



# Annual Report 2025



ims -forallone

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# Message from the President

## Where We're Going

In a time when it is easy to look at events around the world and feel fear about where things are heading, I want to share with you the light that you, the donor, the volunteer, the supporter, have been able to shine in Moldova.

Earlier this year, I met a boy named Sasha (name changed for privacy), a 9th-grade student with special education needs at Auxiliary School No. 7 in Chișinău. Sasha had a remarkable talent: if you told him your birthday, he could instantly calculate your exact age. As the school staff, directors, and our partners from IQ Games looked on, Sasha amazed everyone by getting every answer right, including mine. Then I asked what would happen to him after 9th grade. The room grew quiet. The director sighed and said, "We don't know." There was no 10th grade for students in his situation. Vocational schools lacked the capacity to take them, and regular schools were not equipped to meet their needs.

Most children in Sasha's situation stayed home for years, waiting until they were old enough to work, if they could find a job at all. The school had spent six years trying to get sewing equipment to teach employable skills, which our project finally made possible. Yet, seeing Sasha in person made the challenges of SEN students in Moldova heartbreakingly real. At the end of the visit, the staff presented me with a picture of sunflowers made entirely of beads. It was intricate, colorful, and full of care. It must have taken dozens of hours of meticulous handwork and attention to detail to make. Sasha had made it.

Our partners, IQ Games, had been advocating to the Ministry of Education for years to give children like Sasha an avenue to continue their education and development, without success. Our project helped change that. In August of this year, IQ Games shared this with me, "With this small project we were able to start a large impulse that was not possible with larger organizations in larger projects with more resources and had more strict frameworks that were focused more on overarching strategic development." Because of our project, the Ministry of Education took notice, and agreed to launch a pilot 10th grade for SEN students in the fall of 2025, with the potential to expand further. I recently found out Sasha is enrolled in that pilot program. Sasha's story is just one among hundreds whose lives have been touched by your generosity and the dedication of volunteers who give their time and energy. The light you have shared continues to radiate across Moldova, shining through smiles, joy, and hope in the eyes and hearts of those you have touched.

Thank you for choosing to be a light. Together, we are helping Moldova shine on its own.

Cu drag,  
Bartosz Gawarecki  
President, The Friends of Moldova



# Our Mission

The Friends of Moldova was founded in 2019 by a group of Returned Peace Corps volunteers who understand that local communities understand their own needs and aspirations best. Moldovans must be the leaders, decision-makers, and problem-solvers shaping their communities' futures. We have a vast network of action-oriented community members, in-country volunteers, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, and Friends of Moldova members to assist our grant winners. The contributions of our members and other donors empowers local community members to take direct action to resolve problems in their community. We award grants on a periodic basis to applicants who support small, community-driven projects in Moldova. We have contributed to 20 projects since the start of our organization. The theme always revolves around youth, civic society, and social entrepreneurship.





Friends of  
Moldova

# Our Team of Volunteers



Jennifer Arndt-Robinson  
Grants Committee

Sarah Baker  
Grants Committee

Violeta Frimu-Patel  
Board of Directors

Bartosz Gawarecki  
President/Co-Founder/  
Board of Directors



Courtney Jackson  
Grants & Communications  
Committees/  
Board of Directors

Jennifer McHugh  
Secretary

Ella Nebeker  
Treasurer



Elizabeth Olguin  
Donor Engagement &  
Communications Committee

Alexander St. Leger  
Grants Committee

David Smith  
Board of Directors



KC Soroushian  
Finance Committee

Margarita Vasilaşcu  
Board of Directors

Yathi Yatheepan  
Communications Committee



# 2025 Initiatives

## New Community Survey

In August of 2025, we conducted our first-ever community survey, inviting supporters and partners to share their voices in shaping our future direction. With 80% of respondents from Moldova itself, the results revealed remarkable alignment between our mission and the country's most urgent needs.

The top focus areas identified were:

- Economic Empowerment & Livelihoods
- Youth Development & Civic Action
- Social Entrepreneurship
- Education & Lifelong Learning

Respondents also told us what matters most: knowing their donations support specific project areas, seeing local-level impact, reading more success stories, and having the choice of where their support goes.

At The Friends of Moldova, we believe that true impact begins with listening to those we aim to help. This survey was built on that principle, ensuring that Moldovan voices guide our direction, strengthen our accountability, and keep our mission grounded in the real needs of the communities we serve.

## Social Media Growth/Advertising

In a first for our organization, The Friends of Moldova ran a small ad campaign through our social media accounts. This campaign was a test to see how well the ad program worked for us and to see if it enabled The Friends of Moldova to reach new audiences. Our test was a success, and we're excited to continue it in the new year.

In order to continuously reach new audiences which enable us to serve future grantees, The Friends of Moldova launched a small ad campaign test on Facebook and Instagram through their in-app ad programs. These programs allowed us to target specific groups on a month-to-month basis.

Our one month test cost \$34.97. This expenditure allowed us to reach over 18,000 accounts and almost a thousand clicks on our ad, at a cost of \$.04 per click. In the new year, we intend to repeat the ad campaign and continue to share our message and our goals with new audiences!

# 2025 Initiatives

## Dedicated Funds

In September of 2025, we launched three Dedicated Funds to give donors the opportunity to directly provide support for Moldova's most pressing needs. Inspired by national research and our community survey, these funds will strengthen our impact through targeted, sustainable initiatives.

### Three Causes. One Moldova. Your Choice

[Energy Independence & Climate Resilience Fund](#): Advancing Moldova's green energy transition and helping communities adapt to the realities of climate change.

[Youth Leadership & Civic Action Fund](#): Equipping young Moldovans with the tools and confidence to lead, collaborate, and build community solutions from the ground up.

[Social Entrepreneurship & Economic Empowerment Fund](#): Supporting innovative changemakers who create jobs, strengthen livelihoods, and foster economic independence.

These three causes, rooted in empowerment, innovation, and resilience, reflect what it truly means to be a Friend of Moldova.

## New Timelines

We value the feedback of our donors and supporters and strive to create opportunities for meaningful engagement. In past years, our Annual Donor Meeting was held in December, but participation was often lower. This year, we listened to your feedback, and we introduced a new timeline by hosting the meeting in mid-November, making it more accessible and encouraging broader involvement in the conversation.

## Community Shoutouts Fundraiser

Friends of Moldova began a "Shoutouts" fundraiser for the month of November. For \$25, former volunteers can shoutout communities that meant something special to them during service. FoM posts on their social media to honor the community with photos and memories from the donor.



# Financial Overview

**January - October 2025**

Donations so far: \$8,752.41

Funds raised via Endowment Fund: \$2,557.06

Total Funds raised: \$11,309.47

## Main Expenditures from Donor Funds

1. Grants: \$12,887.00
2. Office Rent: \$1,842.94 (\$4,400)\*
3. Accounting Fees (Form 990 EZ): \$1,400
4. Fundraising (Website, Email, PO Box): \$819.44
5. Bank Fees: \$309.28
6. Other: \$373.42
7. Total Expenditures from Donations: \$17,632.08
8. Total Expenditures: \$20,189.14

\*Rent cost covered from returns on investment from the endowment fund. The total for rent was \$4,400.

74% of funds from donors in 2025 were used directly for Grants. This is lower than in previous years due fewer expenditures on projects and fixed costs remaining the same. To increase this number in 2026, we have decided not to renew our lease for the office so more funds go towards projects.



# Financial Overview

## Endowment Fund Announcement

In 2025, Friends of Moldova established its first Endowment Fund to strengthen the organization's long-term financial foundation and provide a sustainable source of support for future projects. The fund was built around a diversified investment strategy designed to balance growth, stability, and responsible stewardship. The Endowment Fund continues to perform in line with its benchmarks and remains fully compliant with Friends of Moldova's investment policy, emphasizing long-term growth, transparency, and prudent management. This allocation provides exposure to a broad range of sectors across the U.S. and European markets – combining the resilience of large-cap companies with the innovation of technology-driven industries and the diversification of international holdings.

The initial investment goal of \$23,000 was achieved during the averaging-in period. Thanks to positive market performance, the fund has generated gains of approximately \$2,550 to date, bringing the total Endowment Fund balance to around \$25,550 as of November 1, 2025.

The remaining \$1,915 will be invested in the same allocation as the initial investment goal, which is shown below.

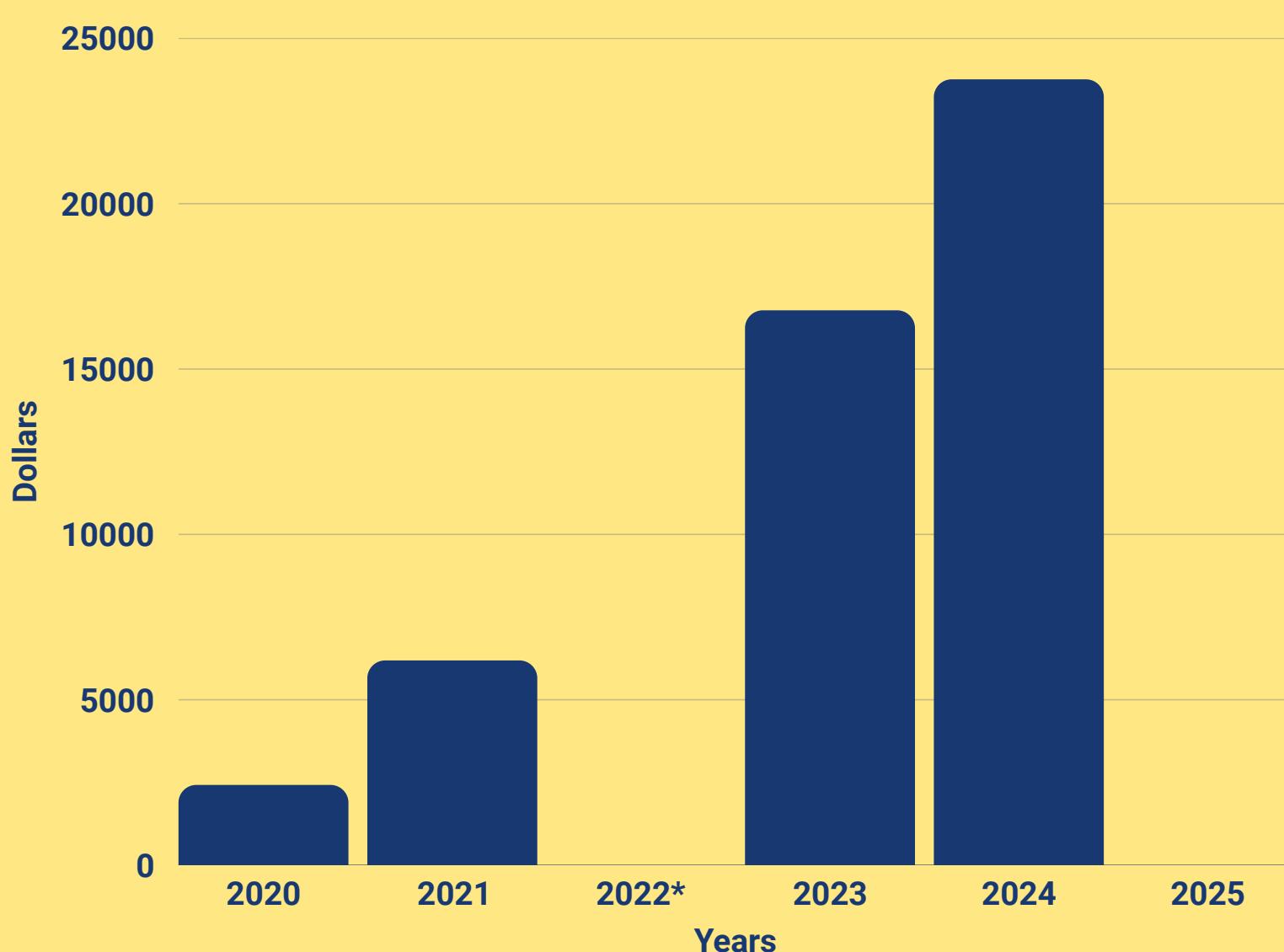
The creation and continued growth of this fund represent a major milestone for Friends of Moldova; turning donor contributions into a permanent, income-generating asset that will sustain the organization's mission and programs for years to come.

### **The portfolio consists of five major market indices with the following allocations:**

- Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) – (35%)
- S&P 500 (SPY) – (35%)
- NASDAQ-100 (QQQ) – (20%)
- STOXX 600 (European Market Benchmark) – (5%)
- DAX (Global X DAX Germany ETF) – (5%)



## Year to Year Financial Health



\*2022 - Anomaly due to the Ukraine Refugee Relief Drive

\*\*2025 - Still pending, it's up to YOU!

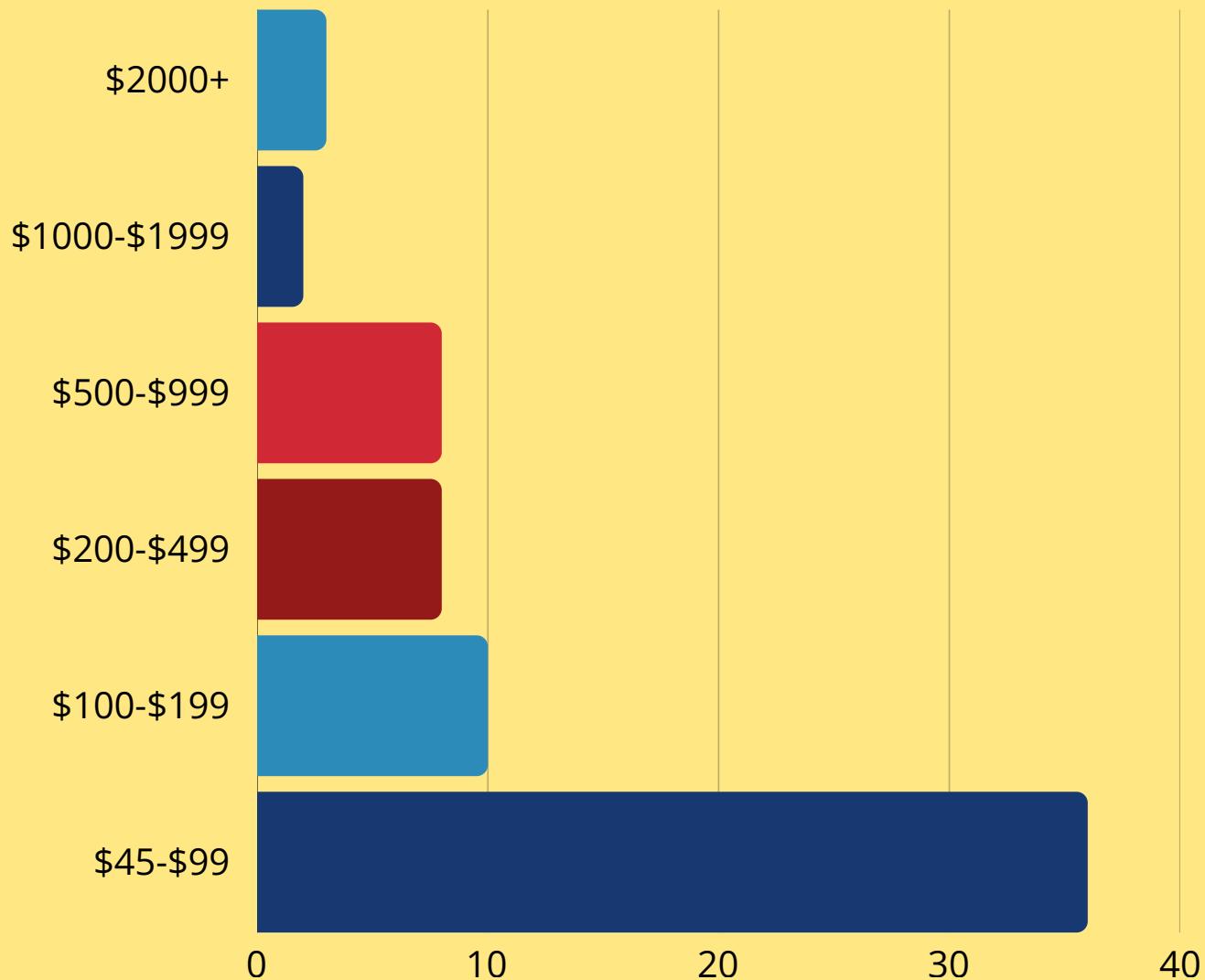
Donor raised for our grants program.

(does not include special fundraisers like Ukraine Refugee Relief, Dan Kane Fund, or Peace Corps 30th Anniversary Tree Planting)



# Donor Breakdown

Donor Breakdown November 2024 - October 2025  
by dollar amounts  
67 total unique donors





# 2025 Grantees

This year's grant selection presented us with a unique challenge: we received 119 proposals from organizations all over Moldova: A record for The Friends of Moldova!

After reviewing all 119, the Grants Committee presented four proposals to the donors in March. The final two proposals received high praise from our donors and it was an honor to see how much of an impact these projects had in their respective communities.





# IQ Games

The Association of Intellectual Games of The Republic of Moldova (IQ Games) has been advocating for children with special education needs (SEN) for a few years. Their mission is to contribute to raising the educational level of the population in the Republic of Moldova, with its long-term goal being the improvement of the educational system by 2030.

They sought additional financial assistance from The Friends of Moldova to develop essential skills for the social and professional integration of SEN students from Auxiliary Schools No. 6 and No. 7 by providing practical skills in areas such as sewing and physiotherapy, to support an active and independent life in society. Their goal was to reach 200 SEN students between these two schools in Chisinau through purchasing special equipment for these students.



Through a series of inclusive events involving over 3,000 youth, 6,551 volunteer hours, and 80 representatives from government institutions, civil society, stakeholders, teaching staff, and parents of children with special educational needs (SEN), the project with IQ Games laid a strong foundation for changing public perception and breaking down stereotypes. It also achieved a major systemic milestone by advocating for access to education for children with SEN. Additionally, the sewing machines and kinesiotherapy equipment procured through Friends of Moldova funds are now supporting 200 students with autism and 263 with special education needs in developing essential social, daily-living, and pre-vocational skills.

The project's greatest success was the profound psychological shift among parents of the children our partners worked with. By creating safe, supportive, and inclusive environments, such as workshops and festivals, the team didn't just explain possibilities; they demonstrated them. Parents saw their children creating, laughing, and succeeding. Many began to see "a personality, not a diagnosis," and to believe in their child's potential without limitations. IQ Games considers helping parents rediscover their children in a new, hopeful light to be their most meaningful achievement.

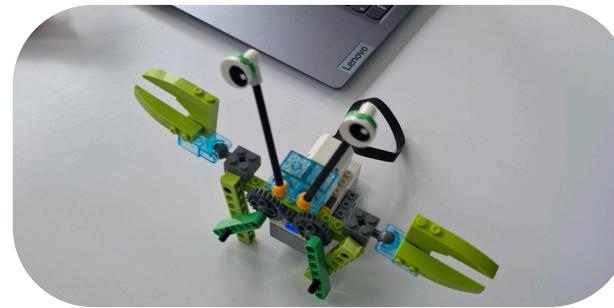
For long-term impact, the most significant accomplishment was the successful advocacy for a pilot program for grades 10–12 for children with SEN. These grades did not exist before the project, and thanks to our collective efforts, a fundamental shift in the national education system is now underway. We helped open a door that had long been closed, creating a permanent educational pathway for future generations.





# Start for the Future

This new initiative group based in Cahul works with vulnerable individuals on teaching IT skills, English lessons, and other creative workshops. Their goal for this project was to develop digital and STEM skills among children through robotics activities and extending their digital literacy courses to unemployed women. Their goal was to enroll 30 children aged 7-10 in robotics and 20 women in the digital education lessons. Each robotics and digital literacy course would last six weeks and a new group of students would be enrolled.



At the close of the project, 61 youth members participated in the robotics courses and 39 women took advantage of the digital literacy courses.

The team received high praises for their work in these courses. One mother noted that her daughter prefers to study maths than to take dance classes. One woman who participated in the digital literacy course shared how she learned more about Excel in one free session than attending a one-week paid course. Students in the robotics course have shared how learning this new skill has opened their eyes to a new future and interest in science. Project manager Gheorge Stoianov made the following remark about their work: "These courses are one step closer to their educational futures".

The learning extended beyond how to make robotics and computer science. The children work in teams and, like most pupils, did not know how to program or work with these bots. There were many missteps and failures, however, this provided a unique learning opportunity for them: mistakes will be made, but what have you learned from them? This theme became a critical component in the curriculum and the students adapt such lessons to each course.

Two of the women who attended the digital literacy course are in the process of starting their own business. Since they learned how to utilize Excel for budgeting purposes and potential projections, they both won funding to help with their start ups. The rest of the women were able to add these skills to their resumes to make them more competitive in the job market.

Demand for both digital literacy and robotics courses remain high. Start for the Future will continue to adapt to this demand and find new ways to ensure as many people are enrolled as possible, while looking for teaching opportunities outside of Cahul.





# 2024 Grantee Recap

**In March, FoM paid one last site visit to our two 2024 grantees to check on the progress of their respective projects. The results were inspiring.**

## Penitentiary Nr 3 Leova

Penitentiary Nr. 3 Leova wanted to establish a construction workshop to offer courses in tiling, carpentry, and welding. The goal was to facilitate the reintegration of the inmates' into society through professional skills training. After completion of these courses, the inmates would receive an accredited certification to help with their job prospects after their release.

Since September 2024, a group of 25 inmates has been participating in a groundbreaking vocational training program, gaining hands-on experience in skills like welding and tiling.

One of the project's key successes is the high-quality equipment, surpassing even that of the local professional school, ensuring participants learn modern techniques aligned with industry standards. This gives them a real advantage in reintegration into the workforce.

Beyond skill-building, the program is fostering financial independence. Inmates working on a new renovation project outside the prison, for those in good standing, are earning wages. This initiative not only supports inmates' financial needs but also saves the prison significant costs by reducing the need for external contractors.

The program is expanding! Plans are in place for welding and cooking courses, while a training program has already been launched through another initiative. Additionally, there is an innovative idea to transfer trained inmates to other prisons to apply their skills in further renovation projects, maximizing impact.

This project sets a new precedent, demonstrating that such initiatives are not only feasible but beneficial for inmates, institutions, and society as a whole. Administratively, the experience of working with an international NGO has paved the way for future collaborations, proving that such partnerships can work successfully with state institutions.

As the prison director's father wisely put it:

"If everyone is going in one direction, it's important to go the other way, to step outside the zone of normality."





# 2024 Grantee Recap

**In March, FoM paid one last site visit to our two 2024 grantees to check on the progress of their respective projects. The results were inspiring.**

## AO Feedback

AO Feedback had a goal of bringing access to clean water in the Basarabeasca area while educating the public about the benefits of clean water. They accomplished this through purchasing two water ATMs and had them strategically installed in the area so that everyone can access them. The installation of water ATMs has not only provided a practical solution but also offered young people a real-world example of how they can tackle problems in their communities.

Despite challenges at the local level and with the supplier, the team has shown impressive perseverance. One of the two water ATMs is fully operational and progressing toward sustainability. With over 230 liters sold in January and 330 in February, they are getting close to their target of 700 liters/month (or ~70 regular users) to make the model fully self-sustaining. The second water ATM is expected to be up and running soon, as the organization is currently waiting on missing parts from the supplier.

The project is already generating income for the organization and has the potential to strengthen AO Feedback's financial stability while continuing to meet a real community need.





# Get Involved

## Become a Donor

We appreciate the generosity of our donors! To thank you, Friends of Moldova is offering swag for contributions to our [Grants Fund and General Activity Fund](#).

Donations thank-you gifts:

- \$15 – Friends of Moldova “Naslavcea” sticker
- \$30 – Friends of Moldova “Ask Me About Moldova” pin
- \$1,000 – “Ask Me About Moldova” T-shirt, mug, and pin package



You may direct your donation to any of our dedicated grant areas:

- [Energy Independence & Climate Resilience](#)
- [Youth Leadership & Civic Action](#)
- [Social Entrepreneurship & Economic Empowerment](#)

Gifts listed above (sticker, pin, or T-shirt + mug + pin package) will be sent based on the donation level, whether you give to the Grants Fund, General Activity Fund, or one of the specific grant areas.



# Get Involved

## Become a Friends of Moldova member!

All you need is to contribute \$45 in membership dues. Members have the opportunity to vote for grantees during our grant selection process.

To be a member eligible for the Grant Selection Vote, please donate before January 31 the year the vote will take place.

## Attend the Annual Meeting

Our Annual Meeting is held in November for members and donors to hear about this year's grantees & their successes, and get any important updates about the organization.

## Donate Time

Current open positions on our team:

- **Social Media Coordinator** - Key responsibilities include sharing stories of impact, creating engaging posts across platforms, and growing awareness of our mission. Send your resume to [info@thefriendsofmoldova.com](mailto:info@thefriendsofmoldova.com)



Follow Us on Social Media  
@friendsofmoldova





# Outgoing Message

This year we regrouped, re-grounded in our mission, and built an all-star team. Together, we laid the groundwork for new initiatives that will strengthen the Friends of Moldova for years to come. We have created the systems and momentum needed to ensure our organization's long-term sustainability and expand our impact across the country.

We now have a proven track record that our method, approach, and projects generate meaningful, lasting results through efficient use of resources. With 22 successfully completed projects in Moldova, we have demonstrated that real change happens when local ideas, practical solutions, and collective support come together.

As we look to the future, we remain guided by the same values that brought us here: service, partnership, and community. In the coming year, we will continue to invest in the people and organizations who carry Moldova's future in their hands: youth, innovators, and leaders who are already creating ripples of change in their communities.

To all our donors, volunteers, and friends: thank you for believing in this mission and for continuing to be part of Moldova's story. Each act of generosity, each idea shared, and each hour of service helps this light grow stronger.

The work ahead is ambitious, but with your continued support, the Friends of Moldova will keep transforming ideas into tangible change.

Thank you for standing with us. Together, we are helping build a more innovative, resilient, and thriving Moldova.

