



ENVIRONMENTAL GRANTMAKING STRATEGY

Executive Summary

New Hampshire's forests, lakes, wetlands, and mountains are the state's most treasured assets. Not only is conservation of these natural resources an economic driver for the state, it also improves the health and well-being of Granite Staters who can enjoy time in nature. However, while natural ecosystems in New Hampshire may seem abundant, they are increasingly threatened by development and climate change, and persistent inequities in access to nature determine who can experience its benefits. Environmental harms from pollution, climate change, and substandard neighborhood conditions are also drawn along lines of race and income, which further deprives some communities, especially BIPOC and low-income communities, of their right to a healthy environment. Excluding people from nature not only causes individual and community harm, it also restricts potential nature advocates who are needed to push for protections globally and locally.

The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation has supported environmental work in the past; however, it was limited in a way that challenged our ability to address core equity issues. Under Together We Thrive, we have an opportunity to reach even further to support a more equitable environmental movement in New Hampshire, one that puts local environmental issues and climate change on par with conservation, preserves natural resources for their intrinsic value and community benefit, and responds to the interests of more people. After extensive research into the field, we are changing our grantmaking strategy in pursuit of the following vision:

Environmental organizations in New Hampshire shift their process and practices to recognize communities historically excluded from environmental work and create platforms for their voices to be heard on environmental issues that matter most to them.

To achieve this vision, we will pursue change in the following areas using open-call grantmaking, invitation-only grantmaking, and convening:

- **Capacity Building:** Support conservation nonprofits to develop the capacity for meaningful community engagement and partnerships to expand their reach into marginalized communities.
- **Greater Access:** Promote greater access to the outdoors for all, with a focus on low-income communities, communities of color, and differently abled individuals.
- **Environmental Justice Organizing:** Invest in organizations that build environmental justice capacity and grassroots efforts, ensuring that everyone has a voice in decisions affecting their local environment.

- **Climate Action:** Apply pressure for climate action at both the state and local levels to address the impacts of climate change on communities and ecosystems. Support legislative and regulatory advocacy for climate change policy and mitigation strategies.
- **Learning Community:** Facilitate opportunities for peer-learning and collaboration within and beyond the environmental sector to share experiences and broaden the network of relationships.

At first our work in these areas will be limited by available resources and capacity. With additional resources, we will grow our investment in environmental justice, access to the outdoors, and climate change resilience, and we will deepen our cross-sectoral work. Over time we will learn more through new and strengthened relationships, at the same time the needs of the field will also change. We will continue to refine this grantmaking strategy as necessary to more effectively pursue our vision.

Background

People need a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment in order to truly thrive. This includes the air we breathe, the water we drink, the built environment that surrounds us, and the functioning ecosystems that are foundational to human life and livelihood. Protecting the environment requires us to see the interconnectedness of people and planet and to recognize that environmental benefits as well as harms can originate from a distant wilderness as much as one's own backyard.

One of New Hampshire's most treasured assets is its abundant natural resources, protected by a strong network of land trusts and a predisposition towards land conservation. When left intact and properly stewarded, these varied ecosystems can lock up carbon, keep agricultural pests at bay, protect pollinators, absorb floods, and mitigate extreme heat. They also attract visitors to the area who come to hike, paddle, climb, swim, fish, and find myriad ways to enjoy the outdoors. All of these benefits amount to a return of \$11 for every \$1 invested in conservationⁱ.

These natural resources have provided life and sustenance to people in this region since time immemorial. Artifacts found in the area now known as Keene date back 12,600 years and might be the earliest known sites of human activity in North Americaⁱⁱ. The Abenaki people who descended from these early residents traveled throughout the region along the Connecticut River, and they continue to steward the land and waters today. An innate bond with nature exists in all of us, and no matter how people engage with the outdoors, a sense of connection to nature has countless benefits to human health and well-being^{iii iv}.

Unfortunately, even where nature is abundant, the distribution of nature's benefits is inherently unequal. The history of public lands in the United States is rooted in the dispossession of Native Americans from their lands, and the early days of the conservation movement excluded people of color^v. A fissure persists in the modern environmental movement between traditional conservation nonprofits, predominantly white and historically focused on preserving wilderness, and a more diverse set of community-minded environmental justice groups that address environmental impacts on people^{vi}.

This legacy is still felt today in the persistent barriers that come between many communities and nature, even to conservation areas that are open and encouraging of public use. Proximity and transportation, expensive recreation gear, complicated jargon, and limited information about what to expect are just a few of the things that keep the outdoors a largely white, cis-gendered, affluent, and able-bodied domain.^{vii} Even in New Hampshire, all people do not share equally in the benefits of open space and natural resources, despite their abundance.^{viii}

The distribution of environmental harms – pollution, toxins, poor air and water quality – is also drawn along lines of race and income.^{ix} ^x. In New Hampshire, distant lands and waters may be conserved, but closer to home a proposed industrial plant threatens air quality, mercury contaminates fish eaten for sustenance, a vanishing tree canopy intensifies summertime heat, a landfill's toxic leachate makes swimming unsafe, and forever chemicals pollute drinking water. Unlike the state's robust community of land trusts and lake associations, New Hampshire has been slow to cultivate a grassroots environmental justice presence. As a result, many communities remain disenfranchised, denied a voice against actions that harm the local environment.

From the White Mountains to the Seacoast and every city in between, the growing climate crisis is threatening all corners of New Hampshire. Steadily rising temperatures, more extreme precipitation patterns, and reduced snowfall will have significant consequences on the northern forest ecosystem, increasing exposure to vector-borne diseases and impacting critical rural industries.^{xi} The same communities that are vulnerable to local environmental harms are poised to suffer the greatest impacts of climate change including extreme heat, poor air quality, and floods. And yet, New Hampshire lags behind its neighboring states on climate action. There has been no recent progress on legislative backed climate policy and even regulatory gains are at risk of backsliding. Fortunately, despite the impasse at the state level, climate action is gaining momentum at the local level as Granite Staters channel their energy into municipal climate plans, energy committees, and other citizen groups.

An equitable environmental movement is good for people and the planet. If all Granite Staters were protected equally from environmental harms and shared equally in nature's benefits, it would improve the health and well-being of more people so that everyone can thrive. The most complex issues of our time – climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution – need more diverse ideas and perspectives contributed at all levels if we have a chance to change our course. An environmental movement that meets the needs of more people will draw in those perspectives. And if more people found their own spark of connection with nature, it would be more universally valued and cared for in the long term.^{xii}

The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation has made grants to environmental organizations from many sources, including the Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund, the Wellborn Ecology Fund, the Tillotson Fund, the Community Grants program, agency and designated funds, flexible funds, and many donor advised funds. In the early 2010s the Foundation actively engaged in the creation and support of energy and climate policy while leveraging federal funding with grants from the Climate and Energy Action Fund, now spent down. The Foundation has also made grants to support conservation work through three primary field of interest funds, which allowed for proactive, on-going, unrestricted support to

some organizations. This grantmaking nurtured important organizational growth and development, supported many successes, and catalyzed impressive equity work. However, we recognize that the focused approach to grantmaking also limited our ability to address core equity issues. Now under a new strategic plan, Together We Thrive, we have an opportunity to reach even further to support a more equitable environmental movement in New Hampshire, one that puts local environmental issues and climate change on par with conservation, preserves natural resources for their intrinsic value and community benefit, and responds to the needs and interests of more people.

Researching the field

Through conversations and observation, we know that several environmental organizations have been leading on these issues for years. Their community engagement, novel partnerships, attention to accessibility, and internal organizational work have demonstrated an embrace of equity in the field. However, the Foundation had never taken a comprehensive look at how environmental organizations saw their role in the movement for equity, racial justice, and economic security. To inform our new grantmaking approach, we engaged the Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative to do a comprehensive study through 28 interviews with environmental leaders and a survey sent to 92 organizations¹ that yielded a 59% response rate. The survey sought to solicit feedback on:

- their greatest needs and funding challenges;
- the degree to which they're advancing equity, racial justice and economic security;
- their approaches to community engagement;
- their focus on climate change mitigation and resilience;
- their work on environmental justice;
- how they are listening to communities and incorporating those voices in their decision making.

A second survey was also sent to potential partner organizations in the social services sector with a 52% response rate. Additional inputs to this research report were the 2020 Environmental Opportunity Grants program, which awarded small grants to projects at the intersection of community and environment; additional research and interviews by the Senior Program Officer; a 2019 landscape scan with leaders in the field; and the research inputs for Together We Thrive.

There was broad agreement among survey respondents and interviewees that these inequities exist in New Hampshire and are a problem that must be addressed. Many organizations are already finding creative approaches that are unique to them and their missions, often in partnership with organizations outside of the environmental sector. These efforts are leading to a growing body of examples and learnings, albeit decentralized, that can inform and inspire more progress. Just a few of these examples are:

- A guided nature walk for New American families in partnership with a refugee services organization

¹ All organizations in GrantSource with a 990 code representing "environment" were invited to participate.

- A piece of high-tech equipment, purchased and shared among land trusts and conservation commissions, to get a standard measure of the difficulty of public trails
- A summer jobs program that gets low-income, rural teens in paid trail stewardship positions
- Community gardens and woodlots, hosted by land trusts and tended by volunteers, that support local food and fuel assistance programs

However, environmental organizations still face significant barriers to bringing equity, justice, and economic security into their work, chief among them are time and resources. Also, organizations may take a narrow view of equity, justice, and economic security, when a broader view would reveal more points of connection to more people while still advancing the mission of the organization. Additionally, organizations often lack relationships in the broader community of people who are not already actively engaged in land conservation and recreation. This lack of connection reflects the persistent cultural and geographic barriers to the outdoors that have become a self-perpetuating loop of inequity that requires targeted capacity and attention to break.

Looking ahead

We recommend a new approach to grantmaking to begin addressing inequities in New Hampshire's environmental sector. This plan is framed within the boundaries of our existing field of interest funds and focuses on the most pressing concerns that were elevated in our research with no additional funding or capacity considered. With this approach we will pursue the following vision:

Environmental organizations in New Hampshire shift their process and practices to recognize communities historically excluded from environmental work and create platforms for their voices to be heard on environmental issues that matter most to them.

To achieve this vision, we will support change in these areas:

Goal: More conservation nonprofits have the capacity, confidence, and relationships necessary for meaningful community engagement. Engaging community members with greater ease, particularly those who have been traditionally excluded, will allow organizations to be more responsive to people's needs and interests.

Action: Help conservation nonprofits build the capacity to deepen their focus on community and bring an equity lens to their work. Many conservation nonprofits, especially smaller land trusts, are still developing the muscle for intentional community engagement and partnership development. Flexible, multi-year grants will provide them with the resources and time that they need to grow that area of their work. We will run an annual open grant call to award multi-year unrestricted grants to improve outreach capacity and community building in conservation nonprofits. While these grants will be unrestricted, applicants will be evaluated on their actionable equity goals and progress. Community voice will be integrated into grant selection either through a selection committee and/or grant readers.

Action: Encourage and support environmental nonprofits to pursue partnerships that build more bridges into the community. Survey respondents reported that their equity work was limited by their existing relationships, and some felt that they didn't have the connections needed to extend deeper into communities of people who aren't already engaged. However, there are examples of existing community-focused projects done in partnership with organizations from outside the sector. A second survey to social services organizations and additional interviews showed an interest in starting a dialogue and potentially collaborating with conservation organizations who make their assets (land, skills, and know-how) more available. Solid partnerships could also obviate the need for organizations to invest in new community programs of their own and prevent reinventing the wheel. NHCN program staff will work together to convene capable and interested organizations of different sectors to share ideas and catalyze potential partnerships with funding support. At least initially, grant making in this area will be by invitation only.

Goal: There are more ways for people to experience the outdoors in New Hampshire, particularly low-income communities, communities of color, and people of different abilities. This will mean that a greater diversity of perspectives are being considered with intentional action to make conservation a bigger, more welcoming tent.

Action: Foster more connections to the outdoors by promoting greater access. Conservation organizations can do a lot to improve and promote access to conserved lands and waters, but there are many other groups working to remove long-standing barriers and draw a broader constituency of people outside. Some of these groups would not consider themselves "environmental organizations," and may not respond to an open call for an environmental grant program. However, they are doing the important work of connecting people to nature at a variety of entry-points. This work should be funded through flexible, invitation-only grants that intentionally seek out new, emergent work. Promoting greater access could include

- Improving information about trail accessibility
- Adaptive outdoor recreation
- Advocacy and support for BIPOC participants in outdoor recreation
- Deeper engagement with Indigenous communities
- Gear-lending libraries
- Transportation support to outdoor areas
- Nature-based education, particularly for underserved youth
- Pocket parks and community gardens in "nature deprived" areas
- Multi-lingual interpretive signage
- Facilitate sharing of local Indigenous history

Identifying these opportunities will require specific, targeted outreach and an investment in relationship-building statewide and beyond. It will also require ongoing collaboration with other staff in the Department of Community Engagement and Impact to refer potential grantee partners. At least initially, grant making in this area will be by invitation only.

Goal: There is greater capacity for environmental justice organizing throughout the state, giving more people the strength to challenge environmental impacts in their own communities and a voice to advocate for the environment they wish to see.

Action: Nurture an environmental justice ground game. From Save Our Shores to the Northern Pass, Granite Staters have a history of organizing to stop big, point-in-time environmental threats, but the energy those campaigns generate quickly dissipates after the threat is gone. As a result, there has been no sustained organizing capacity for environmental justice in the state, and low-income communities in particular have very few tools to oppose the environmental threats they face in their own neighborhoods. While the efforts listed above help more people enjoy the benefits of conserved natural areas, environmental justice helps to ensure that everyone's immediate surroundings are safe and healthy, and that people have a voice in the decisions that impact their surrounding environment. Grant resources can be invested in organizations that are building environmental justice capacity and seeding grassroots efforts in community. At least initially, grant funding in this area will be by invitation only.

Goal: Timely investments apply pressure for climate action at the state level while supporting other climate tools at the local level. The urgency of the climate crisis and its impact on communities and ecosystems demands that we push for climate action at every opportunity.

Action: Protect all Granite Staters and New Hampshire's vital ecosystems from the worsening impacts of climate change. Climate change is exacerbating existing inequities and health disparities, placing the greatest impact on the communities who have contributed the least to the problem. It is also undermining the proper functioning of ecosystems that are already hemmed in by development. New Hampshire may lag the rest of New England in addressing renewable energy, energy efficiency, and other climate mitigation strategies, but improving economics and growing awareness have sparked creative ways to address climate change even when political will is lacking. We also must be attentive to the gains already won to prevent backsliding. A new field of interest fund has made more resources available to fund climate change mitigation strategies, particularly municipal action for climate change mitigation, technical assistance on clean energy and energy efficiency, legislative and administrative advocacy for climate change policy, and coalition building.

Goal: There are more formal and informal opportunities for peer-learning and collaboration within and beyond the environmental field. These opportunities should be designed to inspire equity work by sharing examples and experiences while also broadening the network of relationships and potential partnerships.

Action: Support a robust learning community and a regular gathering to share experiences building equity into environmental work. Given the size of the state, there is already a healthy amount of ad hoc networking among environmental and conservation groups. There is also the annual Saving Special Places conference and regular workshops of the NH Land Trust Coalition, which often explore themes related to equity. However, the work to develop a learning community is capacity limited, and gatherings of conservation and environmental professionals may reinforce existing silos and limit opportunities for cross-sectoral partnerships that can generate new community-focused programs.

To support a learning community for environmental equity in New Hampshire we can use our convening ability and the learnings from our own grant reporting to inspire new and deeper equity work in the sector. We can also measure and share changing trends that we see through grant applications and reports. We can document case studies of new and inspiring examples that we can hold on our website and share with partners.

Areas to grow

More flexible funding will be necessary to knit together all the issues for a stronger, more unified environmental movement. These are the first areas to grow as additional contributions allow for the funding and capacity to go deeper into these issues:

- **Expand the environmental justice ground game.** As the environmental justice organizing work in Manchester and Nashua takes root, and as a community of new partners develops, grant resources to nurture emerging environmental justice groups will be necessary to maintain the momentum of a growing movement.
- **Increase the pool of more flexible funding to foster even more connections to the outdoors by promoting greater access.** New funding that is not restricted to conservation nonprofits will allow us to reach more organizations that are building connections between people and nature that might not even define themselves by environmental work.
- **Build funding for community-level climate change resilience.** Our dedicated climate change funding is intended for climate change mitigation, with particular interest in legislative and regulatory advocacy. We don't have any dedicated funding to support climate change resilience work at the community level, yet local preparedness is crucial. With additional funding, we could support community climate resilience in partnership with other organizations that can reach smaller, community initiatives.
- **Be prepared to support more intensive climate policy planning and advocacy work at the legislative level.** Shifts in the legislative environment may open up unexpected opportunities for climate action that we must be ready to advance.
- **Engage in a dialogue about opportunities in cross-sectoral work.** The research report recommended greater attention to cross-sectoral work to break down silos and draw new pathways for conservation organizations through equity. However, before this work can be promoted at large scale, it will take more conversation and intentional planning about how to break down thematic silos and partner on cross-sectoral work internally. These areas, such as housing, agriculture, and sustainability, are also very resource intensive and would require funding beyond the current scope of the environmental strategy. There are also opportunities in a growing overlap between the Foundation's investments and sustainable industries.

Notes, definitions, and interpretations

Environmental organizations/sector – The environmental sector can be interpreted very broadly and is often a catch-all for a variety of different work. For example “environmental organizations” could be land trusts, lake associations, clean water advocates, clean energy groups, energy efficiency groups, climate change advocacy groups (grassroots and legislative), outdoor recreation organizations, environmental education organizations, sustainability advocates, and solid waste and recycling groups. Environmental justice work is truly cross-cutting and deals directly with issues in the built environment, such as housing, pollution, and public health. Food and farming, especially sustainable agriculture, are often labeled environmental as well.

Conservation organizations/sector – Conservation fits within the environmental sector, but it is primarily concerned with protecting natural resources from degradation and over-consumption. Conservation organizations would be land trusts, lake associations, clean water advocates.

Equity – We believe that everyone should have the opportunities and resources they need to thrive and that outcomes should not be determined by race, background or identity. In this document, when we talk about equity in the conservation sector, we are talking about efforts to ensure that all people can enjoy the benefits of nature equally, regardless of race, income, geography, and ability. Equity in the conservation sector recognizes that the statement “We permanently protect land, which is available for all” is insufficient to eliminate existing barriers to access and participation. Equity in the conservation sector also recognizes that not all people enjoy the outdoors in the same way, and it may require finding different entry points that might feel new or surprising. It may also mean bringing more voices to the table to share their interests, desires, and ideas for making the outdoors more accessible to all people. Equitable participation in the benefits of nature is just one side of the equity coin. The other is environmental justice (see below).

Environmental Justice – We acknowledge the harms of systemic racism and discrimination and believe that all people deserve equal rights and fair treatment in every aspect of society, including the environment. There are varying definitions of environmental justice, but this definition from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ EJ policy is particularly comprehensive: “Environmental justice is based on the principle that all people have a right to be protected from environmental pollution and to live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment. Environmental justice is the equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies and the equitable distribution of environmental benefits.”^{xiii}

Outdoor Access – Any activities that bring more people outside to experience the well-being benefits of nature and to spark an appreciation for the natural world. Outdoor access is not exclusive to wilderness areas. Research shows that time spent in green spaces in dense urban areas, such as in community gardens and pocket parks, convey benefits to health and well-being. Outdoor access includes modifications to traditional recreation spaces and activities as well as new activities and spaces requested by community groups. This also includes work to make outdoor spaces feel safer and more welcoming to groups who have been historically excluded.

Climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation/resilience – Climate change mitigation seeks to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted to the atmosphere. Climate change mitigation happens at all levels, but the work that yields the greatest impact is in policy, regulation, and finance. Climate change resilience and adaptation seeks to help people prepare for and respond to the impacts of climate change as they happen. Without a doubt, the most effective climate change resilience and adaptation efforts will be guided by local communities who will bear climate change impacts ^{xiv}.

More detail on the available funding – Limits on funding and staff capacity require us to find focus within this field, and that focus is also dictated by the purpose language of the three field of interest funds that we are using. Two of the three funds (McCabe and Cottrell), which make up the bulk of the existing resources, have a strict focus on conservation of natural resources: “lands, waters, forests, and wildlife,” or “preservation and protection of our natural environment.” These funds can support the work of conservation organizations, but they cannot be used for other environmental organizations that work on education, recreation, sustainability, climate change advocacy, environmental justice, food and farming, etc. The smallest of the three funds (Hubbard) includes a provision for “other environmentally important purposes.” This fund can be used more flexibly, and can be used to support efforts to bring more access to the outdoors, even if the work is being conducted by other types of organizations, such as environmental education, grassroots advocacy, adaptive outdoor recreation, etc. The Climate Action Fund is for climate change mitigation.

ⁱ Trust for Public Land. 2014. New Hampshire’s Return on Investment in Land Conservation.

ⁱⁱ Goodby, Robert G. 2021. A Deep Presence: 13,000 Years of Native American History.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Wilderness Society. 2022. Access to Nature is a Human Rights Issue.

<https://www.wilderness.org/articles/blog/access-nature-health-and-human-rights-issue/>

^{iv} Jimenez, Marcia P. et al. 2021. Associations between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

^v Vestal, Lornett. 2016. The Unbearable Whiteness of Hiking and How to Solve It. Sierra Club.

<https://www.sierraclub.org/outdoors/2016/12/unbearable-whiteness-hiking-and-how-solve-it>

^{vi} Ferris, Deeohn. 2019. Environmental Justice: Moving Equity from Margins to Mainstream. Nonprofit Quarterly.

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/environmental-justice-moving-equity-from-margins-to-mainstream/>

^{vii} 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report. The Outdoor Foundation. <https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/2021-outdoor-participation-trends-report/>

^{viii} Rowland-Shea, Jenny, et al. 2020. The Nature Gap: Confronting Racial and Economic Disparities in the Destruction and Protection of Nature in America. Center for American Progress. Hispanic Access Foundation.

^{ix} Britton-Purdy, Jedediah. 2016. Environmentalism Was Once a Social-Justice Movement. The Atlantic.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/12/how-the-environmental-movement-can-recover-its-soul/509831/>

^x Irwin, Thomas. 2014. Environmental Justice in New Hampshire: An Assessment of Issues and Needs. Conservation Law Foundation.

^{xi} Lemcke-Stampone, Mary D.; Wake, Cameron P.; and Burakowski, Elizabeth. 2022 “New Hampshire Climate Assessment 2021”. *The Sustainability Institute*. 71. <https://scholars.unh.edu/sustainability/71>

^{xii} DeVilje, Nicole V, et al. 2021. Time Spent in Nature Is Associated with Increased Pro-Environmental Attitudes and Behaviors. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

^{xiii} Irwin, Thomas. 2014. Environmental Justice in New Hampshire: An Assessment of Issues and Needs. Conservation Law Foundation.

^{xiv} Climate Adaptation vs. Mitigation: What’s the Difference, and Why Does it Matter? Climate Reality Project.

<https://www.climateRealityProject.org/blog/climate-adaptation-vs-mitigation-why-does-it-matter>