

The Positive Futures Network



2008 Annual Report

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“Over the last 12 years, the Positive Futures Network has grown to become a highly respected and formidable organization. By providing practical possibilities for change and encouraging people to actively participate in shaping the future, PFN plays a critical role in people’s lives and in the world.”

Negri and Associates, PFN External Review Report, July 2008

Executive Summary

Renowned author and YES! contributing editor Frances Moore Lappé characterizes the time we are in as one in which “things are getting worse and worse, and better and better, faster and faster.” The “worse and worse” screams from the headlines every day. The “better and better” takes more searching. And the possibilities for transforming the “worse and worse” into the “better and better” are rarely evident.

In the media world, YES! Magazine and YES! Online are striking exceptions. We spotlight the possibilities for transforming the “worse and worse” into the “better and better” and showcase the actions that make that transformation possible. In 2008 we featured solutions for global warming, pathways to a peaceful world, common values Americans share across the political divide, and research that shows that human happiness need not cost the planet. In each issue we invited our readers to be part of the social transformation so needed at this time and provided tools to help them take action.



As people wake up to the global economic, social, and environmental crises, they are eager for deeper understanding of the issues, positive solutions, and practical ways they can bring about real change. As a result, 2008 was a record-breaking year for the Positive Futures Network.

Our biggest growth area was on the web, with monthly visits to our site reaching nearly 100,000 by December; by the end of the year our monthly e-newsletter was reaching a list of 31,000 people. Through extensive outreach, other high-traffic sites such as Altnet.org and CommonDreams.org regularly reposted our stories. The number of teachers subscribing to our monthly education e-newsletter continued to grow, reaching 15,000 by the end of 2008. Growth in our subscriber base and newsstand sales, however, leveled off starting in August as the economy declined.

To improve our effectiveness and determine appropriate new areas for growth, we conducted an extensive external review in 2008. We learned that a high percentage of those who read YES! Magazine and YES! Online become more actively engaged in the issues of our times. Our stakeholders told us that the YES! message is especially needed at this time of multiple crises and rapid change, and that we should “step up” our work to reach a much broader audience.

In response to the results of the external review, the PFN staff and board made plans to launch a new program in 2009, called “YES! Takes on the News.” This program will provide daily commentary geared to topics in the current headlines, aimed at shaping public awareness of the possibilities for a more just and sustainable world. We’ve seen that posting and promoting timely news lends wide visibility to our solution-oriented journalism on the web and in broadcast media. “YES! Takes on the News” will be an important complement to the in-depth coverage in YES! Magazine and our extensive outreach to teachers, policy-makers, media, and grassroots groups nationwide. It will acquaint an even broader audience with the YES! perspective that we can all be part of shaping a positive future.

YES! Magazine: Reframing Crises in Terms of Practical Solutions

During 2008, YES! Magazine took on the some of the biggest issues of our time—global warming, peace, politics, and happiness. We featured bold ideas and practical actions to nurture our audience’s sense of what is possible and encourage their own engagement in turning today’s crises into opportunities for transformation. We used the magazine to reach not only our core audience of subscribers and newsstand buyers, but also grassroots organizations, policy-makers, educators, and faith groups. We also promoted our articles to the media to achieve wide visibility.

Spring 2008 issue: “Stop Global Warming Cold”



Our issue on global warming featured the most promising avenues for cutting greenhouse gases in the four largest sectors contributing to the problem—energy, transportation, buildings, and food and forestry. We showcased stories on what individuals, communities, and nations are doing to confront this global threat. A popular tool was our poster “How the Jones Family Goes Carbon Free in 10 Years,” showing easy steps any family can take to do their part.

The issue was extremely popular with organizations working to curb climate change. For example, Al Gore’s nonprofit, The Climate Project, used 1,950 copies in the programs they run to train volunteers to spur conversations about global warming in their communities.

“**YES! Magazine’s “Stop Global Warming Cold” issue is a great resource for showing how we can solve the climate crisis with doable actions that match the scale of the threat.**”

*Jenny Clad, Executive Director,
The Climate Project*

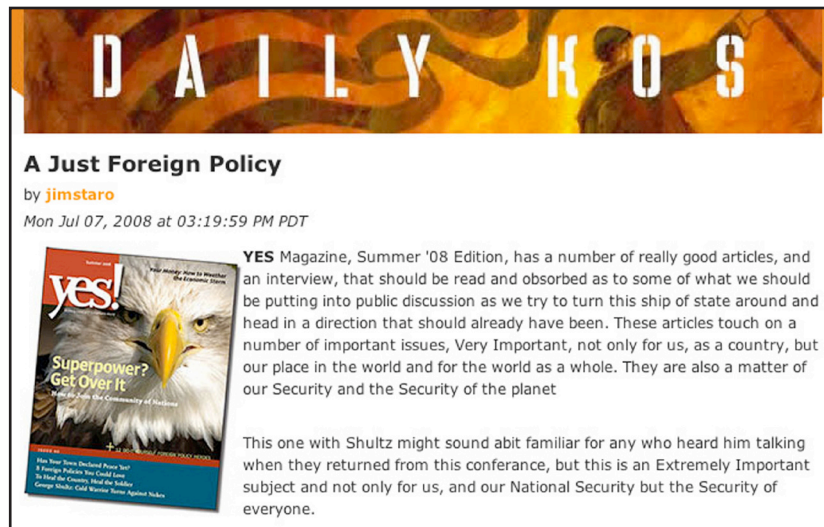
Summer 2008: “A Just Foreign Policy”



Our Summer issue, “A Just Foreign Policy,” showcased the many avenues open to the U.S. and the world to resolve tensions with countries from Iran to Cuba, from Israel to China. John Feffer’s opening essay framed the importance of the U.S. abandoning its image as a “superpower” and becoming a nation within a community of nations. A special feature was Sarah van Gelder’s exclusive interview with George Shultz, who served as secretary of state under Ronald Reagan, on his campaign to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

We provided free copies of this issue at many conferences, such as Veterans for Peace, the National Conference for Media Reform, and the 30th Triennial Conference of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, giving participants a useful “takeaway” to inspire their commitment to a far more cooperative approach to foreign policy. We also had a copy personally delivered to each member of the Progressive Caucus in Congress.

We also provided copies to the 2,000 participants at Netroots Nation in August, the largest conference of progressive bloggers in the country. Subsequently, many featured this issue of YES! in their blogs.



Example of a blog post about our Summer 2008 issue

Fall 2008: “Purple America”



As the election season reached a crescendo, we published our Fall issue, “Purple America.” A striking feature was a two-page spread, “What Americans Want,” spotlighting 10 policy areas on which large majorities of Americans agree, regardless of their political affiliation. We detailed national polling data that showed supermajorities in agreement on issues from the economy to elections, from criminal justice to immigration.

We distributed posters of “What Americans Want” at the big media tent in Denver at the time of the Democratic National Convention. Our research was then widely cited in the blogosphere. We distributed free copies of this issue to many grassroots groups, including chapters of MoveOn.org and MomsRising.

Winter 2009: “Sustainable Happiness”



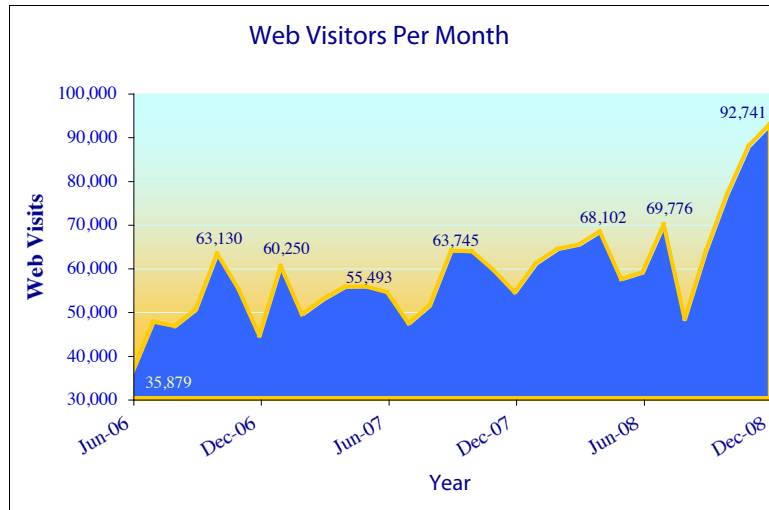
Our “Sustainable Happiness” issue proved extremely popular. With the economy in free fall, this issue struck a chord with many people with its upbeat look at the benefits of downsizing to a simpler life. Particularly popular was our two-page spread, “10 Things Science Says Will Make You Happy,” which detailed scientific findings about how simple pleasures like friendships, giving, gratitude, spirituality, and nature are the true sources of happiness. An engaging article by Colin Beavan, known for his “No Impact Man” blog, drew on his experience of celebrating Christmas with no presents. Colin was then interviewed by several major media outlets about this article,

including by Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now!*

The issue also carried David Korten’s article on a bold agenda for restructuring our economy in light of the failures of Wall Street. That article was extensively reposted on the web. David’s book publisher encouraged him to turn the article into a book, a challenge he took up and completed in record time. *Agenda for a New Economy: From Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth* was set for publication in January 2009.

YES! Online: Reaching Millions With Solution-Oriented Journalism

The internet has become a powerful means to move our solution-oriented perspective far beyond the core audience of the printed magazine. While the circulation of YES! Magazine leveled off at about 53,000 copies per issue, web visits continued to grow. Our timely articles, media promotion, email newsletter, and our Spanish translations all contributed to that growth.



2008 heralded significant growth in visits to the YES! website

Timely, solution-oriented articles

One factor spurring growth in website visitors was the increased number of fresh articles that we posted each week on the big issues of our time, including executive editor Sarah van Gelder’s regular blog. For example, in the fall, as the financial crisis mounted, we regularly posted bold ideas for financial reform from authors such as David Korten, Leslie Christian, and Ellen Brown.



David Korten’s timely article on the YES! website

Websites and media citing YES!

A second factor was the increase in other websites, radio, and TV programs picking up YES! content and referring people to our site. Progressive aggregator sites such as Altnet.org and

CommonDreams.org regularly picked up YES! articles. Sarah van Gelder began posting blogs simultaneously on the YES! site and Huffington Post with links in her columns back to stories on our site, several of which were widely reposted. We also began to post regularly to Facebook and Twitter to alert people to articles on our site. For example, our media and outreach manager Susan Gleason was the fourth most prolific Twitterer on CSpan.org at the Democratic National Convention in August, ranked above even the Huffington Post.



Alternet.org regularly reposted YES! articles in 2008

Our monthly email newsletter

A third factor driving visitors to our site was the growth in the number of subscribers to our monthly email newsletter. By the end of 2008, that number topped 31,000. The newsletter carried not only the articles from the magazine, but also our online-only content, such as an extremely popular set of photoessays on life in Iran, showing the beauty of the country and the humanity of the people.

We've learned that our email list can also serve as a powerful platform from which to call for action. Leading up to the presidential election in November, many feared that the integrity of our voting system would be compromised. With guidance from some of the top voting security experts in the nation, including Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie and Warren Stewart of Verified Voting, we sent out a special guide to our email list with twelve steps to safeguard the vote. The guide was widely reposted on other sites, including many with a largely African-American readership such as Jack and Jill Politics, Blogging Black Miami, and SuperSpade.



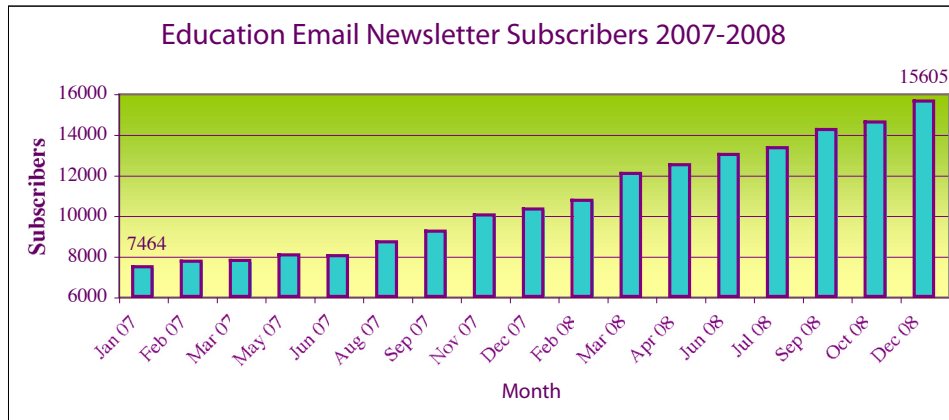
Our voting guide went viral in the fall of 2008

YES! in Spanish

A fourth factor attracting increased web visits was the expansion of our Spanish-language content. We began to post Spanish translations online in 2006 to reach a more diverse audience. By the end of 2008, we had posted a total of 153 article translations and were publishing quarterly newsletters in Spanish. To increase awareness of our Spanish content, we hired Marissa Chavez in the fall of 2008 to reach out to key organizations in the Hispanic community.

Education: Bringing Peace, Justice, and Sustainability Into the Classroom

Over the last seven years we have built a network of thousands of teachers who are looking for teaching materials on issues of peace, justice, and sustainability. As word about YES! Magazine has spread among educators nationwide, our network has grown. By the end of 2008, we were reaching over 15,000 teachers.



By the end of 2008, more than 15,000 educators subscribed to our e-newsletter

Each month these teachers received our Education Connection e-newsletter with ideas for teaching about consumerism, global warming, foreign policy, elections, fair trade, and happiness. We featured not only articles and tools from YES! Magazine, but also from selected partner organizations. For example, in January 2008 we featured the new 20-minute video “The Story of Stuff,” with links to YES! articles related to consumerism and happiness. In this way we alerted thousands of teachers to this provocative and fun video that reminds their students that everything they buy comes from a place and goes to a place—often with devastating consequences.

In the fall of 2008, shortly before the presidential debates, we partnered with the League of Women Voters to feature their guide, “How to Watch a Presidential Debate.” In turn, the League featured our education newsletter in a message to their list of 90,000 subscribers.



The presidential debate guide, featured in our education e-newsletter

To acquaint more teachers with YES! magazine, we continued to offer free one-year subscriptions, fulfilling requests from 3,200 teachers. We also reached out to educators at events such as the Annual Environmental Educators Association of Washington Conference, alerting them to the potential uses of YES! articles in a variety of educational settings.

Conferences and Community Forums: Supporting Change Move-

We provided publicity, speakers, and magazines to conferences and community forums throughout the country. YES! publisher Fran Korten was a keynote speaker at the 30th Triennial Conference of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Des Moines, IA; she also hosted a session at the annual conference of the Environmental Grantmakers Association in New Paltz, NY. Sarah van Gelder led a workshop at the European Social Forum in Malmo, Sweden, and spoke at the Conference on Media and Democracy in Santa Cruz, CA. Education outreach manager Jing Fong spoke at the Food, Farming, Culture & Education Summer Institute on Bainbridge Island, WA. We also staffed a lively booth at the Bioneers conference in the San Francisco Bay Area.



PFN board member Puanani Burgess at the YES! booth at the Seattle Green Festival

Seattle Green Festival

When the Green Festival decided to hold its first event in Seattle in March 2008, we went all out to help make it a success. And it was—attracting over 30,000 visitors over the two-day event. Our media and outreach manager, Susan Gleason, served on the Host Committee. We provided several speakers, including our board members David Korten, Puanani Burgess, and executive editor Sarah van Gelder. For the opening ceremonies, we sponsored Billy Frank, a Native American from the Lummi tribe. We staffed two extremely successful booths—one to acquaint visitors with YES! Magazine and sell subscriptions, and the other to encourage conversations with some of the festival's speakers.

David Korten's talks

Our board chair, author David Korten, speaks at events nationwide, delivering highly motivating talks about the nature of the times we are in and the power of each individual to shape the future. We supported his talks by providing publicity and free copies of YES! to conference participants.

Discussion guides

To encourage local groups to discuss the issues we wrote about, we provided discussion guides for each issue of the magazine, available for free on the YES! website as a downloadable PDF. While it is impossible to know how many of these were used in discussion groups, we know that 9,500 people viewed our discussion guides online in 2008.



Published by
Positive Futures Network
P.O. Box 20818
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-0818
206/842-0236
www.yesmagazine.org

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subscriptions 800/937-4451
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Building a Just and Sustainable World

DISCUSSION GUIDE | ISSUE 47 | PURPLE AMERICA

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a



Discussion guide for the Fall 2008 issue of YES!

Strengthening Our Capacity and Effectiveness

External Review

In 2008 we undertook an extensive external review to find ways to increase our reach and impact. We hired the consulting firm Negri and Associates to conduct stakeholder interviews and online and random-sample mail surveys, examine internal data, and work with staff and board to understand the implications of the findings. The surveys showed that our communications have a tremendous impact on the people we reach, making them feel more hopeful, more connected to others seeking change, and more able to take action.

We learned that our stakeholders were eager for us to significantly step up our reach and impact. They felt the time for the YES! message had come, presenting a tremendous opportunity to mobilize growing numbers of people and shape the national debate on critical issues of our time.

Based on the data, the consultant recommended that we:

- Use the web to produce timely articles that engage current issues;
- Build on the sense of community that YES! readers feel;
- Create a more open brand on the web;
- Increase our visibility through outreach, media, and branding;
- Build on our strong organizational capacity by further diversifying our funding base, streamlining internal communications, and identifying additional measurable indicators of success.

A new program: “YES! Takes on the News”

The staff and board fully embraced the findings of the external review, and responded with a plan for a new program called “YES! Takes on the News.” This program would use headline news stories to provide a “YES! Take” on the positive possibilities that lie in every crisis and would promote these commentaries heavily to other media. Initial major funding for the program was secured by the end of the year for use in 2009.

Website upgrade

Recognizing the importance of the Internet to our communications goals, we began to reconstruct our website to update the look and feel of the site, enable greater interaction with our audience, post material far more quickly, and help our readers easily find articles of interest. The relaunch, planned for 2009, became even more important as we developed plans for the “YES! Takes on the News” program.

Of those responding to the mail survey asking about our “Global Warming” issue:

100% SAID READING THE ISSUE MADE THEM MORE HOPEFUL THAT SOLUTIONS ARE POSSIBLE

85% FELT MORE CONNECTED TO OTHERS SEEKING CHANGE AND LEARNED NEW TOOLS FOR AFFECTING CHANGE

79% FELT MORE ABLE TO TAKE ACTION ON THIS ISSUE

“With each new issue that arrives in my box, I read and devour more and more of the content. I seem to discuss more and more of what I read in YES! as well, incorporating it into my daily life.”

Survey respondent

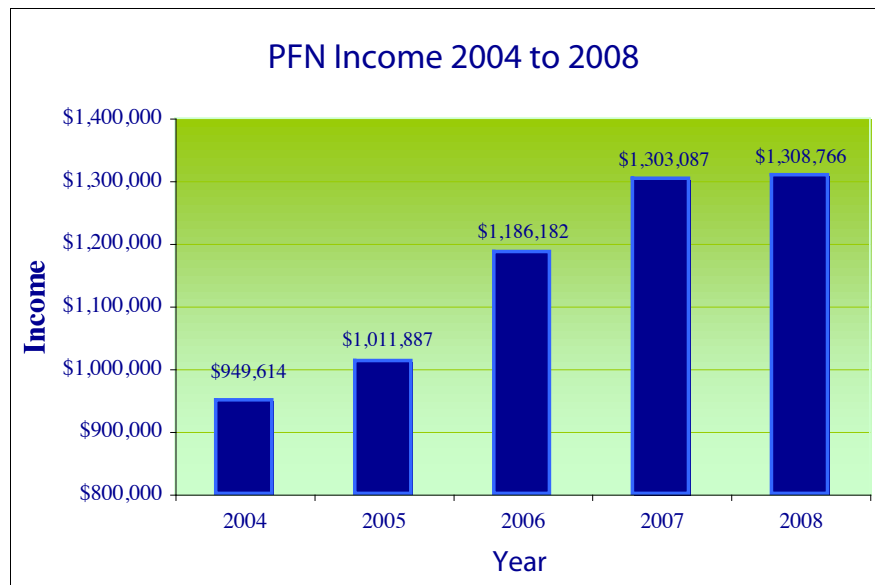
“When you finish an article, you feel compelled to take action.”

Survey respondent

Increasing Revenues Despite the Economic Downturn

As with non-profits and businesses across the country, the widespread economic decline affected our income. We had projected substantial increases in revenues in 2008 as compared to 2007, due to increased online exposure and substantial donor enthusiasm for our work. The financial meltdown that began in late summer, however, meant that those hopes were not fulfilled, although we exceeded our 2007 revenue by a slight margin. Our expenses continued to rise, particularly for health care, postage, and paper. As a result, we ended the year with a net financial loss.

Because we accumulated a reserve fund from surpluses in previous years, we were able to cover the 2008 deficit. As we planned our budget for 2009, we took steps to curtail expenses, particularly to reduce the number of mailings that had added so much to our expenses in 2008. Among the steps, we planned to increase email renewals, decrease direct mail, and promote “pay now” subscriptions to avoid billing. We also set stringent guidelines to ensure that revenues would meet or exceed expenses in 2009.



Total income in 2008 exceeded 2007 by a slight margin

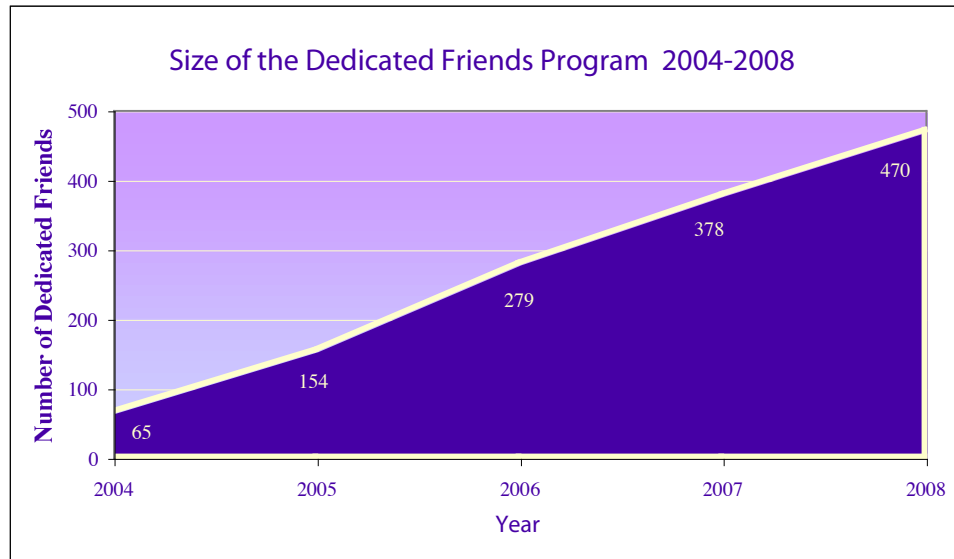
Sales income

Revenue from the sales of subscriptions, books, videos, and posters in 2008 exceeded previous years by a slight margin. We had projected that 2008 would bring a substantial increase in sales, and we met our monthly projections right through July. Then sales slid below projections as the economy sank. A special gift subscription package, combined with heavy promotion and the popularity of our Winter 2009 “Sustainable Happiness” issue, resulted in our highest ever number of gift subscriptions, providing strong end-of-year sales revenue.

Donations

While several major donors cut back on their gifts in light of the decline in the markets, total donations from individuals still exceeded any previous year. We received many comments from donors expressing their passion for YES! and their feeling that this is a crucial time for our positive message of deep change.

Particularly of note was the growth in our Dedicated Friends program, under which individuals sign up to make automatic donations. These donations provide a reliable flow of income throughout the year. The annual continuation rate of 91 percent means that as we recruit more Dedicated Friends, the program becomes increasingly important to our operating income.



Membership in our automatic giving program continued to grow throughout 2008

Foundations

Foundations played an important role in underwriting the costs of the consultancy to relaunch the website, supporting our outreach programs, and covering core operating costs.

Foundation grants included those from the Community Foundation Serving Boulder County, the Ford Foundation, the Foundation for Global Community, the General Atlantic Corporation, the New Visions Foundation, the Park Foundation, the Quixote Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, RSF Social Finance, the Satterberg Foundation, the Seattle Foundation, the Suquamish Foundation, the Deupree Family Foundation, the Larson Legacy, and the Wallace Global Fund.

Conclusion

During times of chaos and confusion, there is nothing more important than public understanding of practical, positive ways forward. During 2008 we showcased the best possibilities for solving the threat of climate change, pursuing a just foreign policy, adopting social policies that benefit the common good, and achieving happiness without harming the Earth. We reached a broader and more diverse audience than ever before with a positive vision for the future.

We also built our capabilities for an even greater role in shaping the public sense of possibility. We invested in modernizing our website and began planning “YES! Takes on the News,” a whole new program of daily online commentaries to complement the quarterly in-depth coverage of YES! Magazine. With broad support from subscribers, foundations, and donors, we ended the year with a sense of excitement and confidence that we can inspire a growing audience to be part of building a more just, sustainable, and compassionate world.

The Positive Futures Network 2008 Operating Budget

INCOME	AMOUNT
Sales (subscriptions, newsstand, books, back issues, and other sales income)	\$506,697
Donations from individuals	\$281,470
Foundation grants	\$499,950
Interest & dividends	\$20,649
Total income	\$1,308,766
EXPENSES	AMOUNT
Staff salaries, benefits, and taxes	\$694,424
Interns	\$28,968
Magazine paper, printing, and distribution	\$214,064
Fulfillment and marketing	\$222,735
Outreach: education, media, conferences, advocacy, and networking	\$35,384
Editorial and web	\$40,128
Development	\$64,777
Office expenses	\$114,682
Total expenses	\$1,415,162

Board of Directors

David Korten, Chair

(Bainbridge Island, WA)

David is author of *When Corporations Rule the World*, *The Great Turning*, and *Agenda for a New Economy*. He speaks worldwide on the global economy, sustainability, and social justice.

Jill Bamburg, Vice-Chair

(Bainbridge Island, WA)

Jill is a member of the core faculty of the Bainbridge Graduate Institute. She is a former technology executive and management consultant.

Alisa Gravitz, Treasurer

(Washington, D.C.)

Alisa is executive director of Green America, publisher of the National Green Pages, and co-sponsor of the Green Festivals.

Tanya Dawkins, Secretary

(Coral Gables, FL)

Tanya heads the Global-Local Links Project. She is a writer and frequent speaker on trade, globalization, leadership, policy, and citizen action.

Puanani Burgess

(Wai'ānea, HI)

Puanani is a community-building facilitator, trainer, and consultant in Hawai'i, the continental U.S., and the Pacific region. She is also a poet and cultural translator.

Richard Conlin

(Seattle, WA)

Richard is currently president of the Seattle City Council where he promotes conservation, smart growth strategies, and civic engagement.

Danny Glover

(Berkeley, CA)

Danny is well known for his film and television roles, serves as Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations, and is active in many peace and social justice causes.

Dal LaMagna

(Washington, D.C.)

Dal pioneered social responsibility through his company Tweezerman, and founded the Progressive Government Institute.

Nate Moxley

(Mountlake Terrace, WA)

Nate is the director emeritus of The Service Board, a Seattle-based organization that mentors young people and encourages community service.

Michael Ramos

(Seattle, WA)

Michael is the executive director of the Church Council of Greater Seattle. He was previously the council's director of Social Justice Ministries.

Sarah Ruth van Gelder

(Suquamish, WA)

Sarah is the executive editor of YES! Magazine, and a founder of the Positive Futures Network.

