

Sustainable Funding Strategies for Community-based Collaborative Conservation (CBCCs) Groups: Challenges and Opportunities
Wednesday, March 11, 2020
2:30 – 4:00 p.m.

Session Hosts:

- Gary Burnett, Executive Director, Heart of the Rockies Initiative
- Gary Wolfe, Executive Director, Cinnabar Foundation

Panelists:

- Henry Rael, Program Officer, McCune Charitable Foundation
- Ethan Kunard, Montana Watershed Coordination Council
- Jonathan Peterson, Network for Landscape Conservation

Opening Comments

From a Practitioner's Perspective – Gary Burnett

The Heart of the Rockies Initiative provides access to science, capacity and capital for our 26 land trust members for their local contributions to landscape connectivity and dependent local community values in the 315 million-acre central Rocky Mountain corridor. The High Divide Collaborative, one of our core programs, is a partnership of diverse, public and private interests in the High Divide of Idaho and Montana delivering collaboratively built conservation capacity and science-based conservation planning.

Wilburforce was a founding funder of Heart of the Rockies Initiative (HOTR).

- Sustained funding over the years has been and remains essential.

Those early investments paid off for land trust work:

- Helped develop Montana Association of Land Trusts and Land Trust Alliance (LTA) Western Program, Terraferma, and Habitat Montana
- Recognizing the significant LTA investment in land trust capacity building and accreditation
- HOTR \$1.5 million investment of capacity for 65 land trust positions
- \$30 million in Land and Water Conservation Fund for High Divide private land conservation

As a Wilburforce grantee, HOTR staff has access to capacity building Training Resources for the Environmental Community (TREC):

- Webinars on a wide variety of organizational topics
- Group trainings, small workshops
- One-on-one training for specific job responsibilities like leadership and fund development

HOTR has been fortunate to have Wilburforce support early on, and the continued support over the years for both general operations and capacity sub-grants to land trust members.

Collaborative conservation practitioners need more funders like Wilburforce, especially with the sunset of the Brainerd Foundation, and the pending sunset of the Kendeda Fund.

Referring the session from the previous day:

- Landscape conservation requires collaboration at scale – these go hand in hand
- Collaboration requires general operations funding to move transactions to transformation

From a Funder's Perspective – Gary Wolfe

The Cinnabar Foundation exclusively funds environmental and conservation organizations in Montana and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, and we really like to work with community-based, collaborative conservation organizations.

The comments I make will be from Cinnabar's perspective, but I think they are representative of many other funders with whom I have visited about this issue.

Opportunities – Conservation funders really like:

- 1) community-based organizations that work across the partisan divide; and
- 2) a collaborative approach to solving important conservation issues.

Challenges

- 1) **The large number of community-based organizations.** This presents a challenge for both the organizations seeking funding and the funders.
 - a. With such a large playing field, it's a challenge for a small local organization to get noticed by a funder; and
 - b. It's a challenge for the funder to filter through the many local groups and identify the ones that are best aligned with the foundation's goals, and most capable of getting the job done.
- 2) **Capacity Issues.** Like local organizations, foundations have capacity issues as well – both with the amount of funding available to grant, and with staff to evaluate granting opportunities.

For example, I am the only employee of the Cinnabar Foundation and each year I receive between 100 and 140 grant applications. I don't have the time to dig deep into each and every one of the small local organizations that apply to us, and thoroughly evaluate which ones are best prepared to deliver the outcomes specified in their grant applications.

Panel Case Studies

“New Mexico Collaborative Zone Grants” – Henry Rael

Multiple funders in New Mexico are collaborating to create a philanthropic structure that enables “collaboration among funders to support collaboration among grantees.” The Zone Grant pilot was launched in 2018 with a Request for Proposals from collaboratives of at least three organizations responding to questions asked by funders.

Participating funders were asked to support 1-year planning grants of around \$25,000 that would support collaborations in their efforts to align their work in response to a particular question. In the pilot year, there were a total of 6 questions that were included in the RFP, including the following:

- What will it take for affordable housing to become a more equitably accessible available resource in Santa Fe?
- How can vulnerable families be supported to overcome the barriers they face in building assets and wealth?
- How might organizations work together to connect direct service provision to broader policy change for the benefit of vulnerable New Mexican Families?
- What would an equitable energy transition look like for New Mexico communities?
- What can be done to accelerate the return to and wider-scale adoption of regenerative agricultural practices?

After the RFP was issued, the collaborating funders (including McCune Charitable Foundation, Thornburg Foundation, Santa Fe Community Foundation, NUSENDA Foundation, Solidago Foundation and others) received 62 collaborative proposals, of which 14 were selected for funding. After completing a year of planning, the 14 groups then submitted applications for implementation funding, with a total of 8 grantees selected to receive grants up to \$135,000 per year for two years to implement what they developed through their planning process.

The big takeaway for the participating funders is that unless we as funders are willing to “walk the walk” and work hard to collaborate, we never quite get where we want to get with regard to getting our grantees to collaborate. Through the pilot year, we learned a lot about how difficult true collaboration actually is, creating a rich environment for learning about ourselves and about how we can collectively support nonprofits in a way that is easier for them and more likely to build collaboration that lasts.

“Montana Watershed Coordination Councils Watershed Fund” – Ethan Kunard

Introduction

At a statewide level, the Montana Watershed Coordination Council (MWCC) works with a wide variety of community-based conservation groups (e.g., watershed organizations, conservation districts, forest collaborative partners, etc.) providing support and resources to their efforts. These groups seek to implement conservation initiatives that improve water resources, wildlife habitat, forest health, and community resiliency, but are often burdened by the lack of sustainable capacity to adequately plan and implement these activities. Whereas there are several funding sources for project implementation across the state, there are very few funding opportunities in Montana that support operating support for these community-based groups. Therefore, MWCC has been working with private funders and state agency partners to garner support for operating capacity of these collaborative groups through the “Watershed Fund”.

Challenges

To be successful, community-based collaboratives need access to professional and organizational development trainings, as well as operating support.

Training and capacity funding is extremely limited and competitive, and therefore, difficult to access.

There are funders interested in supporting this work, but it can be challenging for them to navigate and prioritize the dozens of entities seeking support.

Opportunities

Collecting investments into a statewide pool of funding and sub-granting awards to community-based groups has had an incredibly positive response from conservation groups in Montana.

Building relationships and leveraging financial resources at a statewide level allows for a large return on investment and results in large conservation outcomes across a broad geographic area.

More exposure to this model might draw additional support from prospective funding partners to invest in the MWCC Watershed Fund (and similar efforts in neighboring states) and result in more sustainable funding for community-based conservation groups.

“Catalyst Fund Re-granting Fund to Support CBCCs” – Jonathan Peterson

The Network for Landscape Conservation works to support and grow the field of collaborative landscape conservation. Our work is centered around efforts to connect practitioners to resources and tools—and to each other—so that we can continue to innovate and advance the practice. The Network is comprised of more than 200 organizational partners and more than 3,000 individual practitioners.

In 2019 the Network launched the Landscape Conservation Catalyst Fund, with support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. An example where the Network is well positioned to address a challenge acknowledged in the opening: the constrained capacity of foundations. The Network is already connected with a breadth of landscape conservation initiatives across the country and can more efficiently operate a Fund that drives small capacity-building investments into Landscape Conservation Partnerships.

I. Catalyst Fund purpose—to accelerate the pace and scale of conservation across the United States through targeted support of collaborative landscape conservation.

The disconnect the Catalyst Fund strives to address: It is nearly axiomatic that collaboration is essential to successful landscape conservation, it takes time and energy to intentionally build genuine collaboration—but funding support for the process of collaboration is very scarce.

The Fund works to specifically support key collaborative processes and activities to build critical capacity and forward momentum in Landscape Conservation Partnerships.

II. Catalyst Fund Priorities—careful thought went into the framing of the Fund to ensure a small Fund could have strategic impact in a big field.

The Fund targets capacity building and investing in the collaborative process of:

- Landscape Conservation Partnerships—a very specific definition of Landscape Conservation Partnerships. See [Catalyst Fund materials](#) for the detailed definition, but essentially targeting Partnerships that are coalescing around a community-grounded approach to building the type of long-term, enduring collaboration that can successfully achieve a broadly holistic vision for a defined landscape.
- Building Stage of Partnership Development—a generalized description of three stages of Partnership development (Starting, Building, and Conserving) serves as a heuristic to let us think critically and strategically around when a small capacity-building investment could have the most impact: Building stage is where a \$10,000 to \$25,000 grant can have most impact.

- Indigenous-led Partnership—a portion of the Fund is specifically reserved for Indigenous-led Partnerships that are working to advance Indigenous landscape conservation priorities. Recognizes:
 - The colonizing history of conservation
 - The innovation and leadership that many Indigenous communities are playing around themes of habitat connectivity and climate resilience.

III. Peer Learning Program—we are investing in creating a very intentional peer learning program from grantees to participate in over the course of their grant period. Intent is to foster a real opportunity to learn across Partnerships, and also a huge opportunity for the Network to capture lessons learned and insights to share more broadly with the entire field.

- Rationale: this is an emerging field, and collaborative landscape conservation is asking us to work and think in new ways—we have much to learn from one another.
- Structure: working to co-create an effective exchange and learning environment with the first cohort of grantees currently:
 - Bi-monthly zoom meetings
 - Annual in-person Retreat
 - Opportunity to targeted one-on-one support

Flip Chart Notes Taken During Presentations and Discussion
(Notes taken by Nicole Reese)

Key Points

Challenges:

- Increase in CBCCs, increases competition, capacity issues, funding, and staff
- Long-term funding is limited
- Grants are driving collaboration, which means when funding ends, we lose the CBCC
- Even funders struggle to collaborate
- How do we get line item in agency budget to support capacity?
- Funders struggle to be well-informed and connected with many grassroots
- Tension between funding collaboration vs. project implementation
- Difficulty coordinating fundraising between partners at different scales
 - o Needs honest communication
 - o Potential to use partnership - make the case for more funding
 - o Potential opportunity: mention the value of partnerships within applications for funding
- Collaborative efforts without fiscal agents struggle for funding
 - o Foundations need to give funding to 501c3 entity on behalf of partnership

Opportunities:

- Work across boundaries
- Funders must be as committed to collaboration as they expect of nonprofit organizations
- “Move at the speed of trust”
- Build relationships and communicate with primary funders for these opportunities
 - o The following examples take on the task of reporting to the different primary funders, and ease capacity constraints on grantees by requiring only one report

Example: NM Collaborative Zone Grant

- 1 year for planning and 2 years for implementation
- Framed by questions instead of outcomes
- Must be collaboration of three or more organizations
- Unrestricted funding

Example: MWCC Watershed Fund

- Facilitates connection between funders and CBCCs
- Building relationships with federal, state, and private funders
- Funding for capacity and professional development
- Provides rigorous grant review process to alleviate funders’ struggle to be well-informed

Example: Landscape Conservation Catalyst Fund

- Connected to grassroots efforts, relieve capacity issue for funders and increase impact
- Collaboration is necessary for landscape conservation, makes the case for funds supporting capacity
- Funding targets the phase within collaboratives to support transition from collective vision to collective action
- Priority for indigenous-led partnerships
- Peer learning cohort – sharing between partnerships

Next Steps

- **Share these methods for capacity grants with foundations and funders**
- **Practitioners can pitch these ideas to funders – take charge of your own future!**
Make the case for supporting capacity of collaboration
- **Define CBCC for funders**