

STEPUP FOUNDATION

Spirits Training Entrepreneurship Program
for Underrepresented Professionals

2024 Impact Report



Empowering the Future of the Spirits Industry

Foreword

As we reflect on 2024, I'm proud of STEPUP Foundation's achievements in creating pathways for historically excluded professionals in the spirits industry. This year brought expanded internship programs, a stronger mentorship network, and graduates who continue to excel and bring fresh perspectives to the industry. The stories in this report showcase individuals who overcame barriers with courage and determination. Their journeys prove that embracing varied backgrounds strengthens the entire spirits sector.

While celebrating progress, we acknowledge that challenges remain. We're committed to education, mentorship, and advocacy to drive meaningful change. Our work is possible thanks to dedicated partners, mentors, and supporters. To our graduates and participants: your determination gives this foundation its purpose. Looking ahead, we remain focused on building an industry that truly reflects the communities it serves.

With gratitude,
Margie A. S. Lehrman
President, STEPUP Foundation



About our organization

The STEPUP Foundation (Spirits Training Entrepreneurship Program for Underrepresented Professionals) was born from a spirited idea: What if the craft spirits industry could be as varied & dynamic as the flavors it produces?

In 2020, as conversations around equity and inclusion gained momentum across the country, a few leaders in the American Craft Spirits Association came together and asked a bold question: How do we open the doors wider—for everyone? The answer was simple in concept but ambitious in purpose: Create an internship program that removes barriers to entry, invests in talent from historically excluded communities, and provides a clear path into an industry traditionally shaped by legacy and access.

STEPUP officially launched in 2021. Since then, we've helped launch the careers of passionate individuals who may have never otherwise had a foot in the (rickhouse) door. Alongside our growing family of distillery partners, mentors, and supporters, we're working to make the spirits industry not only more inclusive but stronger, more innovative, and more representative of the world around it.

So yes, we're a small-batch nonprofit.

But with your help, we're distilling BIG change.



Our Mission

To provide underserved and underrepresented individuals with hands-on training and education, encouragement, and opportunities to enter the spirits community through a comprehensive internship program like no other in the alcohol beverage industry. left out of its opportunities.



Our Vision

STEPUP's vision is to diversify the spirits & distilling industry – one person at a time – by providing a hands-on, comprehensive internship program for underrepresented professionals.

Our journey through the years



2020

Organization Founded



2022

Initial Class of STEPUP commenced



2023



2024



2025 & Beyond

100%

Graduation Rate

86%

of all graduates engaged in the spirits industry

Our year in numbers

GRADUATION RATE

100%

ALL STEPUP interns that have entered the program have graduated

SECURED FUNDING

\$1.78M

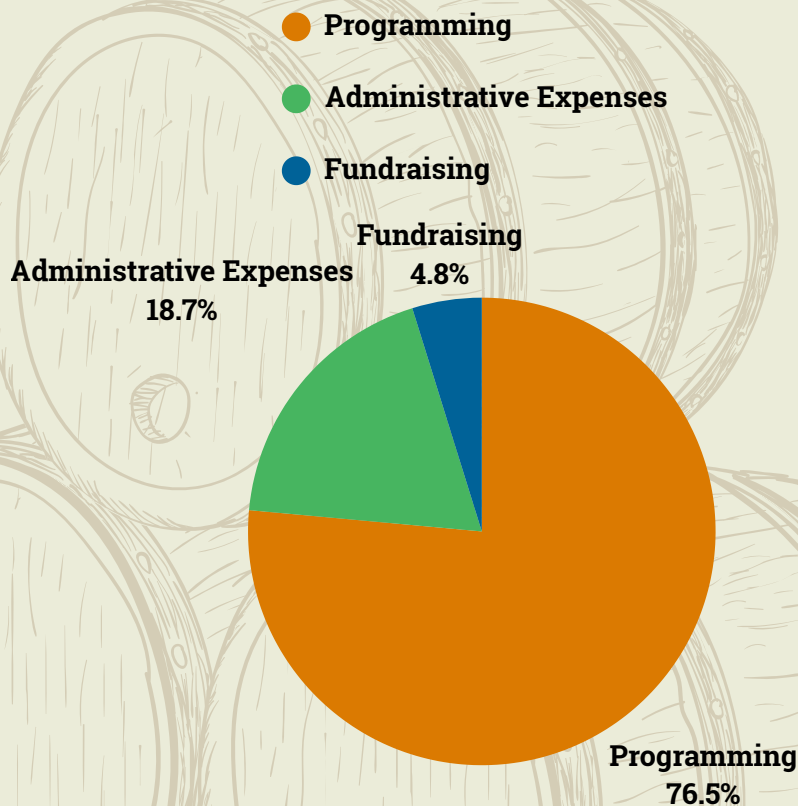
Total Funding, Corporate & Individual Donors, YTD in 2024

FISCAL STABILITY

\$993k

Consistently holding a strong cash reserve

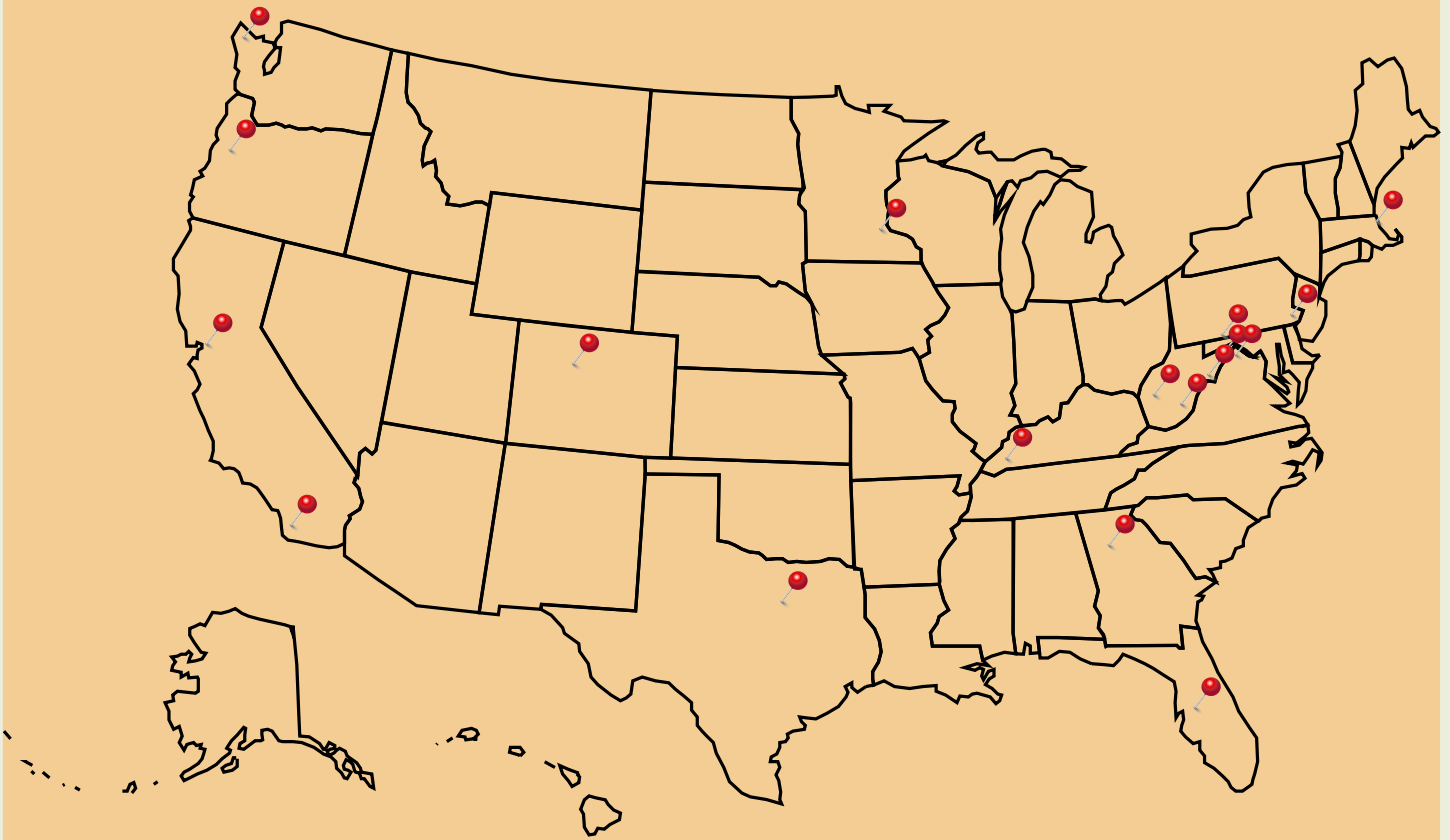
2024 Total Program Expenses



Key Programming Costs

- Lodging, Transportation, Travel, Living Stipend, Community Stipend
- Protective Equipment, Career Coaching
- Accident Insurance, State & Federal Fundraising Compliance

Donors: Past & Present

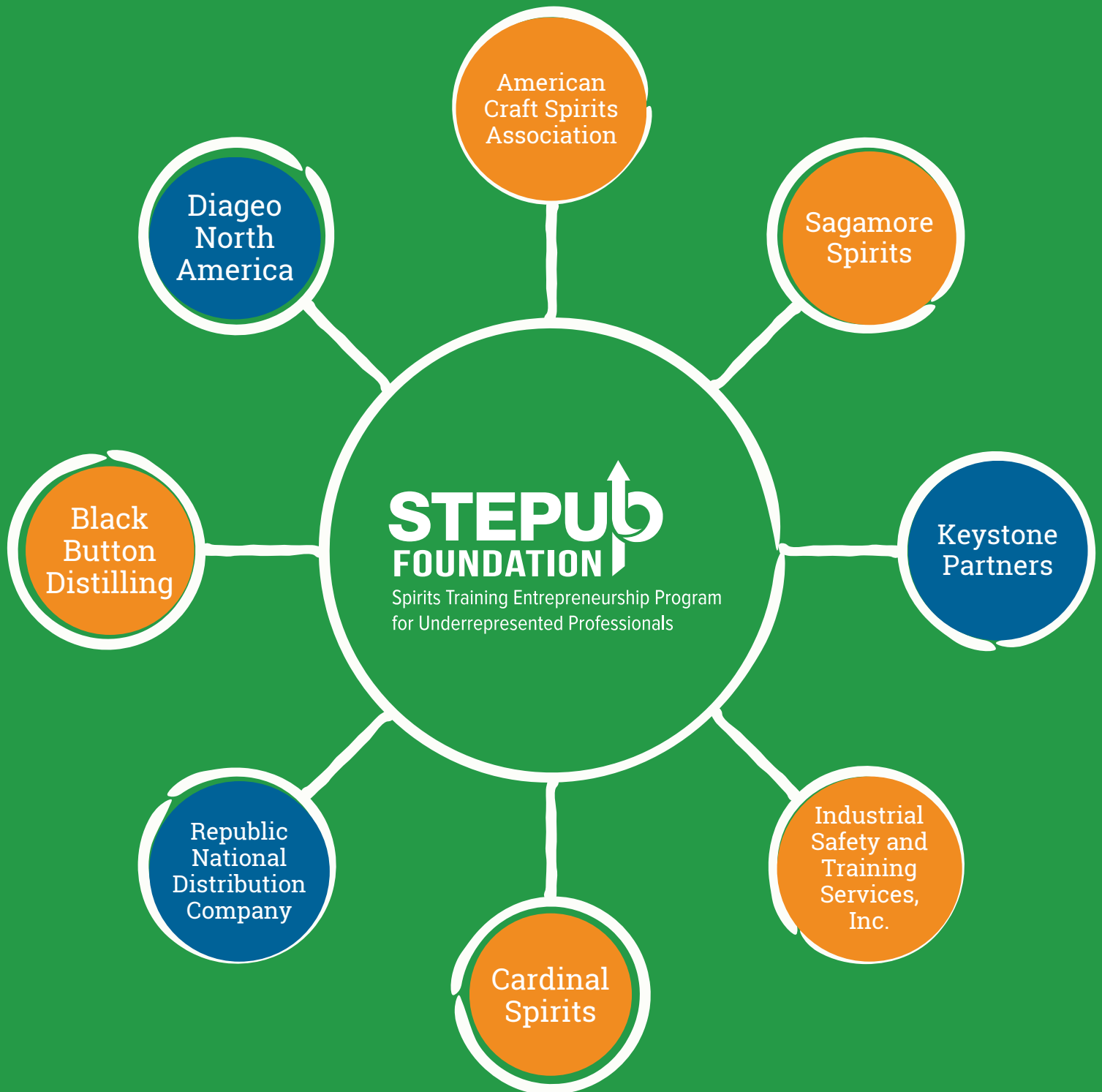


Diageo North America
Beam Suntory
Leopold Bros.
Smooth Ambler
Young's Holdings
Stars & Bars Whiskey
St. George's Spirits
Good Deeds Spirits
Fast Penny Spirits

Infinium Spirits
Catoctin Creek
DuNord Foundation
Michter's Fort Nelson Distillery
Westward Whiskey
Sagamore Spirits
Prestige-Ledroit Distributing Co.
Dunamis Spirits
Individual Donors

Our growing network of craft & alc bev partners

2024 Distilleries, Distributors, & Partners



STEPUP Alumni

"Thanks to the training I received through the STEPUP internship, I became Head Distiller at an award-winning, internationally recognised craft distillery within just 17 months of graduating."



ERIN LEE

2022 STEPUP Alumni

Head Distiller at FEW Spirits/Heaven Hill



ALEXCIA PUGH

2024 STEPUP Graduate

**Bourbon Production Expert,
Bulleit Distilling**

"STEPUP didn't just give me a foot in the door—it gave me space to connect, as myself."



ERICA C. PAUL

2024 STEPUP Graduate

**Michael James Jackson Foundation for
Brewing & Distilling scholarship
recipient - Fall 2024**

"I gained professional and practical knowledge throughout the program, along with a broader scope on my spirit specialty, style, and signature within the spirits industry."

Leadership & Partners



CHRIS MONTANA

STEPUP Board Member
Owner & Distiller, DuNord Social Spirits

"There are people who have careers today that didn't have them and wouldn't have had them and might not have had the opportunity to even start them, but for the STEPUP Foundation."



MELINDA MADDOX

STEPUP Mentor 2024
Former Production Manager , Blender,
Beverage Director, Old Elk Distillery

"My time with STEPUP was amazing and made for a great 2024. I hope to continue to be involved!"



MAX HAMES

Director of Distilling Operations,
Sagamore Spirit
STEPUP Host 2023 & 2024

"Working with STEPUP Foundation has transformed our approach to recruitment and diversity initiatives."

STEPUP With Us!



(L) 2025 Intern Keyah Boyd, (R) 2022 Alumna, Erin Lee

Every dollar invested, every mentor who STEPped up, every partnership forged has created ripple effects that are reshaping the spirits industry—one person at a time.

The spirits industry flourishes when it draws from the wealth of talent across all communities.

Donate today by scanning the QR Code!



Visit stepupinternship.org to discover how you can help us continue distilling change, one professional at a time!

*STEPUP Foundation, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, EIN 85-2454665.
Your contribution is tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.*