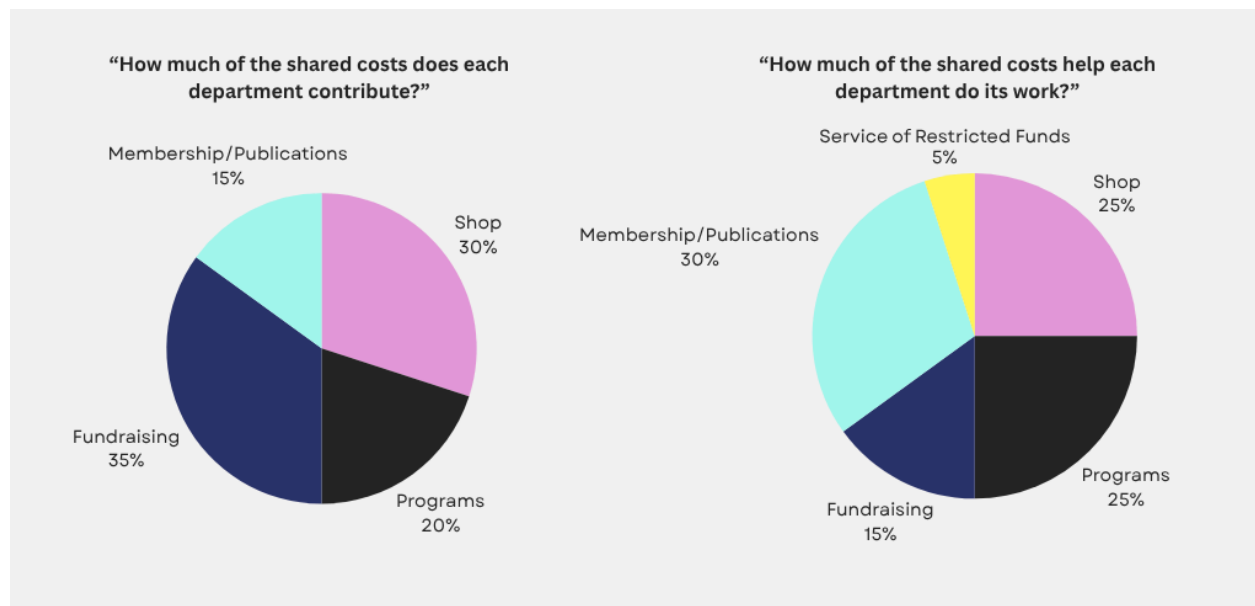


## **Understanding the Thoreau Society Operating Budget**

An annual budget is simply a projection of income and expenses an organization incurs to carry out its mission. It shows what we expect to receive—gifts from supporters, grants, event registration fees—and pairs it with what we plan to spend to keep our work alive: people, programs, places, and the everyday costs that make the mission possible. It's a promise to our community that every dollar spent has a purpose. Like any good plan, it helps us adjust when circumstances change.

### **How the Budget Works**

The Thoreau Society's budget is really a collection of smaller budgets—Membership, Publications, Programs, the Shop, Fundraising, and the administrative costs that keeps the lights on. Each one has to make sense on its own, but also contribute to support the whole. Membership and Publications are especially tied together: the more members we have, the more journals and bulletins we send out into the world. All these parts work like a living ecosystem, each doing its role, each helping the others, all moving together toward accomplishing our mission.



Throughout the year, the budget evolves—we watch how things unfold and make thoughtful adjustments as we go. Attendance, the weather, even world events can shift our financial picture, and when they do, we respond. If a program draws an unexpected rush of enthusiasm early on, we might invest more to offer similar events and build on that momentum. Not expenses are adjustable: essential costs like rent, insurance, tax filings, and payroll services are, to a great extent, fixed regardless of changing circumstances. We balance the flexible with the fixed—staying grounded in what we must provide, while remaining nimble enough to grow when opportunities arise.

## **A Closer Look at the Departments**

### **Membership**

The Membership Department is the heartbeat of the Thoreau Society, sustaining both our community and the work we do. Membership revenue—from annual dues and life member fees—supports the essentials: mailings to members, the membership database, printing costs, and the Membership Coordinator who keeps it all running.

The new membership database, introduced in 2024, brought meaningful savings—about \$4,000 a year—while making service smoother: renewals arrive on time, records stay accurate, and communication flows more easily. This stronger foundation allows staff to reach out proactively, inviting new members to join and helping existing members feel more connected. Growth, however, is tied to the hours and energy staff can give—there is only so much we can do, even with the best systems in place. Every additional hour spent here multiplies the life and vibrancy of the Society, making each effort count toward sustaining and expanding our community.

Income from Memberships goes directly to offset the cost of Publications. **Publications**

The Publications Department is the voice of the Thoreau Society, sharing the scholarship, stories, and insights that connect our members and extend our reach to the wider world. Revenue comes from JSTOR and EBSCO agreements, as well as library subscriptions, but because printing costs are high, the department typically runs at a deficit. This connection to Membership is intentional. For most of our members, our publications are the primary reason they join and renew.

*The Concord Saunterer* and *Thoreau Society Bulletin* are brought to life by volunteer editors and editorial teams who dedicate countless hours to making them the premier publications they are. Staff time focuses on coordinating with printers, maintaining accurate mailing lists, and ensuring our content reaches JSTOR, EBSCO, and libraries worldwide. Costs have been carefully managed through better printing contracts, more efficient international mailing, and meticulous list oversight, all without compromising quality. With continued staff support, the department can keep costs aligned with revenue while maximizing the impact of our publications, strengthening the Society's visibility, its mission, and the connection to our members.

### **Shop**

The Shop at Walden Pond is more than a place to buy books and gifts—it's a doorway into the world of the Thoreau Society, where visitors and members come together to celebrate curiosity, learning, and connection. It is the largest and most expensive part of the Society, in part because running a separate facility comes with its own daily costs: rent, phone, internet, a dedicated website, trash service, staff, signage, cleaning, and all the small details that make the space welcoming and vibrant.

Every item in the Shop carries a story of its own. Before we measure profit, we account for the “cost of goods sold”—what it actually costs to purchase each item, including shipping and handling—so that every sale is grounded in reality and sustainability.

And yet, the Shop is never truly on its own. It depends on the steady support of the Society’s central administration—payroll, bookkeeping, advertising, printed materials, and countless behind-the-scenes resources that keep the whole organization running smoothly. The Shop’s work and its central support are woven together, like threads in a larger tapestry, helping the Society welcome visitors, support members, and advance its mission. Every sale, every interaction, every item on the shelf is part of a shared effort, sustaining the life, energy, and purpose of the Society as a whole.

## **Programs**

The Programs Department is centered on the Annual Gathering—a time of learning and conversation when the community really comes together each year. As the keystone event, it requires a lot of preparation, from providing food and venues to arranging equipment, supplies, printing, postage, and advertising. Bank fees, extra staff when needed, and honoraria for keynote speakers—including their travel—are all part of making the Gathering happen.

We work hard to make the Annual Gathering as collegial and special as possible, creating an atmosphere of warmth that sets it apart from many other academic conferences. Yet we know there is still work to do. Making the Gathering fully inclusive and accessible—reducing the cost to attend, removing barriers, and opening the doors wider—is an ongoing priority. Each registration fee helps bring the event to life, but every choice we make aims to ensure that the Gathering is a welcoming, engaging, and meaningful experience for everyone who comes.

## **Restricted Funds**

Restricted funds are an important part of the Thoreau Society, but they exist outside our regular operating budget and rely on our day-to-day capacity to make them meaningful. These funds include the endowment for the Thoreau Prize and the two Fellowships. They provide support for these specific programs, helping to recognize excellence and advance scholarship, but they do not cover the staffing, bookkeeping, or administrative work required to manage and run them.

In essence, restricted funds create incredible opportunities, but the Society’s regular operations provide the foundation—the people, systems, and resources—that make those opportunities possible. While these endowments allow us to honor achievements and support our mission, they still depend on the broader budget to turn the funds into action and ensure their full impact.