



## SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS:

### ***Capacity Building for Collaboration: A Case Study on Building and Sustaining Landscape-Scale Stewardship Networks in the 21st Century; by Leigh Goldberg***

The following summarizes the key findings from a recently commissioned case study exploring barriers to and strategies for improving capacity for landscape-scale stewardship networks. This summary, prepared by the Steering Committee for the California Landscape Stewardship Network, includes direct excerpts from the case study as well as paraphrased findings. The full case study is available at [www.calandscapestewardshipnetwork.org](http://www.calandscapestewardshipnetwork.org).

#### ***Purpose***

The California Landscape Stewardship Network (CA Network) commissioned this case study to:

- provide a closer examination of the trends, innovations, practices, and intricacies linked to funding collaboration at a landscape scale;
- learn from a wide range of experts and stakeholders in the field, including current funders;
- explore strategies and practices from different regions across the country that are effectively building capacity for collaboration;
- help practitioners and funders understand how they can each play a role in overcoming barriers; and
- identify opportunities and resources for further learning.

The findings were based on interviews conducted by the author with 39 voluntary participants based in the United States and Canada, including network practitioners, funders, scholars, subject matter experts, policymakers, and government affairs specialists.

#### ***Financing Challenges Facing Landscape Stewardship Networks***

Study participants reported that start-up seed capital followed by sustainable, consistent funding streams are essential to successful networks, yet many landscape-scale stewardship networks struggle to find this level of support. Networks experience the greatest funding challenges in the following five critical areas, thus limiting their success (excerpted and paraphrased from pages 6 to 12 of the case study).

1. **Landscape Stewardship Networks Have Unique Capacity Needs:** Networks need talented and dedicated leaders to facilitate collective work and serve as the “connective tissue” to ensure effective ongoing coordination and communication, problem solving, visioning, and accountability. Networks also need to have the ability to aggregate, track, and monitor cross-boundary scientific data from multiple partners and across multiple platforms to determine trends and develop management plans. Collaborative work requires support and flexibility to create new management frameworks and innovate to overcome institutional barriers and advance shared goals. Partnerships are constantly moving through phases of a lifecycle (start-up, building, maintaining, and sustaining) as some successful strategies are embraced

to achieve shared goals while others are replaced with new strategies to achieve greater success. To remain effective, networks require time to re-evaluate how they work together by reviewing shared metrics and revisiting and developing new tactics and practices.

2. **Deep, Cross-Boundary Collaboration is Still a Maturing Field:** The necessary skill sets, practices, policies, and funding models for landscape-scale stewardship networks are still emerging and evolving. Creating new funding models and paradigms takes time, requires frequent innovation and risk-taking, and can involve steep learning curves for all involved.
3. **There is a Shortage of Significant, Stable Public Funding to Steward and Sustain Conserved Lands:** According to the California Protected Areas Database, almost half of the state's land mass is protected for open space purposes. This land requires ongoing collaborative stewardship to protect the ecological, social, and economic value of these areas. However, current public funding is limited in availability, and available funding is limited in the scope of what it can be used for. Without a well-supported landscape-level approach to long-term stewardship, many interviewees believe that these resources are at risk.
4. **Landscape Stewardship Tends to Hold Less Overt Funder Appeal:** Despite philosophically supporting stewardship endeavors, funders and policymakers continue to prioritize projects that result in additional acres of preserved lands or more tangible, immediate results. Many funders see stewardship as an endless endeavor and prefer more finite achievements with shorter timelines.
5. **Natural Landscape Problems Are Often “Out of Sight, Out of Mind”:** The maintenance needs of highly dynamic natural landscapes are often more difficult to communicate and comprehend—and therefore fund—than more visible infrastructure needs like potholes in roads. This issue is exacerbated by the lack of a consistent, shared vocabulary in the environmental community and the need to collaborate with other sectors.

### ***Capacity Building in Action—Success Stories from the Field***

While the research for this case study revealed complex challenges facing landscape-scale stewardship networks, it also uncovered several success stories from different regions across the country. These examples, categorized into the following themes, help illustrate the cultures, strategies, and practices that are effectively building capacity for collaboration (excerpted and paraphrased from page 12 of the case study).

1. **Launching with Humble Beginnings:** “Scrappy” collaboratives like The Stewardship Network in Michigan were birthed from visionary leadership and determined people but very modest financial resources.
2. **Strategically Investing in Network Building:** Progressive family foundations such as the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation in Chicago are strategically investing in leadership development and network building.
3. **Strategically Leveraging Dollars for Scaled-up Benefit:** In Chicago and San Francisco, private foundations, agencies, and public-private partnerships are strategically combining their dollars to meet larger network goals.
4. **Empowering Local Public Investment Decisions:** The use of conservancies in California allows state and federal funders to join local leaders to make public investment decisions together at a landscape scale.

## ***Key Recommendations for How to Build Capacity Gleaned from Interviews***

The following advice from interviewees includes both landscape-scale stewardship practitioners and funders working together to implement a dynamic stewardship vision. Funders can support this work by encouraging adoption of these practices and by playing an active role in a network implementing these practices, while also taking advantage of the benefits from the implementation of these practices (excerpted from page 22 of the case study).

1. When initiating collective work, strategically align and leverage partner budgets and funds to maximize the impacts and benefits.
2. Seek to include diverse interests and understand your role within the larger network's efforts.
3. Develop landscape-scale funding priorities through the network; create a menu of investment opportunities; and leverage network staff expertise to pursue joint funding from diverse sources.
4. On large-scale, cross-boundary projects, determine which partner is best positioned to negotiate the most cost-effective rates with contractors, universities, and other involved agencies.
5. Never rely on a single sector for funding. Develop a multi-year business model that leverages multiple funding streams (e.g., public and private funding; fee-for-service income).
6. Avoid accepting money that is not aligned with your goals and approach.
7. Don't scope a particular problem according to a particular grant opportunity. Resist the temptation to do a smaller project or approach that doesn't achieve your desired outcomes.
8. Strategically leverage existing funder relationships to source additional funding opportunities.
9. Know the funders and policymakers in your region and actively include them in your network.
10. Think of funders as key influencers first; find opportunities to align with them beyond just financial resources and cultivate relationships built on trust. Avoid transactional thinking and behaviors and instead plan for the long term.
11. Generate impact! Then make every effort to tell your impact story.
12. Use non-technical language and the power of metaphor to increase resonance and visibility with policymakers and funders.
13. Track and measure your progress and develop network-relevant metrics tied to increased scope and scale of relationships and trust; systems-level problem solving; resource sharing; operations and communications efficiencies; crisis preparedness; diversity, equity and inclusion benefits; and community resiliency.
14. Keep working to improve your business strategy, fundraising, and communications efforts. Seek out resources, specialized training, peer-to-peer learning, and mentoring.