

**Field Scan, Funder Landscape Scan, and Recommendations for Conservation Funding
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Introduction

In 2024 The Maine Community Foundation (MaineCF) adopted climate change as a new strategic focus across the organization, with intentions of helping address some of Maine's critical climate issues. Since the 1990s, MaineCF has been supporting climate adjacent work through The Maine Land Conservation Grant program, which has been a flexible mechanism for distributing resources around the state. In 2018 MaineCF received a bequest making it possible to reexamine their grantmaking, and the Maine Land Conservation Grant program entered into a period of change. At this juncture, the Foundation contracted with Momentum Conservation (as its previous name: Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative) to conduct a landscape analysis resulting in the "Report on Conservation in Maine." Partially as a result of this report, the Maine Land Conservation grant program was replaced by two emergent grant programs: *Conservation for All*, which offers general support to conservation organizations, and *Maine Land Protection*, which offers support for land acquisitions and easements.

Now, as the Foundation centers climate change more robustly, MaineCF is once again exploring how to redesign grant programs, engage donors and convene interest holders in order to more strategically and effectively direct funding. In this phase of reflection and redesign, Momentum Conservation was hired to research and offer recommendations to MaineCF with the intention of supporting the Foundation in positioning their conservation funding with an eye toward equity, climate adaptation and resilience. Momentum Conservation is a statewide organization that offers a justice-centered approach to the conservation movement by connecting and empowering Maine's conservation organizations through capacity building, grant-making, and convening. This report draws heavily on the experiences of Momentum staff and our extended Momentum community.

In order to present the most thoughtful report possible, Jessica Burton developed a team that included Tyler Kidder, estephanie guaregua maroáll, and Deborah Bicknell. Their bios are included in Appendix 5. This team undertook a comprehensive exploration of the current state of conservation and conservation funding in Maine. The components of this report include:

- The Conservation Field Scan, led by estephanie guaregua maroáll, is a synthesis and analysis of recent reports, interviews, and general research from the field directly related to conservation, climate, and equity.
- The Conservation Funder Scan, led by Tyler Kidder - a synthesis and analysis of the scope of the funding needs and priority gaps through focus groups, interviews, and survey data of conservation funders.
- Collaborative Design Process - in recognition of the complexity of this topic and in respect to the significance of this report, the team undertook an approach of collaborative design for both research and writing. Deborah Bicknell provided collaborative design expertise, thought partnership and editing support.

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- III. *Funder Scan Summary* – This section includes a description of the methodology used and a few central lessons. Analysis of gaps and recommendations are integrated in later sections of this document.
- IV. *Gap Analysis* – This section includes a list gathered from both scans of the gaps that exist in funding and the field.
- V. *Recommendations for Maine Community Foundation’s Conservation Grant Fund Program* – This section includes specific considerations for MaineCF as they move resources to communities including Focus Areas, Grantmaking Models, Measurements.
- VI. *Report Conclusions and Final* This section includes summative thoughts and final notes,
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I. Context, Key Terms, and Guiding Questions

This report is being written during an historic moment in time. The current federal administration in the US is seeking to create radical change here and abroad, including massive cuts to funding for essential services related to the environment. Our current state administration is supportive in attending to impacts and issues of climate change, however Maine’s key elections in the next few years could change Maine’s ability to fund what is needed to prepare our communities. Change is also confronting us ecologically. Due to climate change we see changes impacting the state’s identity through sea level rise, increased storm impacts, and

ocean acidification and warming. Not only are these changes impacting our natural environment, but also the economic structure of our state.

We are also aware that this is a time of great possibility. We know that many of the systems which are dissolving are also systems which have upheld patterns and policies designed to exclude, extract, and oppress historically and systemically marginalized groups.. Therefore, we are living through a time when we must continue to look at our work through an equity lens, standing firmly together with the intention of centering justice, reciprocity and sustainability. We must continue to be aware of positions of privilege, keeping our eyes open to the intersectional issues which weave through conservation and land ownership and access, working thoughtfully and strategically together to create a world that is more in balance.

Alongside understanding the larger context of the times, and the moment in time for MaineCF, it is important to note the context of this report, most importantly the report's limited scope and scale. Though robust in its recommendations, the report is incomplete. Due to limited time, resources and available research, not all necessary questions have been explored and not all important voices have not been included in it. The intention behind this report, even with its limitations, is to offer MaineCF both insight and useful information, and to encourage the Foundation to commit to ongoing, emergent inquiry, and to catalyze a deeper practice of thinking systemically when addressing complex topics such as conservation and climate change. . We hope this report will catalyze an even deeper commitment by MaineCF to seek insight and collaboration with people and communities with lived experiences and from diverse viewpoints, and explore ways to integrate these insights with statewide and regional climate goals and strategies. While it may be tempting to take report recommendations as solid, due to stated limitations, this report covers only part of the information needed to understand and move within such complex times. Please see Appendix 4 for more information.

The following data points provide specific context to intersectional needs, impacts, and solutions for our work at the nexus of climate, conservation, and equity. We hope that they offer an underpinning for understanding this vast topic and provide additional context for the recommendations.

- According to Land In Common, a community based land trust in Maine, 17% of Maine is owned by 4 families and companies; 40% of Maine is owned by multinational corporations, billionaires, and investment firms; 1% of land is owned by Wabanaki Nations and people; and less than .01% is owned by non-native people of color who make up 7% of the population.
- In 2017, the USDA NASS Census of Agriculture reported that .2% of all 7158 farms in Maine are owned by Black or African American Farmers, .36 % are owned by American Indian or Alaska Native people, and 1.3% is owned by Hispanic or Latino people. (Land Access for Indigenous and African American Farmers in Maine.)
- Recent studies have explored how indigenous stewardship has supported biodiversity for over 12,000 years and yet indigenous teachings and practices are suppressed and

excluded from most conservation land (“Wabanaki Stewardship of the Land Benefits All” by Darren Ranco)

- Rural communities are often the most seriously impacted by climate related events and these same communities have limited funding and access to support for recovery projects.

Key Terms

The focus of this report is the conservation sector in Maine, including practitioners, organizations, and funders, both individuals and foundations. At the start of this report, we felt it was important to offer a few key definitions because the Maine Community Foundation does not currently have a working definition of conservation. For deeper exploration of these terms and related considerations, please see Appendix 3.

For the purpose of this report we offer the following definitions:

- We define *conservation* as long-term “protection” and management of “undeveloped” land resources, such as open space, farmland, and forestland. For a land trust, conservation refers to the practice of purchasing or receiving donations of land or conservation easements which the land trust then will hold and care for, through their active stewardship and care activities, forever.
- *Conservation funders* refers to the philanthropists, including individuals and foundations, in Maine, dedicated to the conservation of land, water, and natural resources through diverse initiatives and for multiple reasons. These efforts may encompass education, stewardship, community engagement, and enhancing community access to and acquisition of land.

Guiding Questions

The following is a list of questions we sought to explore in the researching and writing of this report. While these questions guided our initial inquiry, additional questions emerged through the process of both research and report analysis. Some questions were answered through the report research and writing process, while others needed additional time and attention. Some of the questions we explored in the report are:

- What are the current gaps in the field to achieving statewide priorities, particularly as relates to community access?
- Is there a role for conservation intending to societal issues of this time?
- Who else do we need to include in order to be successful? Who else is missing from the conversation?
- What do we mean by conservation?
- What are the measures of impact and recommended tools for evaluation?
- What are recommendations for potential focus areas and scope for grantmaking models, based on information gathered?

II. Field Scan Summary

The Field Scan and Landscape Review on Conservation and Climate by estephanie guaregua maroáll of Mycorrising LLC is one of the key sources of information informing the recommendations within this report. The Field Scan includes reviews of seven formal reports published within the last five years in the state of Maine (Wabanakiek), two websites, three discussions, and the insights of Mycorrising as an organization working with multiple education and land related organizations in the field over the last five years.

Reports reviewed:

- Wildlands in New England: Past, Present, Future. Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands, and Communities. May 2023
- Maine Won't Wait: A Four Year Plan for Climate Action. Maine Climate Council. November 2024.
- Maine Won't Wait: A Four Year Plan for Climate Action. Equity Subcommittee. March 2023.
- EcologyShifts: Sharing Our Learnings. Sewell Foundation; D Bicknell. October 2024.
- Land Access for Indigenous & African American Farmers in Maine. Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. February 2022.
- Report on Conservation in Maine. Maine Community Foundation. J Burton. August 2019.
- Amplifying Voices: Engaging Diverse Populations in the Maine Climate Plan Update. University of Maine, December 2024.

Some key takeaways from the Field Scan are:

- There is a palpable tension amongst all of the reports because of differing assumptions underlying each of their creation and approach. As a result, the reports offer very different perspectives on what success looks like, how we are going to achieve success, and who should be included. This tension is a symptom of a sector undergoing deep change and growth.
- Some consensus does exist across all reports in that:
 - there are escalating impacts and risks rising due to climate change;
 - there is care for and investment in land stewardship;
 - there is a need for immediate and substantive action.
- Organizations in conservation, land trust, environmental, and funding fields have taken big steps in the call from marginalized communities to center relationships in their work. Trust is slowly building as organizations make changes to how they work, while taking action alongside communities as they grow their internal understandings of equity, anti-oppression, and decolonial work.
- The reports are informed by strong empirical research pertaining to climate change and conservation. Furthermore, research on class, socio-economic status, and access to land has played a role in advancing awareness of racial disparities and economic insecurity in the state.
- The field of conservation has room to grow in its understanding of the beneficial aspects to our ecosystems resulting from humans practicing their cultural lifeways and traditional

foodways. For example, Wabanaki harvested sweetgrass beds are healthier than sweetgrass beds that are not harvested.. This gap is notable in the clear binary distinction between “conserved” land and “agricultural” land. This distinction is understandable because in the predominant cultural paradigm, agricultural usage is one of the most harmful impacts on ecosystems because most farmland is largescale, nonorganic, monoculture that does not support biodiversity, local community, or climate.

- There is work to be done on the shared definition of conservation to include more communities of people and more activities that connect people and land, and to clarify what the work of conservation and all of its purposes is trying to change.

III. Funder Scan Summary

Tyler Kidder led the funder scan which included a twenty-question survey, two focus groups, and two interviews. Sixteen funders who self-identify as supporting conservation organizations and programs in Maine completed the survey, and twelve funders participated in the focus groups. Tyler conducted interviews with Julian Rowland of Maine Initiatives and with Frances Socktomah and Darren Ranco of Wolankeyutomone kisi apaciyewik ("Let us take good care of what is returned" Fund) administered by the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship. The results and data received from all of these events are included in the appendices.

It is important to note that despite a widescale effort to recruit many participants in this study, a small group of funders responded. We were still able to collect a lot of data through various methodologies, however because of the size of the participant group and the individualistic nature of Maine’s philanthropic sector, the data is very disparate. This aspect of the results makes developing trends from the information difficult. Even still, there is a clear set of recommendations to harvest from these conversations, and these are shared throughout the following sections. Much remains to be learned and gained through ongoing relationships and collaboration.

Some key takeaways from the Focus Groups include:

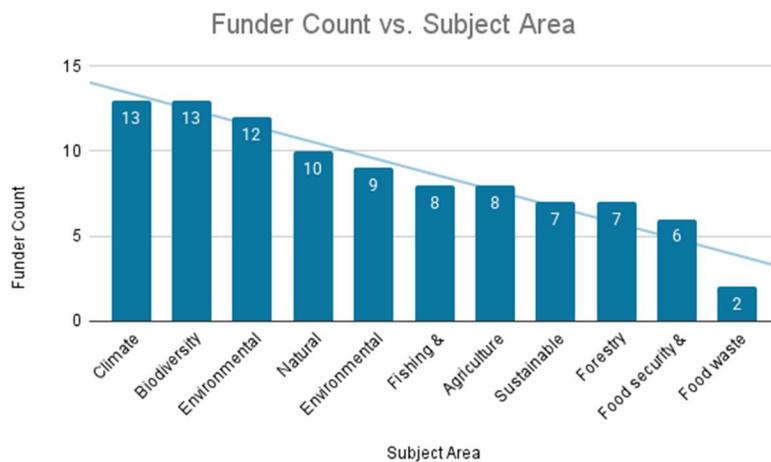
- Overall, participating funders do not formally evaluate their own programs nor the work of grantees. Instead, most of them highlight trust and relationships as evidence of success and demonstration of outcomes.
- Funders expressed the need to balance ongoing commitment to a version of ‘traditional’ land acquisition (utilizing easements or easement alternatives) while also expanding awareness of the intersectional nature of the conservation field.
- Funders have not decided how or if to integrate the Maine Climate Council’s goal to conserve 30% of Maine’s lands by 2030 with grantmaking practices. Questions remain about what counts as conserved land. Participating funders have not officially aligned with Maine’s Climate Action Plan, ‘Maine Won’t Wait’.
- Participating funders noted an increase in stewardship support requests from land organizations due to the combination of an upswing in outdoor recreation and more frequent and severe storm damage, as well as a trend toward creating accessible

places, including trails designed to accommodate one or more disabilities, and a lack of available funding to advance that work.

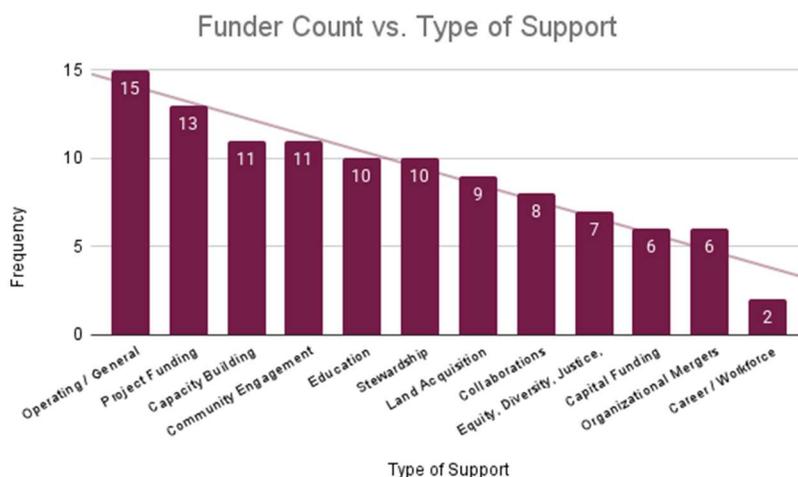
- Funders participating in the focus groups enjoyed being in community with other funders and talking about their specific programs, goals, and methods. Some of them knew each other, but others were new or unfamiliar with each other beforehand.

Some key takeaways from the survey includes:

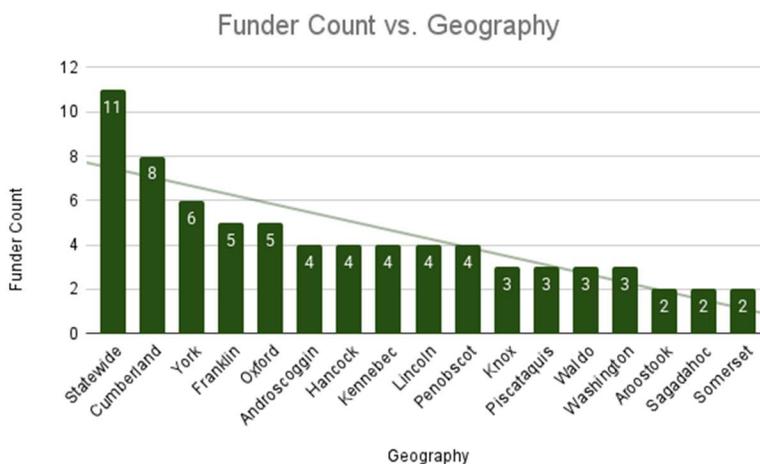
- Most funders surveyed are supporting projects related to climate and biodiversity, while fewer funders are supporting food related issues. We note here that although outreach was done to the Food Funders Network, very few of these funders participated.



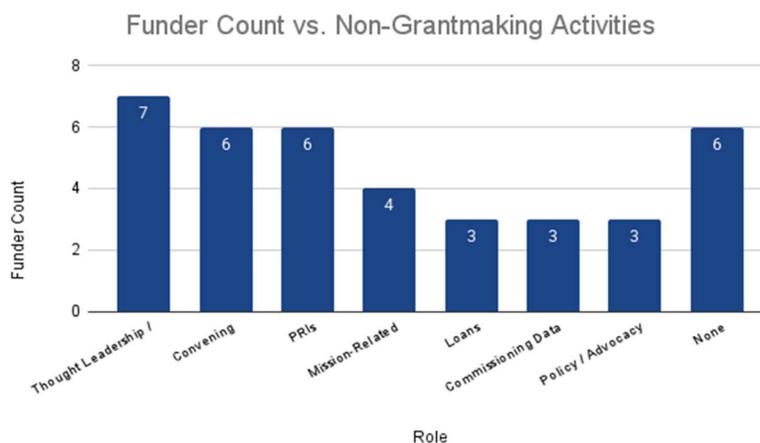
- Most funders surveyed are supporting general operations for organizations; for project specific grant opportunities, the fewest number of funders are supporting career/workforce development.



- Most funders operate on a statewide basis; there are fewer funders prioritizing specific geographic areas.



- Of the funders surveyed about their work in the field beyond grantmaking, the roles of thought leadership / communications, convening, and program-related investments (PRIs) were selected most frequently. Loans, commissioning data, and policy / advocacy were the least frequently selected non-grantmaking activities. Many funders are not offering any of these activities.



IV. Gap Analysis

The following section highlights gaps identified by both the Field Scan and the Funder Scan, and provides justification for the recommendations we propose for the MaineCF Conservation Funding redesign. Please note, there are additional, significant gaps identified in each of the full scans that provide even more context and detail on a broader scale. The gaps listed here are ones which relate directly to the Conservation Grant Program recommendations.

1. Voices are missing from the Funder and Field scan, including Wabanaki people and rural communities.
 - a. In all of the data reviewed, Indigenous voices, perspectives, and priorities are limited. This shows up as the number of Wabanaki people involved, the amount of information authored by Indigenous people, and the amount of focus on Indigenous issues.
 - b. There is also limited involvement from rural communities. The reports from the field scan appear to be separate from the communities. The reports indicate that there is a tendency for the conservation sector and conservation organizations to isolate themselves from parts of their communities, and in doing so preemptively sever the most potent pathways available to meeting their stated organizational visions.
 - c. A small subset of funders submitted data for this report and much remains to be learned, which would be best done through relationships and collaboration.

2. There is a lack of accessible and comprehensive climate adaptation and resilient goals specifically tied to conservation.
 - a. The state's goal to protect 30% of state land by 2030 is controversial and oversimplistic. This benchmark is built on the assumption that there is an average benefit to be gained by any one acre in conservation. Every acre is not the same in any framework, but specifically when we think about community and climate, there are important differentiations related to natural qualities as well as how it is being cared for and by whom.
 - b. Additionally, as stated above, funders have not decided how or if to integrate the Maine Climate Council's goal to conserve 30% of Maine's lands by 2030 with grantmaking practices and questions remain about what counts as conserved land. Participating funders have not officially aligned with Maine's Climate Action Plan, 'Maine Won't Wait'.
 - c. Funders and practitioners do not share or fully agree on what the term "conservation" relates to, contains, or intends to do. In the measurement 30x30, conservation lands are defined in a particular way that does not align with all funders or conservation organizations or communities of people. Therefore, there are not adequate ways to measure success if they do adopt 2030 goals.

3. The availability of flexible funding for innovative conservation projects, including land return, is very limited in Maine's private philanthropic sector.
 - a. Many land return projects that involve transferring land ownership to Wabanaki Tribes do not qualify for state, federal, or private grants and there is a growing demand for flexible financial support for these land return initiatives.
 - b. In order for these land return projects to happen, there is a need for more flexible tools to be used, ones that replace restrictive conservation easements. Tribes are unable to accept land encumbered with conservation easements because the easement is considered a third-party interest; this interest prevents land from

- being placed in trust for the tribes, which represents the ultimate ownership framework for Indigenous lands in this country.
- c. Additionally, the concept of land return includes different models of land access such as for purposes of harvesting, cultural practices, and spiritual connection. Models are being explored that expand access agreements without the burden of ownership, but funding for them is limited.
4. The conservation community needs to be more deeply connected and there are not currently enough opportunities for nonprofits and foundations to convene for the purpose of developing deeper trust and forging more authentic partnerships.
 - a. There is a need for more opportunities for the conservation sector to convene to exchange ideas, introduce concepts successful in other fields and geographies, build trust and relationships, bring in new perspectives, inspire fresh approaches and solutions, and rejuvenate enthusiasm for conservation work.
 5. Funding is limited for projects focused on organizational culture change, career development and pathways, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
 - a. While there is strong support for capacity building, community engagement, education, and stewardship among Maine’s conservation funders, there is significantly less support within the respondent set for support of equity/diversity/justice/belonging, capital funding, organizational mergers, and career pathways/workforce development.
 6. Food production systems on land that align with natural systems are underfunded and undervalued as a conservation purpose.
 - a. There is a lack of understanding of the role small scale, low impact agriculture has on ecosystem and community health.
 - b. Indigenous practices of harvesting native and naturally growing plants is not currently included in the state’s agricultural framework.
 - c. Funders who participated in this study do not see this connection as expressed by the low number of funders making food production a priority.

V. Recommendations for MaineCF’s Conservation Grant Fund Program

We recommend MaineCF consider the following in relation to the renewed Conservation Funding Program’s focus areas, grant making models, and measurements.

1. To address the gaps that we saw in the Field and Funder scan, and position communities for better resilience and adaptation, we recommend the Conservation Grant Fund Program consider including the following focus areas for grant funding.
 - a. *Specific communities of people who share certain identities or passions* - to address the lack of voices from these communities, this approach will help support relationship building and a deeper understanding of needs and priorities.

- b. *Underserved geographic areas* - most conservation funders covered in our research fund statewide; by prioritizing limited geographies, projects that are smaller and community based do not have to compete on a statewide scale.
 - c. *Climate* - to develop relevant and authentic priorities that tie conservation, climate, and equity together, consider using a climate related question on the grant applications as a criteria for funding. This approach will result in goals that are representative of communities and address the inadequacy of 30x30.
 - d. *Land return* - land return projects are complicated, and limitations of some large philanthropic institutions, state, and federal funding streams make return to Wabanki Nations impossible; MaineCF's flexible conservation funding is an essential component in the funding landscape and should remain as such.
 - e. *Food access and production on conservation land as a focus area* - this is a cross-cutting issue that ties the climate goal to increase the amount of food consumed in Maine from state food producers to 30% by 2030 with another goal of the state to end hunger by 2030. Additionally, focusing on food would apply to indigenous harvesters and other communities engaged in wild food cultivation and collection.
 - f. *Evaluation* - across the research we found a lack of commitment to evaluation and we recommend MaineCF invest in equity-informed evaluation of the grant making program. We also recommend MaineCF add an evaluation question to the application forms, and encourage wholistic and thoughtful evaluation practices as best practice for grant recipients.
 - g. *Convenings* – provide funding to support broader partnerships and stronger relationships, which are key ingredients for durable community change.
2. The grant making models practiced by the MaineCF programs should be continued and we recommend deepening the practices by providing:
- a. *Flexible funding for land conservation projects* - this funding can be used for both land return projects that are prohibited from other more restrictive funding sources and traditional conservation acquisition projects.
 - b. *Unrestricted funding* - this type of funding allows organizations to focus on the projects they deem most important including organizational development, early career development, and diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging work.
 - c. *Dedicated pools of funding for* -
 - i. Convenings, such as:
 - 1. Support for specific events and gatherings;
 - 2. Direct funding to organizations whose missions include convening, such as the Maine Climate and Environmental Funders Network and/or Intermediary Organizations (Momentum Conservation and Maine Land Trust Network)
 - ii. Research on specific topics, such as:
 - 1. New conservation tools to support land return and access;
 - 2. Early career and workforce development.

3. We recommend the Conservation Grant Fund Program spend the next three years creating their own set of priorities and measurement tools for climate and conservation impact because we did not find any existing frameworks to offer as models, and MaineCF is uniquely positioned to do so. Some of these actions could include:
 - a. *Collect grant applicants' own priorities and measurements* - use grant applications to learn more about community-based needs and priorities specific to conservation and climate to help build MaineCF's own vision.
 - b. *Develop a MaineCF specific survey of the field* - build off the 2019 survey completed as part of the Heald Fund Report.
 - c. *Connect with other MaineCF funding communities* - study conservation, agricultural, and climate related grant proposals submitted to the Community Building Program and Donor Advised Funds.

VI. Conclusion

Conservation has a role to play in addressing the larger environmental and socioeconomic issues of today. This report represents a snapshot in time and context from a team of people who have diverse and relevant life experiences and are connected to the conservation field. We have broad perspectives and still we encourage an even broader perspective and understanding in order to have the impact we need and want to have.

The extensive research, analyses and writing presented in the full Funder and Field Scans presents a much deeper understanding of the subject than what is represented in this report and therefore we recommend you read the scans in their entirety. It is our hope that the information serves useful to a broader community of people and sparks a more robust investigation into aligned and collective statewide goals and approaches for conservation, climate, and equity

We recommend that MaineCF continue to commit to learning about climate change issues and the intersectional nature of their impacts. Numerous organizations have been working on these issues for many years and there are plenty of lessons to be learned from what has worked and what has not. With MaineCF recently adopting climate as a focus area, we encourage humility, deep listening, and a focus on relationality for effective leadership.

Because of its breadth of programs across topic areas and geographies, MaineCF is in the privileged position to set a course for the State of Maine. The community representation in so many aspects of MaineCF's work provides an opportunity to develop a vision for a thriving future. Through this powerful position we hope that MaineCF will invest the time and resources needed to formalize a data-informed framework for future success and state leadership.