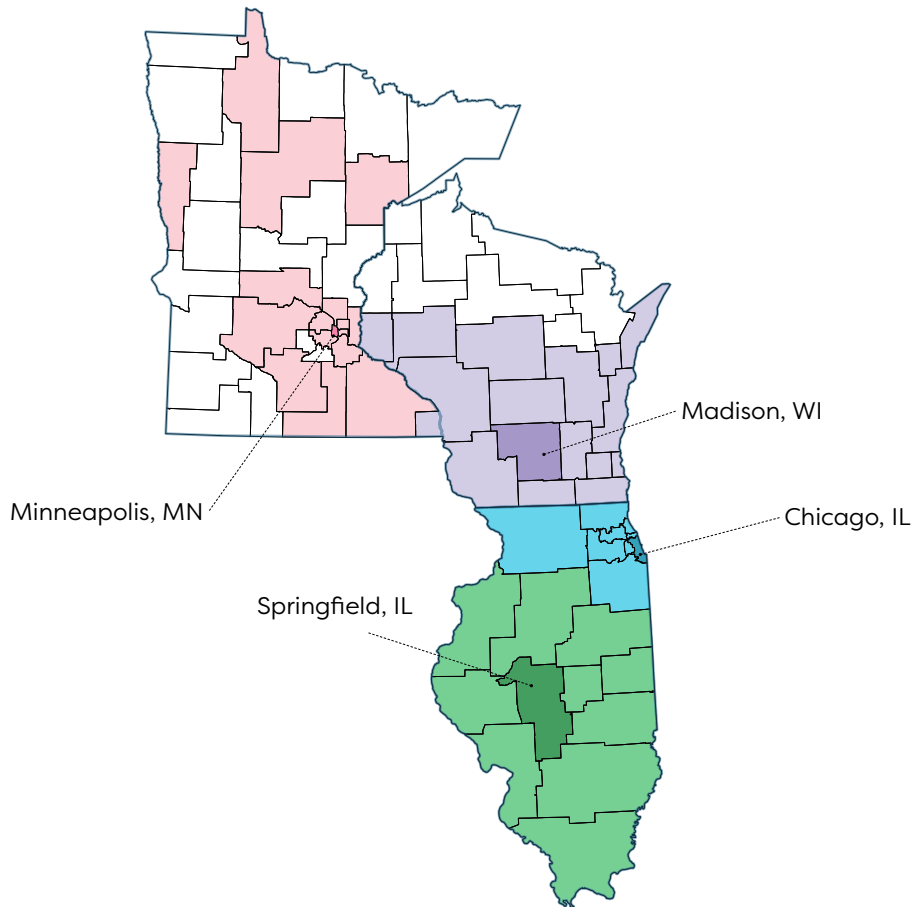
In a growing number of clusters, the friends are learning how to establish and sustain community-building efforts that engage distinct populations. This has led to multiple families identifying themselves as homefront pioneers focused on their own neighborhoods or, in some cases, arising to serve in other neighborhoods where they can support promising initiatives.

Frequent requests are being made for Ruhi Institute materials in languages other than English. This comes as invitations to participate in study circles, junior youth groups, and children's classes are being extended to individuals and families from diverse backgrounds. In one locality, a recent influx of Congolese Bahá'í families has brought vibrancy and joy to the existing Bahá'í community. The friends are learning to surmount language and cultural barriers as they celebrate Feasts and Holy Days together, and children's classes are reaching a wide range of families. As part of the larger Congolese immigrant community, these recently arrived families have been actively teaching the Faith to their friends and neighbors and inviting them to participate in core activities.

Advancing the institute process

An increasing number of youth institute camps, camps for junior youth, and camps for children are being held throughout the region. These gatherings have become opportunities for the families of those participating to offer support through the

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



provision of food and transportation. Participants' families have also identified and invited additional campers who have the potential of engaging their own families and networks. In some of the most-advanced neighborhoods, families are beginning to see themselves as part of expanding nuclei and are learning to engage more widely with civic groups and like-minded organizations, which they see as willing collaborators in their efforts to build community.

The Regional Training Institute Board has systematically promoted summer-of-service initiatives in multiple clusters, along with quarterly subregional youth institute camps and "Strengthening the Institute" gatherings. These gatherings bring together teams from focus neighborhoods—many composed of young people—to reflect on what is being learned about facilitating the movement of youth into the institute process and expanding the reach of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. The past year has seen an increase in youth-year-of-service volunteers, and youth are arising to serve as pioneers or are already serving full time in focus neighborhoods.

Cluster advancement through shared learning

Both of the region's third-milestone clusters—Chicago and Madison—served as reservoirs of experience and resources for the region. The friends in these clusters hosted gatherings and shared what they learned about community building by sending teams to and receiving teams from other clusters. They also participated in a visit to Phoenix, organized by the Counselors, to learn from that more-advanced cluster.

Pioneering

Chicago has recently served as a host cluster for potential homefront and international pioneers, offering opportunities to learn alongside friends in focus neighborhoods.

3 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022



In some of the most-advanced neighborhoods, families are beginning to see themselves as part of expanding nuclei and are learning to engage more widely with civic groups and like-minded organizations, which they see as willing collaborators in their efforts to build community.

This has inspired at least two people to commit to serving as homefront pioneers in the Chicago cluster. Additionally, the newly established Heartland regional pioneer task force will begin identifying, orientating, deploying, and supporting growing numbers of friends who wish to serve as pioneers.

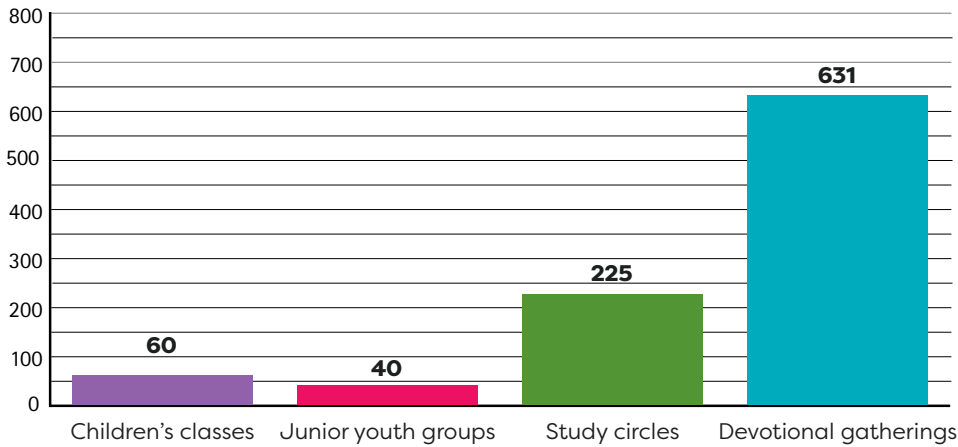
Social action and contributing to the discourses of society

The most promising forms of social action are arising out of community-building processes in the most-advanced clusters. Fostered by the training institutes, local groups of friends and individuals are learning to respond to the needs of their communities.

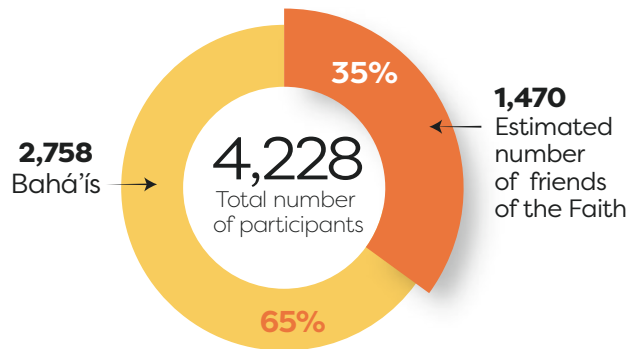
Meanwhile, friends across the region are participating in dialogues about social problems, which has allowed community building to bear fruit in a different way. One initiative serves as a complementary teaching strategy and is widening the Faith's embrace of the population from the south side of Chicago. A teaching team there is hosting weekly meaningful conversations, an effort supported by a targeted social media initiative that is attracting participants to firesides, devotionals, visits to the House of Worship, and other community activities.



956 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022

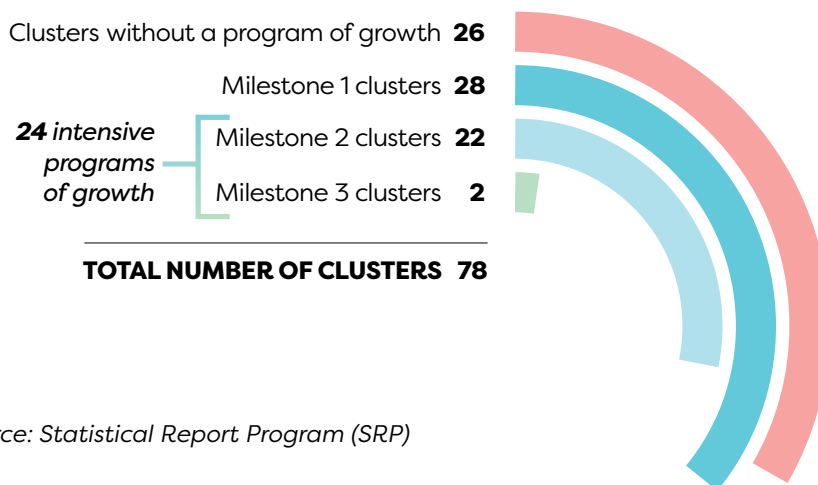


Overall participation in all four core activities



On the south side of Chicago, a teaching team is hosting weekly meaningful conversations, an effort supported by a targeted social media initiative that is attracting participants to firesides, devotionals, visits to the House of Worship, and other community activities.

52 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

Regional Bahá'í Council of the **Midwestern** States

An Indigenous peoples learning group is opening a dialogue among American Indian and Alaska Native Bahá'ís and their friends throughout the region. Inspired by a region-wide study of Ruhi Institute Book 8 through the lens of the Black American Bahá'í experience, Black Bahá'ís continue to study Book 8 and other institute courses in their local communities.



Expanding the circle of friends

The Council-sponsored Racial Justice and Unity (RJU) forum was established in September 2020 to help strengthen learning about racial justice and unity at the grass roots using the framework for action. This year, the RJU forum—held monthly over Zoom—attracted more than 300 people engaged in broad learning that includes studying the history and nature of racial prejudice, bringing themes of racial justice and unity to all core activities, initiating family/neighborhood teaching activities, taking part in society's discourses, and participating in a wide range of social actions. Specific community-building activities included home visits, study circles, devotional meetings, and exploring themes of racial justice and unity.

The Council also sponsored the attendance of Local Spiritual Assembly members in the Wilmette Institute course on anti-Black racism and is in the process of creating learning groups for specific historically significant populations. An Indigenous peoples learning group is opening a dialogue among American Indian and Alaska Native Bahá'ís and their friends throughout the region. Inspired by a region-wide study of Ruhi Institute Book 8 through the lens of the Black American Bahá'í experience, Black Bahá'ís continue to study Book 8 and other institute courses in their local communities. Finally, a special Building Vibrant Communities conference—held primarily in Swahili—was convened in Cleveland by the local Marafiki community (Eastern African populations).

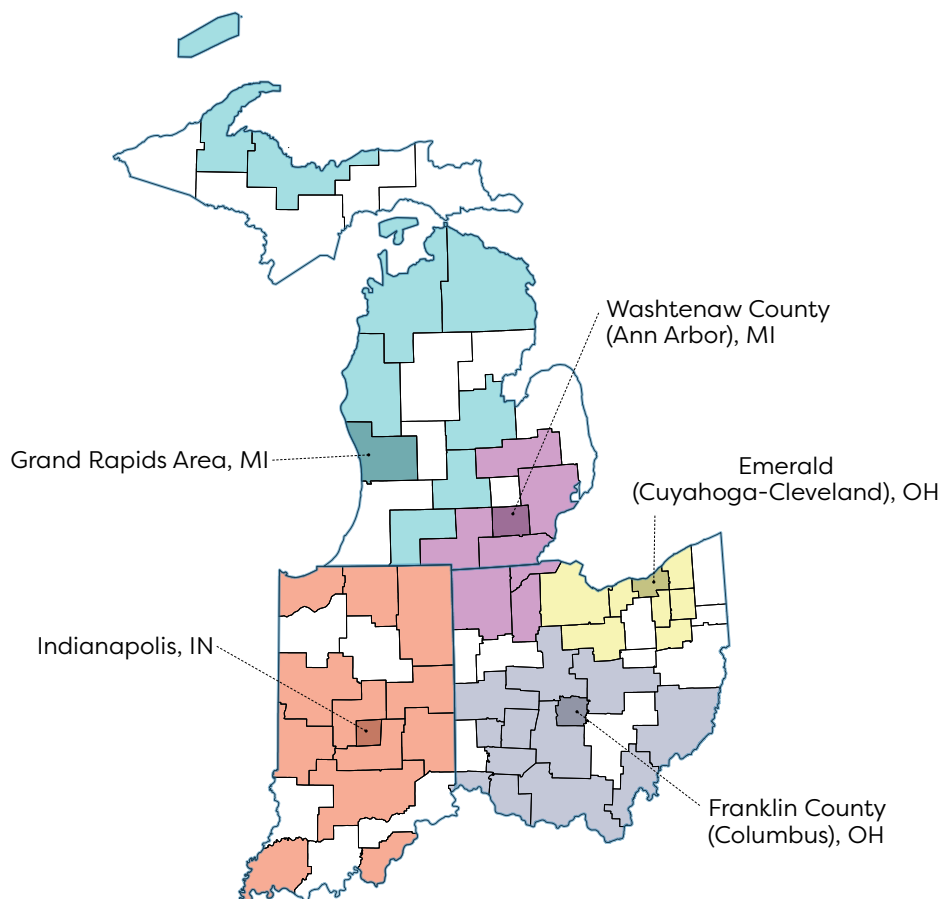
Advancing the institute process

The main strategies for the growth of the training institute are to strengthen capacity to accompany effective tutors through content seminars, to support regional and cluster coordinators through regular reflection spaces and close accompaniment, and to pay special attention to the movement of youth. Through efforts in centers of intense activities and at subregional levels, the institute has mobilized a number of youth into service. Plans are already underway to increase the number of friends who can participate in local, subregional, and/or region-wide efforts to advance the teaching work. In coming cycles, the friends will organize seminars to continue strengthening the institute and gatherings to disseminate learning.

Cluster advancement through shared learning

In April 2022 a vision was developed to assist every cluster in the region to advance to the next milestone on the continuum of growth and for clusters already at the third milestone to reach the frontiers of learning. Major areas of focus included advancing teaching efforts among historically significant and immigrant populations, strengthening the institute, and increasing collaboration and mutual support. Friends committed themselves to developing a shared reading of the region's reality. Since then, the institutions and agencies have regularly analyzed the region's progress, identified obstacles, defined effective lines of action to disseminate

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



10 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

learning, and made efforts to release untapped potential in the region's clusters. Since Riḡván 2022, two clusters have advanced past the second milestone and two more are very close to the third. The region also shares what they are learning through a quarterly newsletter and a [regularly updated website](#).

Pioneering

In addition to a monthly Teaching and Pioneer Café, the Midwest Regional Office of Pioneering held a regional conference in October 2022. This provided space for pioneers to share experiences to inspire future pioneers to serve. Tools were shared to help participants increase their success in teaching and community-building efforts. The friends studied guidance and heard stories of current pioneering efforts and of pioneers from historically significant populations. International and regional Nine Year Plan pioneering goals were reviewed, and information was provided to help pioneers prepare for service. The Council financially supports pioneers (mostly youth) in centers of intense activity. In the past year, pioneering families, including 19 adults and five children, settled in nine regional localities, and nine adults with three children pioneered outside the region.

Social action

One nascent initiative involved sharing the National Spiritual Assembly's statement "Forging a Path to Racial Justice" in Columbus, Ohio's Franklin Park neighborhood. This effort was discussed with friends in the Southside Ypsilanti, Michigan, neighborhood who were seeking ways to engage with residents about inequities plaguing their community. The neighborhood teams consulted, and the Southside Ypsilanti team started a campaign with a study of the statement. This led to increased abilities to have meaningful conversations about the reality of the community at large, the part that

Plans are already underway to increase the number of friends who can participate in local, subregional, and/or region-wide efforts to advance the teaching work. In coming cycles, the friends will organize seminars to continue strengthening the institute and gatherings to disseminate learning.

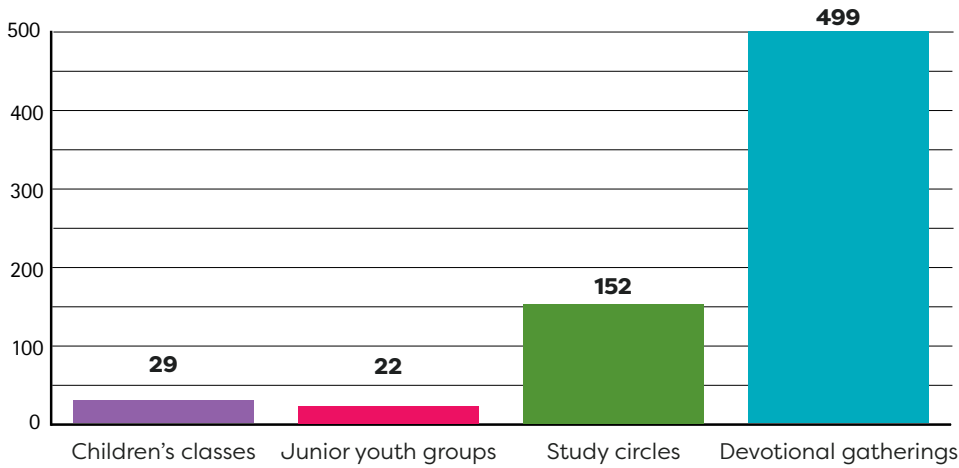
individuals play in combating racial prejudice, and spirituality's contribution to the neighborhood's community life. Other social actions included creating neighborhood organizations, engaging civic leaders in discussions about policies that promote equity, and collaborating with a variety of grassroots efforts in the broader community.

Contributing to the discourses of society

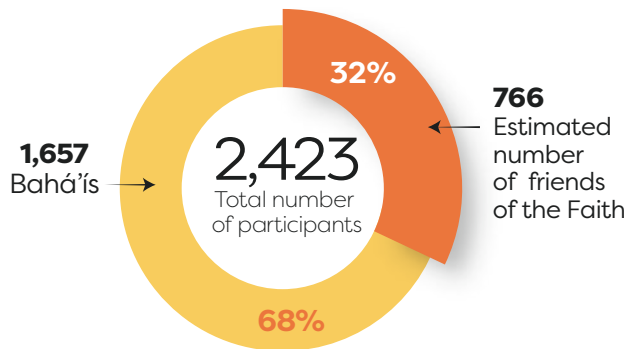
The learning group that facilitates the RJU forum used one meeting to launch a campaign to host local devotional gatherings—with themes relevant to justice, race unity, or cross-cultural understanding—by the conclusion of Riḍván 2023. Participants pledged to start or continue inviting diverse groups of friends into their homes on a regular basis; systematically sharing Bahá'u'lláh's teachings about race and justice; engaging in neighborhood core activities with populations that are mostly Black, Indigenous, Latino, or immigrant; and hosting regular race, justice, or culturally-themed devotional meetings. Other contributions to society's discourses on racial justice and unity include sponsoring discussion groups, making presentations in public gatherings, and engaging in elevated conversations in various settings.



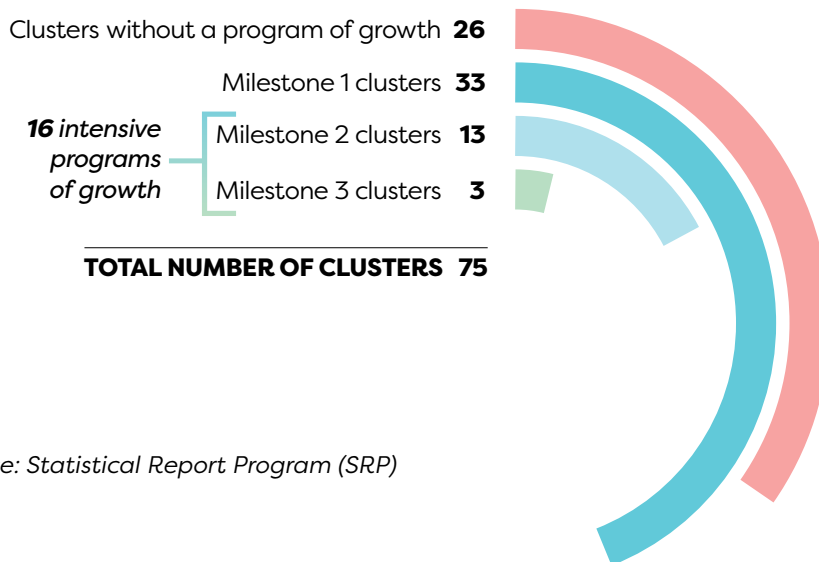
702 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



49 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

In Ypsilanti, Michigan, a campaign started with a study of the National Spiritual Assembly's statement "Forging a Path to Racial Justice." This led to increased abilities to have meaningful conversations about the reality of the community at large, the part that individuals play in combating racial prejudice, and spirituality's contribution to the neighborhood's community life.

Regional Bahá'í Council of the Northeastern States

The region arose magnificently to carry out the wishes of the Universal House of Justice in hosting conferences to expand the circle of friends taking part in the community-building process, particularly focused on outreach to populations that bring the beauty of diversity to those endeavors.



With hearts inspired by the launch of the Nine Year Plan, the friends are developing common vision around regional areas of focus to assist them as they strive to release the society-building power of the Faith in the Northeast region.

Expanding the circle of friends

The region arose magnificently to carry out the wishes of the Universal House of Justice in hosting conferences to expand the circle of friends

taking part in the community-building process, particularly focused on outreach to populations that bring the beauty of diversity to those endeavors. In response to the vision of Bahá'u'lláh for humanity, through ongoing outreach in neighborhoods where relationships are being built with, for example, African American, Latino, and Nepali populations, and with increased learning about expansion, the work of expanding the circle continued.

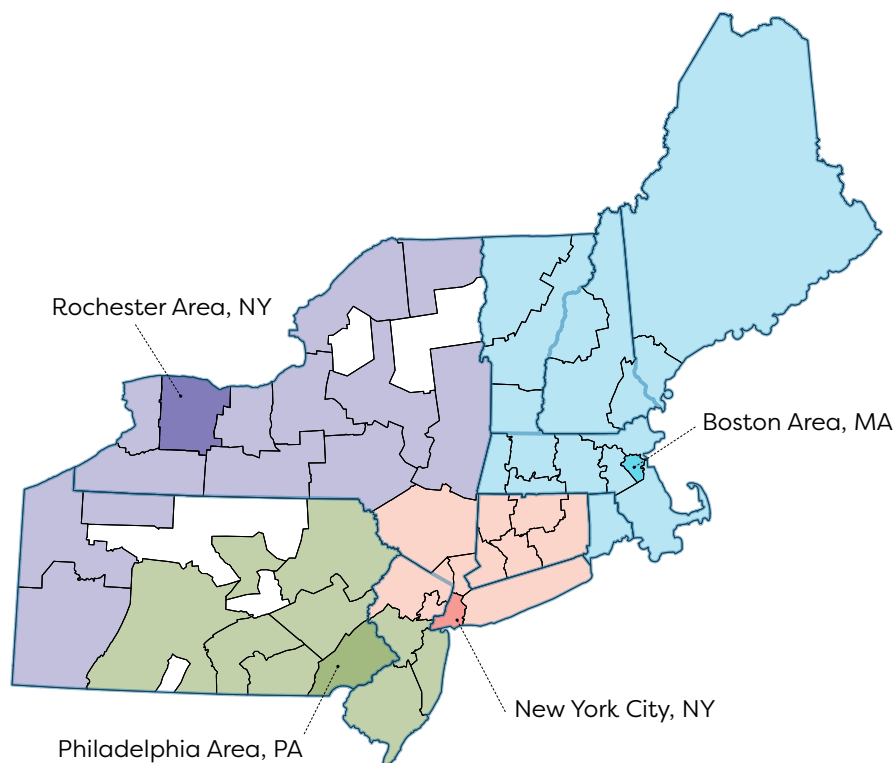
The friends have been learning about the formation of expanding nuclei among the generality of believers, while remaining aware of the value of diversity within each nucleus. Institutions and agencies are creating spaces where the concepts involved are being explored, and the friends are finding ways to get involved. For example, the Auxiliary Board members and Regional Council are hosting workshops for Local Spiritual Assemblies and cluster agencies to help them increase their understanding of the importance of this line of action.

Advancing the institute process

This year saw significant advances in the institute process. For example, many friends serving at regional, cluster, and local levels attended seminars for the study of various Ruhi Institute courses, where they also participated in field work and experienced close accompaniment. Monthly cluster agency gatherings, along with other spaces, fostered analysis and planning for each cycle. This resulted in closer collaboration among the friends, bringing the institute into the forefront of thinking for those working to advance the cluster growth process. At the subregional level, analysis and increased conversations among facilitators resulted in children's classes being offered in more clusters.

Involvement of youth in the institute process also increased. More junior youth and youth camps were held than ever before, with one neighborhood hosting a camp that involved friends from other neighborhoods. Summer-of-service programs were

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



9 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

successful in immersing youth in the study of institute materials and involvement in service. With the capacity to be systematic rising, follow-up efforts resulted in twice-a-month youth gatherings and the formation of a nucleus. Many youth have already signed up for the coming summer.

Advancing clusters through shared learning

This year regional institutions and agencies focused on learning in the region's most-advanced clusters so the friends there acquire capacity to share their experiences with clusters that surround them. An increasing number of examples emerged. One effort structured by the institute within groups of clusters facilitates the dissemination of learning from advanced clusters to nearby cluster coordinators and then to collaborators. Another stride forward is the appointment of regional growth facilitators who accompany and assist Area Teaching Committees as they seek to increase their capacity to serve. The region also learned to appreciate the value of spaces for reflection and learning—and identifying lines of inquiry—that benefit devotional hosts, expanding nuclei, junior youth animators, and others serving in specific fields of action.

Pioneering

The region has been learning about encouraging and supporting friends who arise to serve as pioneers on the home front; this year, the learning was expanded to include efforts in the international arena. A task force appointed by the Regional Council initiated conversations with Auxiliary Board members to identify candidates for international pioneering and extended the conversations to Local Spiritual Assemblies. Meanwhile, a few friends in the region, inspired by the call to serve as pioneers, took the first steps in the process that leads to deployment.

More junior youth and youth camps were held than ever before, with one neighborhood hosting a camp that involved friends from other neighborhoods. Summer-of-service programs were successful in immersing youth in the study of institute materials and involvement in service.

Social action

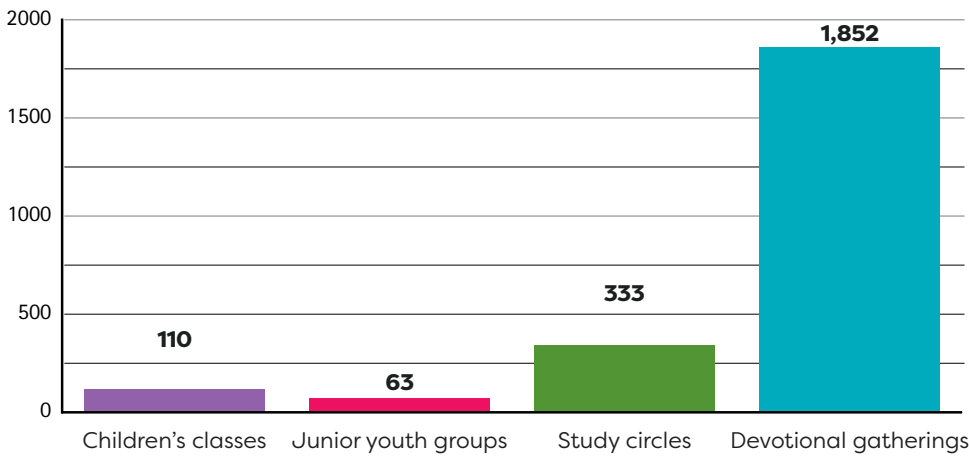
As the community-building process advanced in neighborhoods, so did the ability to engage in improving spiritual and social conditions in the wider community. In some places, this started with groups of mothers working together. In others, friends learning about reaching out to their neighbors embarked on systematic approaches to relationship building that resulted in the commencement of core activities, bonds of true friendship, and efforts to help each other in real life situations.

Contributing to the discourses of society

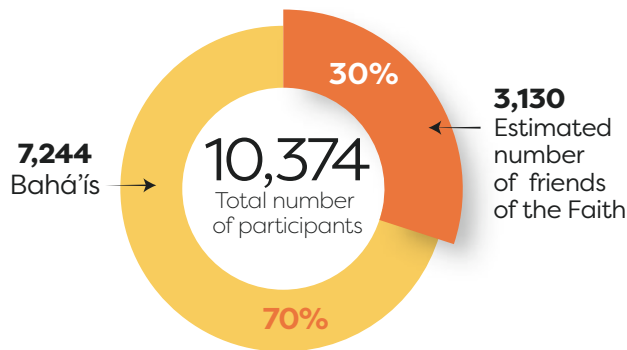
At the forefront of contributions to the discourses of society are endeavors related to race unity, whether through participation in efforts organized by like-minded friends in the wider community or in opportunities created by Bahá'ís. Some clusters have formed nuclei around the subject of race. Others are exploring the arts, while many are involved in discourse on subjects like the oneness of religion, justice, and human rights.



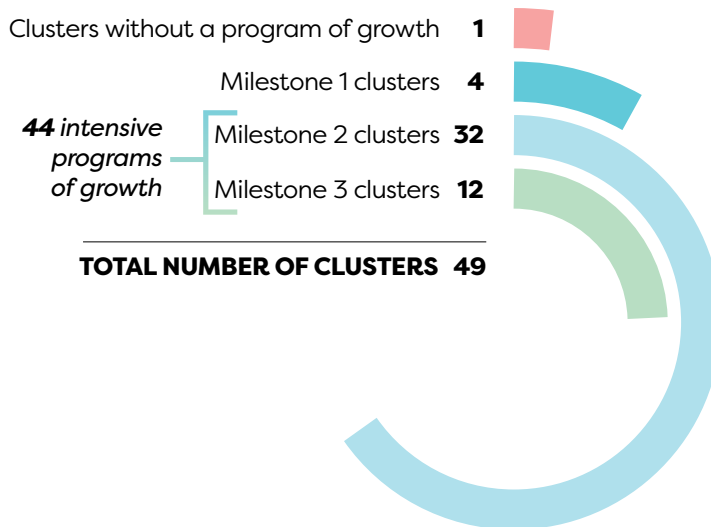
2,358 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



48 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

Some clusters have formed nuclei around the subject of race. Others are exploring the arts, while many are involved in discourse on subjects like the oneness of religion, justice, and human rights.

Regional Bahá'í Council of the **Northern Plains** States

Efforts by four period-of-service youths assisted several communities to expand the circle of friends to include Indigenous peoples and recent African immigrants taking part in community-building.



Expanding the circle of friends

This past year, the Northern Plains States had the bounty of having four youths from the region—two Native Americans, one Marshallese, and one Latina—who dedicated themselves to a period of service to the Bahá'í Faith. Their efforts assisted several communities to expand the circle of

friends to include Indigenous peoples and recent African immigrants taking part in community-building. Serendipitously in Boise, Idaho, community members making visits to immigrant housing facilities met a Bahá'í youth who recently immigrated from Africa. He participated in the winter youth camp, persevering through language difficulties.

In the summer, the youths traveled to the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. They made visits to families, neighbors, and friends of the Bahá'ís. This trip and a subsequent one by institute resource persons resulted in the start of a children's class where elders and parents share tribal stories interwoven with the Ruhi Institute children's class materials. Local devotional gatherings were also energized by the youths' visit.

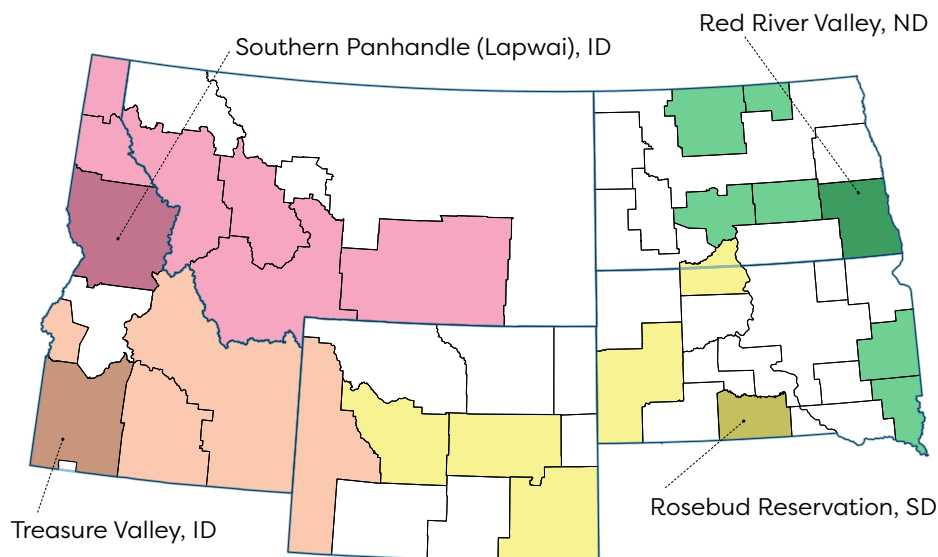
In addition, Bahá'ís in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, were able to expand their circle of friends through a visit by two youths accompanied by homefront pioneers and institute resource persons. This collaboration resulted in the formation of two junior youth groups with African immigrant participants. A study circle also began after their visit to a collegiate interfaith organization.

Throughout the summer, many communities and clusters gathered for conferences that were part of a global series focused on building vibrant communities. Nearly 500 people, including 176 guests, attended 22 conferences.

Advancing the institute process

Two institute seminars took place in the region. The first, held in the Treasure Valley cluster in Idaho, was attended by Bahá'ís from nine clusters, along with the youths offering a period of service. When they returned to their home communities, participants were asked to share what they had learned. An institute seminar in the Turtle Mountain Reservation brought together friends from the greater community and Bahá'ís from nearby clusters. The period-of-service youths also attended institute seminars in Pasadena, California, and Denver, Colorado. Meanwhile, young people from the Nez Perce Reservation in northern Idaho participated in several youth camps hosted in the Treasure Valley cluster, and youths in Montana and North Dakota have been progressing through the sequence of Ruhi Institute courses with a remote tutor online.

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



9 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

Cluster advancement through shared learning

The regional institute coordinator and regional institute resource person organized institute seminars that brought together people from several clusters. They visited clusters to share learning and accompany others. Additionally, a regional institute resource person from the Four Corners States accompanied youth during an outreach in Sioux Falls. Another person from the Four Corners traveled to Turtle Mountain to accompany a few Bahá'ís and one period-of-service youth. They established a children's class there.

Pioneering

The Council is supporting homefront pioneers in Sioux Falls in their community-building activities by renting an institute space. Other pioneers have settled in Billings, Montana, and are working closely with an Auxiliary Board member to advance junior youth groups in the cluster. The Counselor and the Council are also consulting on the placement of an additional homefront pioneer from within the region to the Dakotas.

Social action

Small-scale social action projects to improve the spiritual and social conditions in the wider community have been carried out through individual initiatives. Among these efforts are supporting food banks and highway clean-ups. Others work to raise concern in their communities about protecting the environment. The children's class at Turtle Mountain is held in a space provided by The Suicide Prevention and Outreach Center, and the staff of the center advertise the classes and encourage people to participate.

Contributing to the discourses of society

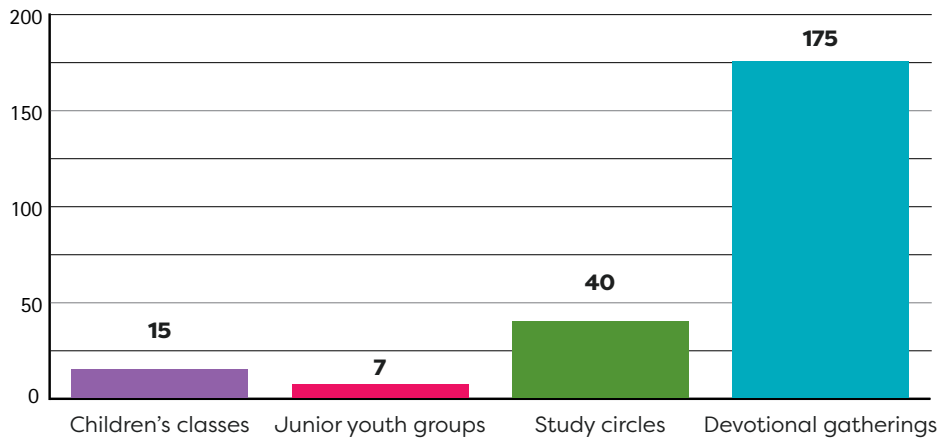
In Sioux Falls, members of the Bahá'í community frequently participate in a program called Multi-Cultural Table Talks. The mission of these talks is to meet the needs of an expanding, culturally diverse community. The junior youth group in Pocatello, Idaho, has partnered with the NAACP, which requested that the youth

provide artwork for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day event. The youth chose to donate a painting to be sold, with the proceeds going to the NAACP Education Fund. The Bahá'ís in Lincoln County, Wyoming, also sponsored a community program for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. They collaborated with others in the wider community to plan and carry out the event. Bahá'ís on the Flathead Reservation in Montana started a racism recovery group to encourage individual growth and improve race relations on the reservation. In Ennis, Montana, consultations about establishing an anti-bullying campaign in the school arose from the Nine Year Plan conference held in that community.

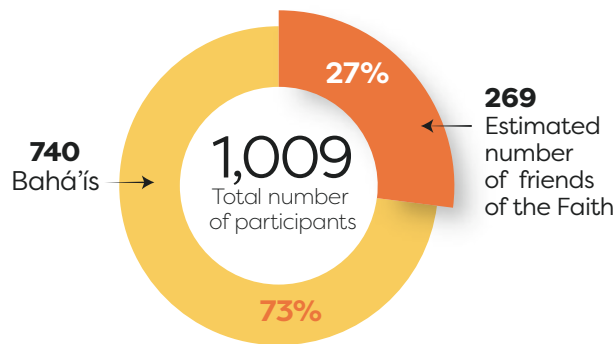
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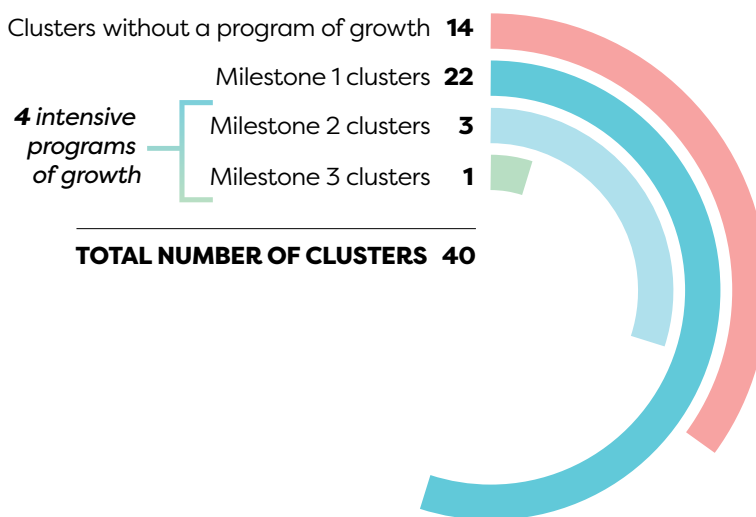
237 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



26 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

Among discourse initiatives in several states, Bahá'ís in South Dakota participated in a Multi-Cultural Table Talks program; those in Wyoming and Idaho took part in community programs for Martin Luther King Jr. Day; and those on the Flathead Reservation in Montana started a racism recovery group to encourage individual growth and improve race relations on the reservation.

Regional Bahá'í Council of the Northwestern States

The Council is in its third year of pursuing every aspect of its work through the lens of historically significant and immigrant populations. It strives to increase the number of diverse friends entrusted with roles of responsibility.



Expanding the circle of friends

The Council is in its third year of pursuing every aspect of its work through the lens of historically significant and immigrant populations. A number of the 100+ conferences to launch the Nine Year Plan were organized by Indigenous, Black, and immigrant populations, including a “Souls of Black Folks” conference. Most conferences made concerted, successful efforts to welcome diverse participants from the wider community. The number of communities partnering with like-minded groups around issues of racial justice and equity continues to grow.

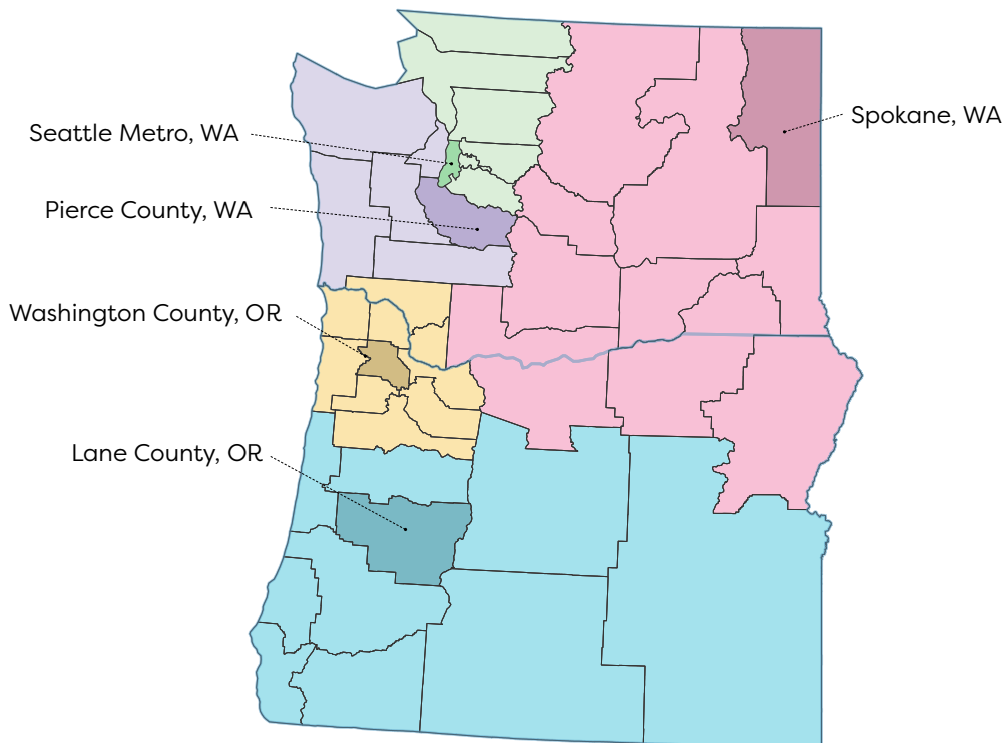
The Council also strives to increase the number of diverse friends entrusted with roles of responsibility, such as service on Area Teaching Committees (ATCs) and the Regional Training Institute (RTI) Board. Of 112 ATC members, 21 percent are people of color; 18 percent of seasonal schools committee members and 78 percent of those serving on the RTI Board are drawn from cultural or racial minority populations. The institute continues to raise up youth from diverse backgrounds as it learns to strengthen the environment of camps, intensives, and study circles.

Some 200 Bahá'ís in the Northwest have taken the Wilmette Institute's course *Anti-Black Racism in the US and Building a Unified Society* to strengthen the capacity of their institutions and agencies to make “freedom from racial prejudice the watchword of the entire community.” A special course for Persian Bahá'ís helps friends understand the history of race in America, to promote diverse friendships, and become advocates for racial justice. The Council is learning that a truthful and loving approach to discussing issues of race in America is attractive and helpful to those involved.

Advancing the institute process

The RTI Board and its collaborators have organized into teams to “gather and apply insights emerging from the grassroots regarding the promotion of children's classes, junior youth groups, and study circles.” A regional vision has emerged for advancing the institute, with strategies and lines of action meant to strengthen the movement of youth and enhance the quality and delivery of the institute's educational programs. The past year or so has seen a marked decline in youth entering the institute, and the region is giving renewed focus to this essential flow and to increasing access to youth service programs. One strategy involves supporting nuclei working with youth in the three strongest centers of intense activity, in their efforts to learn together and to build capacity for hosting seminars and institute camps that welcome participants from other areas. In three clusters, participants in early-stage neighborhood efforts visited a more-advanced center. Institute camps for youth and junior youth were regularly held in reservoir clusters over school breaks, including a unique collaboration across two clusters to organize a camp in western Washington.

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



4 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

Cluster advancement through shared learning

Each of the region's cluster groupings is supported by a regional institute coordinator and regional growth facilitator who create reflection spaces for institute coordinators and ATCs. The facilitators meet biweekly to coordinate shared learning across the region. Some reservoir clusters are gaining experience offering expansion-phase seminars, and participants return home with valuable experience and action plans. Friends travel regularly to other clusters to participate in outreach activities, reflections, and planning meetings. ATCs gather together to consult on issues pertinent to their service, and a well-read newsletter shares learning across the region.

Pioneering

Given the recent placement in Poland of a team of pioneers from the region, the Council will be learning about the ongoing encouragement and support of international pioneers. A regular online space continues for homefront pioneers to study guidance and participate in collective reflection.

Social action

In the region's most-advanced clusters, community-building processes are well established enough for social action to emerge naturally. In several neighborhoods action has become part of the culture for neighbors who arise to assist families in crisis, teach people how to drive, host regular informal English classes, support immigrant parents in conversations with school officials, assist with homework, and more. Actions by junior youth groups include: Little Free Pantry—conceived and built by one group; adoption of a local park for ongoing cleanup and painting over graffiti; support for children's classes; fundraising for homeless shelters; and making and delivering meals.

The region witnessed sizable growth in the number of people engaged in regular firesides, devotionals, and study circles. Teams have focused on learning to invite participants to Bahá'í activities, and to create purposeful secondary spaces where participants can learn more about the vision of the Faith and the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, and can deepen friendships with Bahá'ís.

Contributing to the discourses of society

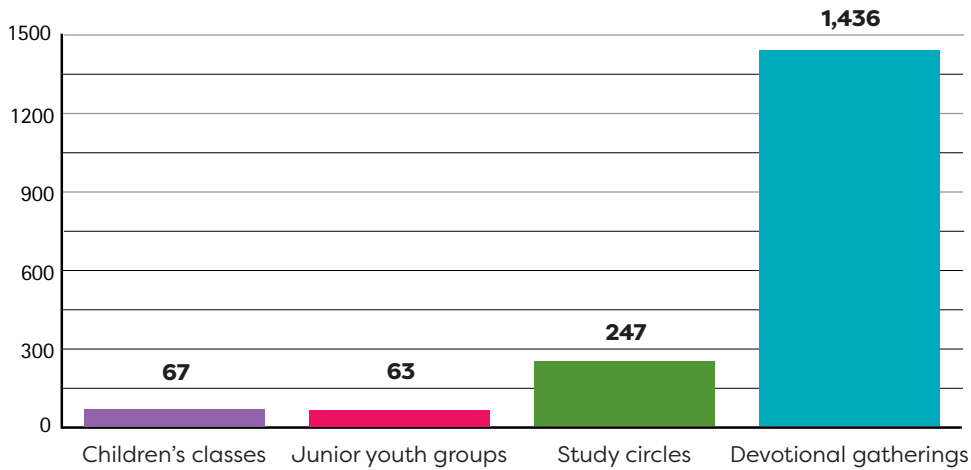
Social media continue to be used systematically to convene spaces for meaningful conversations on spiritual themes and current topics of discourse. The region witnessed sizable growth in the number of people engaged in regular firesides, devotionals, and study circles. Teams have focused on learning to invite participants to Bahá'í activities, and to create purposeful secondary spaces where participants can learn more about the vision of the Faith and the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, and can deepen friendships with Bahá'ís. One cluster has included fireside participants in cluster reflection meetings so they can personally view the Bahá'í community-building process.

Additional comments

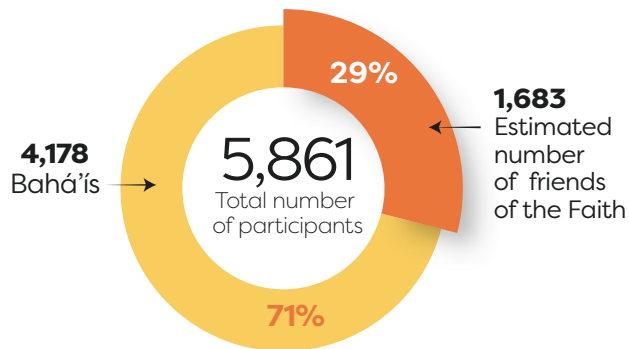
In June the Council embarked on a five-year initiative to learn about strengthening the flow of guidance and information. It also assumed responsibility for the region's four seasonal schools, embracing their unique potential to contribute to deepening and teaching. As well, it appointed a coordinator to accompany friends in the growth of the social media outreach program. This has all been aided by ever-closer collaboration between regional institutions, enabling learning to advance through increasing lines of action.



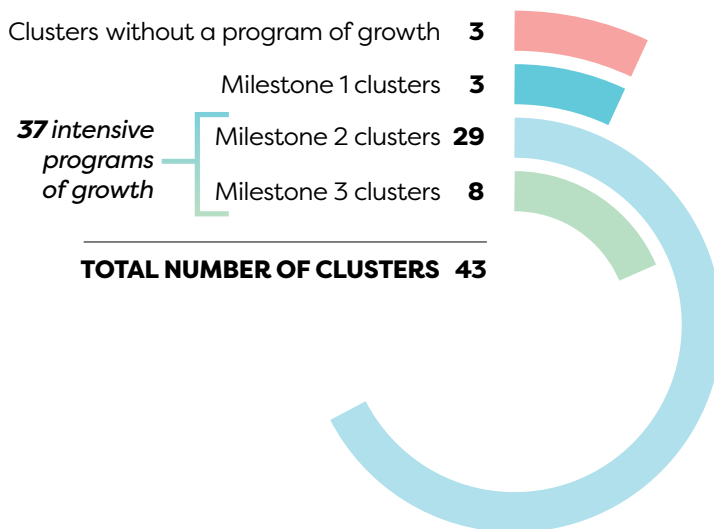
1,813 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



40 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

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Regional Bahá'í Council of the **Prairie** States

Neighborhoods in two of the region's four reservoir clusters held follow-up conferences, creating opportunities for ongoing advancement. One in a largely rural cluster drew several junior-youth-age participants whose desire to continue meeting led to the formation of a new junior youth group that now includes seven participants from three faith traditions.



Expanding the circle of friends

The Nine Year Plan conferences held last spring and summer gave significant impetus to community-building processes in the Prairie States. Conferences reinforced patterns of action and increased understanding of what it means for believers to be “working together and making a conscious

decision to see themselves as belonging to an expanding nucleus.” Neighborhoods in two of the region's four reservoir clusters also held follow-up conferences, creating opportunities for ongoing advancement. A conference in the largely rural Ft. Leonard Wood/Rolla, Missouri cluster, for example, drew several junior-youth-age participants whose desire to continue meeting led to the formation of a new junior youth group that now includes seven participants from three faith traditions.

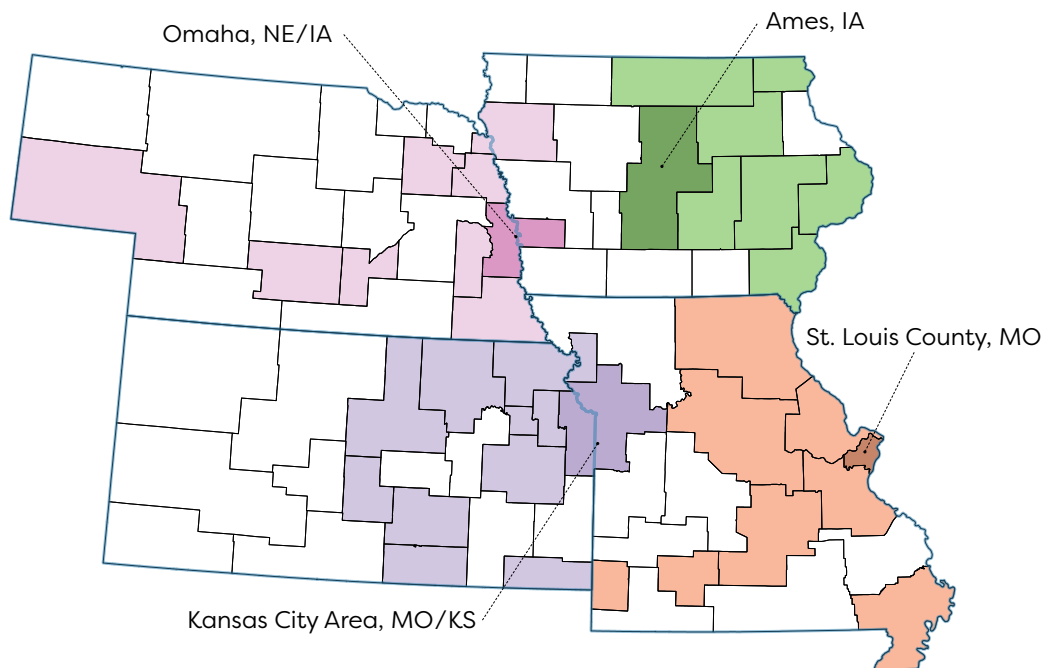
Efforts to connect with populations of historical significance continue across the region. These include a variety of teams working to reach out to African Americans, such as a devotional gathering focused on African American women in St. Louis, Missouri, that led to the formation of a Ruhi Book 1 study circle. Two of the region's reservoir clusters, including Des Moines, Iowa, have found notable receptivity among Congolese and Rwandan communities. The Lincoln, Nebraska cluster has built ties with the Iraqi Kurdish immigrant community, a number of whose members performed traditional dances and songs at the conference held there. The focus neighborhood in Wichita, Kansas, centers largely on Hispanic populations.

Advancing the institute process

A key means of advancing the institute process this year was the launch of an ongoing series of regional youth institute camps. The first, held over the long Martin Luther King Jr. Day weekend, drew several dozen young people from around the region—mostly from centers of intense activity—and included a mix of youths from Bahá'í families and the wider community. Regular afternoon field visits resulted in several dozen home visits across the Kansas City Area cluster. Notable support was lent by regional institutions, including almost all Auxiliary Board and Regional Council members serving as tutors or volunteers. Follow-up camps were planned for spring break in March and in early June; a regional junior youth camp may take place at a later date.

The Regional Training Institute Board sought to strengthen the institute process through regular “tutor effectiveness” spaces. These virtual gatherings, held every other week, assisted those tutoring Ruhi Books 1 and 2 to give attention to concepts, skills, and practices related to their particular courses. They also allowed tutors to share experiences, seek help with challenges, and support one another.

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



2 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

Cluster advancement through shared learning

A series of visits to youth institute camps in the Metro Atlanta cluster, in the Southeast region, provided a key means for the sharing of learning this year. Some 18 youths and adults took part in camps during the Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and winter breaks. These visits to another region—by three Auxiliary Board members, the secretary of the Regional Training Institute Board, and one member of the Regional Council—were key to the launch of camps in the Prairie States.

Periodic region-wide gatherings also facilitated the sharing of learning about specific lines of action. Animator effectiveness gatherings, for example, began to be held every six months, starting in June and December. Gatherings of Area Teaching Committee members in July, October, and January focused on collective study of Ruhi Book 10.3, fieldwork, and reflection and planning.

Pioneering

Following the Universal House of Justice's May 24, 2022 call for pioneers in the international field and on the home front, a regional pioneering task force was established. Attention so far has focused primarily on the identification of international pioneers. Homefront pioneers will be equally vital and may at first come from beyond the Prairie States to a few clusters. It is hoped that the region will generate its own pioneers to meet goals in the latter half of the Nine Year Plan.

Social action and contributing to the discourses of society

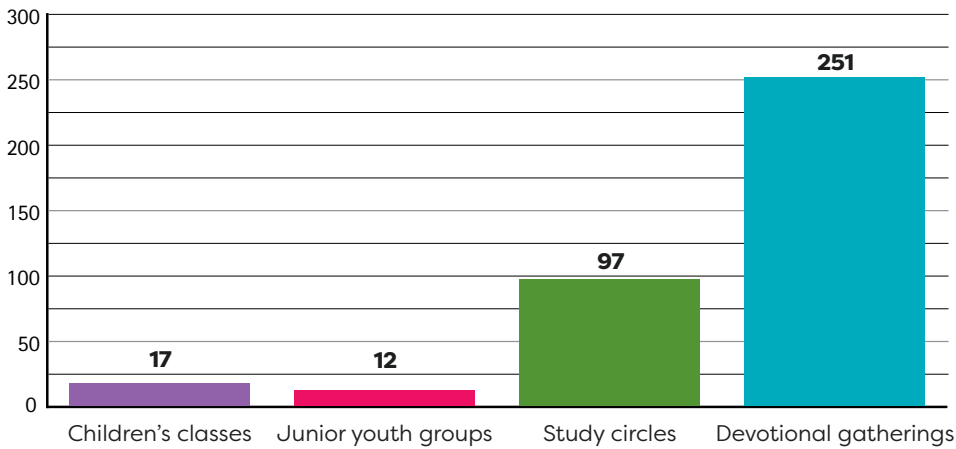
As groups of friends strive to learn about intensifying processes of growth, they are being drawn deeper into the life of society in various ways. Social action often arises from the activities of junior youth groups. One group, for example, successfully urged city authorities to install speed bumps on a residential road to protect children's safety. Homework support has been offered in a number of clusters to assist young people, from middle-school age to those attending community college, as they navigate systems that often have failed and disempowered them.

Contributions to the discourses of society have regularly centered on racial unity and racial justice. Friends in the Sioux City, Iowa cluster, for example, hosted a Juneteenth event that discussed the National Spiritual Assembly's statement "Forging a Path to Racial Justice." The event was attended by the president of the local chapter of the NAACP and facilitated by an African American member of the school board.

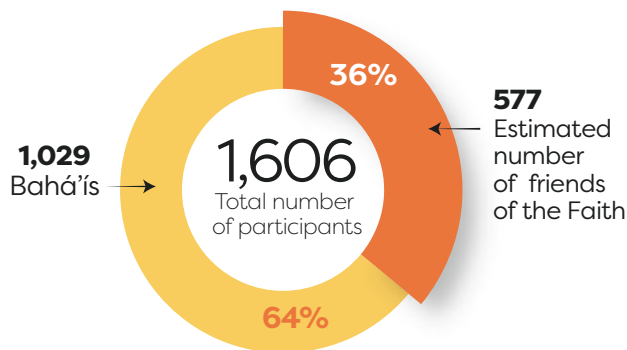
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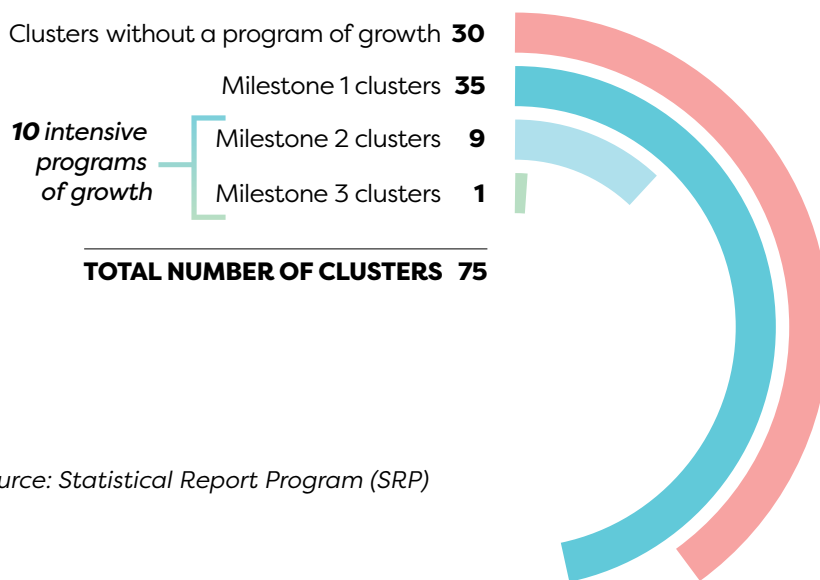
377 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



45 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

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Regional Bahá'í Council of the **South Central** States



Expanding the circle of friends

The protagonists in the South Central States dedicated themselves to the launch of the Nine Year Plan by planning and participating in 31 local conferences in clusters and neighborhoods of intense activity across the region. These gatherings drew 2,964 participants, 509 of whom came from the wider community.

Advancing the institute process

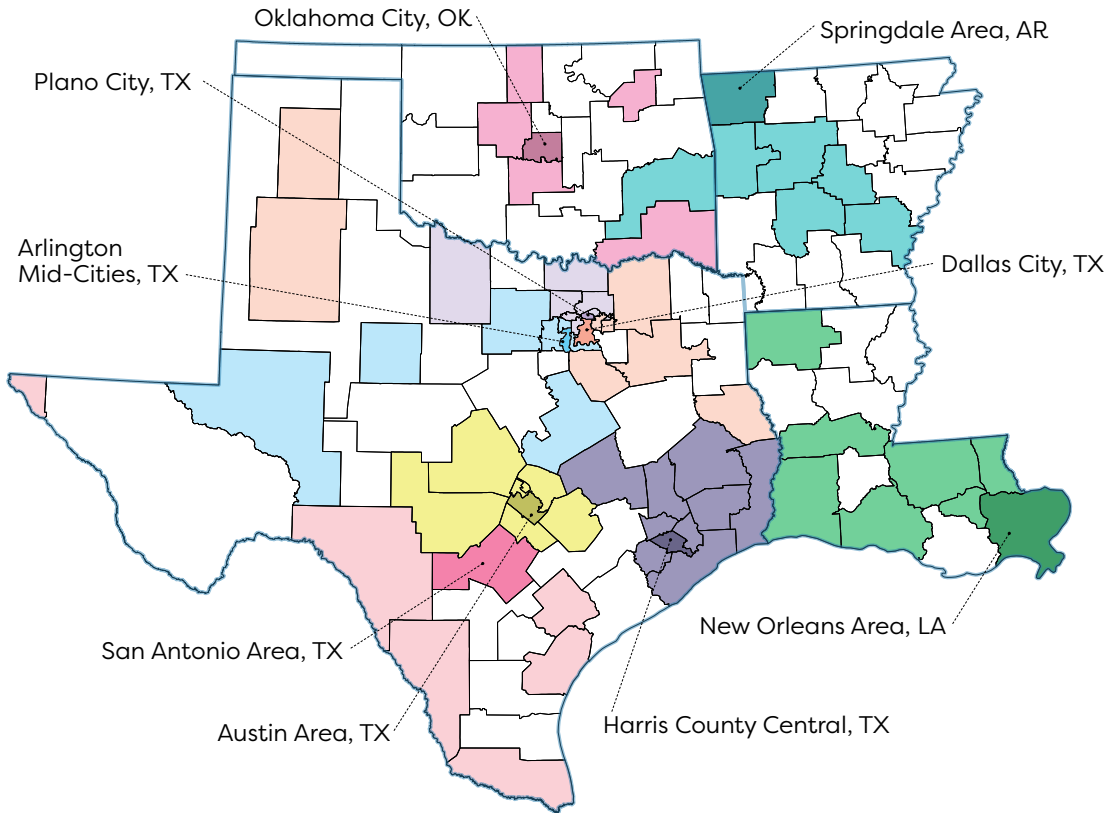
The Regional Training Institute has been in collaboration this year with a group of dedicated friends who are divided into four teams. They focus, respectively, on the main sequence of Ruhi Institute courses, the junior youth spiritual empowerment program, children's classes, and higher-level Ruhi books. Two broad questions have emerged to guide learning in all four areas: how do we increase the regular flow of human resources into the institute through conversations that reflect a clear understanding of the purposes of children's classes, junior youth groups, and study circles? And how do we assist friends to develop the habits and capacities that will make them protagonists? Several approaches outlined in the message from the Universal House of Justice dated December 30, 2021, have been identified to facilitate the necessary learning: forming collaborative groups and teams, holding seminars, designating resource persons, organizing visits to advanced clusters, consulting with Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and drawing knowledge from learning sites.

A major accomplishment over the past year was the execution of seminar spaces for the main sequence of Ruhi courses, focusing on Ruhi Book 1. The seminars started in August at the regional level and spread to subregions and then to cluster groupings and individual clusters. Seminars served to formalize the learning process, share the objects of learning with tutors, and provide practical experience in the field. In total, 334 friends participated in 19 seminars, 72 as facilitators. Future study is needed about supporting tutor teams as they strive to establish reflection spaces and collaborate in the formation of study circles.

There have also been concerted efforts to connect youth to institute training and field experience. Regional institute campaigns have allowed youth from the wider community to study the main sequence of Ruhi courses, to advance their understanding in the field of service, and to contribute to the growth of community-building activities in their own neighborhoods. Visits to the region's learning site for the junior youth spiritual empowerment program have been of benefit to young people who are learning to realize their capacity to be of service through the institute process. In one such visit participants advanced in their institute studies, while also engaging

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Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



8 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

in daily service in the field of action. In addition, they consulted with agencies and institutions about their ongoing service when they returned home. Similar training will be offered as the region strives to raise up youth as capable human resources.

Cluster advancement through shared learning

Regular visits to the clusters by regional coordinators and resource persons have helped the Council follow insights and plans that emerge from institute seminars, campaigns, and training. These visits have been implemented to assist efforts to increase the flow of participants into the main sequence of courses, to establish a basic junior youth program in a few reservoir clusters, and to strengthen children's class programs. Additionally, an emerging spirit of shared learning is evident in heartwarming accounts of animators who join reflection gatherings in nearby clusters and junior youth camps that connect and support programs across a subregion.

Pioneering

In light of the Universal House of Justice's call for pioneers during the Nine Year Plan, the Council appointed a Regional Pioneer Task Force to identify, recruit, and accompany pioneers. The task force has held several virtual gatherings to orient interested believers in the nature and needs of pioneering, and reflection gatherings held once every cycle allow current pioneers to consult and identify types of training that are needed.

The region is home to many Arab-speaking Bahá'ís, and, in collaboration with Counselors and Auxiliary Board members, these friends were invited to a virtual gathering with a Counselor in Jordan to learn about the Arab region's increased receptivity to the Faith. Interested individuals and families have contacted the National Spiritual Assembly's Office of Pioneering to begin conversations about possible relocation.

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On the home front, efforts continue to identify, train, and deploy pioneers to four clusters approaching the third milestone with the goal that they become reservoir clusters. The task force hopes to participate in national pioneer orientations so that it can begin offering similar programs in the region.

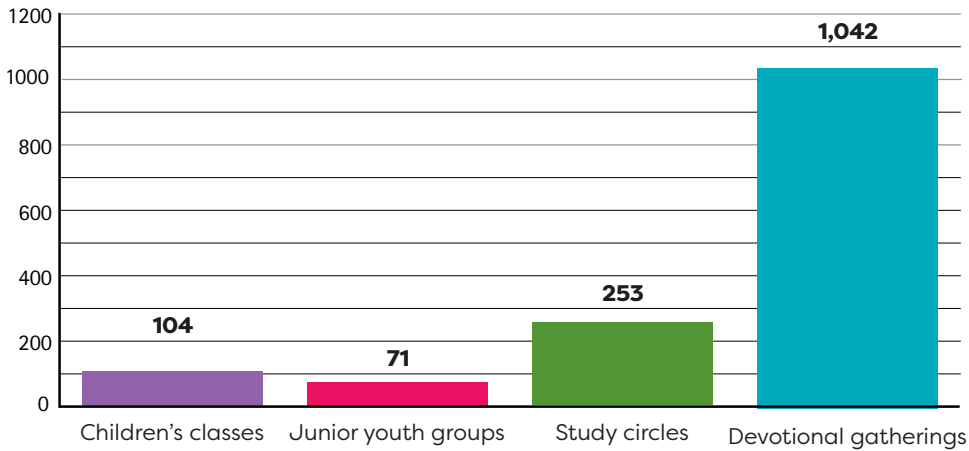
Additional comments

The Council is pleased to share these additional highlights:

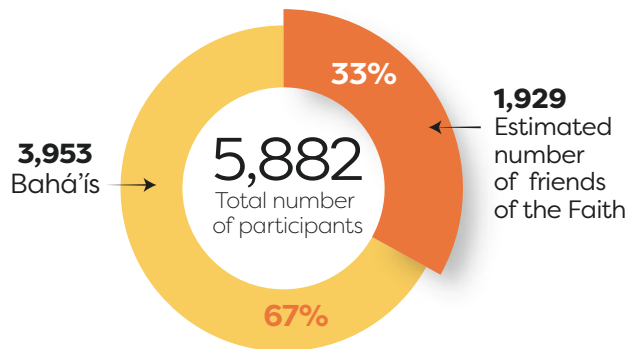
- Local Spiritual Assemblies gathered to study guidance and deepen understanding of the Nine Year Plan.
- Learning continues about how reservoir clusters assist other clusters, and about the movement of clusters in general.
- Seven social media teams hold weekly “Meaningful Conversations” sessions, which contribute to society’s discourses. Several participants from the wider community have joined devotional gatherings, firesides, and study circles.
- The redesigned South Central website (southcentralcouncil.org) includes local stories and events.



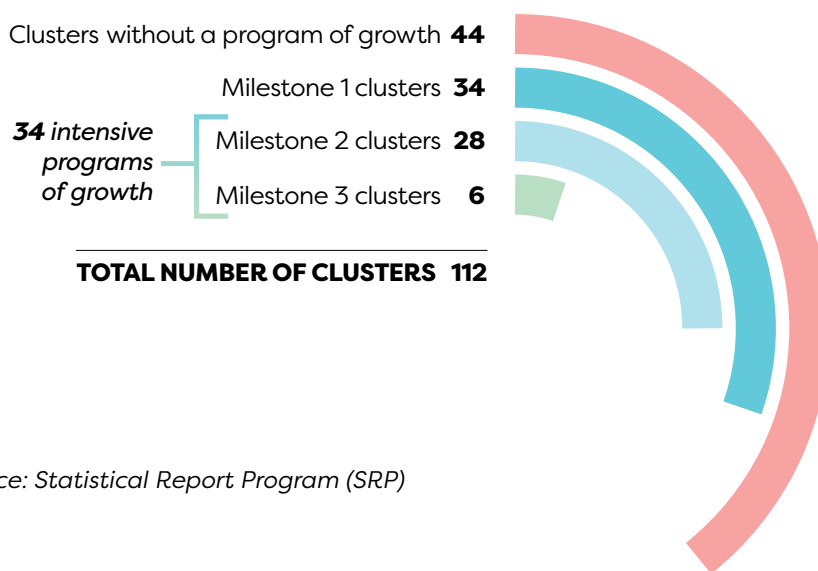
1,470 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



68 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

Seven social media teams hold weekly “Meaningful Conversation” sessions, which contribute to society’s discourses. Several participants from the wider community have joined devotional gatherings, firesides, and study circles.

Regional Bahá'í Council of the **Southeastern** States

Hosting the Nine Year Plan conferences unleashed a freedom to learn and the confidence to take initiative among the friends, who increased their capacities to engage in meaningful conversations and to invite those from the wider society to become active protagonists.



Expanding the circle of friends

The Southeast region is focused on engaging African American youth; as one outcome, about half of the 200 youths participating in regional institute camps were African American. The Council has also made concerted efforts to draw on the capacities of African American believers, inviting them to serve as members of agencies, tutors for special initiatives, and conference

planners and facilitators. Currently 34 percent of Area Teaching Committee (ATC) members and 75 percent of the Regional Training Institute (RTI) Board members are African American or of African descent.

Advancing the institute process

In keeping with the regional strategy of mobilizing large numbers of youth, a series of institute camps provided opportunities for youth and tutors to learn about intensive action with growing numbers. An initial nine-day summer camp was followed by weekend camps over Labor Day and Thanksgiving, and an eight-day camp over winter break. The Thanksgiving camp included children, junior youth, and parents of youth participants. Young people who had studied Ruhi Institute Books 3, 5, and 7 began serving as children's class teachers, animators, and tutors. Parents joined studies of Books 1 and 3. Of the 201 total camp participants, including 57 friends of the Faith, 50 attended more than one.

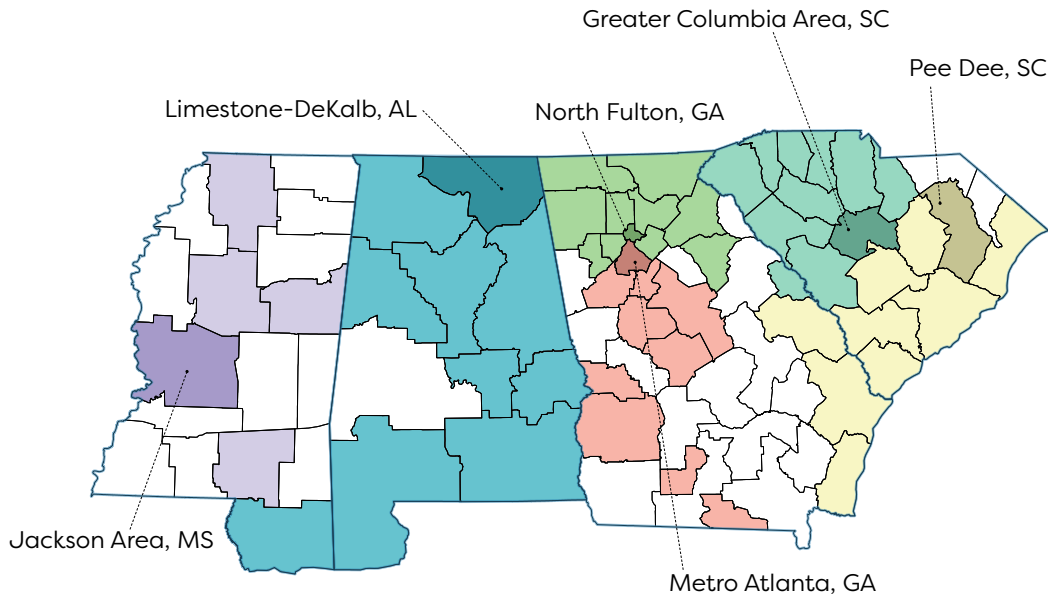
Study of the July 22, 2020 message from the Universal House of Justice addressing racial unity was integral to every camp. The youth also visited the Civil Rights Museum, the Juneteenth celebration at the Atlanta History Center, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park. Participants reflected on the sacrifices made in the quest for social justice and how their engagement with the institute can address the need for spiritual empowerment of a population.

Cluster advancement through shared learning

Hosting the Nine Year Plan conferences unleashed a freedom to learn and the confidence to take initiative among the friends, who increased their capacities to engage in meaningful conversations and to invite those from the wider society to become active protagonists. The region maintained a conference-related weekly newsletter, a real-time online platform, and weekly reflection spaces, which greatly benefited communities still in the planning stages. ATCs and Local Spiritual Assemblies worked together to continue learning about the importance of collaboration for fostering growth.

Meanwhile, cluster agencies and institutions strengthened their capacities as they supported institute youth camps by coordinating home visits and outreach campaigns, as well as housing, transportation, and meals for increasingly larger numbers. Learning

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



from these initiatives is being shared with neighboring clusters. Monthly calls for ATC secretaries provide opportunities to study guidance and share learning across clusters.

The Metro Atlanta cluster benefited greatly from a visit to Ottawa, Canada. The team returned with a vision of what concerted effort makes possible in a short time. A goal was set to launch 100 new devotional gatherings in the cluster before the cycle's end, and Local Assemblies and other collaborators worked to keep the goal in sight. This goal was achieved with four days remaining.

Pioneering

Accompanied by Counselors and members of the National Spiritual Assembly, the regional pioneering task force is learning to identify potential pioneers and have conversations about the role of pioneers in moving clusters past the third milestone. Learning also continues about orientation and support of pioneers who have arisen to serve in the Southeast.

Social action

During the pandemic, the Atlanta community intensified its efforts to mitigate suffering in the community surrounding the Bahá'í Center. Consistently engaging with various partners over time has fostered development of a true collaboration between agencies that serve the population. The Bahá'ís have served as a unifying focal point for the efforts to address needs in the neighborhood. Many other social action efforts on a smaller scale are being carried out throughout the region as the friends seek to respond to the needs of their neighbors.

South Carolina Enterprise

In Florence, where large numbers of African American youth have entered the institute, two focus areas have been learning about working with families and increasing the effectiveness of the institute process. In the Georgetown-Horry cluster, receptivity to conversations on spiritual themes has been identified by a team engaged in the national social media initiative. In 18 months, 844 people have indicated interest, 177 have participated at least once, and 11 have joined community activities.

0 HOMEFRONT PIONEERS

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022

The October celebration of the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute's 50 years of service featured music, drumming, and devotions. Several of the 160 friends who attended were also present for the 1972 inauguration. Presentations highlighted the institute's history, the legacy of the Hand of the Cause Louis Gregory, and the impact programs have had over the decades. Youth from Florence spoke about the impact the institute process has had on their lives.

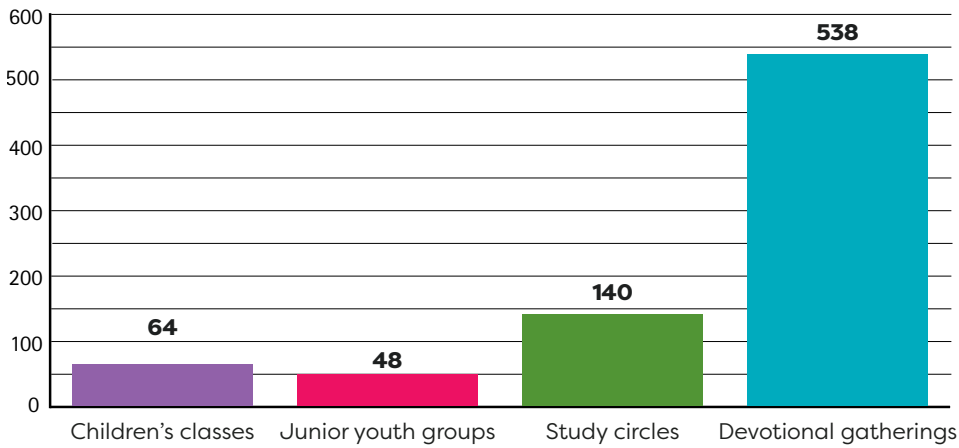
One youth said, "The first book of Ruhi helped me out a lot. That's where I started to change. It's not just that I see changes, my family sees changes . . . keeping me in prayer . . . reading the Holy Book. It helped make me the man I am now. I feel like now I'm a mentor to young males."

Another commented, "It's about love here. I bring my friends here; I bring my family here. Without you [Bahá'ís] I would not be in the situation I'm in, which is, I'm happy."

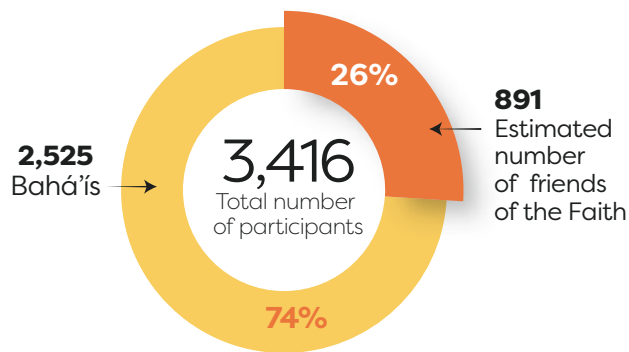
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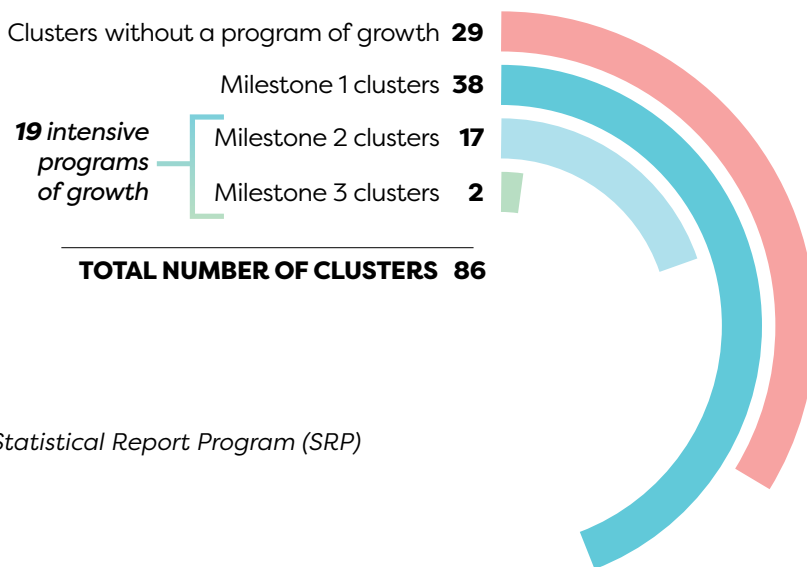
790 core activities underway as of October 31, 2022



Overall participation in all four core activities



57 programs of growth as of March 1, 2023



Source: Statistical Report Program (SRP)

At the 50th-anniversary celebration for the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute, one youth said, "The first book of Ruhi helped me out a lot. That's where I started to change. It's not just that I see changes, my family sees changes... keeping me in prayer... reading the Holy Book. It helped make me the man I am now. I feel like now I'm a mentor to young males."

Radio Bahá'í WLGI

Hemingway, South Carolina

Music is a powerful medium that can either uplift the soul and contribute to joy and happiness or bring someone down through a focus on the more material aspects of life. Radio Bahá'í WLGI seeks, through music, to connect on a spiritual level with listeners and infuse them with joy and love; to help listeners connect with their spiritual reality; to create an awareness of and a positive attitude toward the Bahá'í Faith; and to positively influence listeners' daily lives.

The number of listeners each week in the broadcast area has increased to an estimated 9,400, according to diary-based research conducted twice a year by Nielsen. This represents a gradual but steady year-over-year increase for the past five years. Additionally, the station reached 13,321 unique listeners in the United States via its live stream on the Internet.

The station is focused on significantly increasing the number of listeners—both in the counties served by direct broadcast and on the internet—while playing music that reflects the spiritual principles of the Faith. This is being done through playing songs that are attractive yet principled, increasing the capacity of the announcers to connect with listeners' hearts, and engaging in community outreach.

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Radio Bahá'í's outreach has included remote broadcasts at seven events during the past year, sponsored by like-minded organizations. The trailer carrying equipment and the booth with a tent are all branded, to encourage new friends to listen to the station. Also, billboards were used to promote

listening—two in the spring and one in the fall—in heavily trafficked areas near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Radio Bahá'í's social media presence has been increased through advertising as well as information and video postings on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The station had a total of 250,000 Facebook engagements and 620,000 engagements across all three platforms. A Facebook reposting of the television segment on *CBS Mornings* about the Bahá'í Faith had 10,600 views.

Along with music, Radio Bahá'í aired a number of informational and educational programs. During the past year the station aired 101 community calendar announcements and public service announcements, requested by many organizations, government agencies, and churches, as well as from some surrounding Bahá'í communities; 618 short science, geography, and history programs; 47 half-hour episodes of Peace Talks, a program focused on nonviolent conflict resolution and exploring paths to peace; 27 short programs about Black history; 29 short programs focused on women's history;





special short and long programs for Martin Luther King Jr. Day; and 13 special interviews with local people engaged in community activities and community development.

Radio Bahá'í directly shares the Word of God on air in two ways. Each hour, it airs a devotional song based on a quote from the Bahá'í Writings; 81 of these songs are in rotation. Also, the on-air announcer shares a quote from the Bahá'í Writings once an hour. These quotes are also accessible on the Radio Bahá'í website.

Two major structural changes happened this past year. The first was the replacement of the 16-year-old transmitter, which was becoming less reliable. The new transmitter is significantly more efficient and has resulted in \$500 monthly savings on electricity. The second change was moving the management of the station to a two-person leadership team, following the retirement of the general manager. The station continues to be guided and overseen by the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Southeastern States.

Listener anecdotes

A vendor at one of the remote broadcast events said she would rather listen to Radio Bahá'í than the band that was on stage.

A staff member, while in line at a food truck, overheard a couple behind him talking about the Bahá'í Faith and the Conway Bahá'í Center. When he turned around wearing his Radio Bahá'í T-shirt, they told him they listen to the station, and a conversation about the Faith followed.

Another staff member and his wife were taking a ride-share car home from the airport, and the driver had his radio tuned to the station. He said he loves listening to Radio Bahá'í during his shift, as it helps keep him centered.

A woman was driving toward Conway, South Carolina, and happened across the station while channel surfing. She heard the announcers talking about a live event at which they were present. She not only changed her plans and came to the event, but also sought out the station tent to tell the announcers how much she enjoyed the station.

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National institutional meeting

The largest interinstitutional meeting in US Bahá'í history was convened April 6–9, 2022, in Los Angeles as part of preparations for the launch of the Nine Year Plan. In loving fellowship, nearly 500 people from all 12 regions of the contiguous United States, as well as from Alaska and Bermuda, studied the December 30, 2021 message from the Universal House of Justice—section by section—and deliberated in loving fellowship on the requirements of the new Plan. It was one of 40 such national institutional meetings around the world.

The atmosphere was filled with enthusiasm as old and new friends, including a number of youth and young adults, met to reflect on experience in light of the guidance. Consultations, in plenary and by region, explored ways in which the instruments of the Plan contribute to addressing a range of challenges faced in society, including that of achieving racial unity and justice. The atmosphere benefited from a pervasive devotional spirit and from artistic expressions each evening that included song, dance, and storytelling.

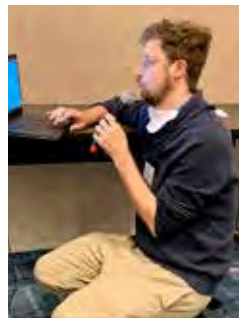
Members of the International Teaching Center in the Holy Land and the Board of Directors of the Bahá'í International Development Organization offered thoughts inspired by the December 30 message. Members of the Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas and of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Alaska, Bermuda, and the United States facilitated discussions.

Participants included Auxiliary Board members, Regional Bahá'í Councils, Regional Training Institute boards, institute and learning site resource persons, regional coordinators, regional growth facilitators, and others collaborating in their efforts. Also represented were the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'láh in the United States, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, and the Executive Committee of the Association for Bahá'í Studies–North America.

News of a fire at the construction site of the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá prompted the friends to raise more than \$100,000, with the help of a beautiful contribution box made by children who had accompanied their parents.

The National Assemblies of Alaska, Bermuda, and the United States as well as all 12 US Regional Councils composed letters to the Universal House of Justice expressing gratitude and resolve.

On the morning of April 10, friends dispersed to their home regions, charged with energy and galvanized to lend their share in contributing to the effective launch of the new Plan at Ridván.







Office of Public Affairs

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA), with offices in Washington, DC, and New York City, represents the National Spiritual Assembly in its relationships with the public, including the US government, the United Nations, members and organizations of civil society, and the media. The work of OPA has continued to gain traction in public discourse as that aspect of the Greater Plan of God moves inexorably forward and the forces of disintegration have continued to accelerate. Public discourse on race relations, the role of the media in society, gender equality and the advancement of women, economic justice, and sustainable development, including climate change, are still gaining momentum. OPA's work in the human rights arena carries on uninterrupted, particularly the defense of the Bahá'ís in Iran, who continue to experience severe persecution by the Iranian government, as well as defense of those in Yemen, Qatar, and other countries.

HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE PERSECUTION OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS

Iran

A surge in persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran from the beginning of June 2022 dominated the defense activities of the Office. By February 2023, some 400 Bahá'ís had been subjected to raids, arrests, detentions, beatings, sentencing, property demolitions and confiscations, or exclusions from university education. Most notably, in June, 26 people in Shiraz were sentenced to a combined 85 years in prison for, according to the authorities, "causing intellectual and ideological insecurity in Muslim society." On July 31, there were raids on the homes or businesses of 52 Bahá'ís across Iran and the detention of 13 individuals, including three former members of the long-disbanded seven-member informal leadership group of the Bahá'ís of Iran, the Yárán-i-Írán (Friends of Iran): Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, and Mr. Afif Naemi. In response, OPA elicited public statements from various

senior State Department officials and [offices](#), several [commissioners](#) of the [US Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) (USCIRF), and [various](#) non-governmental organizations (NGOs). OPA also secured coverage from the Associated Press, whose article was picked up by numerous outlets, including [The Washington Post](#). This was followed on August 5 by a separate piece in [The New York Times](#) updating the persecution to include the destruction of Bahá'í homes and seizure of farmland in the northern village of Roshankoo.

The seriousness of these events prompted a [letter](#), drafted by OPA and transmitted on August 10 to US President Joseph Biden. Signed by over 30 civil society organizations and human rights leaders, it called on the president to voice concerns about the escalating persecution. Numerous NGOs [posted expressions](#) of support for the letter. The US State Department continued to [condemn](#) the persecution, and OPA met with senior officials, including Mr. Robert Malley, US special envoy

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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A surge in persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran from the beginning of June 2022 dominated the defense activities of the Office. By February 2023, some 400 Bahá'ís had been subjected to raids, arrests, detentions, beatings, sentencing, property demolitions and confiscations, or exclusions from university education.

On December 2, 2022, the US House of Representatives passed House Resolution 744 condemning the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran by a vote of 401 to 18. The House Foreign Affairs Committee, noting the increased oppression in Iran, took the unusual step of issuing an accompanying press statement in support of the Bahá'ís.

for Iran, and Mr. Rashad Hussain, US ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom—the latter at the request of the White House. Support continued with various [opinion pieces](#) and an [article](#) by Amnesty International containing a call-to-action letter advocating for the Bahá'ís. On September 28, as the persecution continued and widespread protests in the broader society were gaining momentum in response to the killing of Ms. Mahsa Jina Amini, Freedom House hosted a screening of a film directed by Mr. Farid Haerinejad, “*Others*” in their *Own Land*, about the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran, which drew television press coverage from [Iran International](#). Mr. Haerinejad; Mr. Gerardo Berthin, Freedom House’s vice president for international programs; Mr. Eric Ueland, USCIRF commissioner; and Ms. Elise Auerbach, Amnesty International USA’s Iran specialist, all spoke in defense of the Bahá'ís.

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the Atlantic Council published a [piece](#) by OPA’s director calling attention to the changed conditions in Iran, pointing to an elevated risk of atrocities against minorities, according to some forecasting models, due to the severe repression in response to the persistent protests. At the end of the 117th Congress, in an attempt to bypass internal challenges within the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, [Senator Ron Wyden attempted](#) to get S.Res.183 discharged from the committee so that it could be passed by the Senate. However, that was unsuccessful due to issues unrelated to the resolution. On February 15, OPA’s director was interviewed by the US government’s Arabic language broadcaster, Alhurra, in connection with the Bahá'í persecution in Iran. On February 16, a bipartisan resolution, S.Res.74, was introduced by Senators Wyden and Marco Rubio, with an unprecedented 22 other initial bipartisan cosponsors, and expedited passage is expected early in the 118th Congress. Senator Wyden announced the introduction of the new resolution in a [press release](#) on February 21, as did [Senator John Boozman](#) on February 24.

Qatar

OPA continued to communicate extensively with the State Department to call attention to the blacklisting of Bahá'ís in Qatar, the denial of work permits and visa renewals by the Qatari government, and the unjust prosecution of the National Spiritual Assembly of Qatar’s chairman, Mr. Remy Rouhani, who was sentenced to one month in prison and fined the equivalent of \$13,500. The sentence has not been implemented yet. Further, governmental partners, including USCIRF, [spotlighted](#) the discrimination faced by the Qatari Bahá'í community via podcasts and statements.

Other issues

OPA continued to support the Washington Working Group on the International Criminal Court to strengthen relationships among the participants and with prominent human rights organizations and



professionals. OPA hosted conversations with prominent individuals, including Mr. Peter Lewis, registrar for the International Criminal Court (ICC); Judge Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi, president of the Assembly of State Parties; Ms. Oleksandra Matviichuk, head of the Center for Civil Liberties, a Ukrainian human rights organization that was a joint winner of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize; and Dr. Beth Van Schaack, US ambassador-at-large for global criminal justice, who publicly thanked OPA's human rights officer for sharing ideas related to atrocity prevention, ways to strengthen the US relationship with the ICC, and the utilization of crimes-against-humanity statutes to prosecute individuals violating freedom of religion and belief, which can apply to the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran.

RACE DISCOURSE

OPA pursued its long-standing engagement on issues of racial justice and racial unity through the work of two race discourse officers. OPA staff engaged in efforts to read society and gain a deeper understanding of the national discourse on race by exploring issues in various areas and from many perspectives, including the study of a wide range of content from writers, thinkers, and activists, as well as attendance at events in Washington, DC, and throughout the nation.

Relationships and discourse spaces

Staff members built and cultivated relationships with colleagues from civil society and government, meeting and consulting with new and established contacts in government agencies, NGOs, universities, and community organizations to learn more about their work, share more about OPA's interests and efforts, and explore opportunities for collaboration and partnership. OPA consulted and collaborated with Bahá'ís around the country who have a range of expertise and experience with issues of race, exploring the institutional guidance and conceptual framework that inform OPA's efforts, drawing upon the learning of the Office and of the friends in their multifaceted efforts, and working together to find opportunities for engagement in and contribution to the national-level discourse.

A highlight was a meeting in Washington with Ms. Melissa Rogers, executive director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and senior director for faith and public policy in the White House Domestic Policy Council. This meeting was arranged by a Bahá'í who was working at the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. It gave OPA an opportunity to share with this senior representative of the US president

A meeting with a senior representative of the US president provided the opportunity to present the fundamental teachings and beliefs of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as the efforts of OPA and of the US Bahá'í community to offer positive contributions to the progress of the country.

A highlight from the Dialogue on Faith and Race was a document written collectively by the participants on the role of the faith community and religion in overcoming racism. This document distilled insights from more than five years' dialogue among a racially and religiously diverse group.

the fundamental teachings and beliefs of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as the efforts of OPA and of the US Bahá'í community to offer positive contributions to the progress of the country. Subsequently, this White House office has facilitated introductions to additional senior federal officials and invited OPA to gatherings where they are present.

Other existing spaces in which OPA is engaged include conferences, panel discussions, forums, and coalitions, such as the Aspen Institute's Racial Justice and Religion Task Force, an initiative of its Religion and Society program. OPA attended many online discussions concerning restorative justice, racial healing, solidarity, and the role of religion in the elimination of racism.

OPA initiatives on race

In addition, OPA continued working to learn about creating and organizing social spaces, including the Dialogue on Faith and Race, a quarterly discussion series that OPA has been convening in partnership with The Catholic University of America since January 2017. OPA hosted over 15 of these gatherings, bringing together representatives of about three dozen national-level faith-based organizations in Washington to consider and discuss issues of race from a spiritual perspective. Each session focuses on a different topic, such as the relationship between justice and unity or the roles of the individual, the community, and the institution in eliminating racism.

Related to these efforts, OPA works to generate content that it can contribute to the discourse on race, including discussion papers, presentations, thought pieces, and other materials in which it can offer concepts and ideas that are inspired by the teachings of the Faith and the Bahá'í community's experience in applying them. A highlight from the Dialogue on Faith and Race was a document written collectively by the participants on the role of the faith community and religion in overcoming racism. This document distilled insights from more than five years' dialogue

among a racially and religiously diverse group. Group participants, who come from an array of national faith-based and secular organizations, offered their responses to the critical and complicated question of how religion and faith communities can play a constructive role in overcoming racism. The document is being used as a tool to reach out to new individuals and groups interested in this theme and in how discussions like this can influence thought and action.

One focus of national conversation in recent years has centered on the need to correct traditional American narratives by, for example, recognizing past injustices, overcoming erasure of facts, or better conceptualizing the agency and contributions of various groups. OPA has been exploring, through multiple discourse lenses, the type of narrative that can help Americans understand their difficult history, the crisis of the present moment, and their aspirations for the future—the type of narrative that could help create conditions for building unity in a society with entrenched divisions. OPA developed content to frame and stimulate conversation with social actors about how to construct a narrative of America that is honest, inclusive, empowering, and forward-looking. The first such gathering was held at Green Acre Bahá'í School and co-hosted by the Aspen Institute's Racial Justice and Religion Task Force. A second gathering was held at OPA's Washington offices. OPA is planning a series of additional gatherings on this theme in the coming months.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Under the direction of its media officer, OPA produced and distributed press releases highlighting the meetings and events it organized, and it worked with individuals and reporters to publish articles about the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Qatar. Ten press releases were issued concerning the Bahá'ís in Iran and Qatar, several of which were picked up by prominent news outlets, including the Associated Press.



[Opinion articles](#) were written and published about the friends in Iran in publications and outlets such as the [Religion News Service](#). Owing to OPA's outreach, articles were also published on these issues in [The New York Times](#), [Agence-France Presse](#), [the Associated Press](#), Alhurra, and others. OPA coordinated various campaigns in defense of the friends in Iran and Qatar with the Bahá'í International Community.

Several articles on the Bahá'ís of Iran were published at the local level in coordination with OPA. These outlets included the Louisville [Courier Journal](#), [The Frederick News-Post](#), and [The Antelope Valley Times](#). There was also a TV segment with Tampa Bay's [ABC Action News](#).

A screening of the documentary "Others" in Their Own Land was held, for which press coverage included [Iran International](#) and Persian Bahá'í Media Service.

Correspondence with individual Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions

OPA regularly corresponded with Bahá'ís who had media-related inquiries and, in collaboration with the Office of Communications, worked with Local Spiritual Assemblies and their public information officers to help coordinate local media efforts.

Discourse work: conferences, talks, and travel

OPA hosted six media roundtables, each focusing on themes central to media discourse. These conversations were attended by journalists and media thinkers from a wide variety of outlets and organizations, including *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, Hearken, *The Nation*, and others.

OPA attended several conferences, including the Solutions Journalism Summit in Sundance, Utah, and the Online News Association Conference in Los Angeles, California, making several new connections. OPA helped plan and hold a well-attended conference titled SRCCON: Care, under the auspices of the prominent alternative media organization Open News. OPA spoke on a panel about solutions journalism at the American Society of Journalists and Authors conference, conducted online. OPA coordinated community calls with members of the Solutions Journalism Network, hosting 11 of these calls with other journalists. OPA accompanied several individual journalists in their work, reviewing articles, press releases, and other media.

Social media

OPA, through its social media officer, continued to utilize Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to share news about the

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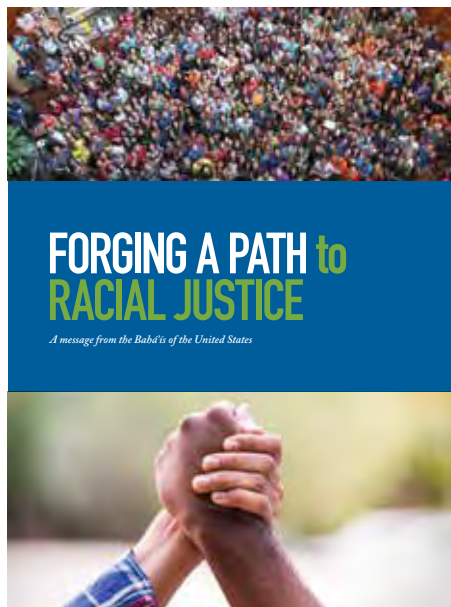
The USUN Office participated in two panel discussions, “Men and Boys in Gender Equity Reconciliation” and “GERI in the United Nations Community,” at the 30th-anniversary conference of Gender Equity & Reconciliation International (GERI). The experiential exercises of the GERI process aim to heal the suffering caused by gender inequality.

situations of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Qatar, as well as articles and information about OPA's areas of public discourse.

COMMUNICATIONS

OPA provided information and guidance to the US Bahá'í community on public-affairs engagement and controversial issues; various matters related primarily to human rights, including the defense of the Bahá'ís in Iran and other countries where Bahá'ís are being persecuted; and other discourse areas. OPA corresponded with government and public agencies, national-level organizations, and prominent people on these topics. In addition to handling many of these communications, the Office's communications manager worked closely with Local Spiritual Assemblies and congressional delegations across the country to reach out to members of Congress. As they have for many years, the delegations asked members of Congress for help in shining a light on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. Additionally, in 2021 delegations began sharing the National Spiritual Assembly's 2020 statement on race, “Forging a Path to Racial Justice,” either directly with members of Congress or through their staffs.

OPA has further extended its offering of public-affairs training for congressional



outreach over the past two years. This training has helped Local Assemblies and delegations increase their understanding of public-affairs work in general, and of working with elected officials specifically. To a lesser degree, Assemblies are learning more about managing general public-affairs issues at the local level and gaining better understandings of how public-affairs matters are managed at the national and international levels. Both direct and published support is available to all Local Assemblies seeking guidance on public affairs.

In parallel, OPA has built its capacity to work with database technology in keeping track of how these delegations interact with members of Congress and their staffs. This not only provides a picture of how the various members respond to Bahá'í contacts, but also allows for Assemblies and delegations to receive timely guidance and support.

UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations Office of the US Office of Public Affairs (USUN Office) continued to collaborate with organizations it has worked with for several years.

The National Spiritual Assembly's principal UN representative attended the 20th Anniversary Breakfast Gala of [A Call to Men](#) (ACM). In the past, he has served on its advisory board. As a result, ACM has played a significant role in his understanding of the intersection of race and gender justice.

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USUN also participated in two national events organized by [Blessed Tomorrow](#), a program of ecoAmerica that brings

together a coalition of diverse religious partners working to advance climate solutions. The Climate Roundtable and Faith + Climate Forum examined the faith community's answers to local climate issues.

The National Assembly's youth representative to the UN joined the principal representative at the [Dialogue on Spiritual Dimensions on Transformation](#), hosted by the Brahma Kumaris United Nations Office. The principal representative and Mr. Ramu Damodaran, former secretary of the UN General Assembly's Committee on Information, helped conceive the Dialogue's content and were presenters.

USUN worked directly with the UN's Department of Global Communications as an advisor to its [Youth Representatives Steering Committee](#), playing a vital role in drafting the committee's recommendations for establishing the United Nations Youth Office. The [resolution](#) adopted by the General Assembly on September 8, 2022, is a moment of excitement for those working within the UN system to promote youth inclusion and participation in decision-making processes.

The youth representative in the USUN office now serves on the Executive Committee of the NGO Committee on Spirituality, Values, and Global Concerns, New York, a committee of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations. The Committee aims to integrate spirituality and values into all areas of the UN agenda and public policy.

USUN responded to the [call for submissions](#) to the 2022 report on climate and racial justice to the General Assembly. The call was issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance.

Additionally, USUN participated in the [Global 16-Day Campaign](#) Against Gender-Based Violence. This year's

theme continues the 2021 30th anniversary theme, "End Femicide." The USUN high school intern was the primary organizer of the event titled "Preservation of Indigenous Women." The 40 people attending the virtual panel listened to stories from a wide array of activists, including youth working on national policy to eradicate Indigenous images as mascots, artists using bead-making as a tool of healing for victims, and elders leading healing and empowerment circles in their communities.

The USUN Office took a lead role in organizing the Bahá'í community's participation in the upcoming August 2023 convening of the [Parliament of the World's Religions](#), to be held in Chicago, where the first public mention of the Bahá'í Faith in America was made in 1893. Approximately 20 Bahá'ís are hosting or contributing to side events.

The USUN Office's principal representative continues to support the [UN International Decade for People of African Descent](#) (2015–2024). In December, the new Permanent Forum on People of African Descent held its historic [first meeting](#).

The USUN Office continues to work closely with the Bahá'í International Community by consulting on topical issues and participating in significant forums at the UN. At the Sixty-Seventh Session of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#), the priority theme was "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls," and the review theme was "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls."

GENDER EQUALITY AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Led by its officer for gender equality and the advancement of women, OPA's endeavors surrounding this subject strive to create clarity on the leading

USUN played a vital role in drafting a recommendation for establishing the United Nations Youth Office. The resolution adopted by the General Assembly on September 8, 2022, is a moment of excitement for those working within the UN system to promote youth inclusion and participation in decision-making processes.

OPA's gender equality and advancement of women officer was invited to speak to CSWG-WPS about the ways that Bahá'ís work to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in their local and global programs, particularly in the areas of gender equity and women, peace, and security.

themes of the national discourse, as well as create an opportunity to reflect on the quality and nature of social spaces. These efforts focused on building the capacity to read the current reality on a variety of themes and concentrated on entering existing spaces and events, building institutional connections, and enhancing relationships with collaborators.

Attention to the role of men in advancing gender equality remains central to exploring four main themes:

- Women, peace, and security (WPS)
- The intersectionality of race and gender
- The dynamics of religion and gender
- Gender-based violence

OPA actively engaged with three coalitions: the Interfaith Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence; the Civil Society Working Group for Women, Peace and Security (CSWG-WPS); and the Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security Network. Two of these have been accompanied by OPA in establishing subcommittees focused on systematic national learning processes. OPA's gender equality and advancement of women officer was invited to speak to CSWG-WPS about the ways that Bahá'ís work to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in their local and global programs, particularly in the areas of gender equity and women, peace, and security. OPA is an active member in a newly established committee within the GLOCAL Committee, a working group that aims to recognize the interconnectedness of WPS, both globally and locally. OPA and the GLOCAL Committee are planning a session centered on the role of men in the elimination of mass shootings in the US through recognizing their root causes, going beyond gun control policies and mental health issues.

OPA has consistently interacted with the Interfaith Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, which tends to focus on advocacy as its mode of

operation. OPA has begun encouraging the organization to think about framing a new model to incorporate consultation into its process; this has resulted in the formation of a subcommittee that will propose substantive changes.

OPA has reinvigorated its cooperation with Gender Equity and Reconciliation International, deepening its relationship with the cofounders. GERI offers courses deeply infused with concepts that are also found in Bahá'í teachings. The space offers a unique perspective on social transformation and works to align the hearts and minds of participants to reach their highest aspirations through building a gender-healed community. OPA contributed to shaping the vision, scrutinizing certain underlying assumptions on human nature, and reconceptualizing other concepts of gender equality, such as power. Deep connections have been made with other national actors within the gender equality circle through this space.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

The global pandemic has affected inequality, and discourses related to it, in paradoxical ways. Extreme wealth has become more concentrated, while those in precarious financial situations, including the “essential workers” on whom society relies for basic necessities, have been disproportionately and negatively impacted. Meanwhile, the pandemic prompted government programs—of types that have been unusual in recent decades—to reduce child poverty and provide other forms of relief. Amid all this, the racial dimensions of inequality became highly prominent in public discourse. The forces of both integration and disintegration continue to build, and while the teachings of the Faith provide the principles and insights on which a just economic order will be built, they do not in most cases offer detailed or technical prescriptions to economic questions. Instead, solutions to economic inequality will be found through processes of learning.

In this context, OPA, through the efforts of the economic justice officer, seeks to understand current discourses related to economic justice at the national level, to gain entry into spaces where these discourses unfold, and to offer insights from the teachings or the experiences of the community. Policy-related spaces tend to reflect the politically polarized and contest-based ethos of public life, and this presents challenges for Bahá'í participation. Still, opportunities for engagement spring from a range of conversations and efforts that focus on rethinking economic life in different ways and building new practices and institutions. These include the topics and movements around cooperatives, Black food sovereignty, reparations, Indigenous sovereignty, solidarity economics, and more. Discourse is further shaped by an awareness of the relationship between American capitalism and other problems, particularly the climate crisis.

Within this landscape of discourse, OPA made varied efforts to engage. Conversations with a few Bahá'í collaborators, as thought-partners in bringing the lens of the Faith to current discourses, took such forms as a small seminar, participation at an important conference, and other efforts. In wider society, OPA was welcomed into several conversation spaces, where it shared perspectives shaped by the Faith. One of these focused on how analyzing future scenarios might influence efforts for social transformation. In this case, the complexity of the evolving Bahá'í approach to social transformation—in which multiple areas of endeavor grow out of a shared conceptual framework and complement and build on each other—provided a basis for encouraging a sense of shared purpose across various approaches and a posture of learning. In addition, OPA took initiative in hosting spaces for organizations working for economic justice, particularly those seeking to advance conversations on the need to build unity as a means for progress. As part of a collaborative examination within OPA of the narrative of America—as mentioned above in

the Race Discourse section of this report—one key underlying problem being addressed is how division of many kinds hampers efforts to build economic justice.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Over the past year OPA's environment officer has maintained the Office's presence in relevant climate and environmental discourse spaces, including the [US Climate Action Network](#), the [National Religious Partnership for the Environment](#), and Blessed Tomorrow. He has sought to build a constructive relationship with the US government, particularly the Office of the Special Envoy for Climate Change.

OPA participated in events, such as the Annual Carbon Dioxide Removal Law & Policy Conference; an international business conference hosted by the World Trade Center Denver, focusing on opportunities and responsibilities posed by globalization of business; and the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Egypt. OPA facilitated the attendance of a robust international Bahá'í delegation at the Conference of the Parties. These activities provided an opportunity to engage with a host of societal actors and share Bahá'í thought in multiple venues.

OPA has continued to develop relevant content, including written pieces and initial recordings for a potential podcast series, exploring the role and need of values in environmental discourse, as well as the need to begin to address other issues, such as overcoming self-interest.

OPA took initiative in hosting spaces for organizations working for economic justice, particularly those seeking to advance conversations on the need to build unity as a means for progress.

Overview of ISGP seminars

For over a decade, the National Spiritual Assembly has made it possible to hold seminars in California, Arizona, Florida, and Maine. In summer 2022—which marked the first time the seminars have taken place since the outset of the pandemic—Texas was added as a location for the first year of the undergraduate seminar.

The [Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity](#) (ISGP) is a nonprofit research and educational organization. At the heart of the Institute's work is an exploration of how science and religion, conceived of as two complementary systems of knowledge and practice, can be drawn on to achieve positive and enduring change for the betterment of the world. In the context of its mission to create spaces in which individuals and groups concerned with social transformation can come together to explore the elements of a framework for thought and action that is inspired by both science and religion, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity offers seminars for university undergraduates, for university graduates, and for young professionals.

Seminars for undergraduate students

Seminars for Bahá'í undergraduate students aim to raise the consciousness of youth about the importance of engaging in action and discourse directed toward social change; to develop their capacity to reflect, to analyze, and to learn from action; to explore elements of a conceptual framework for contributing to the advancement of civilization; to provide them with tools to understand and analyze the culture in which they are immersed as well as the content of the university courses they are studying; to help them assume ownership of their education; and to assist them in their efforts to acquire the kind of knowledge that will enable them to live fruitful, productive, and meaningful lives. These seminars consist of a four-year program of annual gatherings, each of which lasts for 10 days.

For over a decade, the National Spiritual Assembly has made it possible to hold seminars in California, Arizona, Florida, and Maine. In summer 2022—which marked the first time the seminars have taken place since the outset of the pandemic—Texas was added as a location for the first year of the undergraduate seminar. Nationwide, 220 youths participated, 153 of whom entered the first year of the program.

Participants described their experience in the following ways:

- I felt that during ISGP is when I truly became a Bahá'í. I began to see how every aspect of my life was connected and finally recognized the true aim of the Faith to transform our society. I initially thought that the Faith was “not political,” as in aloof from social issues, and became increasingly drawn into secular methods for change including violence. The environment here encouraged me to share my struggles and further investigate the vision of Bahá'u'lláh.
- I feel that the seminar strengthened my faith and love for Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation, and my framework was greatly expanded and solidified. I know this is true based on how I began to sincerely reflect and question my actions, motives, and thoughts and try to adopt a humble posture of learning.
- I came to ISGP very insecure in my understanding of the career I am pursuing and not clear about how school and service can be coherent instead of in conflict. As the seminar went on, I became more excited to pursue my studies in a deeper way than I have been. I began to find that I wanted to do further exploration of the subjects we covered and want to have further conversations about



them in a university setting. I am leaving ISGP excited to advance in college, go as far as I can in learning, and explore my interests and talents in my career in a way that I can support social action.

- Prior to the seminars, I had faith in my beliefs and loved Bahá'u'lláh yet did not have as great of clarity around the vision of what I was doing and the community of which I am a part and represent. Each year of the seminars has allowed me to rededicate myself to service in my home community and understand better the process unfolding across the globe to reconceptualize the spiritual life of mankind.

Seminar for university graduates and young professionals

This seminar aims to assist young adults to develop the capacity to examine and analyze society and the forces acting upon it and to introduce relevant aspects of the Bahá'í teachings both in their academic and professional lives and in other social spaces in which they are present. Some 72 people attended the graduate seminar at Green Acre Bahá'í School.

One participant related: “I feel that the seminar strengthened my faith and love for Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation, and my framework was greatly expanded and solidified. I know this is true based on how I began to sincerely reflect and question my actions, motives, and thoughts and try to adopt a humble posture of learning.”

Persian Public Information Office

The Persian Public Information Office (PPIO) provides accurate, up-to-date information about the Bahá'í Faith and strives to meet the needs of Persian-speaking members of the American Bahá'í community. The office is composed of three main departments: the Persian Office at the Bahá'í National Center, including the Persian Reviewing Panel; Persian Media Productions; and the Persian Bahá'í Media Service. These departments closely collaborate with each other to communicate through a variety of formats to the Persian-speaking public and others in the United States, Iran, and around the world.

In February 2022, Persian BMS dedicated its Thursday radio programs to children ages 6–11 and their educators, and it launched Dordaneh, a website and Telegram channel for children.

PERSIAN OFFICE

In 2022, the Persian Office continued to prepare the Persian pages of *The American Bahá'í* magazine and translated Feast messages and other letters on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly and its subsidiary offices. The Office also consults with the National Assembly and its offices on matters related to the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran. Moreover, the Office serves the needs of Iranian Bahá'ís in the United States, such as by assisting with courses on racial justice, assisting various communities in their study of the Nine Year Plan, providing documentation for students from the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education, certifying marriages, and performing other administrative tasks. The office also collaborates closely with the Bahá'í International Community's (BIC) offices at the United Nations in New York, Switzerland, Brussels, and other BIC offices around the world in the provision of information to the Persian media concerning the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran.

In 2022, the Persian Reviewing Panel received 19 new manuscripts and six works in different stages of revision. The submissions ranged in scope from a dozen to several hundred pages and included studies on the Bábí and Bahá'í Sacred Writings, a volume of articles prepared in commemoration of the centenary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, texts treating aspects of the history of the Faith, translations of Bahá'í books published in English, memoirs, *istidlálfiyihis* (works adducing proofs of the Faith based on scriptures of past religions), a compilation

of poetry, and other literature. In its work, the Panel has been greatly assisted by a group of resource persons who have generously shared with it their time and expertise.

PERSIAN MEDIA PRODUCTIONS

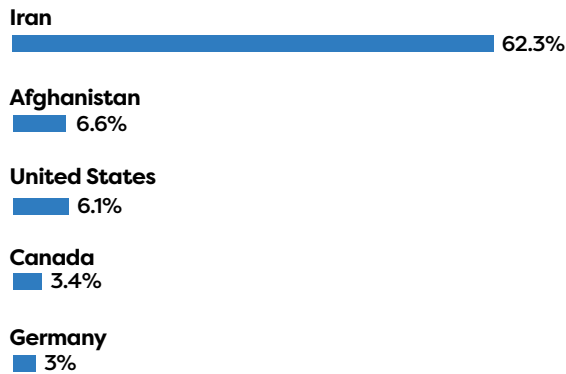
Persian Media Productions (PMP) produces and distributes Bahá'í-inspired media content related to current social discourse, particularly as it pertains to youth residing in Iran. PMP celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2022, a year in which learning and capacity building were significantly enriched. After reflection on its history, PMP devoted significant effort to strengthening its organizational capacities by forming two editorial and advisory boards for, respectively, multimedia productions and article publication. The memberships of both boards are composed mostly of like-minded friends from the larger society.

PMP has significantly increased its outreach, especially through Instagram, where it has 13,004 followers, a 382 percent increase. Almost 63 percent are from Iran and between the ages of 25 and 44, and more than 51 percent are women. This past year, the PMP Instagram page had 1,860,356 unique users, an increase of 282.5 percent.

Since spring 2022, PMP has produced around 400 media pieces on themes of racism, racial justice, appreciation of diversity, unconscious bias, environmental issues in Iran, youth identity, women's issues, parenting, programs for children, Iranian and Afghani women's

Persian Media Productions' online reach

Views (Top countries)



contributions to society, and the role of arts and literature. After the start of the demonstrations in Iran last fall, PMP began striving to produce media content that is relevant to the current situation.

efforts were dedicated to producing a series of podcasts both aimed at and created by junior youth, and a new line of production exclusively for Persian BMS social media platforms.

PERSIAN BAHÁ'Í MEDIA SERVICE

In 2022, the Persian Bahá'í Media Service (Persian BMS) Advisory Board was formed to oversee the agency's development and help it navigate the learning process as it produces programs beneficial to the social, cultural, and economic development of Iran. It endeavors to do so based on a reading of the realities and needs of the Iranian people. Persian BMS continues to produce and broadcast a 45-minute daily radio program, *Payam-e Doost*; two one-hour weekly television programs; and a 24-hour streaming audio service available on two different satellites to Europe and the Middle East. The programs are also available on a free smartphone application, a website (persianbahaimedia.org), Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, YouTube, Podcast, and SoundCloud.

In February 2022, Persian BMS dedicated its Thursday radio programs to children ages 6–11 and their educators, and it launched Dordaneh, a website and Telegram channel for children. During the past year, special



Since spring 2022, PMP has produced around 400 media pieces on themes of racism, racial justice, appreciation of diversity, unconscious bias, environmental issues in Iran, youth identity, women's issues, parenting, programs for children, Iranian and Afghani women's contributions to society, and the role of arts and literature.



Treasury

With its focus on releasing “the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures,” the Nine Year Plan is unlike any the Bahá’í world has seen before. The Universal House of Justice has summoned believers to apply “the knowledge, insights, and skills” gained through efforts expended in previous Plans to contribute not only to the process of developing the Bahá’í community but also to the progress of society. This will require the development of what the Supreme Body has described as an “expansive view”—a capacity to see how the full spectrum of activities and collaborations the Plan calls for will, in time, have a vital and lasting impact on the transformation of society.

The Faith’s growth and development during the 30-year ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offers a clear example of what this means. With His eyes fixed on the long view, the beloved Master worked tirelessly on a host of fronts to build the foundation of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is the perspective the Office of the Treasurer hopes to weave into all its forms of communication as it engages with the present-day Bahá’í community, which is laboring to realize the Master’s vision for the future of humanity.

For individual believers, the community, and the Faith’s institutions, the Nine Year Plan calls for an increase in the work of building communities that will stand as shining examples for all who hope to build a unified world society founded on divine love and the principles of cooperation and mutual assistance. For the Office’s Fund Development team, this means evolving a new set of ideas and processes for engaging with the friends. This year saw the introduction of “The Fund: A Sacred Institution,” a new online deepening designed to assist friends at the grass roots as they accompany newly enrolled believers. The goal is to learn to support these friends in appreciating the spiritual nature of Bahá’í contributions and establish their relationships with the Funds of the Faith. The tool will be made available once the evaluation process and final adjustments are complete.

For Local Spiritual Assemblies, the Nine Year Plan calls for a rise in capacity in

a number of specific areas, including financial administrative systems. The Supreme Body has long emphasized the importance of the development of financial administration as essential to the progress of the Cause and a core element of gaining the trust and confidence of the greater society. The Plan calls for the establishment of uniquely Bahá’í financial systems, characterized by spiritual principles that include “rectitude of conduct and such qualities as justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness.” To this end, the Office of the Treasurer has begun to test and refine a pilot program of what are tentatively called “Financial Literacy Seminars,” which are designed to strengthen the financial management systems of Local Spiritual Assemblies. Thus far, six Local Assemblies have participated, including Los Angeles, Phoenix, New York, and Chicago. A number of additional seminars are being planned for the coming year. The Office is also consulting with the Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems about how to expand the initiative to support the development of financial management systems among the Regional Bahá’í Councils.

Status of the Fund

The level of commitment demonstrated by American believers in spite of economic challenges has been a source of inspiration and confirmation. The House of Justice has conveyed that the

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The Office of the Treasurer has begun to test and refine a pilot program of what are tentatively called “Financial Literacy Seminars,” which are designed to strengthen the financial management systems of Local Spiritual Assemblies. Thus far, six Local Assemblies have participated.

As of March 15, cumulative unrestricted contributions to the National Fund reflected a 6 percent increase over the same period last year. Although estate bequests and contributions to the various regional funds continued to increase, overall contributions intended to be applied to the National Fund goal were approximately 9 percent below those of the previous fiscal year.

current Plan “will require a further rise in the capacity of the individual believer, the local community, and the institutions of the Faith.” An aspect of this challenge is unfolding now in the American Bahá’í community. Though activities are expanding during a period of uncertainty and economic turbulence, the friends are arising with steadfast generosity as a community to meet the goal of the National Bahá’í Fund.

While unrestricted contributions to the National Fund in January 2023 were about half those contributed the previous month, they reached nearly the same level as January of last year. Throughout the current fiscal year, unrestricted contributions to the National Fund have each month remained at or above last year’s levels, with the exception of three months.

As of March 15, cumulative unrestricted contributions to the National Fund reflected a 6 percent increase over the same period last year. Although estate bequests and contributions to the various regional funds continued to increase, overall contributions intended to be applied to the National Fund goal were approximately 9 percent below those of the previous fiscal year. This was mainly due to a large decline in earmarked contributions compared to last year.

An increase in the many activities of the Faith and the needs of the Nine Year Plan also contributed to higher overall operating expenses of the Bahá’í National Organization, creating a gap of \$3.5 million from its revenue stream at the end of February 2023.

The Office of the Treasurer notes with joy that the generosity of the friends has helped to advance many of the Faith’s current projects. At the national level, the friends have contributed a cumulative \$1.1 million to the National Archives Renovation Fund, and at the international level, they have given \$30.4 million to be used in raising the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Planned giving

Planned giving continued to be a viable option for the friends to contribute to the Funds of the Faith. Various instruments available through the Planned Giving Program included gifts of appreciated securities, donor-advised funds, and IRA charitable rollovers, which increased by 48 percent from last year. The charitable gift annuity was again a popular option for believers who wish to make a contribution to the Faith while ensuring a lifetime income stream for the participants. Estate bequests increased by 12 percent over last year and continued to be a major resource for the National Fund and an avenue for the friends to leave a legacy for the benefit of humankind.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Combined statements of financial position

10 months ended February 28, 2023, and fiscal year ended April 30, 2022

	National Bahá'í Fund	Publishing Trust	Combined total	
			February 2023 unaudited	April 2022 audited
Assets				
Current assets				
Cash and investments	\$ 2,783,189	\$ 52,972	\$ 2,836,161	\$ 6,698,927
Investments	36,471,213	-	36,471,213	20,800,000
Due (to)/from other Funds	10,995,326	(10,995,326)	-	-
Accounts and notes receivable	463,509	35,353	498,862	397,043
Inventories	82,125	372,762	454,887	495,468
Other current assets	855,235	14,177	869,412	1,012,255
Total current assets	\$ 51,650,597	\$ (10,520,062)	\$ 41,130,535	\$ 29,403,693
Property and equipment net of accumulated depreciation	\$ 50,265,196	-	\$ 50,265,196	\$ 50,780,683
Investments	42,814,033	-	42,814,033	59,105,469
Other assets	439,684	-	439,684	441,979
Receivable under Trusts	2,497,767	-	2,497,767	2,693,429
Total assets	\$ 147,667,276	\$ (10,520,062)	\$ 137,147,214	\$ 142,425,253
Liabilities and net assets				
Liabilities				
Current liabilities				
Short-term debt	\$ 25,557,467	\$ 9,345	\$ 25,566,813	\$ 23,030,908
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	568,670	21,726	590,395	4,640,618
Amounts payable to International Funds	3,214,589	-	3,214,589	1,578,603
Gift annuities, current portion	728,765	-	728,765	499,406
Total current liabilities	\$ 30,069,491	\$ 31,071	\$ 30,100,562	\$ 29,749,535
Long-term liabilities				
Pension liabilities	\$ 9,134,675	-	\$ 9,134,675	\$ 10,634,675
Security deposits	55,446	-	55,446	30,246
Gift annuities, net of current portion	6,088,495	-	6,088,495	6,067,853
Total liabilities	\$ 45,348,107	\$ 31,071	\$ 45,379,177	\$ 46,482,309
Net assets				
Without donor restrictions				
Undesignated	\$ 29,956,799	\$ (10,551,133)	\$ 19,405,666	\$ 33,327,652
Designated by the Board for Operating Reserve	28,965,080	-	28,965,080	26,487,847
Designated by the Board for Endowment Fund	4,311,946	-	4,311,946	4,441,838
Total without donor restrictions	\$ 63,233,826	\$ (10,551,133)	\$ 52,682,693	\$ 64,257,337
With donor restrictions				
Purpose restrictions	\$ 36,708,713	-	\$ 36,708,713	\$ 29,260,742
Perpetual in nature	2,376,631	-	2,376,631	2,424,865
Total with donor restrictions	\$ 39,085,344	-	\$ 39,085,344	\$ 31,685,607
Total net assets	\$ 102,319,169	\$ (10,551,133)	\$ 91,768,037	\$ 95,942,944
Total liabilities and net assets	\$ 147,667,276	\$ (10,520,052)	\$ 137,147,214	\$ 142,425,253

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Combined statements of activities

10 months ended February 28, 2023, and fiscal year ended April 30, 2022

	Without donor restrictions	With donor restrictions	Combined total	
			February 2023 unaudited	April 2022 audited
Changes in unrestricted net assets				
Revenues				
Contributions	\$ 23,886,560	\$ 4,978,351	\$ 28,864,911	\$ 37,626,811
Estate bequests	3,926,591	-	3,926,591	3,480,576
Investment income	2,282,144	-	2,282,144	2,085,039
Bahá'í schools tuition	337,002	-	337,002	163,917
Sale of books and special materials	609,516	-	609,516	822,746
Other income	367,559	-	367,559	1,398,425
Unrealized gain (loss) on investments	(4,155,616)	-	(4,155,616)	(8,271,767)
Net assets released from restriction	3,740	(3,740)	-	-
Unrealized gain (loss) on Perpetual Trust	(48,234)	-	(48,234)	(322,142)
Total revenues	\$ 27,209,262	\$ 4,974,611	\$ 32,183,872	\$ 36,983,605
Expenses				
Education and teaching	\$17,291,606	-	\$ 17,291,606	\$ 19,512,049
Community services provided by National Assembly	5,257,452	-	5,257,452	6,230,063
Publishing and communications	5,775,578	-	5,775,578	6,663,146
Contributions to related and other organizations	759,801	-	759,801	1,785,000
General management and administration	2,327,678	-	2,327,678	3,633,766
Properties operations and maintenance	3,663,980	-	3,663,980	4,943,858
Information technology	2,691,836	-	2,691,836	2,954,098
Total expenses	\$ 37,767,932	-	\$ 37,767,932	\$ 45,721,980
Changes in net assets before pension adjustment	\$ (10,558,670)	\$ 4,974,611	\$ (5,584,059)	\$ (8,738,375)
Non-operating				
Net periodic pension benefit cost	\$ 170,426	-	\$ 170,426	\$ 469,407
Pension charges other than net periodic benefit cost	(1,579,578)	-	(1,579,578)	(2,027,604)
	\$ (1,409,152)		\$ (1,409,152)	\$ (1,558,197)
Increase/(decrease) in net assets	\$ (9,149,518)	\$ 4,974,611	\$ (4,174,907)	\$ (7,180,178)
Net assets, beginning of year	\$ 64,257,337	\$ 31,685,607	\$ 95,942,944	\$ 103,123,122
Net assets, end of year	\$ 55,107,819	\$ 36,660,218	\$ 91,768,037	\$ 95,942,944

Notes to financial statements *February 28, 2023, and April 30, 2022*

Operations and accounting policies

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States (the Assembly) was established in 1927 as a voluntary trust and subsequently incorporated in October 1994 as an Illinois not-for-profit corporation to administer, teach, and further the Bahá'í Faith in the United States.

The accounts of the Assembly are maintained on the accrual basis. The accounts of the Assembly include the assets, liabilities, net assets (deficits), and financial activities of the National Bahá'í Fund and the Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

The principal accounting policies used by the Assembly are as follows:

Contributions

All contributions from members of the Faith, unless specifically restricted by the donor, are considered to be available for unrestricted use and are recorded as received. Items received of artistic or religious significance for which no value can be readily determined and which are not anticipated to be sold are recorded at nominal value. Contributions also include bequests which are recorded as received.

Contributions from nonmembers may not be used to support the Faith and, accordingly, such amounts received are distributed for other humanitarian causes. Contributions restricted by the donor for particular programs and projects, or for property and equipment acquisitions, are earned and reported as revenues when the Assembly has incurred expenses for the purpose specified by the donor. Such amounts received, but not yet earned, are reported as restricted deferred amounts.

Tax-exempt status

The US Treasury Department has held that the National Spiritual Assembly and all subordinate Local Spiritual Assemblies are exempt from

Federal income tax as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) of 1986. Accordingly, contributions made to the National Spiritual Assembly and all of its subordinate Local Spiritual Assemblies are deductible by the donors for Federal income tax purposes as provided by IRC Section 170.

Bequests, legacies, devises, transfers, or gifts to the National Spiritual Assembly or its subordinate Local Assemblies are deductible for Federal estate and gift tax purposes as provided by IRC Sections 2055, 2106, and 2522.

Inventories

Inventories of books and special materials are recorded at the lower of cost, using the average cost method, or market.

Investments

Investments are recorded at market value.

Property and equipment

Property and equipment are stated at cost. The Assembly computes depreciation of fixed assets over their estimated useful lives using the straight line method. The estimated lives used in computing depreciation are as follows:

Asset description	Asset life
Furniture/Equipment	3–5 years
Buildings/Improvements	5–40 years
Bahá'í House of Worship	75 years

Bosch Bahá'í School

The Bosch school is in the process of being rebuilt.

Pension plan

Effective October 1, 2022, the National Spiritual Assembly amended the defined benefit plan. The amendment freezes all benefits accruals and service credits for all employees in the plan.



Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems

The Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems assists the National Spiritual Assembly by supporting and following the development of administrative and financial systems at the regional level. Though it interacts primarily with Regional Bahá'í Councils, it lends support to the development of systems at the national level when requested. It also systematizes knowledge and prepares reports for the National Assembly. As it carries out its work, the Desk consults regularly with the Desk for the Development of Properties, the Learning Desk, and the Social Action Desk.

After Ridván 2022, the Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems organized two seminars to assist Regional Bahá'í Councils in preparing strategic plans for the evolution of their administration in light of growth. Council members studied working papers and case studies—in these subject areas—that were prepared by the Office for the Development of Administrative Systems at the Bahá'í World Center.

Specific Councils were invited to seminars on two topics:

- In May, a seminar with the California and Four Corners Councils focused on the financial system at the regional level. Topics included educating the believers concerning the sacred obligation of contributing to the Fund, developing financial capacity at the cluster level by holding annual planning and budgeting meetings,

and the development of the regional treasury office.

- A second seminar in June with the Atlantic and Northwestern Councils addressed the flow of guidance and information, as well as the operation of the regional secretariat. Discussion touched on developing strategies for the dissemination and study of guidance, analyzing information and learning, and the development of the regional secretariat.

After the seminars, the Desk supported these Councils in preparing and implementing strategic plans by furnishing them with relevant guidance and experience and offering consultative support.

In the coming year, it is anticipated that this overall effort will be doubled, so that strategic plans in each of these two areas will be created and implemented by four Councils.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

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The Desk organized two seminars to assist Regional Bahá'í Councils in preparing strategic plans for the evolution of their administration in light of growth: one on financial systems at the regional level, and the second on the flow of guidance and information, as well as the operation of the regional secretariat.

Desk for the Development of Properties

The Desk for the Development of Properties pursues two primary objectives: to assist the National Spiritual Assembly to nurture and follow the development and implementation of property plans, structures, and systems at the regional level; and to offer support and gather learning as the friends acquire properties-related capacities. In this work, the Desk closely collaborates with the Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems, as well as the Learning Desk and the Social Action Desk.

Supporting the growth and development of institutional capacity

The Desk's initial area of focus has been accompanying the development of properties in the Atlantic and California regions. Representatives from these two regions joined a national seminar at the Bahá'í House of Worship in October 2021 to study guidance and experience generated by a global learning process. Participants explored the implications of systematically raising the administrative capacity of Regional Bahá'í Councils and related institutions and agencies as they prepare and implement long-term plans for the development of regional properties. A shared understanding has emerged that the need for Bahá'í properties arises organically from the growth of the Cause—particularly when the institute process advances in terms of developing human resources and of sustaining and intensifying the movement of a population.

The Regional Bahá'í Councils of the Atlantic States and the State of California have prepared properties plans, and their implementation is advancing with accompaniment by the Desk. Each Council's plan is updated annually in conjunction with the regional budgeting process. The Councils are moving ahead in their efforts to staff and train friends serving in (or collaborating with) a regional administrative structure to assist the Council in the following responsibilities:

- Implementing its properties plans in the context of available resources
- Developing regional maintenance and protection plans
- Ensuring that key information on all regional properties is readily accessible in a shared database, which among other things can assist in the process of exploring creative ways to utilize existing properties in support of growth
- Encouraging and nurturing processes of learning

The Desk assists and follows the Regional Councils as they undertake the responsibility to ensure that the robust consultation taking place about properties cultivates ownership of the process at all levels in the region. It also accompanies the Councils in the development and documentation of a strong process of reflection and learning; in their study of relevant materials; in the dissemination of learning, both at the Council level and throughout a region; and in ensuring that learning is shared across regions.

To support learning about the roles properties play in the growth process, over the past year the National Assembly approved frameworks for considering regional properties proposals and is nurturing the development of systematic regional learning processes. Starting with the diverse range of institute facilities in the Atlantic and California regions, both leased and acquired, the regional

Two Regional Bahá'í Councils have prepared properties plans, and their implementation is advancing with accompaniment by the Desk. Each Council's plan is updated annually in conjunction with the regional budgeting process.



learning processes being developed will follow, for example, what is being learned about patterns of use in existing properties, the impact of these properties on community building, and how institutional relationships best foster the maintenance and development of properties. The goal of the learning process is to advance in a manner that

- encourages and adapts to the needs of growth,
- emphasizes coherence across all efforts to build institutional capacity and nurtures and supports ever-deeper collaboration at all levels in a region, and
- advances continuing improvement in the quality of the data and in the process of reflection, analysis, and learning.

One shared vision is that, over time, key capacities, elements, and other indicators in the growth process will be identified to help in gauging whether leasing or acquiring a physical space is likely to sustain and propel growth. Learning in this area may help the friends at the grass roots and

institutions at all regional levels to learn to read their reality regarding the need for properties. When it appears timely to secure a physical space, this learning could guide them in moving forward; conversely, it could help them avoid getting bogged down with properties if the necessary conditions and human resources to acquire, manage, and maintain them do not yet exist.

Expanding the formal learning process to other regions

Two other regions are expected to be invited to the next properties seminar in 2023, joining the Atlantic and California regions in the formal learning process about regional properties development.

The regional learning processes being developed will follow what is being learned about patterns of use in existing properties, the impact of these properties on community building, and how institutional relationships best foster the maintenance and development of properties.

Junior youth program learning sites

The Bahá'í International Development Organization (BIDO) at the Bahá'í World Center oversees a global network of sites that are meant to generate and disseminate learning about the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. Each of the four US learning sites also comprises a cluster:

- Dallas City cluster in Texas
- East Valley cluster in Arizona (south suburban Phoenix)
- San Diego cluster in California
- Triangle cluster in North Carolina (Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill)

In October 2022, resource persons dedicated to the sites in the United States and Canada, along with close collaborators, gathered in Vancouver, Canada, with Auxiliary Board members and regional and cluster institute coordinators to study guidance, reflect on experience, and chart a vision for the development of the sites and the dissemination of learning throughout North America. During the process, they had the added bounty of consulting with representatives of the Continental Board of Counselors and BIDO. Three main themes emerged to guide the consultation: learning from the most-advanced clusters, educational endeavors and the training institute, and the dissemination of learning.

Learning from the most-advanced clusters

In keeping with guidance from the Universal House of Justice, those who gathered in Vancouver began envisioning the movement of the sites past the benchmark of having 50 to 100 junior youths involved in five to 10 groups to having some 300 junior youths involved in 30 groups. The friends noted that progress toward achieving this benchmark accelerates when one to two centers of intense activity in a cluster acquire capacity to reach 100 junior youths in regular study. Those serving in these centers come to appreciate that a spirit of teaching animates their efforts,

which further propels the program forward. The friends also developed the insight that for the junior youth program to advance across an entire cluster, friends from beyond the centers of intense activity must feel a sense of ownership of the learning sites' goals.

As those in the East Valley site strive toward the 300-participant benchmark, they have learned that when expanding nuclei engage in consistent patterns of action, reflection, and consultation, it becomes easier to sustain the involvement of a large number of junior youths. Some neighborhoods following this pattern are close to having 100 junior youths participate in the program.

The East Valley site also found that collaboration with cluster agencies, Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and Local Spiritual Assemblies has been essential for the healthy growth of a vibrant junior youth program. Another positive development has been the decision of individuals to dedicate a significant amount of time to service, including youth who serve at the neighborhood level. Full-time cluster and regional coordinators have also been key in terms of dedicated service.

Collaboration has also been important in the Triangle learning site, where Local Spiritual Assemblies, the Area Teaching Committee, and friends from across the cluster aid the growth of the junior youth program in centers of intense activity and in areas being nurtured by other expanding nuclei. Some 31 animators are currently sustaining 24 groups with 125 junior youths participating.

In keeping with guidance from the Universal House of Justice, those who gathered in Vancouver began envisioning the movement of the sites past the benchmark of having 50 to 100 junior youths involved in five to 10 groups to having some 300 junior youths involved in 30 groups.



Educational endeavors and the institute

At the gathering in Vancouver, another insight that emerged is that as nuclei of friends expand, the institute process and the elements of community life it fosters draw populations closer to Bahá'u'lláh. The quality of study circles rises, as does the number of young people committed to the spiritual education of the next generation. Central to this process are groups of committed friends who serve as tutors for youth, as coanimators with youth, and as wise and loving friends alongside youth navigating the complexity of their lives. Another key lesson was that the branch courses of Ruhi Book 5 are instrumental in strengthening the conviction of animators and increasing the formality and quality of the junior youth program.

Study circles have proven important in the Triangle site, where experience has shown that a steady flow of youths through the Ruhi Institute courses has been central to helping a single neighborhood engage 100 junior youths. The nature of the accompaniment these youths receive as they move into service has emerged as another vital component. Close collaboration and consultation with institute coordinators has also fostered the mobilization of youth.

Another positive development in the site has been a more regular rhythm of activity, thanks in part to the availability of the Triangle Bahá'í Institute, a facility designed to help people learn to be of service to their communities. The Institute provides a space for monthly junior youth camps, which have helped advance the flow of new junior youth into the program and helped consolidate existing junior youth groups. The monthly camps also helped galvanize the cluster's animators, who are beginning to support one another's efforts and actively contribute to the monthly gatherings.

In the Dallas City learning site, two complementary areas of learning have emerged around two phenomena: the mobilization of youth, especially those who are part of the populations of their neighborhoods; and expanding nuclei of friends who are operating in a learning mode. From the very start, friends in the cluster assist youth studying the main sequence of courses—most of whom are graduates of the junior youth program in centers of intense activity—to become animators and children's class teachers. These young people begin to systematically serve alongside their tutors, applying a growing set of abilities. After a couple of cycles, the youth begin participating more regularly in consultation and planning about expanding the nuclei of friends striving to build communities that reflect Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity.

As expanding nuclei of friends gain capacity in the San Diego site, consultation becomes more effective and the ability to read their reality more refined. The nuclei increasingly ensure that every member of the community is being nurtured and receiving the accompaniment they require. This has resulted in stronger junior youth groups and better levels of support for animators, which have helped increase the retention of friends in community-building activities. As the capacity of animators grows, the average size of junior youth groups has increased,

One emerging insight is that as nuclei of friends expand, the institute process and the elements of community life it fosters draw populations closer to Bahá'u'lláh. The quality of study circles rises, as does the number of young people committed to the spiritual education of the next generation.

Learning sites disseminate their acquired learning through a network of associated clusters and through collaboration with friends serving in the region and zone where the site is located. As part of the training institute, the sites also help answer a number of key questions about the development of the junior youth program.



and the pace at which groups progress through the Ruhi books for junior youth has quickened. Nuclei not only in the site but also throughout the network of associated clusters have seen rising numbers of animators draw closer to Bahá'u'lláh and formally enroll as Bahá'ís.

Dissemination of learning

Learning sites disseminate their acquired learning through a network of associated clusters and through collaboration with friends serving in the region and zone where the site is located. As part of the training institute, the sites also help answer a number of key questions about the development of the junior youth program.

In their efforts to disseminate learning throughout the region, dedicated resources persons in the East Valley site have maintained ongoing conversations and collaboration with the Regional Training Institute Board, with the institute resource person, and with regional and cluster coordinators. In the coming year, these friends plan to move from consultation and reflection into the field of action. The East

Valley site also has a resource person dedicated to working with Indigenous rural populations in the heart of the Four Corners region. This friend is also sharing learning and support with teams serving in the Northern Plains region.

In Dallas, a pattern of visits both to and from the site has begun to spread learning to associated clusters and to animators across northern Texas. The network of clusters associated with the San Diego site has, through the learning shared, begun pursuing connecting youths to junior youth groups early in their study of Ruhi materials so they can learn from experienced animators. Youths who have been through this process are now welcoming new cohorts of Ruhi participants.

Learning Desk

The National Spiritual Assembly established the Learning Desk in October 2013 to assist it in systematically following the work of expansion and consolidation unfolding across the regions of the country.

As the Universal House of Justice describes the matter in its message of December 29, 2015:

To discharge their duties effectively, regional and national institutions will need to remain fully acquainted with developments at the grassroots and what is being learned in the clusters whose progress they oversee. . . . The need to stay well informed about the community's accumulating experience holds particular implications for National Assemblies in larger countries that have several Regional Councils, notably so when the Assembly has devolved to Councils the work of administering the institute. Here, new arrangements at the national level have sometimes been necessary to provide the Assembly with cogent analysis of what is being learned in all regions.

During 2022-23, the Desk continued to organize its work around these primary objectives:

- Providing the National Spiritual Assembly with cogent analysis of the process of expansion and consolidation in progress across the country

- Offering what the Desk is seeing across the country as an assistance to the efforts of other offices of the Bahá'í National Organization

This year the Learning Desk resumed its national travel to spend time with friends at the grass roots in gatherings and in the field. Both the conversations that ensued and analysis of data allowed the Desk to prepare reports for the National Assembly and Continental Counselors residing in the United States.

The need for training institutes to attain a higher level of functioning remains a pressing concern, and the exigencies of the current Nine Year Plan continue to place a heavy demand on the institutes. In November 2022, the National Assembly and Counselors asked the Learning Desk—together with the Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems—to focus specifically on the analysis of three of the country's training institutes. The collaboration between these two desks has helped both advance their work; the Learning Desk is also in the early stages of conversation with the Desk for the Development of Properties and the Social Action Desk to try to ensure coherence among all these agencies.

In November 2022, the National Assembly and Counselors asked the Learning Desk—together with the Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems—to focus specifically on the analysis of three of the country's training institutes. The collaboration between these two desks has helped both advance their work.

National Statistics Office

One important accomplishment of recent Plans, as conveyed by the Universal House of Justice, is the heightened awareness of the role statistical information plays in facilitating the planning process at the cluster level. Across the United States, institutions and agencies are demonstrating a steady rise in the capacity to collect pertinent data; to use this information to identify strengths that can be built upon; to track progress; to analyze emerging patterns of growth within their communities; and to make decisions on the next set of goals to be adopted.

So that each cluster's progress can be effectively evaluated through analysis and planning, the Universal House of Justice established three instruments:

Statistical Report Program (SRP).

Operational online across the United States since November 2019, SRP is used by cluster agencies at the grass roots to report the progress of the society-building power of the Faith that is extending deeply into the soil of many localities and neighborhoods. Use of SRP makes it possible to measure the number of clusters where a program of growth is being initiated and the degree of intensity that each has reached.

Cluster Growth Profile. Automatically generated from information flowing into SRP, this instrument accelerates planning and analysis of emerging patterns of growth at the cluster and regional levels.

Biannual Progress Survey. Also flowing from SRP, this report provides a snapshot of progress in each region twice per year.

The national statistics officer works with institutions and agencies—such as Regional Bahá'í Councils, regional statistics officers, and Regional Training Institute Board members—to ensure that the capacity to use these instruments is firmly established, and to further strengthen the flow of statistical information from various sources into SRP. This helps Regional Bahá'í Councils meet the objective, in the Supreme Institution's words, of being “fully acquainted with the developments at the grassroots and what

is being learned in the clusters whose progress they oversee.” The qualitative and quantitative data collected, the House of Justice additionally states, “is primarily for the purpose of reviewing and planning grassroots efforts. . . . Timely access to information about the movement of clusters and the work of the institute . . . is required for institutions to support their agencies and take the many decisions. . . .” Further, such information allows these institutions “to accurately read the reality of their communities and act on the basis of clearly understood needs when marshaling the energies of the friends towards meeting the exigencies of the hour.”

In addition to supporting these regional institutions, the national statistics officer provides monthly reports to the National Spiritual Assembly on progress made in expansion and consolidation.

Strengthening the flow of statistical information

To build capacities for support of the exigencies of the Nine Year Plan, the National Statistics Office focused efforts this year on fortifying the flow of statistical information to aid the “community of the Greatest Name in establishing intensive programs of growth in all the clusters” in the United States.

The office facilitated a three-day National Statistics Workshop, hosted in October 2022 by the National Spiritual Assembly, that included members of each Regional Bahá'í Council, members of each Regional Training

Use of SRP makes it possible to measure the number of clusters where a program of growth is being initiated and the degree of intensity that each has reached.



Institute Board, and regional statistics officers. Its purpose was to identify objects of learning that contribute to reliable statistical data and how data is collected and utilized at the grass roots. Participants consulted and learned from each other about lines of action underway at the neighborhood, locality, cluster, and subregional levels to collect statistics, and they discussed how to apply lessons learned to entire clusters and regions. Sections of the document “Flow of Guidance and Information,” prepared by the Office for the Development of Administrative Systems at the Bahá’í World Center, were used as a foundation for study and consultation. Two members of the National Assembly and a member of its Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems offered further insights. Stories from the field and artistic exercises, relevant to the topics, were incorporated into the activities to invigorate the experience. These and other learning outcomes emerged:

- Familiarity with and use of SRP are advancing at a faster pace in cases where the Regional Training Institute is involved.

- The study and discussion space was vital in building understanding and intensifying planning.
- In the absence of accurate data, agencies and institutions face challenges in planning and analysis.

Connecting Local Assemblies to statistics

In collaboration with the Office of Assembly Development and Office of Community Administration, the National Statistics Office helped to develop new content within *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies* that included reference to the importance of statistics, as well as how Local Assemblies can access and use SRP for planning and analysis as a natural part of the local process of expansion and consolidation.

The National Statistics Office may be contacted via email (NSO@usbnc.org) with any questions about the Statistical Report Program.

At a three-day National Statistics Workshop, participants consulted and learned from each other about lines of action underway at the neighborhood, locality, cluster, and subregional levels to collect statistics, and they discussed how to apply lessons learned to entire clusters and regions.

Office of Pioneering

In its December 30, 2021 message introducing the Nine Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice draws believers' attention to the vital role the deployment of pioneers—both internationally and on the home front—will play in advancing at least one cluster in every country and region of the world past the third milestone on the continuum of development. The American Bahá'í community, in line with the Supreme Body's instruction that “Bahá'í communities in countries where the processes of growth are firmly established are expected to provide the majority of such pioneers,” has been charged with raising up 52 pioneers to settle in 26 goal clusters across the globe during the Plan's first phase. The Office of Pioneering is delighted to report that the believers in this community have responded to this call with resounding enthusiasm.

In the almost 12 months since the community received its pioneering call, efforts commensurate with the needs of this momentous endeavor have increased drastically at every level. At the grass roots, hundreds of friends from clusters at every milestone of development have expressed interest in arising to serve as pioneers both internationally and on the home front, leading to an upsurge in administrative operations. At the institutional level, members of the Continental Board of Counselors, the National Spiritual Assembly, both Auxiliary Boards, and Regional Bahá'í Councils—as well as so many other devoted souls—are, armed with the spirit of mutual support and assistance, intensely engaged in collaborative processes to organize and mobilize prospective pioneers from all over the country.

The establishment of numerous pioneering-focused task forces has also proven vital, and the Office of Pioneering has assumed a significant role in ensuring efficient and consistent communication between them. A National Pioneering Task Force—an agency of the National Assembly—meets regularly with Counselors to consult and reflect upon the procedures being created to meet the international pioneering goals. Burgeoning regional pioneering task forces have been appointed in each of the 13 regions and are being accompanied by the National Task Force through frequent correspondence and the holding of regular spaces for consultation. These

efforts are largely facilitated by the Office of Pioneering.

Much has been learned, through action and reflection, about the principal elements comprising the pioneering process—pioneer identification, training and orientation, deployment, and continued support in the field. Experience thus far has shown the first step—identification—to be the most pressing at this early and critical stage of the Plan. Once friends have been identified as potential pioneers, they go through a series of steps designed by the National Task Force to further explore this possibility, including the identification of additional support that would be beneficial before their departure.

After completing an in-person orientation, many pioneers who are planning to depart soon decide to gain further experience with the community-building process by moving to a local advanced cluster and serving there for a period before relocating. Communities have arisen to support international pioneering by offering their neighborhoods as training grounds where pioneers may acquire these additional skills through close accompaniment and the support of the friends in these localities. Following this training, pioneers are deployed to their posts and their Bahá'í memberships are formally transferred to their new communities. Deployed pioneers remain in close contact with the individuals

A National Pioneering Task Force—an agency of the National Assembly—meets regularly with Counselors to consult and reflect upon the procedures being created to meet the international pioneering goals. Burgeoning regional pioneering task forces have been appointed in each of the 13 regions.

Goal countries assigned to the US Bahá'í community



and institutions that supported them throughout the training process; this helps ensure the continued accompaniment of pioneers in the international arena, which has proven especially valuable when they are faced with practical considerations such as applying for visas or navigating new economic structures.



On the home front, ongoing efforts to identify, train, deploy, and support pioneers follow a similar structure. While the National Task Force has focused primarily on international goals, it is also involved in the homefront pioneering enterprise, particularly by accompanying regional task forces to increase their capacity to identify and initiate conversations with prospective homefront pioneers. The notable strengthening of these task forces over the past year is the latest indication of a growing sense of regional ownership over the mobilization of homefront pioneers.

As of March 2023, more than 27 pioneers have arisen to unleash the society-building power of the Faith overseas, at least 21 of whom are fulfilling international cluster goals. Eager to capitalize on the swift momentum this community has produced over the past year, the Office of Pioneering remains enthusiastic about the blessed work that is underway and that which is to come. The Office strives to enable believers to, in the words of the Supreme Body, follow “in the footsteps of so many heroic souls of the past,” and “ensure that the light of the Faith shines bright in every territory.”

After completing an in-person orientation, many pioneers who are planning to depart soon decide to gain further experience with the community-building process by moving to a local advanced cluster and serving there for a period before relocating.

The Desk's work takes place within two prongs: a broad annual snapshot of social action across the whole country that is primarily captured through the social action survey, and a deeper analysis that is captured through iterative descriptions of the social action that is stirring at the grass roots in regions at the forefront of growth.

Social Action Desk

The Social Action Desk, established by the National Spiritual Assembly in 2010, will continue working during the Nine Year Plan to assist the Assembly to “stay well informed about what is being learned at the grassroots” in terms of social action and to “analyse the experience being gained” (in the words of the Universal House of Justice).

During 2022–2023, the Desk continued to describe the social action that is emerging across the country, whether in terms of nascent efforts, sustained social-action programs, or Bahá'í-inspired organizations. Its work takes place within two prongs: a broad annual snapshot of social action across the whole country that is primarily captured through the social action survey, and a deeper analysis that is captured through iterative descriptions of the social action that is stirring at the grass roots in regions at the forefront of growth. For the deeper analysis, the Desk visited clusters with centers of intense activity, participated in regional institute reflection spaces and inter-institutional meetings, opened spaces alongside friends serving at various geographic levels to reflect on the emerging social action, and maintained a wide network of collaborators to stay abreast of developments in this area of activity. These collaborators have continued to develop three important capacities:

- To identify the spectrum of social action taking place in our midst
- To describe how social action efforts have been emerging, particularly at the grassroots
- To extend to others a clear conversation about the nature of social action

Qualitative observations

At the regional level, the Desk has witnessed an increasingly pronounced conversation taking place in three regions—Atlantic, California, and Four Corners—about contributions the friends are making to improve the spiritual character and social

conditions of their wider communities. This unfolding conversation reveals a growing appreciation of the advances being made in multiple dimensions of the work of the Plan, and a regional awareness about the path ahead.

At the grass roots, more friends this year have seen how social action emerges from the community-building process. This learning advances particularly when individuals and groups lean into natural opportunities that present themselves. These opportunities have been ripe in small geographic settings where the training institute is building capacity among a growing number of people to apply the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh toward improving spiritual, material, and social conditions. In such settings, the friends are stepping into the arena of social action, bearing in mind the principles expressed in this passage from the December 30, 2021 letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors:

The contribution made by Bahá'ís is distinguished by its focus on building capacity for service; it is an approach founded on faith in the ability of a population to become the protagonists of their own development.

The Desk noticed that many simple stirrings of social action tended to emerge from community gatherings, junior youth service projects, devotional spaces among families and youth, and a pattern of home visits in which friends became well familiar with each other's aspirations and the material and spiritual barriers to attaining them. Simple efforts of short duration often included academic assistance to younger



generations; helping people navigate health-care, immigration, and education systems; promoting environmental health; and others. Women’s groups, English-language learning spaces, tutorial programs, and community gardens are among the endeavors emerging from growth processes that became sustained for a period of time, and a few of them developed administrative structures to further sustain their efforts.

Quantitative observations

The Desk has recorded thousands of informal, short-term efforts aiming to promote the social and economic development of a population (see chart, page 9).

In the area of longer-term efforts, last year the Desk’s survey recorded 179 sustained endeavors and 26 Bahá’í-inspired organizations. Some of these ongoing initiatives emerged from community-growth processes, others at the initiative of individuals and small groups. The latter initiatives were characterized by Bahá’ís becoming involved in organizations in wider society and bringing aspects of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh to bear on their approach and methodology; initiating projects with like-minded friends; or forming entities dedicated to improving fields of human endeavor. The most advanced efforts taking place in this context were observed to be those that, in the House

of Justice’s words, “have benefited from being able to draw on the principles and insights guiding the activities occurring at the grassroots of the worldwide Bahá’í community, and they have also benefited from the wise counsels of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies.”

Whether these sustained endeavors are community-based initiatives stemming from growth processes or are undertaken in the context of the wider society, the fields to which they contributed include: the advancement of women, agriculture and food systems, the arts and media, economic life, education, the elimination of racial prejudice, the environment, and health.



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Every vote counts in electing Bahá'í Institutions



Annual Local Elections

Each April, Bahá'ís elect nine local members to serve as their **LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY**

Each October, at a unit convention, Bahá'ís elect a delegate who will attend the national convention the following spring

ELECTORAL
UNIT
DELEGATES

Bahá'ís 18 or older may vote, and those 21 or older may be elected

National Convention

Delegates gather each spring to consult and share insights about the progress of the Bahá'í community and elect nine members to serve on the **NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY**

In the United States, 171 delegates convene

NATIONAL
SPIRITUAL
ASSEMBLY

All Bahá'í elections are conducted by secret ballot, without nominations, candidacies or electioneering

International Convention

Every five years, members of the world's National Spiritual Assemblies gather in Haifa, Israel, to elect the **UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE**

This world-unifying institution was ordained by Bahá'u'lláh

UNIVERSAL
HOUSE OF
JUSTICE



Office of Assembly Development

The Office of Assembly Development is a national resource for assisting Local Spiritual Assemblies in reflecting on the spiritual and administrative principles and processes that underpin their work, especially pertaining to application of Bahá'í law.

In 2022—in collaboration with members of the Auxiliary Boards, Regional Bahá'í Councils, the Office of Community Administration, the Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems, and other offices and agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly—the Office pursued two primary trajectories: facilitating the flow of guidance and information, and encouraging a learning process about applying Bahá'í law.

Facilitating the flow of guidance and information

The Office seeks to facilitate the systematic flow of guidance and information related to Local Assemblies through the continuous updating of *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies*, producing new issues of *Emerging Insights*, and preparing compilations of guidance and insights from the Office's numerous conversations in the field.

The Office also prepares questions and guidance for the “Abiding in God’s Law” column in *The American Bahá'í* magazine.

Each year Local Assemblies contact the Office of Assembly Development or the Office of Community Administration to consult about topics that remain elusive or unclear. Some Assemblies’ conversations with these two offices are sustained over years, allowing the offices to recognize common questions and to follow Assemblies’ learning about their work over time. These questions now form the basis for the creation of several documents that are shared as needs arise. One assists with welcoming new Assembly members to service, another contains considerations on operational practices, and a third offers compilations of relevant guidance. In the upcoming year, the Office plans to share these materials more widely.



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The Office seeks to examine how Local Assemblies at similar stages of development learn about applying Bahá'í law as a foundational aspect of fostering a local community's spiritual health. This entailed opening periodic spaces for reflection among Local Assemblies, particularly those in larger communities that have been in ongoing conversations with the Office.

When Assemblies were asked to take on the new responsibility of conducting two-stage elections, the Office observed that their secretariats had already established systems for home-visit campaigns; decentralized Feasts and Holy Day observances in smaller geographic areas; and channels for the flow of guidance and information related to this decentralization.



Encouraging a learning process about the application of Bahá'í law

The Office, in collaboration with the Office of Community Administration, seeks to examine for the National Assembly how Local Assemblies at similar stages of development learn about applying Bahá'í law as a foundational aspect of fostering a local community's spiritual health. This entailed opening periodic spaces for reflection among Local Assemblies, particularly those in larger communities that have been in ongoing conversations with the Office. In response to questions related to the operation of the secretariat, the Office held seminars with individual Assemblies to encourage systematic reflection on the development of their secretariats as their communities grow in complexity.

Regional Councils have also been strengthening their efforts to accompany Spiritual Assemblies in their development. This opened an opportunity for the Office, in collaboration with the Office of Community Administration, to focus on encouraging Assemblies to engage in a

posture of learning as they apply Bahá'í law. These efforts have typically included topics of Bahá'í law such as the two-stage electoral process at the local level, which was implemented at Riḍván 2022.

When Assemblies were asked to take on this new responsibility, the Office observed that their secretariats had already established systems for home-visit campaigns; decentralized Feasts and Holy Day observances in smaller geographic areas; and channels for the flow of guidance and information related to this decentralization. In short, these Assemblies had already developed systems to handle complex matters to the extent that engaging in the two-stage election was seen as a natural next step in their development.

Their ability to delegate tasks to over 100 people simultaneously reflected an advanced capacity to operate within an evolving framework and to learn alongside and trust in the ability of others. The Office hopes these observations encourage Assemblies that are just beginning to focus on the functioning of their secretariats more intentionally in light of the demands of growth.

Looking ahead

One of the goals of the Nine Year Plan is raising capacity for administration at all levels. The Office was drawn into consultations with various entities to consider each one's contribution to the goal. At the start of the Plan, the National Assembly established the Desk for the Development of Administrative Systems to work closely with Regional Councils. Additionally, the Plan asks that the Auxiliary Boards and Regional Councils devote attention to "establishing Local Spiritual Assemblies and consolidating their operations." Further, institutions at national and

regional levels are tasked with becoming more systematic in their efforts to support Local Assemblies as they "begin to take on a greater and greater share of responsibility for nurturing the development of the community." Much of this past year, then, has been spent in consultations to determine how best to encourage a system that provides sustained support to Assemblies through a progressively decentralized scheme of accompaniment. These consultations are ongoing, and it is hoped that a strategy for the Plan's next few years will emerge shortly.

Spiritual Assemblies, in close collaboration with the Auxiliary Boards, sought to educate the friends on the two-stage election process through various means, including home visits, sharing guidance at the Nineteen Day Feast, and direct communications to the community.

Insights from the two-stage election process



- Spiritual Assemblies, in close collaboration with the Auxiliary Boards, sought to educate the friends through various means, including home visits, sharing guidance at the Nineteen Day Feast, and direct communications to the community. They did this in hopes of fostering an ongoing conversation regarding the electoral process year after year. One Assembly observed that the efficacy of the friends visiting one another in their homes depended on the quality of the relationships that had already been established.
- Small-group meetings and one-on-one interactions to study the guidance of the Universal House of Justice and implement the new process proved most effective. These efforts resulted in almost doubling election participation rates in each community.
- Some friends expressed relief because the two-stage process required them to vote for two to three people they knew from their neighborhood instead of nine people, some of whom they might not know.
- The two-stage electoral process had a profound impact on the San Diego Assembly with the election of four new members. While some feared the new membership would slow the Assembly's progress, the transition was seamless because every member serving on the Assembly is familiar with the city's growth process. In place of dichotomies, they found unity and a heightened sense of urgency. Relationships with Auxiliary Board members were deepened as they now expect to see each other regularly in the field of action and at retreats.

Office of Community Administration

The Office of Community Administration handles a wide variety of administrative matters, but primarily sees its work in terms of two broad areas of endeavor undertaken on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly: the administration of Bahá'í law and learning with Bahá'ís and their institutions how to foster individual and collective spiritual health.

The management of administrative matters on behalf of the National Assembly includes gathering information, compiling and summarizing document history, and analyzing facts in light of guidance to assist the review of the National Assembly in its meetings. This is followed by the implementation of the National Assembly's decisions, including the development of correspondence and the coordination of administrative changes.

Most situations that involve the Office originate from Local Spiritual Assemblies. The Office works with a Local Assembly by providing the following: scenario-specific guidance; suggestions for approaches to resolve issues without the need for the National Assembly's intervention; and requests for additional information, as needed, when the National Assembly is required to make a decision.

In this work, the staff members of the Office regularly interact with individual believers or Local Spiritual Assembly representatives. In some instances, this is because a specific task is needed after a decision by the National Assembly. Most often it involves information gathering and the initial provision of assistance based on the National Assembly's established guidance and policies.

Each *Riḍván*, the Office assists communities where difficulties have arisen in relation to the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly. On average, this involves 70 to 100 individual instances, in which some issue prevents a Local Assembly from being immediately recognized following its election. Many of these can be resolved without the input of the National Assembly. The Office was also closely involved in consultations to prepare the guidance that was issued in advance of *Riḍván*, and remained involved to help

address questions that arose from Local Assembly elections.

In the course of carrying out its work in the past year, the Office presented 87 agenda items for the meetings of the National Assembly. Among these, 74 involved the circumstances of individuals—such as questions regarding administrative status, exceptions to the law of parental consent, and other issues. Questions related to the functioning of specific Local Assemblies or general questions related to the administration of Bahá'í law were also presented for the National Assembly's review.

The Office also engages in a significant volume of correspondence on behalf of the National Assembly. The past year involved some 1,700 communications facilitated by the Office to individuals and agencies, across the country and internationally, related to questions and issues that had arisen.

The pattern of collaboration has strengthened and the mode of working with those outside of the Office through videoconferences has continued to grow. During the year, members of staff participated in joint consultations in this way with entire Assemblies and Assembly representatives, committees, Auxiliary Board members, Counselors, and groups of individuals.

The Office has continued to pursue efforts to refine its daily operations, with specific emphasis on adjusting systems to more effectively distribute the workload and track the range of issues that are brought to its attention. In this regard it has been involved in an extended conversation about adjustments that may be needed as it strives to rise to the implications of the Nine Year Plan and the vision of the Universal House of Justice for the future.

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Office of the Secretary

The Office of the Secretary directly serves the secretary of our National Spiritual Assembly—its chief executive officer—and the deputy secretary, if one is elected. The Office provides administrative support to the National Assembly as it carries out its responsibilities, and it functions in a broad range of areas, including the following:

- The organization and execution of conferences and meetings, including the regular monthly meetings of the National Assembly
- The processing of incoming correspondence as well as the Assembly's outgoing communications with other Bahá'í institutions and this national community (the Office processes approximately 4,000 incoming pieces of correspondence per year, as well as facilitates the flow of about 3,800 outgoing written communications conveying guidance, information, and resources to individuals, the community, and other Bahá'í institutions.)
- The organization and/or execution of the Bahá'í electoral processes annually, including the National Convention, the Regional Bahá'í Council balloting process, Unit Conventions, and Riḍván elections
- Direct support of the National Assembly's close relationship with the 13 Regional Bahá'í Councils, through its Regional Bahá'í Council Liaison Desk
- The handling of other necessary tasks associated with the efficient functioning of a complex organization and community

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Office of Education and Schools

Great strides were set in motion to learn about aligning programming at the permanent Bahá'í schools, seasonal schools, and Wilmette Institute with the current phase of the Divine Plan; particular attention was paid to expansion and consolidation, social action, and social discourse. Those serving in the Office of Education and Schools also explored opportunities to collaborate in vision and action with other national offices, Counselors, Auxiliary Board members, Regional Bahá'í Councils, cluster agencies, and local institutions.

As the schools continued to offer programs designed to deepen believers in an immersive Bahá'í atmosphere, their roles were reexamined in light of advancing growth. Particular emphasis was placed on inviting friends and often entire families from the community of interest to school programs that encouraged participation and meaningful contribution.

A concerted effort was also made to reimagine the Wilmette Institute as a center for higher learning, where undergraduate and graduate students might gain insights from a Bahá'í perspective in academic fields and current discourses of society. These lines of

learning will continue to be central to the proposed efforts in the Nine Year Plan, especially in its first four years.

The following pages highlight a few selected endeavors by the Green Acre and Louhelen Bahá'í Schools, the seasonal Bahá'í schools, and the Wilmette Institute. The Bosch Bahá'í School continues on hiatus for the immediate years ahead until its repair and reconstruction are completed.

Statistically, overall participation numbers were lower than in previous years. Some 394 people were recommended and approved through the National Spiritual Assembly and the Office of



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As the schools continued to offer programs designed to deepen believers in an immersive Bahá'í atmosphere, their roles were reexamined in light of advancing growth. Particular emphasis was placed on inviting friends and often entire families from the community of interest to school programs that encouraged participation and meaningful contribution.

This process of learning through the arts begins through conversations with individuals, families, and local institutions about a community's hopes and aspirations.



Education and Schools to present or facilitate programs for minors at the permanent and seasonal schools from May 2022 through February 2023. This figure does not include approvals made by Regional Councils overseeing programs at a permanent or seasonal school.

Green Acre was able to accurately capture registration statistics this year even though the Cvent registration software was not used. Many seasonal school programs were held online and did not provide accurate attendance figures. Ways to effectively capture statistics for all these spaces are being reexamined for the coming year.

Learning about the arts

The Office of Education and Schools has continued its collaboration with the Bahá'í-inspired Children's Theater Company (CTC). Louhelen had already garnered three years' experience in partnership with CTC alongside a charter school in Flint, Michigan, in efforts to learn how the arts can, in historically underserved communities, help people build their capacities through exposure to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Similar programs have been introduced in Jackson, Tennessee, Pensacola, Florida, and Brooklyn, New York. OES and CTC have established a conceptual framework for learning in action based on the study of the Ruhi Institute's in-development Book 13,



Engaging in Social Action. In piloting these efforts in a few regions of the country, the Office of Education and Schools has helped CTC to work with other agencies and departments of the National Spiritual Assembly.

This process of learning through the arts begins through conversations with individuals, families, and local institutions about a community's hopes and aspirations. This leads to an exploration of how a CTC arts program can advance discourse on topics such as the elimination of racial prejudice and advancing the quality of life, especially for African American families with young children. After some consultation, a local advisory board, akin to a

cluster core team, begins meeting weekly. The advisory boards assist in planning a children's theater camp, with an accompanying Parent Café—a space for conversation on relevant spiritual concepts.

One outcome is the production of a professional show performed for the wider community. In Pensacola and Jackson, both the production of the play *Henry Box Brown* and performances springing from the children's theater camp have inspired families to join in local devotional gatherings and children's classes. It has been observed that these artistic activities awaken in the parents and the wider community a spiritual thirst to learn more about the

principles of the Bahá'í Faith. Cluster agencies can facilitate the formation of core activities in which interested individuals and families might come to see themselves as protagonists of their own spiritual and material well-being, contributing to the community's vibrancy.

Green Acre Bahá'í School, Eliot, Maine

With 15 gatherings and 600-plus participants, including two 10-day ISGP seminars, returning to a more robust schedule was challenging and joyful. Green Acre also provided a complete family program in December called *Families and the Nine Year Plan—Winter School*, the first such gathering since the start of the pandemic.

In the past year, the [Green Acre Bahá'í School](#) returned to in-person programming with more than 3,000 on-campus participants, some 45 percent of whom were from the wider community. The arts became a magnet, drawing more than 900 people to the school from the local area, including many first-time visitors. The year also marked the return to hosting programs for several Bahá'í institutions, such as the Institute for the Study of Global Prosperity (ISGP), the Association of Bahá'í Studies, and the Office of Public Affairs, while maintaining ongoing support for the Regional Training Institute.

The arts and discourse flourished at Green Acre with two major art exhibits—*Afrofuturism* and *The Creative Power of Unity*—which included a series of related performance and dialogue spaces. The Afrofuturism theme allowed for an imagination-based exploration of race that encouraged conversations focused on possibilities, the unique contributions of the people of the African diaspora, and the inherent oneness of humanity. The exhibit was also an opportunity for collaboration with an array of local arts institutions, including the Seacoast African American Cultural Center (SAACC), Theater for the People, Artists Building Capacity as World Citizens, and Kinship. SAACC, which is based in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, co-hosted the exhibit with Green Acre, and, between its two locations, it was seen by thousands in the local community. A series of performances from Theater for the People, an arts conference called SeaChange, and web and social media efforts shared the art and related concepts with tens of thousands.

Green Acre continued to support the activities of the local cluster through staff participation, hosting children's classes, junior youth camps, cluster reflection meetings, and the Building a Better World conference. A relationship blossomed with one friend of the Faith who participated in the conference discussions—the director of Voices from the Heart, a prominent local women's choir. This led to a concert being held at Green Acre with 600 people attending.

Relationships with the town of Eliot, Maine, where Green Acre is located, continued to grow as the school hosted two town-sponsored gatherings. It also maintained its ongoing dialogue and *The Conversations We Should Be Having* podcast with the Eliot Police Department. In addition, the many arts-related events provided opportunities for Bahá'ís to connect with the broader community and engage in meaningful, spiritual conversations.

Green Acre returned to hosting trainings, seminars, and reflection spaces sponsored by Bahá'í institutions and learned to navigate the various health and safety procedures made necessary by the pandemic. With 15 gatherings and 600-plus participants, including two 10-day ISGP seminars, returning to a more robust schedule was challenging and joyful. Green Acre also provided a complete family program in December called *Families and the Nine Year Plan—Winter School*, the first such gathering since the start of the pandemic.

Building on the physical, social, and spiritual beauty of the location, the increased capacity to engage with friends from the wider community around Bahá'í concepts, and the commitment to a mode of action, reflection, consultation, and study, Green Acre stands ready to engage with the opportunities of the Nine Year Plan and to aid in the release of the society-building power of the Faith.

Louhelen Bahá'í School, Davison, Michigan

Louhelen team members continue to focus on building a unified understanding of the school's vision among staff, volunteers, and local and regional institutions. This center of learning aims to develop a culture of constant study, consultation, action, and reflection year-round, cycle after cycle. Staff and volunteers frame their understandings of the Nine Year Plan based on the principles of true friendship, mutual support, and reciprocity. In this light, they seek collaboration with Bahá'í institutions and like-minded organizations at the local and regional levels, continuously building capacity to participate in the community-building process.

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, formal sessions at the school were drastically reduced. Only recently has activity begun to approach anything that resembles that of previous years. Though small in attendance, more and more local activities in collaboration with Regional Training Institutes propelled Louhelen toward higher levels of coherence, integration, and complexity in 2022.

A few examples of the emerging and returning programs, held on the [Louhelen](#) campus or in nearby Flint, Michigan, include the following:

- A summer day camp with students from a local school in attendance
- A local conference to launch the Nine Year Plan, themed "We Are One Family"
- Theater productions sponsored by Louhelen and the Children's

Theater Company of New York on Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2022, with participants including local school students and the mayor of Flint

- Artistic and cultural presentations by Mr. Kevin Locke at Louhelen and at The New Standard Academy, a charter school in Flint

As restraints associated with the pandemic are eased, The New Standard Academy, with support from its administration and staff, is facilitating a number of programs in collaboration with Louhelen. These include in-class programs with junior youth and children's class materials from the Ruhi Institute, as well as materials from *Brilliant Star* magazine; outings for families to the Louhelen campus; family camps; and literacy and arts programs, including children's theater.



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Seasonal Bahá'í schools

The Universal House of Justice, in its Ridván 2010 message, affirmed a role for collective study of the Bahá'í teachings in parallel with the institute process: “[L]ocal deepening classes, winter and summer schools, and specially arranged gatherings in which individual believers knowledgeable in the writings were able to share with others insights into specific subjects emerged naturally as prominent features of Bahá'í life. ... [T]hese forms of study continue to hold a place in the collective life of the community.”

In 2022, as restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic lessened in the first year of the Nine Year Plan, nine seasonal schools in six regions operated in person, with programs ranging from one to six days. In 2023, around 15 schools are expected to offer regional and subregional programs. In addition, the way is being prepared for a few dozen new local schools to emerge through close collaborations among nuclei, families, and individuals in clusters where an intensive program of growth is underway. This process of collaboration is a primary learning objective for the schools committees in the interest of strengthening the vitality of community life.

Annual gathering of Councils and seasonal schools committees

In an extended weekend February 2023 at the Louhelen Bahá'í School, members of seasonal schools committees gathered with members of several Regional Bahá'í Councils to reflect on how the schools—in the Nine Year Plan and beyond—are developing as an integral component of the framework for action that complements the institute process. The schools seek to play a distinctive role in enabling participants, especially families and friends of the Faith, to see themselves as protagonists of their own spiritual and material well-being in their communities.

With people participating both in person and by teleconference, the gathering benefited from observations and insights from Counselors Lucho Boddy and Nwandi Lawson, the secretary of the National Spiritual

Assembly, and members of the Office of Education and Schools. Several key concepts helped participants reexamine their assumptions about the role of seasonal schools in alignment with the institute process, the core activities, community well-being, and institutional accompaniment.

Informed by the study of guidance, the learning at this gathering was guided by case studies and analytical questions:

- How can a neighborhood children's class and the involved families advance their understandings of the verities of the Faith and its social teachings?
- How might regional and local institutions—a Regional Bahá'í Council and its agencies (including regional growth facilitators and regional coordinators) and Local Spiritual Assemblies, alongside Auxiliary Board members—assist in establishing a regular summer school in a subregion or locality, both spiritually (through capacity building) and materially (with sustainable funding)?
- How might both Bahá'ís and those from the community of interest be invited into a summer school environment?
- What is the relationship of the National Spiritual Assembly to the seasonal schools?

One immediate object of this learning process was to gain insight into how a local seasonal school in a small setting might use an invitation-only

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registration system (rather than first-come, first-served) in close consultation with a Local Spiritual Assembly and subregional institutions in more advanced clusters. The purpose would be to selectively invite friends of the Faith and their families who are already involved in some core activities in their communities. A vision was explored concerning the potential growth in school programs, held locally with around 50 participants each, and how many could be established by the end of the Nine Year Plan as direct invitations are extended to larger numbers of enrolled Bahá'ís as well as to friends of the Faith engaged in at least one core activity.

Programming

While in 2023 there will be no national theme for programs at regional, subregional, or local seasonal schools, the discourse on race unity remains a primary focus. School committees are encouraged to avail themselves of materials already developed such as “Hope and the Family” and “Walking Together on a Path Towards Race Unity & Oneness.” However, each region may establish other themes, in consultation with partner institutions and in light of the needs of each region or area. Committees are also learning to creatively use *Brilliant Star* magazine and its resources to enrich and strengthen programming for children (and grown-ups).

Collaboration with institutions

One highlight of the annual gathering of school committees was a report from the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Northwestern States and committee members of two of that region's schools. This Council recently began the process of taking under its purview the four currently operating schools in its two states. Its representatives shared at length the learning, insights, and recommendations gained from that experience. The goal is for schools in all regions eventually to operate in this decentralized fashion, rather than directly under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly.

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Wilmette Institute

Over the past year, the Wilmette Institute continued to pursue its mission of increasing enrollment among college-aged students, both Bahá'ís and friends of the Faith, who are interested in Bahá'í perspectives on the prevalent discourses of society and in learning about the history, principles, and tenets of the Faith.

To meet its growing operational and educational demands, the Institute last year added a full-time chief academic officer, a part-time course designer, and a digital support associate. After more than two decades, the current director became dean of history, tenets, and principles.

As the Wilmette Institute pursued accreditation from the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, the leadership team learned that to be accredited, it must run independent academic programs using its own registrar and its own learning platform, such as Moodle. Thereafter, the team started two Institute-sponsored graduate certificate programs—Bahá'í History, Text and Tenets; and Social Change—and added several related classes.

A variety of noncredit continuing education courses are also offered throughout the year, and the Illinois Board of Higher Education has renewed the Institute's permission to offer noncredit courses on religion and theology. A guide to the Institute's course offerings and activities can be accessed on its website (wilmetteinstitute.org).

To meet its growing operational and educational demands, the Institute last year added a full-time chief academic officer, a part-time course designer, and a digital support associate. After more than two decades, the current director, Robert Stockman, became dean of history, tenets, and principles. The Institute plans to hire a new full-time director.

Orientation course

In June 2022, Wilmette Institute staff decided to reduce the number of continuing education courses from 60 to 30 in order to concentrate its resources on developing and implementing a systematic approach to pedagogy. The staff set out to create five new courses to exemplify pedagogy as it relates to the Bahá'í teachings. They also created a six-hour orientation called First Look, to be run the first week of every extension

course. This minicourse, which seeks to educate learners and faculty about the Institute's approach to learning, has three sections: Moodle Orientation, Bahá'í Conceptual Framework for Action, and Contributing to Public Discourse.

Partnerships with other academic institutions

The Wilmette Institute continues its partnership with [United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities](#), where two Bahá'ís have nearly completed master's degrees in religious studies. In the 2022-23 academic year, the Institute also offered three credit courses through the course-management platform of the [Graduate Theological Union](#) (GTU) of Berkeley, California. Four students enrolled, including one friend of the Faith who was encouraged to do so by her professor. Two Wilmette Institute staff members attended GTU's fall faculty retreat, where they made new or renewed existing acquaintances with faculty members and generally strengthened their relationships with the school. One staffer also attended GTU's reception at the American Academy of Religion in November.

Three GTU seminarians enrolled in Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith, a course that started January 30, and collaboration on projects related to sustainable development and the phenomenon of religious pilgrimage are also under consideration.

An emerging partnership with [North Carolina Central University](#) (NCCU), a historically Black university in Durham, North Carolina, took definite shape last year. In April 2022, members of the Wilmette Institute team visited the university and introduced the

idea of using the arts as a catalyst for discussions about and interventions in society's prevalent discourses. This culminated in November in the production of *The Bus Stop*, a powerful stage drama that serves as a springboard for dialogical education about the mass incarceration of people of color. The play was a collaborative effort between the NCCU Department of Theatre and Dance, the Wilmette Institute, and Theatre for the People, a newly formed Bahá'í-inspired non-profit organization. More than 500 university and community members attended the six performances.

Discussions with the audience followed each show, progressing from a focus on the problem of a racialized caste system to the development of insights about the symbiotic relationship between a top-down dismantling of systemic racism through policies and institutional changes and bottom-up grassroots efforts like community building, raising awareness, and spiritual education. A repeated point of discussion was that change had to involve neighborhoods to be sustainable.

Since the play closed, one Wilmette Institute faculty member was invited to give an engaging and challenging guest lecture at NCCU. Conversely, an NCCU lecturer will present in a Wilmette Institute webinar. In February 2023, *The Bus Stop* became one of four southeast productions selected to be featured at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival occurring in Statesboro, Georgia. The NCCU Theatre Department anticipates working closely with the Institute and [Theater for the People](#) in future productions incorporating Bahá'í perspectives and social discourse.

Webinars

The Institute offered 22 webinars in 2022, including five that were part of a weekend conference about publishing, cosponsored with the Bahá'í Publishing Trust. The Institute also cosponsored a webinar with the International Environment Forum. Subscribers to the

Institute's YouTube channel have grown to 6,100, and the channel has had 667,000 views of its videos since 2015, with an increase of more than 110,000 in the last year.

Non-credit extension/continuing education courses

Wilmette Institute's non-credit courses have continued to attract significant participation. In 2021, the Institute offered 48 online courses serving 1,076 learners. Eight new courses were offered, and ongoing efforts to raise course completion rates have been successful. The total number of countries and territories where the Institute has had learners exceeds 128.

The course [Anti-Black Racism in the US and Building a Unified Society](#) was offered three times in 2022 to a total of about 260 students. In the 12 times the course has been offered, it has reached more than 1,050 people. The Regional Bahá'í Council of the Northwestern States continues to sponsor the enrollment of Local Spiritual Assembly members, and some Assemblies sponsor their community members. Students from the course came together three times in "Project Center Gatherings" to share community initiatives.

The Northwestern States Council and Wilmette Institute have also continued their collaboration on the course *Race Unity: The Role of Persian Americans*. In September 2022, the course was offered to 73 learners. The course led Persian Americans to reach out and befriend African American Bahá'ís and neighbors.

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House of Worship: Report from the Temple Board

The following areas of learning continue to guide the Temple Board and those serving at the Bahá'í House of Worship as they strive to fully realize the Temple's potential to contribute to the release of the society-building power of the Faith.

Enhancing the visitor experience—Nurturing a spiritual atmosphere while considering cultural context

Between March 2022 and January 2023, more than 200,000 people visited the Temple. While specific counts and population trends (ethnic, cultural, racial, language, age demographics, distance traveled, etc.) are difficult to track accurately, observations indicate that the majority of visitors are doing so for the first time, are not enrolled Bahá'ís, and tend to be youth or older adults.

From observation, the most frequent ethnic populations visiting are from India and other countries in that region, and Hispanic/Latino. Many in both populations come from the greater Chicago area. However, people from all parts of the world and every ethnic or racial group regularly visit the Temple. Local individuals who are not enrolled Bahá'ís, including many who are involved in community-building activities in their neighborhoods, make regular or occasional visits to the Temple for personal prayer and reflection. During the busiest months (April–October), photography in connection with weddings, graduations, quinceañeras, or other special celebrations also attracts many visitors to the gardens.

The Temple Board has focused over the past year on learning to more systematically observe visitors' patterns of interaction with the Temple, its surroundings, and its staff and volunteers; and to more effectively share the nature and purpose of the Temple in a manner that both preserves the spiritual environment and invites visitors to experience it from within their own cultural context. A redesigned Temple brochure, expected to be available by

Riḍván 2023, will be translated into a dozen of the most frequently spoken languages. It will focus on the Temple's mission as it relates to the innate connections between worship and service to humanity.

Significant steps were also taken this year toward starting a new youth-period-of-service program, which is expected to begin in 2023. It will build on the experience of the previous Spirit of the Cornerstone summer programs for youth.

In addition, further learning among those serving at the Temple has strengthened their capacity to recruit, engage, and orient volunteer guides. These steps are expected to significantly contribute to enhancing and maintaining the Temple's spiritual environment while welcoming and enriching the experiences of all visitors.

Strengthening relationships—The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and the teaching and community-building process

Throughout the past year, major strides were taken to strengthen collaboration between the Temple, its surrounding cluster agencies, and, by extension, the communities these agencies serve. Beginning in August 2022, in response to consultation with the agencies, the Temple began hosting camps for junior youth and youth on a regular basis, utilizing facilities made available by the National Spiritual Assembly. The result was a doubling in the number of participants in local camps as well as a strengthening of their ties to the Temple.

These same facilities have also seen regular use by regional Bahá'í institutions

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With increasing frequency, families, groups of friends, and communities are encouraging and scheduling activities and events at the Temple. These include prayers for special occasions, dawn prayers, firesides, core activities, and conversations with visitors attending regular devotional programs.



and agencies, both those serving in the Heartland and beyond. To nurture these efforts, the Temple Board has begun to give more systematic attention to current and future needs for Temple maintenance and the maintenance of surrounding properties, including an expansion of facilities that can be used for gatherings or overnight stays.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as the spiritual center of the community and of collective worship

With increasing frequency, families, groups of friends, and communities are encouraging and scheduling activities and events at the Temple. These include prayers for special occasions, dawn prayers, firesides, core activities, and conversations with visitors attending regular devotional programs. These interactions often serve as a bridge to connect seekers to local Bahá'í communities and activities.

Nurturing relationships with organizations from the wider community

Last year, the Temple served as host to a number of significant events involving members of the wider community. These include the following:

- A Rosh Hashanah devotional gathering, led a local Jewish congregation in the Temple

Auditorium and gardens for the second consecutive year

- A visit by the Israeli Consul General and his staff
- A gathering of Indigenous people in collaboration with a Bahá'í-inspired organization
- A special visit to the Temple by a group of African American junior youth selected as members of the Royal Court of Chicago's annual Bud Billiken Parade
- An observance of Black History Month featuring orchestral and choral music, visual arts, poetry, and local speakers that included public officials and representatives of social justice organizations

To learn about ways to deepen existing ties between the Temple and society's diverse organizations and populations—and to form new ones—the Temple director and Bahá'í National Center staff have begun conversations with the Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs. In regular meetings with the Office of Communications, staff members have also considered this area of learning. These consultations have identified the 2023 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago as one golden opportunity for expanding such connections.

House of Worship Music Department

The Bahá'í House of Worship Choir provides sacred a cappella music on the first three Sundays of each month for the weekly 12:30 devotional program in the Temple Auditorium. Individual choir members, the choir director, or guest soloists, including the director of the House of Worship, sing on the fourth and fifth Sundays.

Following steady losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, choir membership rebounded this year to 18 people, including several friends from the wider community who joined after hearing the music at Sunday devotionals. The choir continues to hold weekly rehearsals, which were reduced from two to one session during the pandemic to reduce choir members' chances of exposure to COVID-19. The choir did not sing outside of Chicago's North Shore neighborhoods over the past year, primarily due to the pandemic.

Special programs in the House of Worship

The choir has as its main purpose to provide music in the House of Worship for a variety of functions. In addition to the Sunday devotionals and Holy Days, it also sings on other occasions as requested by either the National Spiritual Assembly or Bahá'í communities and local organizations. In the past year, additional participation has included the following:

- 114th US Bahá'í National Convention, April 2022— opening devotions
- National Ḥuqúqu'lláh Conference, September 2022— opening session
- Twin Holy Day observances, October 2022— Anniversary of the Birth of the Báb

Outreach programs in the wider community

When the choir appears in the community, many listeners learn for the first time that music is offered at the House of Worship and that the choir sings regularly. With this in mind, the choir participated in two community events in the past year that were

sponsored, respectively, by the Village of Wilmette and a local interfaith organization:

- A February 2022 event leading to the celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Village of Wilmette featured House of Worship Choir members as part of a mass choir composed of singers from several village congregations. The closing song, based on the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, featured the House of Worship choir director as soloist. In the course of preparing for the concert, the choir's director and members formed friendships in the wider community.
- The Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, sponsored by the New Trier Multifaith Alliance, was held at Winnetka Congregational Church in Winnetka, Illinois. This was the first time this long-standing event had reconvened since the beginning of the pandemic and was the choir's first in-person event in the wider community since 2020.

In addition to the above, the choir director conducted his fifth gospel music workshop with singers from across the country at the Chautauqua Institution in New York. This was the first such workshop in two years.

Visiting choirs

In 2022, the Forney and North Forney High School choirs visited the Bahá'í House of Worship from Texas to sing for the devotional program on Sunday, May 1. The group, which initially sang three a cappella pieces from the choir loft, was so excited to have the opportunity to sing in the Temple that they requested permission to also do so from the main floor. So after the devotional service,

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they sang several more songs where their parents and counselors could see them.

Annual Choral Festival returns

Some 130 singers participated in the 14th Annual [Bahá'í Choral Music Festival](#), which was resurrected in 2022 after not being held for two years during the pandemic. This was the largest gathering of any group at the House of Worship since pandemic restrictions were implemented, and the size of the audience further indicated that music, as a vital part of Bahá'í worship, attracts many guests to the House of Worship. The Choral Festival each year is attended by one of the largest non-Bahá'í audiences visiting the Temple and generates much anticipation in the surrounding communities.

Preparing for the festival required additional thinking about how to accommodate a large group of people in a way that enhances their spiritual experience at the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. The whole process—from planning to execution—emphasizes family and community building, and accompaniment and encouragement are key operational principles. To that end, participants are encouraged to invite their non-singing spouses, family members, and friends of the Faith to

be involved. The inclusion of selections from varied musical styles and based on several religious scriptures—sung by a diverse, multi-racial choir—further supports and expresses the oneness of both religion and humankind.

Music Department successes

The House of Worship Music Department subscribes to the principle, expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that *“music is one of the arts that is highly approved and is considered to be the cause of the exaltation of sad and desponding hearts.”* Based on this truth, the choir has increasingly selected music that addresses unusual and catastrophic events—in our nation and the world—with regards to racial justice and the oneness of humankind.

Furthermore, the choir director continues to be actively involved with several local church choir directors and racial justice groups in Chicago's North Shore neighborhoods.



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Office of Communications

The story unfolding in the Office of Communications over the past year is one of embracing new staff members, examining current processes, exploring possibilities, and envisioning growth—all in alignment with the Nine Year Plan.

The Office comprises several teams focused on creating and sharing a variety of content about the Bahá'í Faith. Team members strive to generate content that sparks interest and facilitates advancement along a path of engagement in the Faith's community-building activities.

Among the teams are those producing *The American Bahá'í*, a magazine published six times a year for members of the Bahá'í Faith, and *Brilliant Star* magazine for children. US Bahá'í Media Services focuses on video production and on providing AV support to major conferences and events. The Office of Inquiry Services handles incoming requests for information, and the Social Media Initiative team is learning about engagement through “Meaningful Conversations” dialogues promoted on social media.

Written news articles, features, audio stories, and video pieces are also shared in *US Baha'i News*, an electronic newsletter directed to a public audience via SoundCloud; on social media platforms; and the website of the Bahá'ís of the United States (www.bahai.us).

Embracing new staff members

The relaxation of pandemic-era hiring restrictions allowed the Office to advance considerably with the onboarding of four new staff members. Orientation and intensive training occurred in the early months of 2022. By Riḍván and the start of the new Bahá'í year, three of these new hires were well integrated into the rhythm of daily work and making eagerly-awaited contributions to workflow. The fourth person, a digital creation associate, joined the team in March.

The editorial team added a content acquisition editor—a new role—who is helping to look at ways content is being sourced, written, and shared across platforms. The editor serves as a vital link between the Office, the regions, and a growing team of diverse freelance content creators in the field.

The Office of Inquiry Services (IQS) added two new members, one of whom will primarily join those already working on the design and implementation of a new Inquiry Management System (IMS). The other will accompany seeker response coordinators across the country as they carry out their efforts to connect people expressing interest in the Faith with Bahá'ís in their localities through the seeker response network.

IQS is the initial contact point for the thousands of requests for information from the general public and members of the Bahá'í community that come in by way of 800-22-UNITE, online contact forms, and web chats.

The new IMS will better enable those serving in the seeker response network to follow up and connect with people who call, pose questions online, or engage in conversations as part of their spiritual search. The goal is to invite people to engage with community-building activities at the local level. The new system will also collect information about the topics that interest seekers. This information may inform future story coverage and content creation by the Office's publishing teams.

Refinements were being made to the new IMS up until the first phase of its launch in three regions—Appalachian, Atlantic, and South Central—late in 2022. It will eventually be used in all

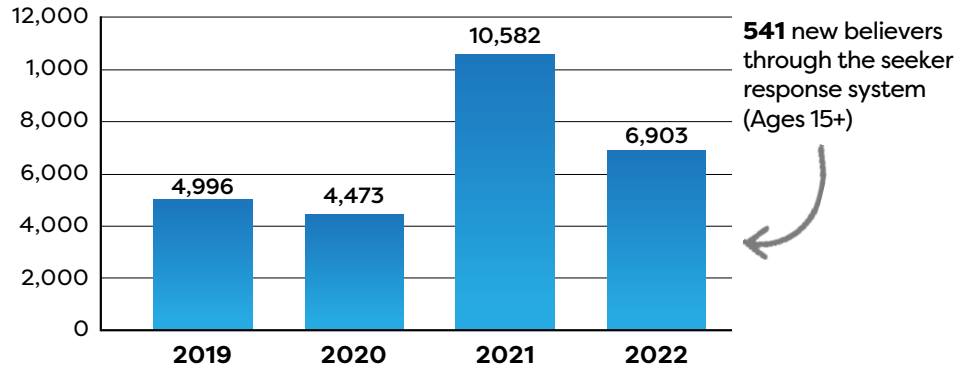
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Seekers inquiring through national portals



Individuals inquired through baha.us and bahaiteachings.org forms, or calling 800-22-UNITE

Seeker and new believer counts

Year	Count of seekers	Total new believers in United States (15+)	New believers who came through seeker response network	% of new believers who came through seeker response network
2022	6,903	539	359	66.6%
2021	10,582	513	394	76.8%
2010	4,473	519	354	68.2%
2019	4,996	657	377	57.4%

All date ranges are between January 1 and December 31 of the corresponding year.

The Office took steps toward its goal of refining content creation, promotion, distribution, and analysis by designating a content strategy team. This group will consult about big-picture issues such as finding optimal matches between platforms and certain types of stories, with an emphasis on clarity and accessibility.

13 regions. The business consultants who are developing the system are located in Ukraine. Despite major life disruptions due to the war there, they carried on diligently with their work, sometimes from temporary offices.

Prior to introducing the new system, IQS staff members prepared training materials, including quick-start guides and desk reference cards. They facilitated initial training sessions and introduced monthly online forums for small groups, allowing members of the regional coordinating teams to drop in, ask questions, and share their experiences using the new system. They also share insights gained into how to better serve seekers.

Examining current processes

Looking at how the Office currently approaches its work was one of the first steps in creating its goals for the Plan's first year. This examination was enhanced by the physical return to the Bahá'í National Center of a core team in July 2022. Team members experimented with hybrid operations and schedules, project management tools, and the repurposing of space and equipment, which included setting up recording and editing facilities for video and audio. Along the way, the team learned how to ensure that those still working remotely were routinely brought into conversations and consultations.

Several of the office's publications, including the *US Baha'i News* and a magazine-style piece titled [A Spiritual](#)

[Path to Unity and Social Justice: The Bahá'í Faith in America](#), were recognized with multiple [DeRose-Hinkhouse Awards](#) presented by the Religion Communicators Council.

Exploring possibilities and envisioning growth

The Office took steps toward refining content creation, promotion, distribution, and analysis by designating a content strategy team, which will consult about big picture issues such as finding optimal matches between platforms and certain story types, with an emphasis on clarity and accessibility.

Early in the year, the Office worked with the Regional Bahá'í Councils and grassroots communities to gather photos from the local conferences called for by the Universal House of Justice. The main objective was to encourage local communities to self-document their activities and processes as they learn to create their own narratives. Secondly, the Office compiled the material it received into a composite video that showed a diversity of styles, approaches, and people from across the country responding to the call for conferences.

The ongoing development of the [A Rich Tapestry](#) series by US Bahá'í Media Services involves undertaking some experiments to better understand what methods of storytelling and delivery will most effectively enhance the process of entry by troops. To this end, the team worked with local youth and junior youth camps in the Chicago area, filming their activities and assessing the most-effective ways to use the footage to attract more participants. It plans to report what it learns back to local institutions, camp organizers, and community members.

The Office continued to work closely with the Office of Information Technology and the National Bahá'í Archives to ensure the optimal usage and long-term preservation of its digital assets. A comprehensive media-asset-management system has been procured and is under development with the support of system integrators. The system will enhance the

Office's ability to manage, organize, and access all of its photos and videos, and will provide greater access to these assets for all stakeholders. Furthermore, it will ensure the safekeeping of these files for future generations and will facilitate their eventual transfer to the National Bahá'í Archives.

THE AMERICAN BAHÁ'Í

The American Bahá'í continued to evolve in its efforts to inform, inspire, educate, and unify the US Bahá'í community. In this first year of the Nine Year Plan, the magazine operated in a context of transition: in the evolving vision of its continued service to the national Bahá'í community, as part of the nascent content strategy being shaped by the Office of Communications, and in view of impending changes in staff.

The following were among the objects of learning that emerged in a series of reflections and consultations:

- Serving a US community that will experience the growth anticipated in this Plan, with both printed and digital editions
- Shaping the magazine's written and visual elements for a readership that is widely diverse in culture and in Bahá'í experience, especially to clarify its glimpses of the release of the society-building power of the Cause
- Increasing the effectiveness of collaborations with the Learning Desk and other agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly, in the interest of deepening the national community's understanding of how to support and advance Plan objectives and national initiatives
- Championing "living the Bahá'í life," with a special focus on young people and families
- Developing a digital edition of *The American Bahá'í* that is widely utilized (the ezine edition for iPad and Android tablets, whose circulation was limited, was discontinued after November 2022)

The American Bahá'í operated in a context of transition: in the evolving vision of its continued service to the national Bahá'í community, as part of the nascent content strategy being shaped by the Office of Communications, and in view of impending changes in staff.

In the six issues published since Rīdván 2022, much of the early focus was trained on the many conferences launching the Nine Year Plan across the country, as well as community-building activities both leading to and flowing from those conferences.



- Helping potential collaborators in every region develop their capacities for written and visual storytelling
- Preserving and maintaining a wealth of institutional knowledge as veteran staff members approach retirement and new staff and contributors are welcomed

The American Bahá'í is published six times per year and distributed to the US Bahá'í community in the traditional printed edition and in a PDF downloadable from the member services website (www.bahai.us/community). It is a news mainstay and a reinforcer of Bahá'í identity for tens of thousands of Bahá'í households from coast to coast. It serves to disseminate guidance from the senior institutions; to inspire and encourage the national community to carry forward the Divine Plan; and to share news of how Bahá'ís are acting on the national, regional, and local levels to build community, to further the Cause, and to benefit humanity.

In the six issues published since Riḍván 2022, much of the early focus was trained on the many conferences launching the Nine Year Plan across the country, as well as community-building activities both leading to and flowing from those conferences. A strong vein of content in the magazine dealt with efforts to address matters of race and working toward justice and the oneness of humanity. This coverage cast light on (among other elements) individual and community initiatives such as devotional and discourse spaces; efforts by local and regional institutions to create spaces for conversation and relationship building; and national-level action by such entities as the National Assembly's Office of Public Affairs, the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, and the National Center for Race Amity.

The publication benefits from regular collaborations with the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh; the Regional Bahá'í Councils; and national agencies including the Learning Desk, the Office of Public Affairs, the Bahá'í Distribution Service, *Brilliant Star*, Community

Administration, Assembly Development, Fund Development, Human Resources, Inquiry Services, Persian Public Information, and the Social Action Desk. Staff members also work with the Office of the Secretary to help produce the Annual Report.

BRILLIANT STAR

Brilliant Star helps to advance the Nine Year Plan through its twofold mission: to empower children and junior youths as world citizens working for the betterment of humanity; and to provide resources for teachers and parents to use in education and community building. The magazine's contents address timely themes in an accessible way, creating effective tools for sharing the Bahá'í Faith and contributing to public discourse.

This year, the following issues were in editorial development, production, and/or distribution: "Better Together," "One Garden," "Harmony with Nature," an issue on Life Skills, and an issue on Family and Community (Vol. 51, No. 6 – Vol. 52, No. 4).

Readers express enthusiasm for *Brilliant Star*, which the National Spiritual Assembly generously provides to all registered Bahá'í children in the United States ages 7–12:

"*Brilliant Star* makes me feel like a completely different person when I read it. It makes me feel important. I've learned that . . . kindness is the best virtue."

—Benjamin A., age 12, North Carolina

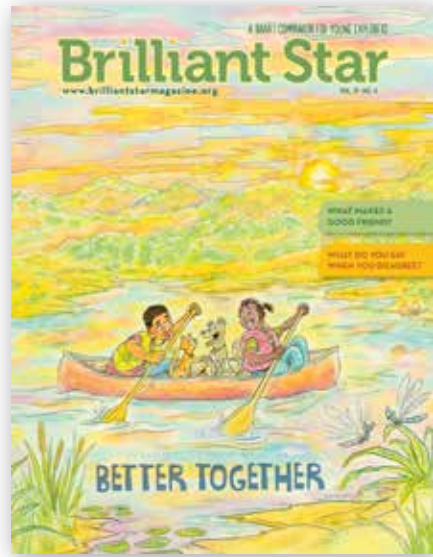
"I like how there are activities and I like how you can learn. When I read the stories about Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it helps me learn about them. I've learned to be kind and generous even if someone might be being mean to you."

—Violette Y., age 8, Virginia

One parent wrote: "[My son] has been scouring *Brilliant Star* magazines [going back to] 1983, reading hundreds

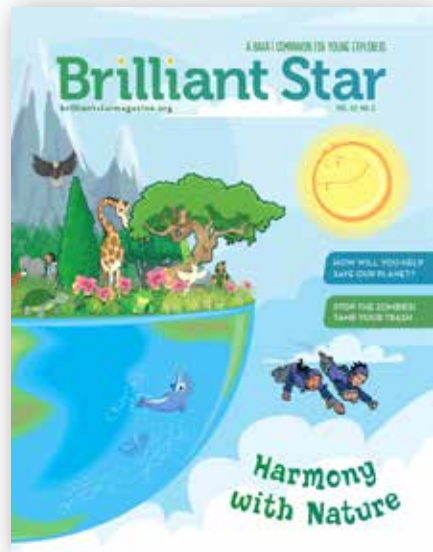
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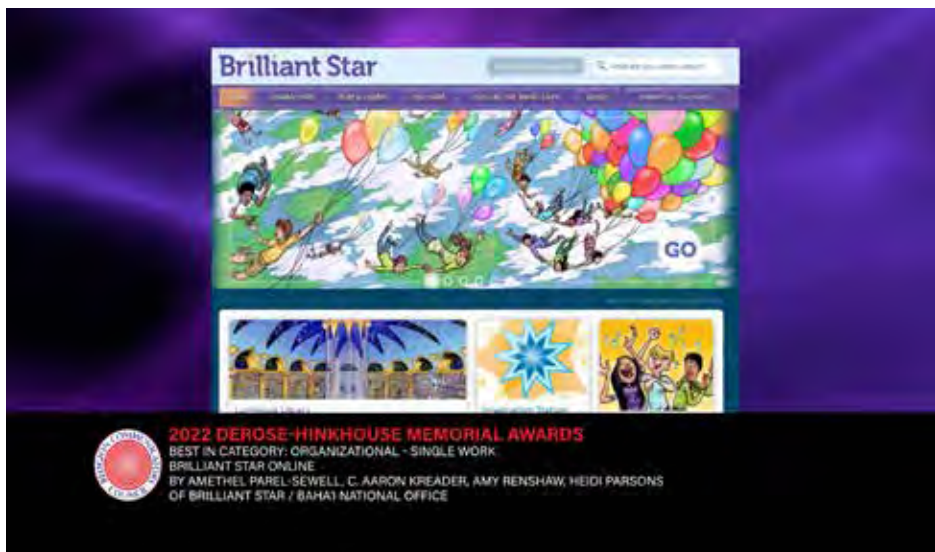
During the Nine Year Plan, the magazine aims to increase its direct engagement with children's classes, junior youth groups, and schools at the grass roots. This will help its creators to better identify the audience's needs and implement effective lines of action.



of stories . . . I just wanted to thank *Brilliant Star* for making all of this content. Even stories that are almost 40 years old are still engaging and instructional for a child. Thank you so much.”

In the past year, the magazine earned a [Mom's Choice Gold Award](#), a global sign of excellence in family-friendly materials. In addition, it received the Religion Communicators Council's DeRose-Hinkhouse “Best in Class” award for *Brilliant Star Online*, “Best in Category” honors for the 2021 series, and an Award of Excellence for the “Transforming Our Spirits” cover art by Mr. C. Aaron Kreader.





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and participants later shared nine-pointed stars they created with the app.

Brilliant Star Online remains essential for nurturing relationships with the magazine's global community of children, parents, and teachers. The Luminous Library, a searchable and printable PDF database, offers more than 50 magazine issues of content.

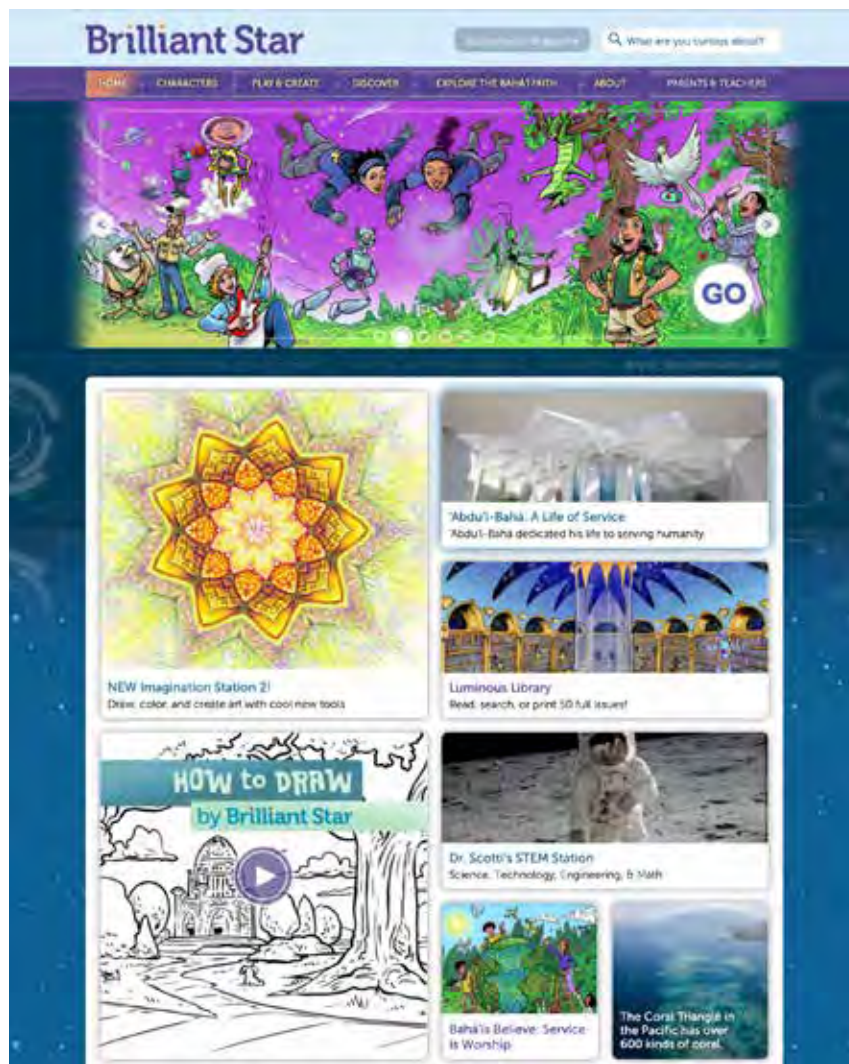
The *Brilliant Star* team has maintained its collaboration with the Office of Education and Schools. About 200 copies of "One Garden" were distributed for students at seasonal schools, and team members presented representatives of seasonal schools and Regional Bahá'í Councils with information about using the magazine with children, families, and communities. *Brilliant Star* is eager to continue collaborating with the schools as their coordination transitions to the Regional Councils.

During the Nine Year Plan, the magazine aims to increase its direct engagement with children's classes, junior youth groups, and schools at the grass roots. This will help its creators to better identify the audience's needs and implement effective lines of action. *Brilliant Star* seeks to diversify representation of content creators and audiences and publish more youth-generated content.

Dr. Stephen Scotti, a NASA distinguished research associate, continues to volunteer as the magazine's STEAMS (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math, and Spirituality) education advisor. He writes and provides constructive feedback about STEAMS-related content, answers reader questions, and connects the magazine's creators with astronauts and contributors.

Dr. Scotti also updated *Brilliant Star's* online art app, Imagination Station. Afterward he joined a livestream event with the magazine's designer/illustrator and children from around the world to launch the new version. The illustrator demonstrated tools for creating art with Imagination Station,

B *Brilliant Star* Online remains essential for nurturing relationships with the magazine's global community of children, parents, and teachers.



The magazine produced “*Brilliant Star’s* Treasure Box” for *The American Bahá’í* magazine to complement core activities, and provided complimentary *Brilliant Star* subscriptions to US children’s class teachers, junior youth group animators, schoolteachers, and counselors. This year, about 130 subscribing teachers reached at least 945 children. In Flint, Michigan, *Brilliant Star’s* content has been used at a public charter school. Magazine staff also provided a complimentary subscription to a Bahá’í-inspired school in Australia opening in 2023.

Balancing time and human resources for the magazine, website, and special projects is an ongoing challenge. Most of the team members work part time, and the pandemic has disrupted workflows and increased stress. Team members

are significantly behind schedule and continue to implement strategies to resume more timely distribution. The magazine’s headquarters moved in the past year into a new office at the Bahá’í National Center in Evanston, Illinois.

To promote communication, the team holds weekly video conferences to supplement daily discussions. They also hold an extremely valuable in-person annual meeting where they study guidance, develop editorial themes, present workshops to build team capacity, and strengthen team unity.

The *Brilliant Star* team is thankful for the opportunity to use its skills to help kids, junior youths, and adults “build communities that are havens of peace, places where a harried and conflict-scarred humanity may find shelter.”

Bahá'í Publishing Trust and Distribution Service

The past year was busy and productive for the Bahá'í Publishing Trust (BPT). The spring/summer 2022 season saw the release of several new titles, including the vibrantly designed prayer book *Strive: Prayers and Meditations for Youth*; an addition to the Change Maker series, *Warrior Grandma: The Patricia Locke Story*, by Littlebrave Beaston with illustrations by Luthando Mazibuko; and a new title in the Pause & Reflect series, *Meditations for Community*.

Spring 2022 also saw the launch of the first Bahá'í Publishers Summit, a weekend-long webinar hosted by BPT and the Wilmette Institute. It included panel discussions with the staffs of the Trust and publisher George Ronald, as well as multiple author presentations. Also published was a new edition of *The Nine Year Plan*, a booklet distributed to every Bahá'í household in the United States. New editions of the Bahá'í Wall Calendar and Bahá'í Datebook were published in the fall. *A Child in the Holy Land*, which presents stories of children interacting with members of the Holy Family, compiled by Gisu Mohadjer, was released at year's end. BPT also took over production of *The Call of the Divine Beloved* from World Centre Publications and produced the book's first BPT edition. Additionally, the editorial department conducted an overhaul of its digital assets for several key titles, creating new production files for reprints of *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, *Some Answered Questions*, and *God Passes By*.

The Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS) continued to serve as BPT's distribution arm and the primary distributor for Bahá'í World Centre Publications. Over the last year, BDS acquired nearly 75 new titles from independent publishers and self-published authors, resulting in nearly 1,200 titles being available through its website (BahaiBookstore.com). BDS also added seven new audiobooks and 13 new e-books to its portfolio. Additionally, the Service fulfills most product needs for national Bahá'í schools and provides subscriber services for *Brilliant Star* and

for international subscriptions to *The American Bahá'í*.

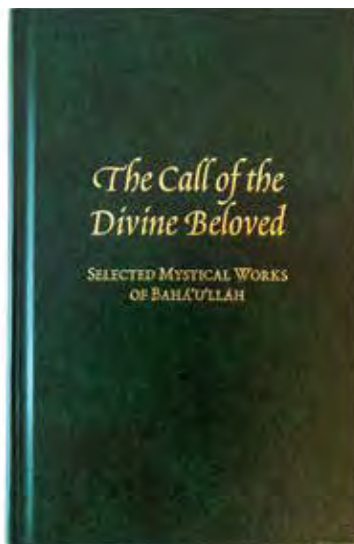
BPT increased the number of free e-book titles available through the online bookstore and expanded the languages in which they are offered to 15. During the past year, BDS customer service processed and shipped nearly 8,500 orders including 25,000 units, and BahaiBookstore.com logged more than 123,000 online sessions by more than 87,000 users, with approximately 460,000 page views.

As part of a BPT/author partnership, BPT collaborated with several outside agencies to promote the work of its authors. Events included an online fireside presentation of *A Child in the Holy Land* and a talk about *Anchor of Faith* at the Northern Virginia Bahá'í Center. The Trust continues seeking ways to support its authors' aspirations and reach out to and support the work of third-party initiatives.

BPT continues to expand marketing and communications efforts. A six-week Facebook campaign, including both static ads and videos, promoted two new individual titles—*A Spiritual Path to Unity & Social Justice: The Bahá'í Faith in America* and *Warrior Grandma: The Patricia Locke Story*. The Trust also participated in the Publishers Weekly "Grab-A-Galley" online promotion in conjunction with the annual American Library Association conference. The goal was to reach librarians and make them aware of BPT titles. In collaboration with the Independent Book Publishers'

BPT increased the number of free e-book titles available through the online bookstore and expanded the languages in which they are offered to 15.

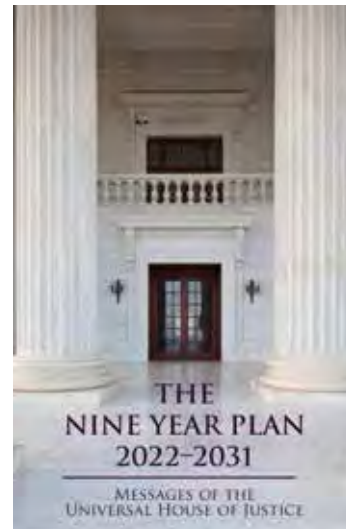
Key areas of focus included identifying publishing needs at the grass roots of community building and learning about the development of new titles through team building, consultation, and collaboration.

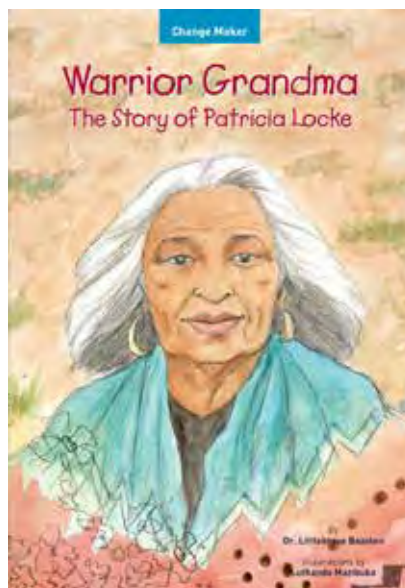
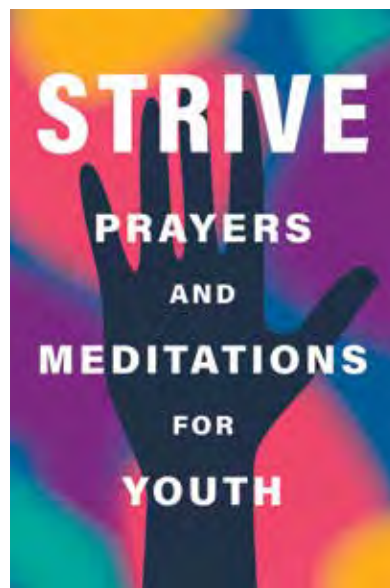
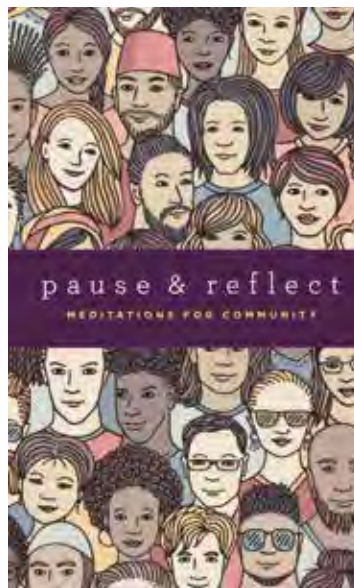
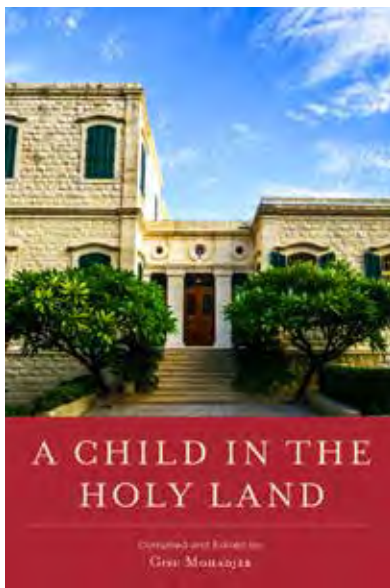


Association, four Change Maker titles were promoted in a full-page ad in the Association's spring 2023 catalog, which is distributed to more than 3,500 booksellers. BPT also sent two digital newsletters per week to more than 26,000 email addresses, promoting its items. This amounts to more than 100 email blasts over the course of a year.

The launch of the Nine Year Plan has inspired a great deal of consultation and reflection from which new lines of action have emerged. Key areas of focus included: identifying publishing needs at the grass roots of community building; identifying vital subject areas in which the BPT portfolio is lacking literature; and learning about the development of new titles through team building, consultation, and collaboration. Concerted efforts have been made to move away from a model entirely reliant on manuscript submissions toward one in which BPT actively identifies needs and opportunities and develops projects to meet them.

Several projects are at advanced stages. A team assembled to produce a booklet introducing the Bahá'í Faith to teenagers produced a first draft, which will soon be ready for field testing. Also, BPT began collaborating with an author to review materials for children under the age of five. A team of authors was convened to collaborate on a biography of the Hand of the Cause Roy Wilhelm, and the resulting manuscript is scheduled for a spring 2023 release. Other titles solicited and developed by BPT and expected for release this year and beyond are a new entry in the Change Maker series about the life of Elsie Austin, written by Gwen Etter-Lewis, and a book by Paul and Will Hanley about the agricultural village overseen by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Adasiyyih, Jordan. Another title to be released in spring 2023 is Michael Day's *Point of Adoration*, which explores the history of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.





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National Bahá'í Archives

The National Bahá'í Archives acquires, preserves, and provides access to materials documenting the history and activities of the National Spiritual Assembly and the United States Bahá'í community. This is in accord with Shoghi Effendi's guidance that: "The importance of the institution of Bahá'í Archives is not due only to the many teaching facilities it procures, but is essentially to be found in the vast amount of historical data and information it offers both to the present-day administrators of the Cause, and to the Bahá'í historians of the future." The most cherished possessions in the Archives are the collections of original Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and letters by Shoghi Effendi. The Archives also holds the permanent records of the National Spiritual Assembly and other Bahá'í institutions, and assists Local Spiritual Assemblies in the management of their records, supporting the development of administrative systems.

The Archives welcomes donations of the personal papers of Bahá'ís, as well as materials documenting all segments of the diverse and ever-changing community. Since Riḍván 2022 the Archives has received more than 114 collections of records, personal papers, photographs, and audiovisual materials. These included

- three Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and several original contribution receipts that He issued,
- two original letters by the Guardian,
- more than 57 collections or additions to the archival papers of individuals,
- audio and video recordings, and
- historical images.

Also received were 10 transfers of Bahá'í National Center records, and 10 transfers of the records of Bahá'í organizations and communities.

Archives staff arranged and described more than 62 linear feet of records and personal papers, and some 1,992 historical photographs were added to the photograph collection. The National Bahá'í Library—a special library of publications related to the Faith containing more than 20,000 items—was augmented by several donated personal and institutional library collections, in addition to books acquired by purchase. Cataloging

of these new resources has been suspended due to lack of shelf space in the current Archives location.

During the past year Archives staff responded to more than 276 reference requests from individuals, Spiritual Assemblies, and offices of the National Center. The Archives hosted five visiting researchers during the year. Approximately 480 people from 39 states and 16 countries also visited the display of relics and original Bahá'í Writings. Furthermore, staff members assisted researchers remotely by producing digital copies of historical documents, audio recordings, and moving images. The Archives provided historical images and documents for two academic books and articles, several websites, a motion picture project, and other online resources.

Renovation and construction of the new Archives building near the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, is expected to begin soon and continue throughout 2023. The building will be structurally reinforced and refitted with modern high-quality utilities, fire protection and security, climate control systems, and new, dignified furnishings. The early 20th-century limestone façade will be restored to its historic appearance. The storage system, to occupy two-thirds of the building's interior, will feature custom-designed mobile shelving cabinets

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to maximize efficiency, security, and convenience. The continuing generosity of the friends in contributing to the special Archives Fund to support the construction of the much-needed new building is acknowledged with deep appreciation.

Those serving at the Archives continue to study how best to preserve and provide access to digital materials and audiovisual recordings. A significant achievement during the past year was the implementation of a new digital asset management system to maintain and catalog AV and other digital resources of historical importance—a collaborative line of action with US Bahá'í Media Services. At the same time, digitization of legacy audiovisual recordings has continued with a primary focus on videotapes in obsolete formats, which, as the most-endangered physical medium, must be quickly saved as digital files or lost. To date, nearly 9,000 archival video recordings have been digitized, including historical interviews and talks, scenes at National Conventions, and footage from Bahá'í activities around the world. Some of this archival video footage has appeared in motion pictures produced by the Bahá'í World Center and by other creators. Additionally, the Archives holds many thousands of audio recordings that were digitized in previous years.

Part of the Archives' mission is to assist Bahá'í agencies and Spiritual Assemblies to manage their own records. Good record keeping helps all

Bahá'í organizations to carry out their responsibilities on behalf of a growing community. Because the records of today become the archives of the future, investment in record-keeping practices brings both near-term and future benefits. However, maintaining trustworthy digital records that stand the test of time can be challenging, especially in circumstances with inconsistent staffing, so the Archives advises Spiritual Assemblies to retain paper copies of their most important documents whenever possible. Guidelines for Spiritual Assembly and community archives can be found in chapter 4 of *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies*, which can be found online (bahai.us/community/resources). A supplement related to archives is available on the same website or upon email request (archives@usbnc.org).





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Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project

The Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project began decades ago as an effort to provide a reliable, comprehensive reference work on the Bahá'í Faith. In the 1980s the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran was attracting extensive international attention, but information about the Faith in published sources was scattered, fragmentary, and often inaccurate.

The task of producing a reference volume or series of volumes faced huge initial challenges on many fronts. Some were foreseen, others not. Early in its second decade, the project's then-current plan to publish a short A-Z encyclopedia in two volumes gave way to more provisional approaches in terms of both content and medium of publication. In December 2006 the Universal House of Justice approved the project's proposal to post an interim selection of articles online while proceeding to develop a larger reference work. These short- and long-term goals met another challenge in late 2008, when the Encyclopedia Project was downsized in response to the world economic crisis.

as well as to the public. Participants in Ruhi Institute study circles have commented that a number of the articles have proved especially useful in their learning process. Many articles provide information that can be elusive or unavailable in the English language.

Each year the website attracts many thousands of readers from the United States and abroad. The overwhelming majority continue to be first-time visitors; during 2022–2023, 80 percent were new to the site. More than 60 percent of visitors were from the United States. That percentage continues to decrease slightly each year as more users from around the world discover this valuable resource. This past year



Launched in April 2009, the Encyclopedia Project's website (bahai-encyclopedia-project.org) offers a selection of signed articles—detailed, meticulously researched, and illustrated—of interest to Bahá'ís

the largest numbers of international visitors were from the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. Hundreds more were from non-English-speaking countries, especially including China.

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Once again, the most-read article in the past year was “Hands of the Cause of God” by Eunice Braun and the editors. The articles with the next largest numbers of readers were “Children” by Nancy A. Davis and the editors; “Mashriqu'l-Adhkár” by Julie Badiee and the editors; “Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbas” by Firuz Kazemzadeh; and “Administration, Bahá'í” by Glenford E. Mitchell. Biographical articles on Mírzá Yahyá and Mírzá Mihdí and on early Western Bahá'ís—ranging from Richard St. Barbe Baker to Louis Gregory—are also among the most-widely read.

The Encyclopedia Project has amassed hundreds of draft articles written by authors from around the world. From these a range of articles on history and biography; the literature of the Bahá'í Faith; and its laws, institutions, and teachings have been approved for final editing once the difficulties that have hindered further development of the project's web presence can be overcome.

To support its continued existence, even in its current form, the Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project depends on earmarked contributions and volunteer service. Thus, the generosity of individual Bahá'ís is essential to both

maintaining this unique reference work and eventually enabling it to develop further.

“Far from being a diversion from the worldwide effort to advance the process of entry by troops,” a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 24, 2008, states, “Bahá'í scholarship can be a powerful reinforcement to that endeavour and a valuable source of new enquirers.” Thus, the works of scholarship made available by the Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project provide a valuable tool in meeting the goals of the Nine Year Plan. As the House of Justice wrote in its letter dated December 30, 2021, “It will be up to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh to provide, in the world of ideas, the intellectual rigor and clarity of thought to match their commitment to spiritual and material progress in the world of deeds.”

The Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project responds to emailed comments and inquiries (encyclopedia@usbnc.org), encourages visits to its website, and looks forward to continuing to serve as a valued resource for many years to come.

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The open-ended network of reviewers consists primarily of authors and artists who have themselves submitted materials for review, thus continually building the community's collective capacity to uphold the review standards for accuracy and dignity across a wide diversity of fields.

Office of Review

The literature review process was initiated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a temporary measure to protect the Bahá'í Faith while in its early stages of development. This requirement has been continued to date by the Guardian and by the Universal House of Justice, which, in a letter dated December 29, 1988, wrote: "[F]ar from adopting a carefree attitude, the community must be conscious of the necessity to present a correct view of itself and an accurate understanding of its purpose to a largely skeptical public."

While still a temporary measure, pre-publication review continues to ensure that works produced by Bahá'í authors and artists represent the Bahá'í Faith accurately and with dignity. A third criterion is timeliness—whether a work may endanger the friends or be unwise to distribute for another reason.

The review of literature and audiovisual materials (including films and music) is carried out by the Office of Review, in collaboration with a network of reviewers around the country. Local Spiritual Assemblies are responsible for reviewing literature that is for local use only, as well as all "special materials" produced by individuals in their jurisdiction, whether intended for local or national distribution; examples of these may include artwork and graphic creations, greeting cards, jewelry, and T-shirts. Publication of certain translations and historical documents is subject to additional protective approval requirements at the international level.

In general, the policy of review does not apply to the Internet medium, particularly personal web pages and blogs, where content is amenable to easy change and revision, individual initiative is strongly encouraged, and learning through multiple experiences is valued. In the case of more-formal online undertakings, such as e-books or articles in online journals with institutional sponsorship, the policy of review does apply.

A learning process

Among the aims of the Office are to nurture a consultative approach to review, to educate authors and artists new to the process about review standards

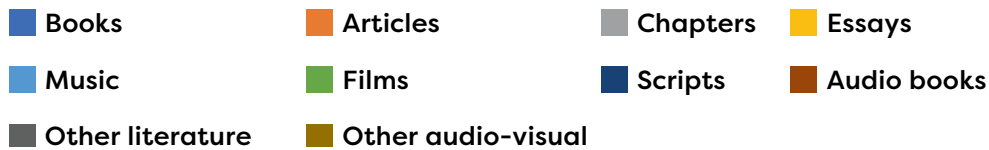
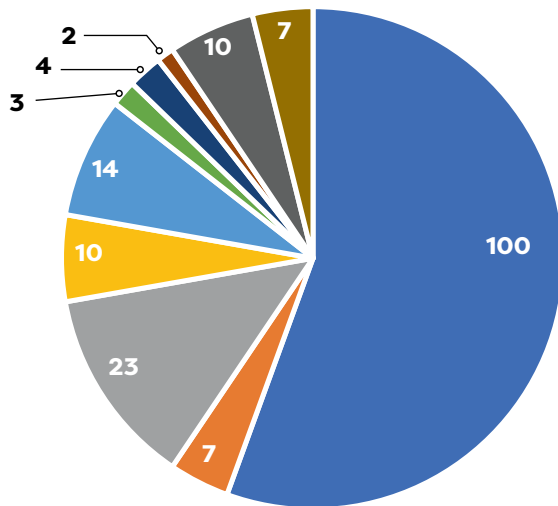
and purposes, and to foster a spirit of collaboration among all involved. As the Universal House of Justice wrote in a letter dated December 10, 1992, Bahá'ís should look upon review "in this early stage in the development of the Faith [as] a species of peer review which they welcome, since it is primarily among their fellow Bahá'ís that they would find at this time those who would have sufficiently wide and deep understanding of the Faith and its Teachings to raise issues of importance which they would want to consider before publication."

The open-ended network of reviewers consists primarily of authors and artists who have themselves submitted materials for review, thus continually building the community's collective capacity to uphold the review standards for accuracy and dignity across a wide diversity of fields. Authors are frequently asked to recommend reviewers, and in some cases reviewers and authors may choose to consult with each other directly. The Office of Review fosters this learning process both as it carries out its daily work and as it addresses newly emerging review questions in consultation with authors, artists, and reviewers in accordance with the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Systems and statistics

All submissions are received in electronic form. The 180 submissions in the past year represent an increase of 2.3 percent over the previous year, and an increase of 13 percent over the preceding five-year average of 159 submissions. Approximately 87 percent of submissions were literature, and 13 percent audiovisual materials. The

180 submissions to Review Office by genre – 2022



wide variety of items reviewed includes articles, chapters, nonfiction books, novels, memoirs, compilations, magazines, comics, poetry, essays, children’s materials, games, sheet music, pamphlets, scripts, films, songs, and CDs.

Authors and artists are generally asked to allow approximately three to four months for review of a book, eight weeks for an article, and four weeks for a CD. Many reviews are completed more quickly than this and some require more time, depending on the length and complexity of the work and the availability of reviewers. In addition to reviewing new cases, the Office responds to a steady stream of general correspondence, specific inquiries, and resubmissions.

In their diversity, range, and depth, the materials being created by Bahá’í authors and artists include work intended to contribute directly or indirectly to the community-building work, to spiritual

transformation, to public and academic discourse, and to new approaches to social action. It is a privilege to witness the creativity and devotion inspired by the Message of Bahá’u’lláh as expressed by the talented and dedicated friends with which the US Bahá’í community is blessed.

The Review Office added a second staff member in late 2022, and continues to work with a diverse and expanding group of volunteer reviewers.

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Office of Human Resources

The Office of Human Resources strives, on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly, to build capacity for service among those working for the Bahá'í National Organization (BNO). In its work, the Office also consults with Bahá'í institutions at regional and local levels as they gain experience addressing human resources-related issues. In all its lines of action, the Office endeavors to build capacity for service among Bahá'ís and, by extension, in the wider community.

To advance the BNO as a collaborative workspace, the Office employs methods of each phase of the Divine Plan, including the underlying principles associated with the community-building process. Through its participation in two groups—the Learning Group and Group 31—it supports the development of the BNO culture in areas such as the eradication of racism, a spirit of selfless service, a deep appreciation of systematic learning, and the ongoing pursuit of excellence. The fruits of these efforts gave expression to new patterns of thought and action and helped foster an environment of mutual love and support.

Learning Group

The purpose of the Learning Group is to increase coherence between the operations of the BNO and the concepts, methods, and approaches of the community-building work of the Faith. The Group chooses as its primary emphasis the application in BNO workspaces of three core elements of the Plan: to further understand what it means to be engaged in a learning process; to read reality; and to study, consult, act, and reflect within office spaces. The Group leads regular meetings to diffuse knowledge, build connections,

provide opportunities for consultation, and initiate conversations about themes relevant to the qualities and attitudes the BNO seeks to promote in its workspace culture. The Group also organizes regular office narratives across the BNO to help further understanding of the learning and progress taking place in the organization. The promotion of discourse among diverse BNO staff members who represent the various protagonists of the Plan builds their capacity to serve at individual and institutional levels, and fosters personal engagement in staff members' home communities.

In 2021, the Learning Group organized a 12-month “values process,” engaging all staff in facilitated small-group consultation to explore how Bahá'í values and principles operate within the organization and where they need to be strengthened. This informed the drafting of *Bahá'í National Organization Purpose and Core Principles*. This document is intended to provide a basis for learning throughout the organization, as well as to further develop systems for hiring, staff orientation, collective decision-making, accountability, and the continued evolution of administrative structures within the BNO.

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In 2021, the Learning Group organized a 12-month “values process,” engaging all staff in facilitated, small-group consultation. This informed the drafting of *Bahá'í National Organization Purpose and Core Principles*.

Through regular consultation and interaction, the Office supports the implementation of the Policy for the Protection of Children, Junior Youth, and Youth within the regions, and the regional clearance processes for those serving with minors.

In 2022, the Learning Group launched the implementation of the core principles through a systematic process of learning. It identified two initial offices which it could accompany through the systematic application of a core principle. The offices studied the document, identified an area upon which it wanted to focus its learning, and set up a two–three week cycle of action.

Staff devotionals

To foster a devotional spirit within the organization, the Office sponsored two regular weekly devotional gatherings. In these spaces, reflection and elevated conversation take place, encouraging spiritual qualities and their application in BNO offices.

Collaboration with Regional Bahá'í Councils

The Office also supports Regional Bahá'í Councils in their administrative processes related to the engagement of human resources at local and regional

levels. Through regular consultation and interaction, the Office supports the implementation of the Policy for the Protection of Children, Junior Youth, and Youth within the regions, and the regional clearance processes for those serving with minors. Additionally, due to the close collaboration between the Office and Regional Councils, much has been learned about institutional support for individuals who offer a period of service within clusters and regions.

The Office of Human Resources, in collaboration with all BNO offices and local and regional institutions, strives to reflect its unshakable commitment to the pursuit of Bahá'u'lláh's vision within the organization and to inspire individual and collective transformation for greater levels of service.



Office of Information Technology

The Office of Information Technology (IT) provides case and document management, digital preservation, email and telecommunications, help desk support, data analysis and reporting services, and several enterprise applications to the offices and agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly and Regional Bahá'í Councils. The Office also offers support for many applications to Local Spiritual Assemblies, registered Bahá'í groups, and individual believers.

IT's Operations section at the Bahá'í National Center has evolved, particularly during the pandemic years. The services it provides include virtualization, cloud computing, and support for working from home. With this advancement comes the strengthening of the Bahá'í National Organization's security in both the physical and virtual environments.

Select enterprise-level services: national, regional, and local

IT organizational development.

Conscious of the impact information technology has on social reality, and arising from an enterprise architecture audit conducted in 2021, an Architecture Review Team (ART) and a Program Management Office (PMO) have been established at the National Center. The ART provides technical and scientific advice to the chief information officer and will be called upon to validate technical innovation and monitor technical solutions to ensure the upkeep of IT policies and standards. The PMO will ensure all projects are monitored and receive the support they need for the timely execution of projects.

Case management system. A new case management solution titled ARK has been created initially for the Offices of the Secretariat and Community Administration, expected to be put to use by Naw-Rúz 2023. ARK allows for more-efficient recording and retrieval of all communications, documents, and other files stored at the National Center's document repository without compromising the security of the information it contains.

Finance system. The finance system has undergone various changes to better serve our communities, particularly young people, and to enhance various aspects of integration with other services. Work has also begun to analyze the requirements for the finance system's next generation to better serve both the National Center and, in time, regional and local institutions.

Seeker Response System and Inquiry

Management System. Transition from the Seeker Response System (SRS) to the new Inquiry Management System (IMS) has been successful. For the time being the support for SRS continues. IMS has begun to be implemented in the South Central, Atlantic, and Appalachian regions. The learning regarding its usability is being recorded and shared with the development team to inform further development and improve the system. It is anticipated that additional regions will begin using this new system in 2023.

Online Balloting System. Facilitating online elections since 2021, the Online Balloting System (OBS) continued to be enhanced for the benefit of users, which include voters, Local Spiritual Assembly secretaries, and election tellers. For the first time, OBS will be available to the communities conducting two-stage elections of Spiritual Assemblies. The data collected through OBS can now automatically transfer to the existing membership database. Work continues on the integration between OBS and existing systems.

Conscious of the impact information technology has on social reality, and arising from an enterprise architecture audit conducted in 2021, an Architecture Review Team and a Program Management Office have been established at the National Center.

IT is formulating approaches to the design and development of systems and applications in accordance with accessibility standards for blind and visually impaired users. Currently, the OCS and OBS development teams are working diligently to make these applications accessible in this way.

Online Contribution System. Fine-tuning continued for features of the Online Contribution System (OCS) for its three primary types of users: individuals, local treasurers, and Local Spiritual Assembly members. For its internal users in the Office of the Treasurer, two major new modules in OCS are in use. These include one to manage non-cash contributions and one to assist Local Spiritual Assemblies in preparing and submitting their annual audits online. A new external module, for Local Assemblies to use in submitting their audits, is expected to be made available in mid-May 2023.

Statistical and analytics services. The analytics team continued to advance the deployment of methods, techniques, and instruments to better visualize the gathered statistics. Customized visual reports and interactive maps are now available to more offices of the Bahá'í National Organization as well as to Regional Bahá'í Councils and Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Security enhancement. During the past year, a two-pronged security strategy included implementing mandatory security awareness training for staff and fortifying defenses around critical infrastructure and data. It is expected that this enhanced security posture will be further strengthened through the adoption and implementation of a formal IT security governance framework.

Qualified consultants conducted IT penetration tests—an effective way to discover weaknesses in IT infrastructure, allowing IT to remediate vulnerabilities. Findings will result in action items to be implemented throughout 2023.

Supporting infrastructure services. Proper operation of information technology services requires a firm and secure foundation for networking, hardware, servers, and databases to work in harmony and remain secure. IT has

continued diligently to maintain these essential computing services by applying security solutions, replacing obsolete servers and applications, and employing essential hardware and networking components (as well as ensuring they are properly upgraded and secured).

Accessibility. IT is formulating approaches to the design and development of systems and applications in accordance with accessibility standards for blind and visually impaired users. Currently, the OCS and OBS development teams are working diligently to make these applications accessible in this way.

Alignment with the Plan

In addition to the consultations routinely carried out in various staff meetings, IT organized a three-day retreat for all its staff members at the National Center offices to reflect on various aspects of the Nine Year Plan, particularly focused on how technologies can be developed to support Plan priorities.

To foster unity, staff participated in planning. A series of visualization exercises was intended to help unify the vision and inform development of plans. Devotional and social activities brought the team closer together; staff members shared about themselves and reflected on how they coped during the pandemic. An important part of the retreat was a videoconference with the BNO's overseas application development partners.

MEMBERSHIP AND RECORDS

The Office of Membership and Records is responsible for maintaining the official records for all Bahá'ís, Local Spiritual Assemblies, and registered groups in the US community. In this capacity, the Office

- processes enrollments, child registrations, and international transfers into and out of the United States;

- provides access to UnityWeb and the member services website for approved foreign Bahá'ís;
- makes changes to the database when locality boundaries change;
- enters results for Riḍván elections, Spiritual Assembly officer elections, and by-elections;
- records contact information and postal addresses, marriages, and the verified decease of members of the Bahá'í community;
- provides marriage and birth certificates;
- issues digital welcome letters and instructions on how to access virtual Bahá'í identification cards on the Bahai.us mobile application for all new enrollees, and new arrivals to the US Bahá'í community;
- issues hard copy welcome packages to registered Bahá'í youths turning 15, which include a welcome letter, a Bahá'í ID card, and instructions for creating a Bahá'í Online Services Account (BOSA) and downloading the Bahai.us mobile app; and
- captures and digitizes correspondence sent by individuals and institutions to the National Spiritual Assembly and its offices and agencies. This year the Office uploaded 27,944 items into the national database. Team members uploaded 23,956 while 3,988 were uploaded through an automated process.

Improving the accuracy of addresses in the National Spiritual Assembly's database

An ongoing task is to improve the accuracy of individual addresses stored in the national membership database by using National Change of Address (NCOA) reports produced by the US Postal Service. During 2022–23, the Office updated 3,977 personal addresses using this report. Team members in this Office also made 9,568 address or name

changes that were reported through phone calls and emails. For statistics on more Membership transactions, see the “Selected membership statistics” table on page 9.

Support for BNO applications

The Office of Membership and Records is the first line of support in the use of the following applications maintained by the Bahá'í National Organization: eMembership2, Bahá'í Online Service Accounts (BOSA), the Online Balloting System (OBS), and the Bahai.us mobile app. In this position, team members often walk the friends step-by-step through application features over the phone or by email for eMembership2, creating a BOSA, or identifying where they are in the OBS election reporting process. Particularly for OBS, team members provide support during evening hours, Holy Days, and weekends for the various Bahá'í elections: Riḍván, Unit Convention, and the Regional Bahá'í Councils. During elections the office also answers questions in Crisp, an online chat support feature in OBS.

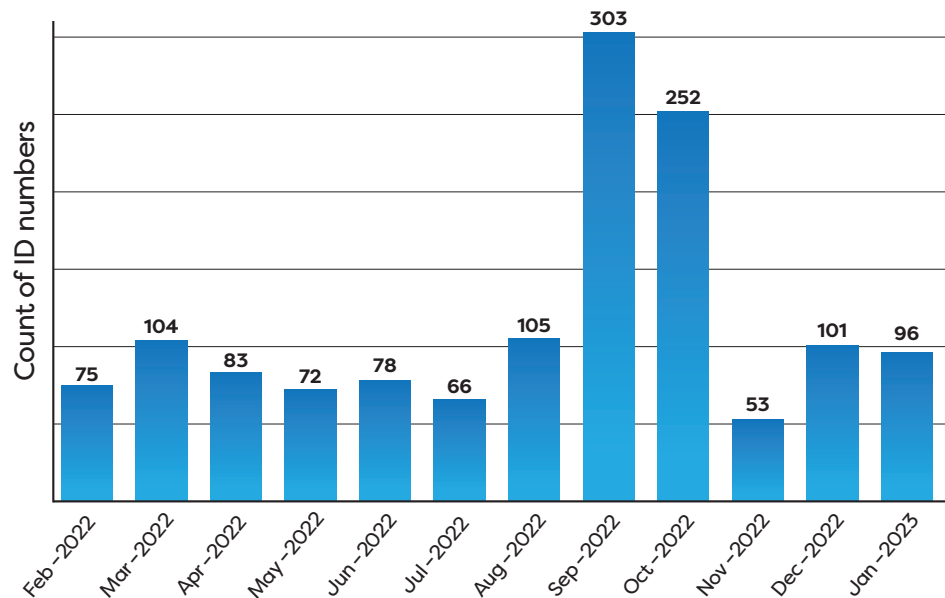
Community accompaniment through webinars

The Office is responsible for providing webinars and materials to accompany the friends in utilizing the online services mentioned in the previous section. During 2022–23 the Office concentrated its webinars on BOSA, the Bahai.us mobile app, and eMembership2. Panelists from other offices, such as Community Administration and the OBS Development Team, are routinely called upon to address crossover questions that occur during the webinars. Of the eight webinars presented, half were offered on evenings and weekends to accommodate the friends' various schedules.

BOSA and mobile app webinars. On four dates in February, the Office offered the webinar “Introduction to BOSA and the Bahai.us Mobile App.” It demonstrated how to create a BOSA, how parents can use the new self-service child registration

During 2022–23, the Office updated 3,977 personal addresses using National Change of Address (NCOA) reports produced by the US Postal Service. Team members in this Office also made 9,568 address or name changes that were reported through phone calls and emails.

Number of BOSA created by year – month



feature, and how to access community mapping features in both www.bahai.us/community and the Bahai.us mobile app. Finally, it showed participants where to find their virtual Bahai ID card and the searchable *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies* in the mobile app.

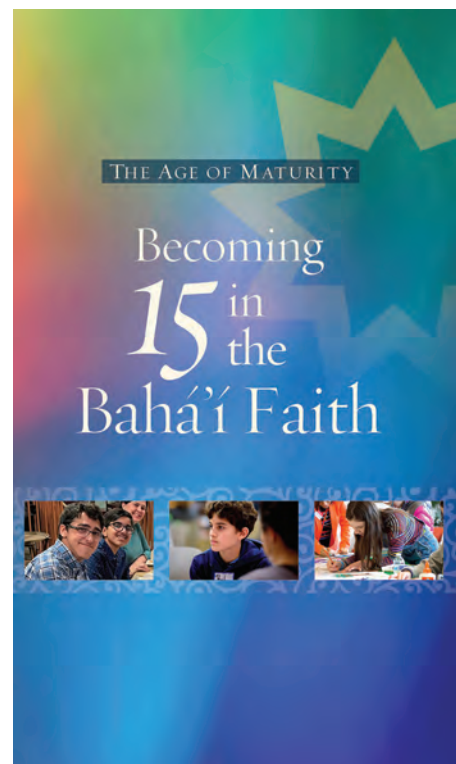
For the year from February 2022 through January 2023, 1,388 new BOSAs were created (see chart above for a month-by-month breakdown). Additional BOSA and Bahai.us app webinars were offered in February 2023.

eMembership2 Riḍván election reporting webinars. A webinar on reporting elections in eMembership2 was offered four times in April 2022. These webinars covered reporting Assembly elections and officers' elections, as well as tips on changing the contact person for the local Bahá'í community's contact person; each ended with a question-and-answer session. A total of 267 people attended.

Youth Acknowledgement Project

Since March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, registered Bahá'ís turning 15 years of age were issued digital youth acknowledgement letters, along with instructions for creating a Bahá'í Online Services Account (BOSA) and downloading the Bahai.us mobile

app, through which they could access their virtual Bahá'í ID card. Starting in 2023 the Office has been sending physical Bahá'í ID cards and a newly designed youth acknowledgement letter in a packet, allowing those turning 15 to have both a virtual and a physical Bahá'í ID card. Approximately 1,600 youth acknowledgement packets were sent out.



During 2022–23 the Office concentrated its webinars on BOSA, the Bahai.us mobile app, and eMembership2. Panelists from other offices, such as Community Administration and the OBS Development Team, are routinely called upon to address crossover questions that occur during the webinars.

Logistics and Support Services

The Office of Logistics and Support Services has operated since 2016 to assist offices and agencies of the Bahá'í National Organization (BNO) in consolidating and coordinating resources, aiming toward greater efficiency and effective cost management. Logistics and Support Services also oversees mailroom services, meetings and events, centralized purchasing, office furniture inventory, and front desk operations at the Bahá'í National Center. The Office has continued to establish more-streamlined procurement functions across the organization, which entails coordinating numerous lines of action in collaboration with other BNO offices to more efficiently disseminate information and facilitate transactions. Research into new ways to improve purchasing systems at the Bahá'í National Center continues, including efforts to create a national procurement office with the goal of achieving concentrated purchasing power at lower cost.

Meetings and events

Those in the Office responsible for meetings and events typically manage logistical details pertaining to events that occur multiple times a year. These include the meetings of the National Spiritual Assembly and BNO staff reflection gatherings; annual events, including the Bahá'í National Convention, the Bahá'í Choral Festival, and the Arab American Conference, which transitioned to an online platform this year; board meetings and other gatherings serving the Huqúqu'lláh Trust, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, the Wilmette Institute, Persian Bahá'í Media Service, and Regional Training Institutes; and Treasurer's Office fundraising events.

Mailroom services

The mailroom has continued to facilitate routine mailings, including seeker response packets and other bulk mail projects. The mailroom also performs custom print job projects for various departments, where feasible, rather than sending them to off-site printers, resulting in cost-savings for the BNO.

Front desk

The front desk switchboard position continues to be shared by Office staff in a spirit of collaboration.

The Office will continue to cross-train staff to serve in all of its areas of endeavor: purchasing, meetings and events, mailroom, and front desk duties. In this spirit of service, staff will support the Office to meet the needs of the National Spiritual Assembly and its offices and agencies.



The mailroom has continued to facilitate routine mailings, including seeker response packets and other bulk mail projects. The mailroom also performs custom print job projects for various departments, where feasible, rather than sending them to off-site printers.

Office of Operations

The Office of Operations strives to promote, sustain, and drive coherent operation within the Bahá'í National Organization (BNO), especially among departments that supply critical support services for the organization, with an eye toward carrying out the National Spiritual Assembly's strategic vision. These efforts are spearheaded by the chief operations officer (COO) through the coordination of projects and the accompaniment of department managers.

Staff members include a business analyst and a systems analyst, who operate in consultation with strategic and tactical committees and task forces. The Office has steadily evolved in alignment with its primary objective of ensuring that paths are created that allow for continuous improvement in interdepartmental collaboration, organizational governance, and resource management.

Office evolution and its areas of focus

When the National Assembly created the COO position several years ago, one of the first identified tasks was to begin providing independent quality assessment for the BNO as the need arose—with emphases on business analysis/research and strategic planning. This entailed, on one hand, developing collaboration between the COO and the National Assembly secretary, support services, department managers, and other agencies; and, on the other, having the business analyst conduct long-range projects that focused on various facets of the BNO and required collaboration across departments.

The addition of the systems analyst, who focuses on technical elements of information systems, added the dimension of working to properly identify and meet users' needs for systems and applications. The new capability of applying both a business and a technical focus to the procurement of new information systems holds much promise.

During the administrative year 2021–22, the need to enhance strategic planning coordination and collaboration at the organizational level resulted in the formation of an ad hoc enterprise architecture team. Enterprise architecture is

regarded as a key way to achieve advanced capacity and efficiency through information technology. With each step taken there was a certain milestone in mind, a certain need to be met, all with the aim of contributing to the advancement of the organization.

As the Office has evolved, certain patterns have developed that well define how it works. Foremost, nearly every line of action is either in collaboration with or in support of other departments of the BNO. Further, nearly every strategy, system, or project the Office works on involves advancing the service capability of a department as a whole. In this way, the Office has steadily evolved in alignment with its primary objective of ensuring that paths are created that allow for continuous improvement in interdepartmental collaboration, organizational governance, and resource management. Whether ensuring that the systems purchased through the sacrificial contributions of the Bahá'í community deliver the necessary value, or creating environments that enable staff members to work more effectively, the Office of Operations has tried to maintain a service-minded focus with a creative sensibility.

Reflections

As the Office looks to the future, the possibilities in its scope have a common theme of leveraging a collaborative mode of operating to continually deliver greater value to the organization. In each case, it appears essential to expand the Office's knowledge base as well as its continuing conversations with other departments. It is driven to deliver measurable results in its service to the National Spiritual Assembly and its constituent base, while acknowledging the need to allow things to develop organically.

The addition of the systems analyst, who focuses on technical elements of information systems, added the dimension of working to properly identify and meet users' needs for systems and applications. The new capability of applying both a business and a technical focus to the procurement of new information systems holds much promise.

Properties Office

The Properties Office is responsible for the stewardship of more than 250 structures comprising some 300,000 square feet of occupied space owned by the National Spiritual Assembly, along with many acres of grounds, landscapes, and gardens. Properties managers and staff, who are experienced in overseeing construction and repair projects, employ new technology and methods to reduce costs and improve maintenance, custodial care, groundskeeping, and repairs.



Building unity and capacity while reducing costs

During closures forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, Properties staff performed many needed repair and refurbishment projects after acquiring the necessary certifications and skills in areas such as painting, electrical, carpentry, upholstery, plumbing, and flooring installation. Staff have saved the National Bahá'í Fund hundreds of thousands of dollars by performing these tasks themselves, in addition to completing their regular tasks.

Some staff members are given management positions after a significant period of service. Managers still participate in on-site tasks and collaborate with staff as they develop solutions and promote teamwork. Through the embrace of multiple skills, the staff is about 50 percent smaller than it was 20 years ago, while the number

of properties being managed in the Evanston and Wilmette, Illinois, area is almost 50 percent higher.

Focus on Bahá'í principles and embracing the Faith

Although most staff members are not registered Bahá'ís, all express a desire to care for and maintain the Temple and surrounding properties. Over the past year, some team members and outside contractors have enrolled as Bahá'ís and are now active in community life. Properties staff are beginning to work with the Temple director to create opportunities for volunteers to participate in the care of the Temple and gardens. This will not only save funds but also allow volunteers, including youths, to develop their capacities for service.

Development of House of Worship and adjacent properties

In addition to the growing number of

Properties staff are beginning to work with the Temple director to create opportunities for volunteers to participate in the care of the Temple and gardens. This will not only save funds but also allow volunteers, including youths, to develop their capacities for service.

Multiple properties have recently been purchased and are being refurbished and repurposed for use by Bahá'í institutions, volunteers, and outside participants. Properties staff are providing these services when possible.



daily visitors, activities at the House of Worship, not only for Bahá'ís but also for nearby agencies and neighborhood groups, are expanding. This has demonstrated a need for additional meeting space and accommodations. In response, Properties is working to further develop the Temple and adjacent properties over the next four years. Multiple properties have recently been purchased and are being refurbished and repurposed for use by Bahá'í institutions, volunteers, and outside participants. Properties staff are providing these services when possible.

Several of the National Assembly's real estate holdings are concentrated around the Temple (*numbered properties correspond with map at top of page 160*):

1) House of Worship, gardens, and Welcome Center. The Properties Office managed the restoration of the Temple in 2015, as well as the design and construction of the gardens and Welcome Center. Properties staff perform year-round garden maintenance, numerous repairs, custodial services, and event setups. In 2023, the Office will develop plans for the refurbishment of the Temple's lower level, including Foundation Hall, as well as update mechanical equipment.

2) Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds. The Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds is the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly and hosts various meetings and receptions. The Properties Office has repaired and restored the structure's exterior, created new landscaping,



and managed a shoreline revetment project to protect the property from serious lakefront erosion. The Office is now working with engineers to protect the northern portion of the shoreline and to develop initial plans for future institutional structures on the property.

3) 155 Linden Avenue. Purchased in 2015 and completely refurbished, this residence is rented to tenants.

4) 147 Linden Avenue. Purchased in 2023, this residence will be rented to tenants at the close of escrow.

5) 143 Linden Avenue. Purchased in 2022, this residence is being repaired and refurbished by Properties staff to be used as a residence for Temple volunteers,



Properties owned in the Fourth and Linden neighborhood, the nonresidential area nearest to the Temple, could, in the future, provide space for Bahá'í institutions.

conference participants, and invited guests of the National Center.

6) 121 Linden Avenue, the Amelia Collins residence. This historic home was completely restored and refurbished in 2022 and is primarily used by the National Spiritual Assembly and other Bahá'í institutions, as well as invited guests and consultants.

7) 111 Linden Avenue. This historic home, purchased in 2014 and completely reconstructed and restored, is now rented to tenants.

8) 101 Linden Avenue. This land owned by the National Assembly was landscaped into a garden in 2021. Future uses are

being explored by the Temple Board in coordination with the Properties Office.

9) 415 Sheridan Road. This 104-year-old residence was purchased in 2015. After tenants moved out in 2022, the Office is repairing and refurbishing it for use by Temple participants, volunteers, and other guests of the National Center.

Properties owned in the Fourth and Linden neighborhood, the non-residential area nearest to the Temple, could, in the future, provide space for Bahá'í institutions (*numbered properties correspond with second map on page 160*):

1) The Bahá'í Home. Originally a convalescent facility, the Bahá'í Home

Temple and adjacent properties



The historic commercial building at 415 Linden Avenue is being reconstructed to contain the National Bahá'í Archives.

Fourth and Linden neighborhood



is being redeveloped for use as a facility for community outreach and support services, as well as a venue for meetings and offices. Its refurbishment is being planned for this summer, with construction of parking and exterior enhancements to follow. Properties staff will perform as much of the refurbishment as possible.

2) 519-521 Fourth Street. Purchased in 2022, these structures are being prepared for use by commercial tenants.

3) Linden Square. This large commercial block with shops and offices was purchased in 2018 and, after repairs and refurbishment, is now a profitable real estate holding. Future uses are under consideration.

4) 415 Linden Avenue. This historic commercial building is being reconstructed to contain the National Bahá'í Archives.

Public Safety

The Public Safety Department is staffed by 11 full-time public safety officers, including an operations lieutenant, who assists in the department's day-to-day operations and administration. The officers are responsible for the safety and security of all properties and staff members of the Bahá'í National Center.

The Public Safety Department provides continuous 24-hour-a-day security. Officers' duties include vehicle and foot patrols of all properties, several times a day. Their friendly and courteous interaction with visitors ensures that all guests appreciate the standards of behavior that are necessary to maintain the serene spiritual atmosphere that pervades the Bahá'í House of Worship. The Department has also been collaborating with House of Worship activities staff to ensure a pleasant and secure environment for all visitors to the Temple and its grounds.

The Department provides transportation services and security for National Center meetings and events, including, but not limited to, the Bahá'í National Convention and National Spiritual Assembly meetings. During the previous year, it also provided security for the 2022 Choral Festival at the Temple and the July 3, 2022 fireworks celebration in nearby Gillson Park. In the coming year, the Department will increase the number of full-time staff to enhance its services to all National Center properties, staff, and visitors.

The Public Safety Department, in collaboration with the Office of Information Technology and Properties Office, is currently completing an upgrade of access-control and surveillance equipment to ensure that the National Center maintains a state-of-the-art security system.

The Department strives to maintain professionalism through training. It will continue to enhance its professionalism through a culture of learning and collaboration with other departments within the Bahá'í National Center and outside law enforcement agencies.

The Public Safety Department, in collaboration with the Office of Information Technology and Properties Office, is currently completing an upgrade of access-control and surveillance equipment to ensure that the National Center maintains a state-of-the-art security system.



Association for Bahá'í Studies–North America

The [Association for Bahá'í Studies](#) (ABS) plays a role in fostering the intellectual life of the community, focusing on helping to build the “capacity of the friends to contribute to the prevalent discourses of society in their academic fields and in their professions” in a manner that “enrich[es] the capacity of the Bahá'í community to discharge its mission” (Universal House of Justice, September 7, 2015). The Association aims to enable participants of varying backgrounds and academic interests to effectively explore how “to provide, in the world of ideas, the intellectual rigour and clarity of thought to match their commitment to spiritual and material progress in the world of deeds” (Universal House of Justice, December 30, 2021).

Approach to learning

Central to advancing the mandate of the Association has been strengthening its systematic mode of learning in action.

It has continued to focus on how to further build capacity to read reality, identify evolving visions of growth associated with specific lines of action, set associated cycle objectives, identify next steps, assess the merits of actions taken, document decisions and learning, and cultivate a spirit of mutual learning in all that is done. A key development this past year has been the refinement of the Association’s vision to align it with guidance from the December 30, 2021 message of the Universal House of Justice, along with other guidance.

Committee for Collaborative Initiatives

To advance the Association’s objectives, the Committee for Collaborative Initiatives (CCI) has been pursuing several lines of action that aim to build capacity to participate in academic, professional, and/or thematic discourses of pressing concern. These lines of action include further developing, systematizing, and multiplying workshops, reading groups, working groups, and seminars:

Workshops. These are typically half-day sessions that serve as points of entry for growing numbers of people interested in learning about how to contribute to prevalent discourses in

their respective fields and further engage with the work of ABS. By the end of this year, 11 workshops with more than 110 participants will have been held.

Reading Groups. These small collaborative spaces cover a range of themes, such as climate change, technology, the nature of work, health promotion, organizational development, and reconciliation. Cultivating this line of action involves exploring the ways in which reading groups can act as portals to other activities, such as small collective research projects, seminars, writing groups, and active participation at the annual conference. Over the past year, more than 30 reading groups with more than 250 participants formed for various durations.

Working Groups. These larger groups ideally consist of growing networks of sustained collaborative initiatives. Currently, working groups are at various stages of development in the areas of Africana Studies, agriculture, economies, health, Indigenous Studies, and media.

Seminars. Over the past year, seminars were held in the areas of Africana Studies, climate change, economies, health, media, narrative and ethics, resilient communities, and science and religion. More seminars are planned for this summer in association with the ABS annual conference, as well as throughout the year.

AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS

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To build capacity to participate in academic, professional, and/or thematic discourses of pressing concern, the Committee for Collaborative Initiatives (CCI) has been further developing, systematizing, and multiplying workshops, reading groups, working groups, and seminars.

As with the previous two years, the online format of the Annual Conference allowed engagement with different modes of interaction, including prerecorded presentations followed by live conversations. For the first time last year, all presentations featured subtitles.

The CCI, in collaboration with the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* (JBS) committee, is also learning how to encourage collaborative writing groups that can advance in producing content for JBS and other journals. A few groups are making significant headway in this regard.

Evolution of the ABS Annual Conference

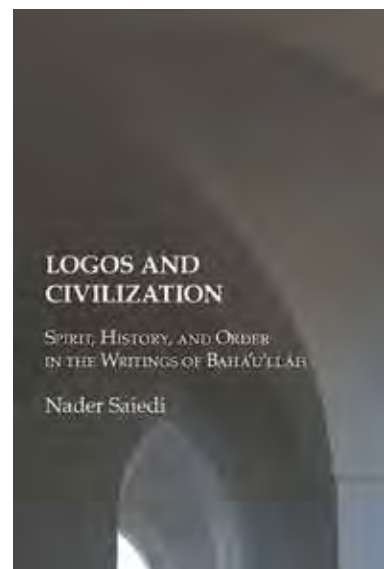
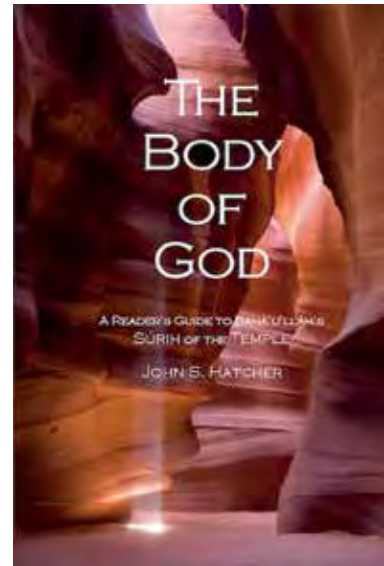
As with the conference last year, the online modality this past summer (July 29–31, 2022) helped ABS to respond to the call of the Universal House of Justice to “re-imagine” the conference. In lieu of a theme statement, a vision of the conference goals based on the December 30, 2021 message was shared with the approximately 1,000 attendees and presenters. As with the previous two years, the online format allowed engagement with different modes of interaction, including prerecorded presentations followed by live conversations. For the first time last year, all presentations featured subtitles.

Publications

ABS published three issues of JBS: Volumes [31.3](#), [31.4](#), and [32.1–2](#). In addition, a study by Dr. John S. Hatcher of Bahá'u'lláh's Súriy-i-Haykal, *The Body of God: A Reader's Guide to Bahá'u'lláh's Súrih of the Temple*, was published in both print and e-book formats; and Dr. Nader Saiedi's 2000 book *Logos and Civilization*, long out of print, has been updated and republished as both a paperback and an e-book. The Publishing Committee of the ABS imprint is currently working on three more volumes it hopes will become available towards the end of 2023 or early in 2024. In view of the momentum building in the publication work, a remunerated part-time position has been created and filled.

Finances

The annual budget of the Association is C\$311,966. It has been primarily supported through conference fees and by the National Bahá'í Funds of Canada and the United States.



Association of the Friends of Persian Culture

The [Association of the Friends of Persian Culture](#) is a non-profit organization operating under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly. Since its inception, its main activity has been the planning and management of annual conferences, initially intended for the benefit of Bahá'ís of Persian descent. As the vision of the Association expanded, its goals and objectives also evolved to include discourse and dialogue with Persian-speaking scholars of every background.

The objectives of the Association are based on its long-term vision statement and include the following:

Discourse and dialogue.

- Make the annual conferences unique spaces for dialogue and substantive discourse with like-minded Iranian individuals, groups, and organizations—as well as people of capacity at every level of the Iranian diaspora—on matters of importance to the future of Iran and the welfare of humanity.
- Attract Iranians of every background to experience unity in diversity and an alternative vision for Iranian society and humanity in general.
- Help dissipate misconceptions about the Bahá'í Faith, including the alleged lack of love and concern of Persian Bahá'ís for Iran and its future.
- Build a bridge of love, understanding, and trust with Iranians of every religious, ethnic, and ideological background and inspire genuine conversation among them on some of the most challenging issues facing Iran and the world, including the equality of women and men, human rights, elimination of prejudice, social justice, unity in diversity, education, the environment, and the role of religion in society.

Celebration of Iranian culture.

- Promote and celebrate the diverse aspects of Persian arts and culture.

- Provide an opportunity for artists, whether Bahá'í or not, to share their talents with a diverse Iranian audience connected by deep love and common respect for the cultural and literary heritage of Iran.
- Provide an opportunity for Bahá'í children and youth of Iranian descent to familiarize themselves with and enjoy their cultural heritage.

Community building and social action.

- Create an opportunity for conference participants to familiarize themselves with the practical aspects of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.
- Provide information about the community-building activities and social-action initiatives of Bahá'ís in their communities.
- Provide an opportunity for conference participants to experience the joyous, courteous, friendly, and inspiring atmosphere of Bahá'í gatherings.
- Further enhance the transformative and unifying spirit of the conference by continually improving the quality of its devotional gatherings.

2022 Annual Conference

In 2022, the Association's Board of Directors decided to host its 32nd Annual Conference virtually due to continued health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, marking the third consecutive year the conference

The Association aims to build a bridge of love, understanding, and trust with Iranians of every religious, ethnic, and ideological background and inspire genuine conversation among them on some of the most challenging issues facing Iran and the world.

Viewers from more than 53 countries watched this year's conference broadcast, with over 200 devices accessing the program live via the Association's Zoom link and over 23,900 views on YouTube. There were also 3,685 views of individual presentations.

was conducted in this way. The event was broadcast from September 1–5, 2022, on a variety of platforms, including YouTube, Zoom, GLWIZ, and on Andisheh TV.

Although virtual meetings, by nature, lack the social dimension of face-to-face gatherings, the conference was well served by two unique opportunities: diversity of programming and presenters, and access to a worldwide audience. Viewers from more than 53 countries watched this year's broadcast, with over 200 devices accessing the program live via the Association's Zoom link and over 23,900 views on YouTube. There were also 3,685 views of individual presentations. The entire conference was broadcast to Iran via Andisheh TV during local evening prime time, followed by a rebroadcast the following day. Andisheh TV estimates that it has over five million household viewers in Iran.

Opened by remarks from the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, the conference included inspirational and thought-provoking presentations from eminent Iranian scholars on the general theme of "Glimpses of Persian Culture" and on the subtheme of "Humanity at the Threshold of Maturity." Speakers at the 2022 conference included Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri, Dr. Nader Saeidi, Dr. Janet Afary, Dr. Sohrab Kourosch, Ms. Azam Bahrami, and Mr. Maziar Bahari. Artistic programs highlighted photography, poetry, painting, and dance, with musical performances by Bahá'í artists and those from the wider community. Interviews with prominent musicians such as Mr. Bijan Khadem Misagh and Mr. Hooshmand Aghili were also shared with participants. Video recordings of the entire five-day program are available on YouTube, by searching for FOPCA talks, and on the Association's website (www.fopca.com/en/archives/video).

Finances

Consistent with its status as a nonprofit organization, the Association's main source of income is registration fees, sales of materials, and individual contributions. In recent years, it has also received financial assistance from the National Assembly to allow maintenance of quality programming, specifically in the years the conference has been held virtually with no income from registration fees. In 2022, the Association held its first fundraiser to help meet the expenses of the conference.

Bahá'í Center Assistance Corporation

The Bahá'í Center Assistance Corporation (BCA) is a nonprofit agency established by the National Spiritual Assembly. Since 2005, its mission has been to support the growth and development of the Faith by providing a systematic program of education, training, and technical assistance to communities whose goal is to lease, purchase, or build Bahá'í centers or to maintain Bahá'í facilities. BCA board members have skills in areas such as property acquisition, fundraising, design and construction, facilities management, financing, accounting, architecture, conflict resolution, and non-profit management. The agency consults with communities, either in person or by conference call, and assists them to realize the full potential of their Bahá'í Centers and other properties in support of meeting the goals of the Nine Year Plan.

In addition to its roles in consulting and providing resources and training, BCA has the capacity to provide loans for energy-related improvements and safety-related renovations.



National and regional offices can add and update information in a database on Bahá'í-owned properties through UnityWeb, and Local Assemblies and registered groups can add or update properties through eMembership.

A number of resources are made available by BCA. Its *Technical Assistance Manual* continues to be a resource for communities with regard to leasing, acquiring, and maintaining Bahá'í facilities. The manual provides a systematic way to assess a community's readiness and feasibility for acquiring a center, planning, organization, fundraising, financing, accounting, legal matters, construction, renovation, and property management. The Technical Assistance Manual may be downloaded from the BCA website (www.bahaicenterassistance.org).

The *Emergency Operations Planning Manual for Local Spiritual Assemblies* is another resource developed by BCA. Its purpose is to protect the safety and security of the community's inhabitants, as well as buildings, facilities, and community assets. This manual can also be found on the BCA website.

In addition to its roles in consulting and providing resources and training, BCA has the capacity to provide loans for energy-related improvements and safety-related renovations. Applications are sent to BCA for processing and are reviewed by the appropriate offices in the Bahá'í National Organization for approval and funding by the National Assembly. One new loan was processed and approved this year.

At the request of the Office for the Development of Administrative Systems at the Bahá'í World Center and in collaboration with offices at the Bahá'í National Organization (BNO), BCA continues to update and maintain data related to all Bahá'í properties. BCA also works with the BNO's Office of Information Technology to ensure all relevant data on properties can be included in a properties database. This year, database fields were updated and modified so that data requested by the World Center was populated directly from the database. This

includes all properties owned or rented by the National Assembly, Regional Bahá'í Councils, Local Spiritual Assemblies, and registered Bahá'í groups. National and regional offices can add and update this information through UnityWeb, and Local Assemblies and registered groups can add or update properties through eMembership.

This year, BCA consulted with 16 Local Spiritual Assemblies and visited six centers. In addition to visiting sites that explicitly request assistance, BCA is also reestablishing the practice of regularly visiting Assemblies and centers to offer support and to learn about their activities and concerns. Members of BCA also gather quarterly with the Offices of Community Administration and Assembly Development in order to learn and coordinate responses to Local Assemblies. BCA held its annual in-person meeting to discuss its plans, which are based on study of the Nine Year Plan and the input of the National Assembly's liaison to BCA.

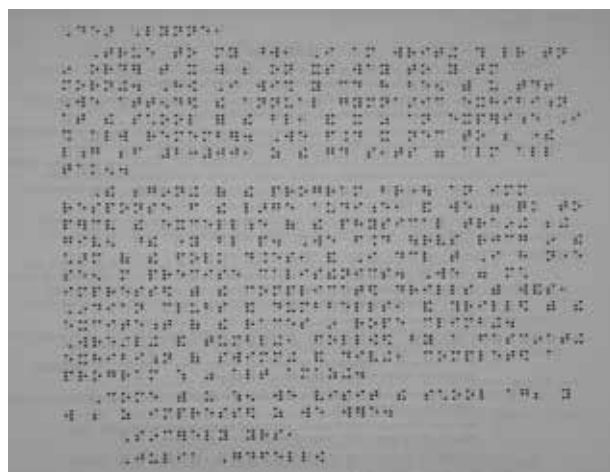
For more information on BCA, please visit its website (www.bahaicenterassistance.org). It can also be contacted via email (info@bahaicenterassistance.org), telephone (847-425-7940), or surface mail (Bahá'í Center Assistance, 1233 Central St., Evanston IL 60201-1611).

Bahá'í Service for the Blind

During the past year, the Bahá'í Service for the Blind has continued carrying out its primary responsibility of making available the literature of the Faith in various media to those who are unable to use normal print due to a disability. The three media currently available are Braille, audio recordings in MP3 format, and large print.

This year, the Service added to its collection nine audio-recording titles, 16 new or UEB upgrade titles in Braille, and six new large-print items. The Service also makes a lending library of audio and Braille materials available to Bahá'ís and those from the wider community, and this year it provided over 110 books to clients through either sales or library loan. Additionally, the Service issues, at no charge, *The American Bahá'í* in MP3 format to those who need it.

The work of the Service is done entirely by volunteers who produce audio recordings and prepare large-print and Braille books. The Service's website (www.BahaiServiceForTheBlind.org) provides information about its work and an up-to-date listing of all its materials. It is undergoing a major overhaul for ease of use.



This year, the Service added to its collection nine audio-recording titles, 16 new or UEB upgrade titles in Braille, and six new large-print items.



Deaf and Hard of Hearing Task Force

Since the launch of the Nine Year Plan, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Task Force has grown in membership and increased the number of its activities and collaborators. Among these activities are virtual social gatherings, which serve as spaces to build bonds of friendship and community among Deaf and hard of hearing Bahá'ís and which currently include participants from 15 states, as well as Canada and Spain. Three of these social spaces are ongoing, with two in American Sign Language (ASL)—one of which is hosted by a Deaf participant—and one for the hard of hearing in English with captioning hosted by a hard of hearing member of the Task Force.

Other endeavors coordinated by the Task Force include a bimonthly virtual, nationwide ASL devotional; a fireside; a translation group composed of one Deaf and six hearing individuals who are engaged in translating sections from Ruhi Book 1 and select prayers into ASL; and efforts to draw on the initiative and support of collaborators to begin a Book 1 study circle in ASL. The Task Force has also vetted a Deaf ASL instructor who now offers beginning and intermediate ASL classes at minimal cost to Bahá'ís. Together, the class has recently translated the short healing prayer into ASL and experimented with signs for Bahá'u'lláh.

One goal of the Task Force this past year was to select a focus community wherein learning could take place around ways of welcoming Deaf and hard of hearing individuals through improved communication access. The Bahá'í community of Port St. Lucie, Florida, agreed, with the assistance of the Task Force, to explore, develop, and practice methods of welcoming Deaf and hard of hearing people into their community. After the community did outreach in a local area, a Deaf family in the vicinity began attending their events. The Task Force is eager to learn how the efforts aimed at inclusion are assisting this community to become more diverse.

The “Deaf in the Bahá'í Community” Facebook page, which has hundreds of followers, continues to attract seekers, inform visitors of activities, and share Deaf community resources. Through the

platform, individuals from across the country and overseas have reached out for more information about the social gatherings, as well as about the Faith in general. An invite-only WhatsApp group—with 19 current participants—has also been established for Deaf and hard of hearing friends to share photos or videos of activities, invitations to events, prayers, encouragement, and fellowship with each other.

In its effort to further contribute to accessibility, the Task Force has supplied the Bahá'í National Organization with a list of suggestions for Deaf-friendly events, applications, and devices that facilitate communication between Deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing people. Additionally, the Task Force is engaged in consultations to ensure the reliability of accommodations at the House of Worship to ensure that Deaf and hard of hearing visitors are welcomed appropriately. Looking ahead, the Task Force has set a goal of coordinating fully accessible trips to the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, along with a longer-term goal of facilitating an accessible pilgrimage to the Holy Land for members of the Deaf and hard of hearing community. The Task Force can be reached by email (bahai.deaf@gmail.com).

In its effort to further contribute to accessibility, the Task Force has supplied the Bahá'í National Organization with a list of suggestions for Deaf-friendly events, applications, and devices that facilitate communication between Deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing people.

Abundant LLC is an organization dedicated to developing grassroots programs that support communities, individuals, and health providers as they build a shared understanding and practice around individual and collective health.

Health for Humanity

Health for Humanity seeks to inspire and motivate local communities through global resources to improve health through the execution, in various settings, of medical services, clinical training, and health education projects. The organization continues to be guided by the Bahá'í World Center on the most effective methods of social and economic development and aims to serve as an instrument through which the health of people everywhere can be improved.

Now in its 31st year, [Health for Humanity](#) continues its efforts to advance discourse in the broader health community and contribute to social action through medical services and health-education initiatives. Board and staff strive to strengthen institutional capacity through administrative and financial development, improved web and social media presence, systematic contact with members and like-minded organizations, exploration of strategic support to health-related youth projects in the Bahá'í community, contribution to discourse on health, and development of potential pathways for Health for Humanity members to conduct service in the health care arena.

In recent years, Health for Humanity has focused on exploring practicable ways to serve as a catalyst for strategic grassroots

health-care and health-promotion projects, especially among Black, Indigenous, people of color, and refugee communities. To this end, it has invested in multiyear collaborations with two partners: Abundant, based in Chicago, Illinois; and Oceti Wakan, based on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

Abundant LLC is an organization dedicated to developing grassroots programs that support communities, individuals, and health providers as they build a shared understanding and practice around individual and collective health. Abundant's 2022 activities and accomplishments included

- organization of resources for sleep health and nutrition courses that help families think and act systematically in efforts to optimize their health,





- development of a training program that allows pre-health students to gain experience and mentorship while working closely with physicians as volunteers, and
- development of health-provider networks to engage in learning processes around shared health questions.

Oceti Wakan, which means “sacred fireplace” in Lakota Sioux, is a non-profit organization working to preserve Lakota culture and language and promote healing. Oceti Wakan’s 2022 activities focused on efforts to improve the overall health of the community, raise high school graduation rates, reduce rates of alcohol and drug addition, reduce rates of suicide, and teach critical life skills to help heal historical trauma. Their 2022 accomplishments included the development of educational materials:

- *Life Skills for the Young Lakota (LSYL)* series—a daily curriculum offered in 18 South Dakota public schools that teaches students to nurture, develop, and educate their physical, emotional, spiritual and mental bodies—expanded this year after the completion of *Wolakota–Life Skills for Teens Book 9*. The LSYL series now serves 4,500 Lakota kindergarten to 12th grade students.
- *A Guide to Transformation using Lakota Values: Recovering Life Skills to Create a Life of Purpose*, a 15-week course for adults, evolved further.

Content was created for a 2023 conference on “Historical Trauma and Healing” for teachers, educators, administrators, and the community. The content is based on the life skills curriculum and focused on culturally appropriate healing practices.



Oceti Wakan’s 2022 activities focused on efforts to improve the overall health of the community, raise high school graduation rates, reduce rates of alcohol and drug addition, reduce rates of suicide, and teach critical life skills to help heal historical trauma.



Annual Report of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, University of Maryland

The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland, College Park, is an academic program endowed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and dedicated to advancing interdisciplinary study and discourse on global peace. The mission of the Bahá'í Chair, as described in its founding documents in 1993, is “to initiate public forums for discussing the issues proposed in the Statement of the Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*.” The contents of this statement provide the guiding charter for the work carried out by the Bahá'í Chair.

While drawing insights from religion, the program aims to develop a sound scientific basis for knowledge and strategies that lead to the creation of a better world. Viewing humanity as a collective and organic whole, the Chair's director and professor, Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi, and the program's faculty explore the role that social actors and structures play in removing obstacles and creating paths to peace.

On-campus events

In 2022, the Bahá'í Chair held eight lectures, one roundtable, and one film screening, many of which were held in a hybrid format in order to continue engaging with both the community on campus and an audience further afield. These events were attended by more than 1,000 people from both the University of Maryland and online, and have been seen on the Chair's YouTube channel by 12,500 viewers around the world.

The following is a list of the Bahá'í Chair lectures and symposia held during the academic year 2022–2023. Event videos are posted online on the Bahá'í Chair's website (bahaichair.umd.edu).

- On September 8, 2022, the Bahá'í Chair hosted a roundtable on [Systemic Racism in America](#) virtually and in person.
- On September 13, Dr. Martha S. Jones, history professor at Johns Hopkins University, gave the Bahá'í Chair [Annual Lecture 2022](#) on “Democracy,

Voting Rights, and Black Women as the Vanguard” virtually.

- On October 5, Dr. Manon Garcia, philosophy professor at the University of Berlin in Germany, gave a virtual and in-person lecture on [“Experiencing Men's World.”](#)
- On October 18, Dr. Ingrid Robeyns, professor of ethics of institutions at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, gave a virtual lecture on [“In this world on fire, what can limitarianism bring us?”](#).
- On October 26, the Bahá'í Chair hosted [“The Bomb: A Film Screening and Q&A with the Artist Smriti Keshari”](#) virtually. This event was cosponsored with the Phillips Collection.
- On November 1, Dr. Susannah Heschel, Jewish studies professor at Dartmouth College, gave a virtual and in-person lecture on [“The Tenacity of Antisemitism: From the Global to the Emotional.”](#)
- On January 30, 2023, the Bahá'í Chair hosted its [30th Anniversary Celebration](#) in person. The event was attended by over 350 guests and featured remarks from Dr. Jennifer King Rice, vice president and provost of the University of Maryland; Dr. Susan Rivera, dean of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences; former students, alumni, and faculty. It also included a presentation from Professor Mahmoudi.

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Events on campus were attended by more than 1,000 people from both the University of Maryland and online, and have been seen on the Chair's YouTube channel by 12,500 viewers around the world.

The Bahá'í Chair's 30th Anniversary Celebration was attended by over 350 guests and featured remarks from the vice president and provost, the dean of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, former students, alumni, and faculty.



- On April 25, 2023, Dr. Kris Sealey, philosophy professor at Fairfield University, is to present a lecture on “Variants in the Machine: Mothering and Other-mothering Toward Afrofutures.”
- On May 2, 2023, Stanford University professors Dr. Rob Reich, political science; Dr. Mehran Sahami, computer science; and Dr. Jeremy Weinstein, political science, are slated to give a panel presentation on “System Error: Where Big Tech Went Wrong and How We Can Reboot.”

Publications

In 2022, the Chair published two edited volumes: *Infrastructure, Wellbeing, and the Measurement of Happiness*, edited by Professor Mahmoudi, Dr. Jenny Roe, architecture professor at the University of Virginia, and Dr. Kate Seaman, assistant director of the Bahá'í Chair; and *Fundamental Challenges to Global Peace and Security: The Future of Humanity*, edited by Professor Mahmoudi, Dr. Michael Allen, a political science/Africana studies professor at Bryn Mawr College, and Dr. Seaman.

The Chair also published one journal article, “[A Bahá'í concept of peace as a resource for peace education: Case study of “The Problem of Prejudice”](#)” by Dr. Tiffani Betts Razavi, visiting research professor at the Bahá'í Chair, and Professor Mahmoudi in the *Journal of Peace Education* Vol. 19.

Other activities

In the second half of 2022, Professor Mahmoudi attended the Africana Studies Working Group weekend at Green Acre Bahá'í School, gave a presentation on “Bold visions of a peaceful future” at the One Planet Peace Forum, and attended the International Conference on Interfaith Harmony for Global Peace and Security at Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. In March 2023, the Chair hosted a roundtable at the International Studies Association Annual Convention in Montreal, Canada, on “Challenging Structures, Changing Institutions, and Creating Knowledge.”

National Center for Race Amity

The National Center for Race Amity (NCRA), a Boston-based nonprofit organization inspired by the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, works to advance cross-racial and cross-cultural friendship through initiatives including forums, workshops, service projects, films for public television, and support for school curricula. NCRA's overarching mission is to move the public discourse on race beyond the blame-grievance-rejection framework to one that recognizes and celebrates humanity's ability to overcome racial prejudice through association, amity, and collaborative action. Since its founding in 2010, the Center has received both in-kind and financial support from the National Spiritual Assembly.

National Race Amity Conference

NCRA's annual National Race Amity Conference was held virtually in 2022 on the theme "Experiencing the Power of Race Amity in Individual and Organizational Partnerships." Nearly 250 participants enjoyed keynote presentations, workshops, discussion groups, and film and art breakouts. One highlight was the moving keynote conversation on race between artist Mr. Masud Olufani and actor Mr. Penn Badgley. NCRA packaged the dialogue into an hour-long educational video with a discussion guide, geared to high-school and college settings.



The 2023 conference will be held in person in Atlanta, Georgia, from November 9–11, with virtual access to keynote presentations. There will be two pre-conference workshops: "Addressing Bullying in Our Society" and "UnityWorks: A Proven Tool for Addressing Race in the Classroom."

National Race Amity Institute

NCRA continued to prepare for the establishment of a permanent national research, teaching, and program-piloting presence in Atlanta. The National Race Amity Institute is envisioned as a center of education, training, youth outreach, and the arts, to be housed in the "Be on Edgewood" community center in Atlanta's historic Sweet Auburn district, only a block and a half from the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park and the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church. The Institute groundbreaking is scheduled for late April 2023.



NCRA's annual National Race Amity Conference was held virtually in 2022 on the theme "Experiencing the Power of Race Amity in Individual and Organizational Partnerships." Nearly 250 participants enjoyed keynote presentations, workshops, discussion groups, and film and art breakouts.

The Race Amity Leadership Academy (RALA) provides high-school sophomores, juniors, and seniors with powerful interracial and intercultural experiences, including field trips, speakers, media experiences, and service projects.

Plans for local NCRA chapters

To advance NCRA's national presence, the Center has begun developing a model process for cities and towns to develop affiliate NCRA chapters. Those initially invited will be cities that have shown ongoing race amity activities and programs. Interested communities should contact NCRA by email (localchapters@raceamity.org).

Race Amity Day

NCRA continued efforts to establish Race Amity Day nationally on the second Sunday in June; to seek state, county, and municipal proclamations of Race Amity Day; and to encourage grassroots observances. The Center seeks to build on the US Senate's 2016 resolution "designating June 12, 2016, as a national day of racial amity and reconciliation" with the goal of establishing Race Amity Day in perpetuity. Four states have already taken this step, while three others have proclaimed Race Amity Day at least once. Nearly 60 cities and counties in 17 states have also issued Race Amity Day proclamations, and Race Amity Day has been celebrated in at least 100 localities.

Boston Race Amity Arts and Music Festival

The inaugural Race Amity Arts and Music Festival was held on July 30, 2022, in Boston's Faneuil Hall Marketplace. The festival featured live music, an interactive community art project, a display of youth art from local Boys and Girls Clubs, and free ice cream from a festival cosponsor. NCRA founder Dr. William "Smitty" Smith spoke about NCRA's vision for advancing social and racial justice through cross-racial collaboration and friendship.

Gala fundraising event: *Sing Sistah Sing! Tales of Transatlantic Freedom*

NCRA's major 2022–23 fundraiser was a performance of *Sing Sistah Sing! Tales of Transatlantic Freedom* at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Opera singer Andrea Baker, in collaboration with composer Howard Moody, created and performed the show, which celebrates narratives and music of the African diaspora and the living musical cultures of folk, blues,

jazz, psalm singing, and opera. Nearly 200 people attended. The gala also offered the first public viewing of *Icons of Race Amity*, an exhibit by artist Pamela Purdy.

Race Amity Leadership Academy and Race Amity Fellows

The Race Amity Leadership Academy (RALA) provides high-school sophomores, juniors, and seniors with powerful interracial and intercultural experiences, including field trips, speakers, media experiences, and service projects. They are mentored by Roxbury Community College students who serve as Dwight W. Allen Race Amity Fellows, named for Bahá'í educator Dr. Dwight W. Allen. Fellows receive a stipend to support some college expenses. The pilot RALA program was launched in collaboration with the Greater Boston Boys and Girls Clubs, with the goal to expand across the country.

Program on race and climate

In 2022, NCRA explored significant linkages between race amity and issues of environmental justice and climate resilience and adaptation. Communities of color are disproportionately burdened by the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change, and building a more sustainable future will require interracial dialogue and collaboration. NCRA helped fund a feasibility study for a memorial linking the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade to climate mitigation efforts across the Sahel region of Africa. Other possible initiatives include supporting reforestation and community-building efforts in Haiti and a variety of local environmental-justice initiatives across the United States.

Updated web and social media presence

The NCRA website (www.raceamity.org) was updated and restructured, and a team of six Boston University students spent the fall semester refreshing NCRA's social media channels, applying consistent branding, researching keywords and hashtags, and establishing a pattern of posting on a regular basis.

Appendix:

Membership of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2022–2023

Muin Afnani
Fariba Aghdasi
Kenneth E. Bowers, *Secretary*

Juana C. Conrad
Nanabah Kahn Foguth
Robert C. Henderson, *Treasurer*

Rabi Musah, *Vice Chair*
Kevin Trotter
David F. Young, *Chair*

Membership of the Regional Bahá'í Councils in the United States

Appalachian States

Ntianu Bullock
Aram Ferdowsi, *Chair*
Niaz Khadem, *Assistant Secretary*
Laura Alison McGee
Elizabeth Price, *Secretary*
Bita Rahmadian, *Treasurer*
Stephen Tabe

Atlantic States

Taraneh Akhavan, *Treasurer*
Nathan Glines, *Vice Chair*
Jerome (Jay) Allen Green, *Deputy Secretary*
Eric Johnson
K.Lynne Loving, *Deputy Treasurer*
Behzad Mazloom, *Recording Secretary*
Lauren Quddus Nasser
Chahine Rassekh
Tod Rutstein, *Secretary*

State of California

Cynthia Adlparvar, *Chair*
Payam Adlparvar
Farzin Aghdasi, *Secretary*
Jeffrey Albert
Randolph Dobbs
Tanees (Tina) Edraki
Charleen Maghzi-Ader, *Recording Secretary*
Sana Rezai, *Treasurer*
Mark Sisson, *Vice Chair*

State of Florida

Beverly Azizi
William Derry, *Secretary*
Na'im Fanaian, *Recording Secretary*
Hooman Rafiee, *Treasurer*
Josefina Santa-Ramos, *Chair*

Four Corners States

Douglas Allen
Christopher Jolyon Clarke
Gregory Hatayama
Gwendolyn Kramer
Esther Kumi, *Chair*
Jennifer North Morris, *Secretary*
Julianne Redson-Smith, *Treasurer*
Jan Saeed
Shahab Saeed, *Vice Chair*

Heartland States

Nadia Fifita, *Vice Chair*
Joseph Kopke
Lisa Lang, *Recording Secretary*
Mathlida Mola, *Treasurer*
Rebecca Rice, *Secretary*
Elma Strom
Jordan van Rijn, *Chair*

Midwestern States

David Douglas, *Treasurer*
Marylou Miller, *Secretary*
Tucker Myers
Karen Pollock, *Chair*
June Thomas, *Vice Chair*
Oliver Thomas
Jose Uribe

Northeastern States

Tabassom Anvari
Luke Bolton
Carey Corea
Nina Dini
Marie McNair, *Secretary*
Joel Nizin, *Treasurer*
Vickie Nizin
Michael Penn, *Chair*
Frank Robinson Jr., *Vice Chair*

Northern Plains States

Stacey Firestone
Margaret Dru Hanich, *Secretary*
Mondana Heern, *Treasurer*
Jon Paisano, *Chair*
Serge Van Neck, *Recording Secretary*

Northwestern States

Mauricio Brizuela
Henri Cross
Shawn Javid, *Chair*
Todd Kutches, *Recording Secretary*
Omid Meshkin, *Treasurer*
Beverly Moore, *Vice Chair*
David Simmons
Erica Toussaint-Brock, *Secretary*
Elahe Vahdat Young

Prairie States

Vicki Abel, *Recording Secretary*
Susan Bishop, *Vice Chair*
Chad Dumas
Marcia Gitchell, *Treasurer*
Sahba Jalali
Portia Lyle, *Chair*
Kenneth (Clif) Mason
Mark Scheffer, *Secretary*
Avalan Wilson

South Central States

Allison Ashley
Susan Hansen, *Chair*
Fereidoun Homayoun
Sandy Huening
Bahram Jalalizadeh
Nadia Moayyad, *Recording Secretary*
Regina Rafrat, *Secretary*
Sina Sabet Sarvestani, *Vice Chair*
Mark Sherrill, *Treasurer*

Southeastern States

James Abercrombie Jr., *Treasurer*
Danita Brown, *Chair*
Reginald Colbert, *Vice Chair*
Linda Ahdieh Grant
Gregory Kintz
Virginia Kintz, *Secretary*
Nabil Kleinhenz
Andrea Perkins, *Recording Secretary*
Farhad Vojdani

Appendix:

Membership of key consultative and directorial bodies

Investment Committee

Emily Chew
Douglas Henck
Grant Kvalheim
Adam Ludwin
Cary M. Maguire Jr.
Stephen Vaccaro

National Properties Advisory Task Force

George E. Davis
Brad La Rue
Marcus Reese McKerley

Affiliates' boards and committees

Association for Bahá'í Studies–North America

Executive Committee

Mariam Ashtiani, *Vice Chair*
Shabnam Koirala-Azad, *Chair*
Jasmine Miller-Kleinhenz
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