

Positioning Collaboratives to Generate Impact

An Evaluation of the Catalyst Fund and Collaborative Capacity Investments

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A heartfelt word of gratitude goes to all funded collaboratives and their extended networks. Your dedication to stewarding, conserving, and restoring your respective lands and communities is remarkable.

Since 2019, the Network for Landscape Conservation has been grateful to be in partnership with the Doris Duke Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, whose support has made the Catalyst Fund possible. Additionally, NLC would like to acknowledge the partners who contributed to shaping the Catalyst Fund since its inception, including everyone who contributed to the grant-cycle review process and those who supported the development and implementation of the peer learning program. In particular, NLC is grateful to Jaimie Baxter, Sharon Farrell, Claudia Mengelt, Melissa Ocana, and Tracy Stanton—an advisory team that provided high-level, strategic guidance in supporting the initiation of this evaluation.

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Cover photo: As part of a two-day workshop on best practices around aspen restoration, **High Divide Collaborative** partners tour a 350-acre aspen treatment project on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest outside of Dillon, MT, in September 2020. Credit: Emily Harkness, Heart of the Rockies Initiative.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Administered by the Network for Landscape Conservation (NLC), the [Catalyst Fund](#) is a national regranting program designed to deliver collaborative capacity investments to place-based, community-grounded landscape collaboratives. A portion of the Catalyst Fund is dedicated to supporting Indigenous leadership in conservation and stewardship work.

The Catalyst Fund program seeks to address a disconnect between what is generally understood about landscape conservation and stewardship (i.e., collaboration is essential when working across jurisdictions) and what is funded (i.e., project implementation is frequently funded with limited funding dedicated to the collaborative process). The program directly addresses this “collaboration disconnect.”

The Catalyst Fund is based on the premise that strategic investments in collaborative infrastructure and coordination capacity strengthen a collaborative’s processes and functioning, thereby better positioning it to meet its landscape goals over the long term. By making such investments, the Catalyst Fund strives to accelerate the pace and practice of collaborative landscape conservation and stewardship across the United States and transboundary geographies, addressing systems-level challenges such as the interconnected crises of biodiversity, climate, and environmental injustice.

The Catalyst Fund supports capacity building in two ways: collaboratives’ capacity with \$25,000 grant awards and coordination leads’ individual capacity through participation in a two-year peer learning program. Over six annual funding rounds between 2019 and 2024, the Catalyst Fund granted 85 awards to collaboratives, with one-third awarded to Indigenous-led collaboratives.

This evaluation is focused on addressing four questions:

1. Did the Catalyst Fund help collaboratives invest in relevant capacity-building elements, and did these investments strengthen a collaborative’s processes and functioning?
2. Did strengthening collaborative processes and functioning better position collaboratives to achieve on-the-ground conservation and stewardship outcomes and other impacts?
3. Is there an understanding of *how* enhanced capacity strengthens a collaborative’s ability to function and better position it to achieve on-the-ground outcomes and other impacts?
4. What are key insights or takeaways to consider for the broader field of practice?

An integrative mixed-methods approach was used to collect and analyze data. Evaluation findings are informed by quantitative and qualitative data from a range of sources. These include 129 online surveys collected from individuals with direct knowledge about a funded collaborative (i.e., grantee), ten focus groups with a total of 45 participants serving in coordination roles, grant proposals and interim/final reports from 85 grantees, and 20 supplemental documents internal to NLC.

FINDING 1: The Catalyst Fund's capacity-building investments strengthened collaborative processes and functioning of funded landscape collaboratives.

THE CATALYST FUND ENABLED COLLABORATIVES TO INVEST IN TWO TYPES OF CAPACITIES: COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY AND INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY. Financial awards were used by funded collaboratives to invest in collaborative capacity-building elements such as coordination capacity and shared strategies and priorities. To build individual capacity, individuals serving in coordination roles were invited to participate in a two-year peer learning program.

CAPACITY INVESTMENTS STRENGTHENED PROCESSES AND FUNCTIONING FOR THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF FUNDED COLLABORATIVES. Collaborative coordination leads and partners reported their collaboratives being more effective in setting priorities, making decisions, coordinating communication among partners, implementing practices to sustain the collaborative, planning ways to sustain collaborative efforts, and running meetings.

FUNDED COLLABORATIVES' DEVELOPMENT ADVANCED, MOVING THEM FURTHER ALONG IN THEIR LIFE CYCLES. Prior to receiving a grant award, 30% of funded collaboratives identified as being in start-up, 53% in building, and 18% in sustaining stages of their life cycles. After the Catalyst Fund grant period, 41% reported being in building and 59% in sustaining stages—marking a clear shift forward in collaborative development.

FINDING 2: Strengthened collaborative processes and functioning better positioned collaboratives to achieve on-the-ground conservation, stewardship, and other desired outcomes.

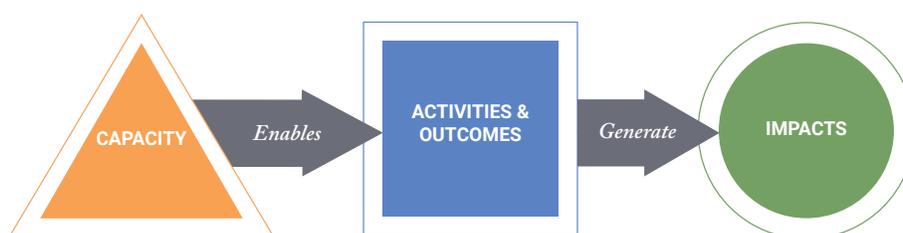
FOLLOWING THE CATALYST FUND GRANT PERIODS, POST-GRANT COLLABORATIVES WERE BETTER POSITIONED TO GENERATE ON-THE-GROUND IMPACTS. 73% of survey respondents observed increases in the pace at which their collaboratives were reaching conservation and stewardship goals, while 71% observed increases in the scale of on-the-ground outcomes.

POST-GRANT COLLABORATIVES WERE BETTER EQUIPPED TO ACHIEVE OTHER DESIRED OUTCOMES. For example, 82% of survey respondents observed increased implementation of outreach, education, and other engagement programs by their collaboratives.

FINDING 3: The Collaborative Capacity Impact Model™ illustrates how enhanced capacity strengthens a collaborative’s ability to function and better positions it to achieve on-the-ground conservation and stewardship goals.

The *Collaborative Capacity Impact Model* (Mickel & Farrell, 2025) is a data-driven framework used to illustrate how enhanced collaborative capacity enables collaborative activities and outcomes which generate collaborative impacts. For this evaluation, this cutting-edge model is applied to illustrate how Catalyst Fund investments in collaborative infrastructure and human capacity needs enabled essential functions that made on-the-ground conservation and stewardship outcomes possible.

Figure ES-1. Generating Collaborative Impacts™



DURING THE TWO-YEAR GRANT PERIODS, CATALYST FUND CAPACITY INVESTMENTS ENABLED FUNDED COLLABORATIVES TO CARRY OUT TWO INTERCONNECTED CATEGORIES OF ACTIVITIES.

Collaborative development and functioning activities include coordination and convening, collective planning and strategy setting, partner relationship building, and communication strategies that make effective collaboration possible. *Project and program activities* include targeted outreach, project priority identification and planning, and public awareness and engagement that reflect shared priorities and collective action.

THROUGH THESE ACTIVITIES, FUNDED COLLABORATIVES GENERATED IMPACTS RELATED TO RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND COLLABORATIVE AND PARTNER FUNCTIONING.

During the Catalyst Fund grant periods, many funded collaboratives produced *foundational impacts* of enhanced connectivity and trust among collaborative members, partners, and communities. They also generated *operational impacts* of boosted creativity and innovation, increased resource sharing, added capacity, and enhanced cultural awareness and respect among collaborative partners.

FOLLOWING THE CATALYST FUND GRANT PERIODS, A NUMBER OF POST-GRANT COLLABORATIVES CONTINUED TO PRODUCE SIGNIFICANT AND VALUABLE IMPACTS.

A subset of post-grant collaboratives achieved *outcome impacts* that advanced their core purposes and *integrated impacts* resulting from institutionalized approaches—with a subset scaling up, accelerating, and sustaining collaborative impact processes.

THE COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY IMPACT MODEL SHOWS HOW THE QUALITY OF COLLABORATIVE FUNCTIONING AND COLLABORATIVE PERFORMANCE ARE INEXTRICABLY INTERTWINED. Delivery of on-the-ground conservation and stewardship work is directly linked to how effectively and efficiently a collaborative operates. Collaborative capacity investments are critical to scaling up, accelerating, and sustaining both function and performance.

FINDING 4: The field of practice can learn and benefit from key evaluation insights and general takeaways.

COLLABORATIVES ARE A SPECIAL TYPE OF ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL WITH CAPACITY NEEDS.

Bringing together a suite of organizations and partners to work towards shared goals, collaboratives are marked by a high degree of adaptability. This allows them to respond to perceived needs and/or opportunities that span physical, political, institutional, and cultural boundaries. Like any for-profit, nonprofit, or governmental entity, collaboratives experience life cycles and have capacity needs. To optimize performance and maximize their potential, collaboratives' capacity needs must be met.

INVESTING IN COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY AT PIVOTAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT IS

WORTHWHILE. Catalyst Fund grant support was indeed catalytic. It helped fulfill grantees' capacity needs, better positioning them to achieve long-term conservation and stewardship success. This suggests that strategic capacity investments in collaboratives' early life-cycle stages can produce desired outcomes and lasting impact.

COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY INVESTMENT WORKS, BUT IT TAKES TIME. It takes time to start and build collaboratives for long-term success. And, it takes time for investments in this kind of relationship- and trust-based work to yield their full potential. Those that take the time to build trusting relationships, agree on a collective purpose, develop a shared strategy, and establish governance and decision-making structures are better able to implement, scale up, and accelerate conservation and stewardship work on the ground.

INVESTMENTS IN COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY ARE NEEDED THROUGHOUT COLLABORATIVES' LIFE

CYCLES. One of the continual challenges that landscape collaboratives face is how to sustain themselves over time to achieve outcomes that shift the trajectory of their landscapes. Building collaborative capacity is not a one-time investment, but instead is an ongoing need.

PEER LEARNING IS A VALUABLE WAY TO ENHANCE INDIVIDUALS' ABILITY TO COORDINATE AND MANAGE COLLABORATIVES.

For many, this aspect of the Catalyst Fund stood out as invaluable. It equipped participants with a set of skills, competencies, and practical knowledge, enabling them to better support their collaboratives. This suggests peer learning programs can better position those in coordination roles to serve their respective collaboratives in reaching their goals.

TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY IS EMPOWERING AND PROMOTES EQUITY. This approach allows the flexibility that collaboratives are seeking to best position them to advance on-the-ground outcomes and build just, sustainable futures for landscapes and communities. It also shifts power dynamics, creating a more equitable relationship between funders and grantees.

COLLABORATIVE IMPACTS EXPAND BEYOND QUANTITATIVE MEASURES. What is clear from the experiences of Catalyst Fund grantees is that relying solely on quantitative measures—such as acres restored or miles protected—fails to capture the full value and impact of collaborative efforts. In addition to the more quantifiable impacts, the field of practice would benefit from assessing extremely valuable impacts such as relationship building, effective collaborative functioning, and other socio-environmental impacts. These less-tangible impacts are essential to delivering on-the-ground conservation and stewardship outcomes.



ABOUT THE NETWORK FOR LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

[The Network for Landscape Conservation \(NLC\)](#) is a national umbrella group and leading voice for advancing collaborative conservation and stewardship at the landscape scale. As a practitioners' network, NLC works to connect practitioners to ideas and innovation—and to each other—in order to accelerate the pace and practice of landscape conservation and stewardship across the United States and transboundary geographies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Amy Mickel has 30 years of experience conducting applied social science research using integrative mixed-methods approaches. Through numerous peer-reviewed articles and practitioner publications, she has helped build a shared language and understanding to improve the effectiveness of landscape and seascape-scale stewardship and conservation initiatives. Examples of some of her work include [Collaborative Capacity Impact Model](#), [Partnership Impact Model](#), [Partnership Impact Evaluation Guide](#), [Cutting Green Tape Case Study](#), and [Four Cornerstones to Effective Collaboration](#). Dr. Mickel is a full professor in the College of Business at California State University, Sacramento where she has taught undergraduate and graduate students since 2000. She is the Applied Research Lead for [The Stewardship Network](#).

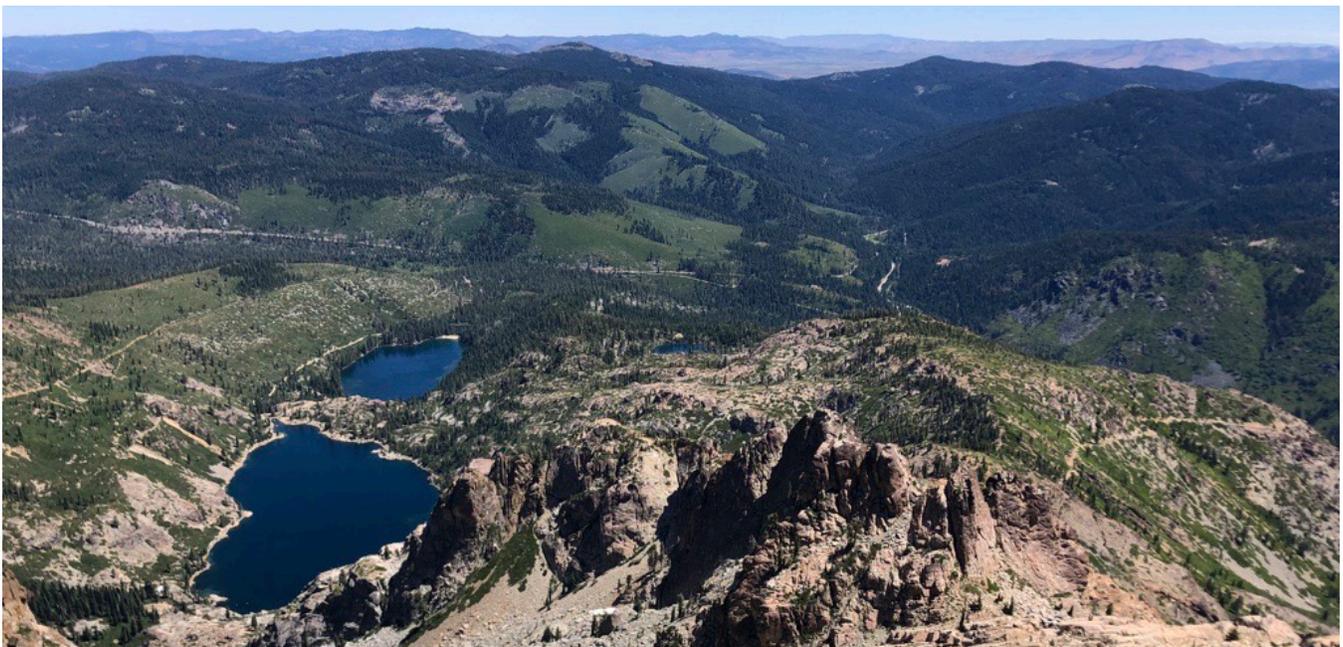


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EVALUATION FINDINGS

The Network for Landscape Conservation (NLC) serves as a national umbrella group committed to advancing collaborative conservation and stewardship at the landscape scale. NLC works to connect practitioners to ideas and innovation—and to each other—to accelerate the pace and practice of landscape conservation and stewardship across the United States and transboundary geographies.

The central premise of the Catalyst Fund program is that strategic investments in collaborative infrastructure and coordination capacity strengthen a collaborative’s processes and functioning, thereby better positioning it to meet its conservation and stewardship goals.

The focus of this evaluation is the [Catalyst Fund](#), a competitive regranteeing program that NLC has run since 2019, awarding grants to 85 landscape collaboratives over its first six annual funding rounds (2019-2024).¹ This program strategically invests in building collaborative capacity for place-based, community-grounded landscape collaboratives using a trust-based approach.

The purpose of this multi-faceted evaluation is to address four questions:

- 1 Did the Catalyst Fund help collaboratives invest in relevant capacity-building elements, and did these investments strengthen a collaborative’s processes and functioning?
- 2 Did strengthening collaborative processes and functioning better position collaboratives to achieve on-the-ground conservation and stewardship outcomes and other impacts?
- 3 Is there an understanding of *how* enhanced capacity strengthens a collaborative’s ability to function and better position it to achieve on-the-ground outcomes and other impacts?
- 4 What are key insights or takeaways to consider for the broader field of practice?

In this evaluation, *collaboratives* is used as an umbrella term to include the range of collaborative models (e.g., partnerships, coalitions, alliances, networks, etc.) funded through the Catalyst Fund. *Collaborative capacity* refers to a collaborative’s ability to perform.

¹ At the time of this evaluation, the 2025 grant cycle was underway.

Background

A flagship program of NLC, the Catalyst Fund aims to accelerate the pace and practice of landscape conservation and stewardship through collaboration. Collaborative models are recognized as essential to addressing systems-level challenges—including the interconnected crises of biodiversity loss, climate change, and environmental injustice. Therefore, the Catalyst Fund invites proposals from collaboratives that are place-based, collaboratively-governed, and community-grounded with a long-term conservation purpose. Because a portion of the Catalyst Fund is dedicated to supporting Indigenous leadership, proposals from Tribal-led collaboratives are welcomed.

The Catalyst Fund was designed to address what the program staff describe as a “collaboration disconnect”—the disconnect between what is generally understood about landscape conservation and stewardship (i.e., that collaboration is essential for working across jurisdictions) and what is funded (i.e., project implementation is frequently funded with limited funding dedicated to the collaborative process). The program directly addresses this collaboration disconnect by supporting capacity building in two ways: collaboratives’ capacity with \$25,000 grant awards and coordination leads’ individual capacity through participation in an in-depth peer learning program.

Grant awards: On the grantmaking side, a trust-based philosophy is employed—where funding is flexible and the reporting requirements are not cumbersome. The flexible funding is intended to allow each collaborative to focus on addressing its specific collaborative capacity needs, with grantees instructed to use funds for capacity-building elements that enable them to function effectively toward a collective shared purpose. Funded collaboratives used the monetary award for coordination staffing and other collaborative-process activities such as convenings, communications, partner and community engagement, governance development, and strategic planning and prioritization.

Peer learning: On the professional development side, each funded collaborative is asked to identify a leadership representative (e.g., coordinator lead or steering committee member) to participate in a peer learning cohort with other recipients from the same annual grant cycle. Over a two-year period, the cohort convenes virtually every month for shared learning, exchange, exploration, inspiration, and support—and has the opportunity to come together for an annual in-person retreat.

The peer learning component of the Catalyst Fund was designed to strengthen individual practitioner capacity, enabling key individuals to build confidence and be better equipped to fulfill their collaborative leadership roles. This focus on professional growth recognizes that enhancing individuals’ capacity ultimately supports collaboratives in achieving their long-term landscape conservation and stewardship goals.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

NLC launched the Catalyst Fund in 2019, and over the six-year period from 2019 to 2024, 85 grants were awarded to collaboratives working in landscapes across the United States and transboundary geographies (see Figure 1). Funded collaboratives were at pivotal points in their development, when early momentum had coalesced around a collective vision and the partners were ready to take collective action.

Figure 1. Map of Catalyst Fund Grantees



High-Level Observations

FUNDED COLLABORATIVES WERE BETTER POSITIONED TO MEET THEIR CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP GOALS. Grant and peer learning support enabled collaboratives to strengthen their collaborative processes and overall functioning, better positioning them to achieve lasting on-the-ground conservation and stewardship outcomes. In essence, The Catalyst Fund achieved what it set out to do.

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP WAS ADVANCED. Over its first six annual grant cycles, one-third of Catalyst Fund grants was awarded to Tribal-led collaboratives. Many of these Tribal-led collaboratives affirmed that the Catalyst Fund played an essential role in their advancement, enabling them to meet or exceed their goals.

“For **Stewarding the Asqinaq**, receiving the Catalyst Fund made a huge difference. When the Alaska Wildlife Alliance and my tribe, the Native Village of Paimiut, got this award it changed others’ perspectives about us. It shifted from ‘they are Native tree huggers’ to becoming the group that others listen to and seek guidance from. Honestly, I had no idea how big this effort would get. We have finished a vulnerability assessment of Hooper Bay, have the Cultural Rangers program in place, and are now creating a Yup’ik science and climate change dictionary in the Hooper Bay dialect.

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

THE CATALYST FUND’S FOCUS ON INVESTING IN COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY AT PIVOTAL STAGES OF COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT WAS INNOVATIVE. This program highlights how and why investing early on in a collaborative’s development can be instrumental in scaling up and accelerating desired conservation and stewardship outcomes over the long term.

“The Catalyst Fund fulfilled a crucial organizational need at an important make-it-or-break-it phase of our organizational development. There’s such wide and growing partner commitment (interest, time, and spirit) and dedication to our regional collaborative, **Obtawaing Biosphere Region Partners**. We all want it to succeed, but coordination and operational activities are often fulfilled by partner organizations’ staff when they are able to spare their time—which unfortunately isn’t much in most cases. The support from the Catalyst Fund has been a huge and necessary boost for us.

COORDINATOR LEAD (SURVEY)

PEER LEARNING PARTICIPANTS UNDERScoreD THE VALUE OF THE PEER LEARNING PROGRAM AND EMPHASIZED THAT OTHER FUNDERS SHOULD DO THIS. For many coordination leads, this aspect of the Catalyst Fund stood out as the most beneficial aspect of the program because it equipped them with a set of skills, competencies, and practical knowledge to more effectively serve their collaboratives. A program participant stated: “The biggest benefit for me was the peer-to-peer learning. It was a supportive group of folks who were positive and solutions-oriented thinkers. This is welcomed and needed, particularly in this time. I am so very grateful for the space.”

THE CATALYST FUND’S APPROACH TO FUNDING COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY—COUPLED WITH ENHANCING COORDINATORS’ INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY TO PERFORM IN THEIR ROLES—IS AN IMPACTFUL WAY TO SET COLLABORATIVES UP FOR SUCCESS. The Catalyst Fund serves as an important model to consider for others seeking to undertake or fund conservation, stewardship, and restoration work at a scale sufficient to address the systems-level challenges of the 21st Century. According to a grantee, “this program is a shining model of how a small amount of money can elevate a growing collaborative program. To provide funds, while also offering peer-to-peer learning opportunities, is extremely beneficial to helping us steward our landscapes.”

FINDING 1: The Catalyst Fund’s capacity-building investments strengthened collaborative processes and functioning of funded landscape collaboratives.

THE CATALYST FUND ENABLED COLLABORATIVES TO INVEST IN TWO TYPES OF CAPACITIES: COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY AND INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY. Financial awards were used by funded collaboratives to invest in collaborative capacity-building elements such as coordination capacity; shared strategies and priorities; collaborative practices, skills, and tools; systems and infrastructure; governance and decision-making structures; and collective purpose and goals.

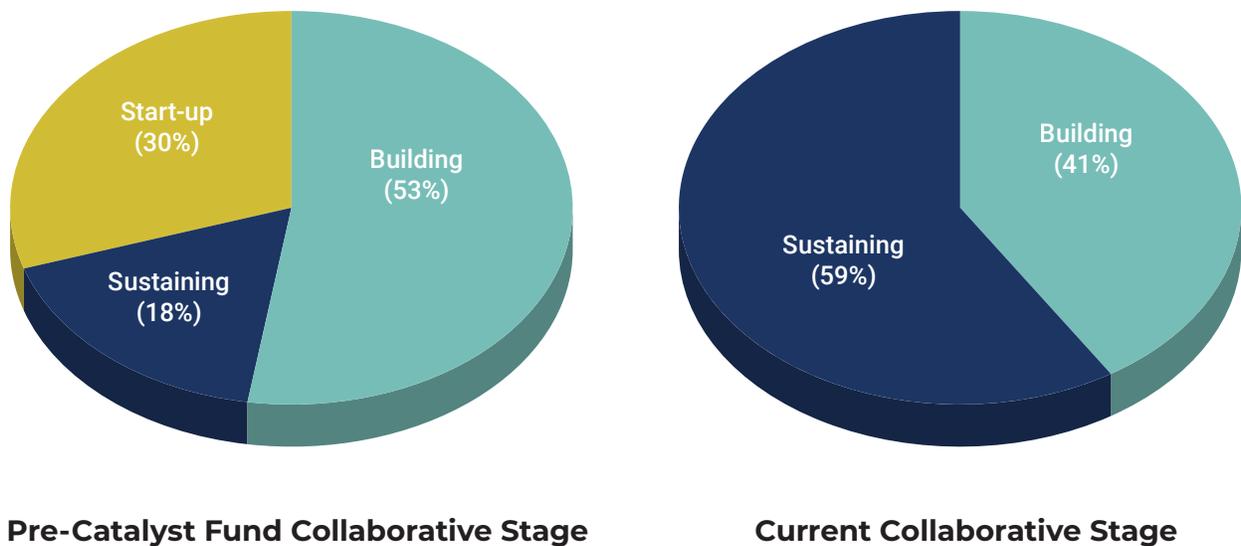
To build individual capacity, individuals serving in coordination roles were invited to participate in a two-year peer learning program. This program enhanced participants’ individual abilities, enabling them to better serve their respective collaboratives.

Across funded collaboratives, a common observation was that the integration of grant and peer learning investments strengthened collaborative processes and overall functioning, facilitating advancement into higher-performing life-cycle stages such as building and sustaining.

CAPACITY INVESTMENTS STRENGTHENED PROCESSES AND FUNCTIONING FOR THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF FUNDED COLLABORATIVES. Collaborative coordination leads and partners reported their collaboratives being more effective in setting priorities (89%), making decisions (86%), coordinating communication among partners (86%), implementing practices to sustain the collaborative (86%), planning ways to sustain collaborative efforts (85%), and running meetings (82%).

FUNDED COLLABORATIVES' DEVELOPMENT ADVANCED, MOVING THEM FURTHER ALONG IN THEIR LIFE CYCLES. Prior to receiving a grant award, 30% of funded collaboratives identified as being in start-up, 53% in building, and 18% in sustaining stages of their life cycles.² After the Catalyst Fund grant period, 41% reported being in building and 59% in sustaining stages—marking a clear shift forward in collaborative development (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Increased Pace of Development: Comparison of Collaborative Stages

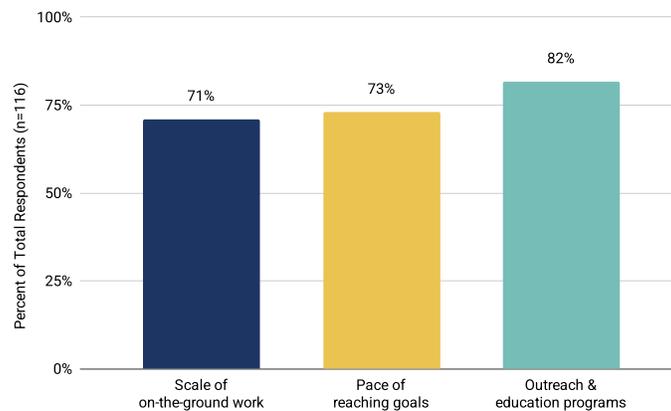


² Life-cycle stages describe a collaborative's evolution as it grows in structure, function, performance, and impact. The start-up stage is characterized by emergence and formation. The building stage involves strengthening and operationalizing the collaborative. The sustaining stage is defined by maturity and long-term effectiveness (Mickel & Farrell, 2026).

FINDING 2: Strengthened collaborative processes and functioning better positioned collaboratives to achieve on-the-ground conservation, stewardship, and other desired outcomes.

FOLLOWING THE CATALYST FUND GRANT PERIODS, POST-GRANT COLLABORATIVES WERE BETTER POSITIONED TO GENERATE ON-THE-GROUND IMPACTS. 73% of survey respondents observed increases in the pace at which their collaboratives were reaching conservation and stewardship goals, while 71% observed increases in the scale of on-the-ground outcomes (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Increased On-the-Ground Impact and Other Desired Outcomes



POST-GRANT COLLABORATIVES WERE BETTER EQUIPPED TO ACHIEVE OTHER DESIRED OUTCOMES. For example, 82% of survey respondents observed increased implementation of outreach, education, and other engagement programs by their collaboratives.

As collaboratives advanced in their development, their capacity to perform and make progress toward their long-term conservation and stewardship goals grew accordingly.

“Funding collaborative capacity has accelerated the success of regional-scale efforts on all levels, leveraging more funding and opportunities, increasing care and reciprocity, and achieving social and ecological goals. It is vital to our work.”

GRANTEE (SURVEY)

FINDING 3: The Collaborative Capacity Impact Model™ illustrates how enhanced capacity strengthens a collaborative’s ability to function and better positions it to achieve on-the-ground conservation and stewardship goals.

The Collaborative Capacity Impact Model (Mickel & Farrell, 2025) is a data-driven framework used to illustrate how enhanced collaborative capacity enables collaborative activities and outcomes which generate collaborative impacts (Figure 4). Four classifications of impacts—foundational, operational, outcome, and integrated—build upon one another in a dynamic fashion that allows collaboratives to scale up, accelerate, and sustain collaborative impact.

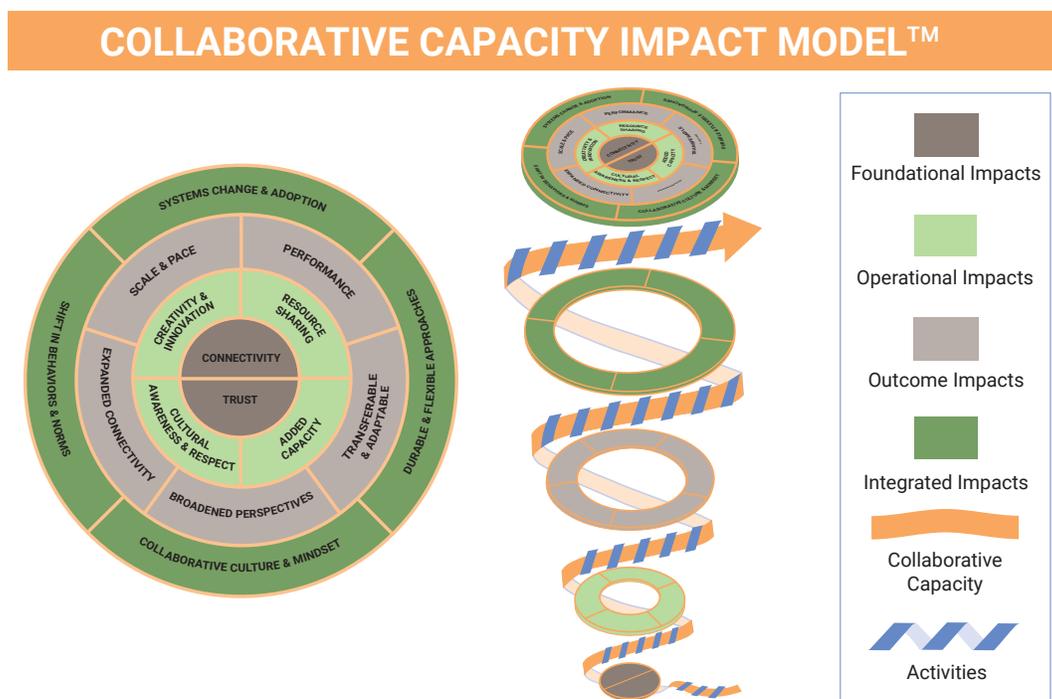
The Collaborative Capacity Impact Model can be used by individual collaboratives and their partners, networks, funders, and grant programs to describe, assess, and demonstrate their impacts.³ It helps us understand:

- ▶ What types of impacts collaboratives can generate;
- ▶ How the quality of collaborative functioning (i.e., how effectively and efficiently it operates) and collaborative performance (i.e., delivery of work on the ground) are inextricably intertwined; and
- ▶ Why collaborative capacity investments are critical to scaling up, accelerating, and sustaining collaborative functioning and performance.

This cutting-edge model is applied to demonstrate how Catalyst Fund investments in collaborative infrastructure and human capacity have enabled collaboratives to undertake activities that strengthen relationships, improve partner and collaborative functioning, and better position them to ultimately achieve on-the-ground conservation and stewardship outcomes, and other positive impacts.

³ The Collaborative Capacity Impact Model was most recently applied to an [evaluation of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction program](#) (Mickel & Farrell, 2025).

Figure 4. Collaborative Capacity Impact Model™



DURING THE TWO-YEAR GRANT PERIODS, CATALYST FUND CAPACITY INVESTMENTS ENABLED FUNDED COLLABORATIVES TO CARRY OUT TWO INTERCONNECTED CATEGORIES OF ACTIVITIES.

Collaborative development and functioning activities include coordination and convening, collective planning and strategy setting, partner relationship building, and communication strategies that make effective collaboration possible. *Project and program activities* include outreach, project priority identification and planning, and public awareness and engagement that reflect shared priorities and collective action.

THROUGH THESE ACTIVITIES, FUNDED COLLABORATIVES GENERATED IMPACTS RELATED TO RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND COLLABORATIVE AND PARTNER FUNCTIONING. During the Catalyst Fund grant periods, many funded collaboratives produced *foundational impacts* of enhanced connectivity and trust among collaborative members, partners, and communities. They also generated *operational impacts* of boosted creativity and innovation, increased resource sharing, added capacity, and enhanced cultural awareness and respect among collaborative partners.

Table 1. Funded Collaboratives' Collective Accomplishments *During* the Grant Period

ACTIVITIES	<p>Carried out activities related to collaborative operations and on-the-ground work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative development and functioning activities such as coordination and convening, collective planning and strategy setting, partner relationship building, and communication strategies. • Project and programs activities such as targeted outreach, project priority identification and planning, and public awareness and engagement.
FOUNDATIONAL IMPACTS	<p>Generated foundational impacts related to enhanced relationships and increased connections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced connectivity among collaborative members, partners, local communities, and their extended networks. • Increased trust among collaborative members, partners, local communities, and extended networks, which enables deeper engagement and sustained action.
OPERATIONAL IMPACTS	<p>Produced operational impacts that allowed for effective collaborative and partner functioning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boosted creativity and innovation in developing processes, practices, programs, and solutions. • Increased resource sharing among partners and increased access to knowledge, data, experience, personnel, and equipment. • Added capacity by hiring collaborative-dedicated employees, and leveraging Catalyst Fund grants to secure additional funding. • Enhancing cultural awareness and respect, fostering appreciation for collaborative partners and enabling extended network members to understand, respect, and leverage their differences.

FOLLOWING THE CATALYST FUND GRANT PERIODS, A NUMBER OF POST-GRANT COLLABORATIVES CONTINUED TO PRODUCE SIGNIFICANT AND VALUABLE IMPACTS. A subset of post-grant collaboratives achieved *outcome impacts* that advanced their core purposes and *integrated impacts* resulting from institutionalized approaches. Some of these collaboratives also scaled up, accelerated, and/or sustained collaborative impact processes in three primary areas: collaborative development and functioning, project and program implementation, and network expansion.

Table 2. Subset of Catalyst Fund Collaboratives' Collective Accomplishments *After* the Grant Period

OUTCOME IMPACTS	<p>Achieved outcome impacts that moved funded collaboratives toward fulfilling their core purposes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced pace and scale of collaborative development and functioning, on-the-ground conservation and stewardship work, and partner member engagement. • Improved performance of funded collaboratives, partner organizations, and individuals participating in collaborative steering committees, leadership teams, and working groups. • Developed transferable and adaptable models and tools that can be applied to other regions. • Broadened perspectives in the way funded collaboratives understand what is going on throughout their regions of focus. • Expanded connectivity where funded collaboratives serve as centralized hubs and information portals in their respective regions.
INTEGRATED IMPACTS	<p>Generated integrated impacts with long-term effects stemming from institutionalized approaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiated systems change in their respective regions through policies. • Strengthened durable and flexible approaches to meet complexity and evolving situations. • Catalyzed a culture and mindset shift by normalizing collaboration as a valued and effective approach to this work. • Shifted behaviors and norms, including emphasizing relationship building and expansive thinking.
COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES	<p>Scaled up, accelerated, and/or sustained collaborative processes in three primary areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative development and functioning by moving through life-cycle stages to become high-functioning entities. • Collaborative performance in achieving conservation and stewardship goals, including on-the-ground work. • Network expansion through scaling up and accelerating the centralized role of collaboratives in their respective regions.

THE COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY IMPACT MODEL SHOWS HOW THE QUALITY OF COLLABORATIVE FUNCTIONING AND COLLABORATIVE PERFORMANCE ARE INEXTRICABLY INTERTWINED. Delivery of on-the-ground conservation and stewardship work is directly linked to how effectively and efficiently a collaborative operates. Collaborative capacity investments are critical to scaling up, accelerating, and sustaining both functioning and performance.

FINDING 4: The field of practice can learn and benefit from key evaluation insights and general takeaways.

COLLABORATIVES ARE A SPECIAL TYPE OF ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL WITH CAPACITY NEEDS.

Bringing together a suite of organizations and partners to work towards shared goals, collaboratives are marked by a high degree of adaptability. This allows them to respond to perceived needs and/or opportunities that span physical, political, institutional, and cultural boundaries. Like any for-profit, nonprofit, or governmental entity, collaboratives experience life cycles and have capacity needs. To optimize performance and maximize their potential, collaboratives' capacity needs must be met.

“*It's hard to overstate how important capacity is. If there is no person or organization to coordinate people coming together, fewer trees will be put into the ground. You also need to educate the people who live near those trees. You need capacity and coordination to do this.*”

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

INVESTING IN COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY AT PIVOTAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT IS

WORTHWHILE. Catalyst Fund support was indeed catalytic. It helped fulfill capacity needs, better positioning grantees to achieve long-term conservation and stewardship success. This suggests that strategic capacity investments in collaboratives' early life-cycle stages can produce desired outcomes and lasting impact.

In the Spotlight: Tri-Pueblo Coalition

The Tri-Pueblo Coalition illustrates the catalytic nature of the Catalyst Fund. An inter-Tribal coalition comprised of the Cochiti, Kewa, and Jemez Pueblos, the Coalition emerged in 2019 to foster conversations and collaboration across the three Pueblos. In 2022, it received a Catalyst Fund award and used the grant to gather and better organize itself. Since then, through the organization that is supporting the coordination of the Coalition, the Coalition has signed agreements with the Santa Fe National Forest to collaborate on reforestation, watershed improvement, and forest restoration within the Jemez mountains in New Mexico. This collective effort received a \$1.1 million grant from the America the Beautiful Challenge in 2024 to restore this neglected landscape after decades of drought and megafires.

“*A lot of us in in the Coalition are very thankful to the Catalyst Fund for giving us this seed money. For us, the Catalyst Fund represents 'seeds of hope, seeds of change.' It gave us the opportunity to grow and now we are able to flourish with the new federal grant.*”

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

For some, the process of even applying for a grant was catalytic in nature. A recent grantee, **Bristol Bay Guardians**, describes this: “In a way, the application for this opportunity served in and of itself as a catalyst to further strengthen a budding relationship with our partner. Since then, we have been meeting relatively regularly to discuss shared visions and opportunities to collaborate, advance research, and work on conservation projects implemented by Tribal community members.”

COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY INVESTMENT WORKS, BUT IT TAKES TIME. It takes time to start and build collaboratives for long-term success. And, it takes time for investments in this kind of relationship- and trust-based work to yield their full potential. Those that take the time to build trusting relationships, agree on a collective purpose, develop a shared strategy, and establish governance and decision-making structures are better able to implement, scale up, and accelerate work on the ground.

INVESTMENTS IN COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY ARE NEEDED THROUGHOUT COLLABORATIVES’ LIFE CYCLES. One of the continual challenges that landscape collaboratives face is how to sustain themselves over time to achieve outcomes that shift the trajectory of their landscapes. Building collaborative capacity is not a one-time investment, but instead is an ongoing need. According to one focus group participant, “partnerships need long-term funding. This is a perpetual and persistent problem. While the Catalyst Fund catalyzed an important next step in our partnership’s evolution, it is not the silver bullet for partnership longevity.”

PEER LEARNING IS A VALUABLE WAY TO ENHANCE INDIVIDUALS’ ABILITY TO COORDINATE AND MANAGE COLLABORATIVES. For many, this aspect of the Catalyst Fund stood out as invaluable. It equipped participants with a set of skills, competencies, and practical knowledge enabling them to better support their collaboratives. Through the peer learning program, a network of landscape collaborative coordinators emerged, which serves as an ongoing resource and support system that contributes to their enhanced performance as collaborative leaders. This suggests peer learning programs can better position those in coordination roles to serve their respective collaboratives in reaching their goals.

“*I feel like I truly made friends and now have relationships with people that I met several years ago in the cohort. If I have a question or concern that I think they could help with, I now have people to contact. We have built a cohort network and that is really valuable.*”

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY IS EMPOWERING AND PROMOTES EQUITY. This approach allows the flexibility that collaboratives are seeking to best position them to advance on-the-ground outcomes and build just, sustainable futures for landscapes and communities. It also shifts power dynamics, creating a more equitable relationship between funders and grantees. Reducing burdensome reporting requirements is another appreciated aspect of a trust-based approach; it frees grantees up to focus more energy on delivering on-the-ground outcomes. According to a grantee, “the Catalyst Fund was ahead of its time. The trust-based philanthropy approach was a unique aspect of this program, and now more funders are starting to lean into it.”

COLLABORATIVE IMPACTS EXPAND BEYOND QUANTITATIVE MEASURES. What is clear from the experiences of Catalyst Fund grantees is that relying solely on quantitative measures—such as acres restored or miles protected—fails to capture the full value and impact of collaborative efforts. In addition to the more quantifiable impacts, the field of practice would benefit from assessing extremely valuable impacts such as relationship building, effective collaborative functioning, and other socio-environmental impacts. These less-tangible impacts are essential to delivering on-the-ground conservation and stewardship outcomes.

“*One of the main challenges with funding collaborative capacity is the difficulty in clearly quantifying the impact of increased capacity. Collaboratives often don't 'own' the work being done (i.e., not always the ones directly implementing projects). But, without the collaborative's support and structure, the work wouldn't happen or wouldn't be as coordinated or effective.*

A collaborative's value is in the connective tissue—coordinating efforts, aligning strategies, helping secure funding, and making partnerships possible. But because that role is often 'behind the scenes,' it can be harder to elevate and justify through traditional metrics. In other words, it is hard to measure impact in a black-and-white way which is what funders are looking for (i.e., direct, measurable outputs or tangible deliverables specific entities). We need to shift this lens and consider measuring work that a collaborative touches, initiates, or facilitates.

COORDINATOR LEAD (SURVEY)



NOTE TO THE READER

The rest of this report provides more specifics about the evaluation research and its findings. It is organized into two sections: research approach and detailed findings. The *Collaborative Capacity Impact Model* is used to show the types of impacts generated by Catalyst Fund grantees and the process by which those impacts were achieved. Findings are supported by the qualitative and quantitative data collected for this research.



RESEARCH APPROACH

Study Design

The design of this evaluation addresses the complexity of researching 85 funded collaboratives who received Catalyst Fund grants between 2019 to 2024—many of whom are now in the post-grant phase. An integrative mixed-methods research approach was developed and applied (see Appendix B). Additionally, this study’s design was guided by a number of foundational understandings outlined in Mickel and Farrell’s (2025) article, *Do more, better together: Investing in collaborative work to make a difference*. These include:

- ▶ The generation of collaborative impacts follows a process.
- ▶ Collaboratives are a special type of organizational model with capacity needs.
- ▶ Purpose, structure, composition, function, and processes are five collaborative design elements.
- ▶ Collaboratives experience a life cycle just like any organizational model.

THE GENERATION OF COLLABORATIVE IMPACTS FOLLOWS A PROCESS. Collaboration is about the process of people working together toward a shared vision, purpose, or goal(s). Similarly, the generation of impacts also follows a process which is illustrated by a simple model (Mickel & Farrell, 2025). Depicted in Figure 5, collaborative capacity enables the activities and outcomes that generate collaborative impacts.⁴

Figure 5. Generating Collaborative Impacts™



Collaborative activities and outcomes are best described as the direct and more immediate results enabled by increased collaborative capacity. Impacts differ from activities and outcomes because they indicate changes over time.

⁴ Note, this logic assumes that collaborative capacity needs are met. In the development of this simple model, several guiding frameworks were applied to help conceptualize collaborative capacity (deSilva et al., 2022), collaborative activities and outcomes (Baxter & Land, 2023; Land et al., 2025), and collaborative impacts (Mickel & Goldberg, 2018; Mickel & Farrell, 2025) (see Appendices C and D).

COLLABORATIVES ARE A SPECIAL TYPE OF ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL WITH CAPACITY NEEDS.

Collaboratives meet the basic textbook definition of an organization: “a consciously coordinated social unit, comprised of [sic] two or more people, that functions on a relatively coordinated basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals” (Robbins & Judge, 2024). Representing organizational models that span physical, political, and cultural boundaries, collaboratives often emerge in response to perceived needs or opportunities that a single organization cannot address on its own. Examples include partnerships, coalitions, and networks.

Well-resourced collaboratives embody the adaptable and responsive nature of informal organizations alongside the enduring stability of formal ones, making them uniquely positioned to address today’s most complex challenges. “Their enduring strength lies in their ability to adapt and respond effectively to changing circumstances, ensuring lasting impact and relevance” (Mickel & Farrell, 2025).

Like all organizations, collaboratives have capacity needs. For this evaluation, *collaborative capacity* refers to a collaborative’s ability to perform (i.e., to function effectively toward shared purpose). *Collaborative capacity needs* refer to the collective requirements of the collaborative to do so (Mickel, 2022).

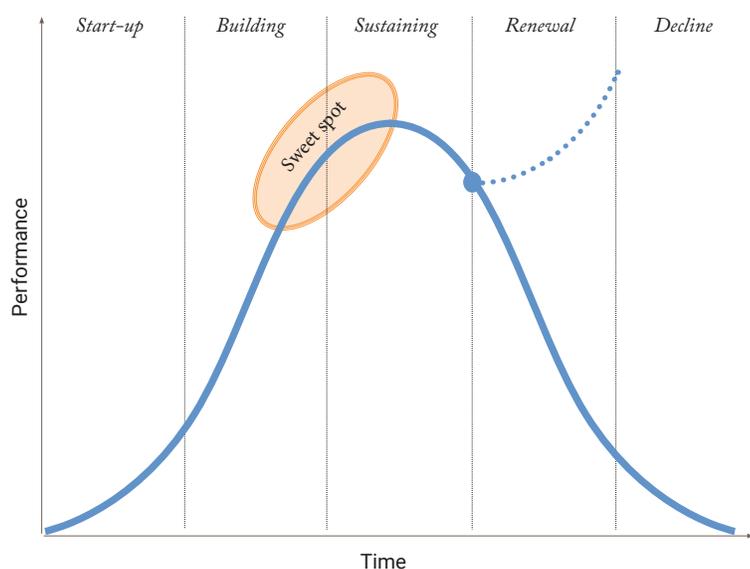
PURPOSE, STRUCTURE, COMPOSITION, FUNCTION, AND PROCESSES ARE FIVE COLLABORATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS.

Like other types of organizational models, collaboratives can differ in their design. Mickel and Farrell (2025) identify design elements that include those linked to a collaborative’s governance (Johnson et al., 2021) and other factors that help illustrate their differences and similarities. Five collaborative design elements are central to understanding how and why a collaborative operates, and what it must sustain (or adapt) to achieve its desired conservation and stewardship goals.

- ▶ **Purpose:** Why the collaborative exists, typically based on a shared understanding of the opportunity, problem, and/or challenge it seeks to address.
- ▶ **Function:** The specific roles performed by the collaborative to fulfill its purpose (e.g., information sharing; planning and implementation; capacity building; advisory, policy, or advocacy; science and research; catalyzing change). A collaborative may choose to perform multiple functions or focus on one.
- ▶ **Structure:** How the partners organize, manage, and coordinate to achieve their purpose. For example, a multi-party collaborative may use an adaptable, network-based structure with a broad, emergent scope, while another with a more focused purview may choose a centralized model.
- ▶ **Composition:** Who participates in the collaborative. For example, depending on how it can best fulfill its collective purpose, a collaborative may choose to have members, core participants, affiliate partners, and/or project-based participants. Composition may also (and often does) evolve over time.
- ▶ **Processes:** How the collaborative communicates, works together, and makes decisions (e.g., systems, methods, governance agreements, strategies).

It is worth noting that there is no one-size-fits-all design. Instead, collaboratives benefit from being adaptive and responsive to what is needed to achieve their collective purpose.

Figure 6. Collaborative Life Cycle



COLLABORATIVES EXPERIENCE A LIFE CYCLE JUST LIKE ANY ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL. Collaborative models, much like traditional organizations, progress through a series of life-cycle stages that shape their development, performance, and long-term impact (Figure 6).

Collaboratives generally perform best when they operate in the “sweet spot,” though capacity is needed at every stage. The time spent in each stage varies widely and is influenced by factors such as available resources, levels of trust, clarity of purpose, and external conditions.

Applying Mickel and Farrell’s definitions (2026), these collaborative life-cycle stages are described here.

- ▶ **Start-up:** Defined by emergence and formation. Partners come together around a shared vision or common purpose, often in response to a pressing issue or opportunity. The focus is on laying the groundwork for joint action and developing the foundational relationships and structures that make collaboration possible.
- ▶ **Building:** Characterized by strengthening and operationalizing the collaborative. The group moves beyond initial agreements and focuses on implementing systems and strategies to achieve its goals. This is a period of active implementation and refinement of governance structures, decision-making, and collective priorities.
- ▶ **Sustaining:** Defined by maturity, stability, and demonstrated effectiveness. The collaborative has established strong systems, a shared identity, and proven its ability to deliver impact over time. This is often where collaboratives find their “sweet spot” of performance. The focus on maintaining momentum, scaling up and accelerating impact, and ensuring long-term resilience.
- ▶ **Renewal:** Marked by reflection, reassessment, and strategic reinvention. The renewal stage emerges when a collaborative recognizes the need for significant adaptation to remain relevant and effective — often in response to changing needs, funding, leadership, or policy contexts.
- ▶ **Decline:** Characterized by waning energy, engagement, or relevance. The decline stage occurs when a collaborative’s energy, resources, or alignment diminishes, making it difficult to sustain meaningful collective action. This may result from decreased participation, unclear direction, or erosion of supporting structures.

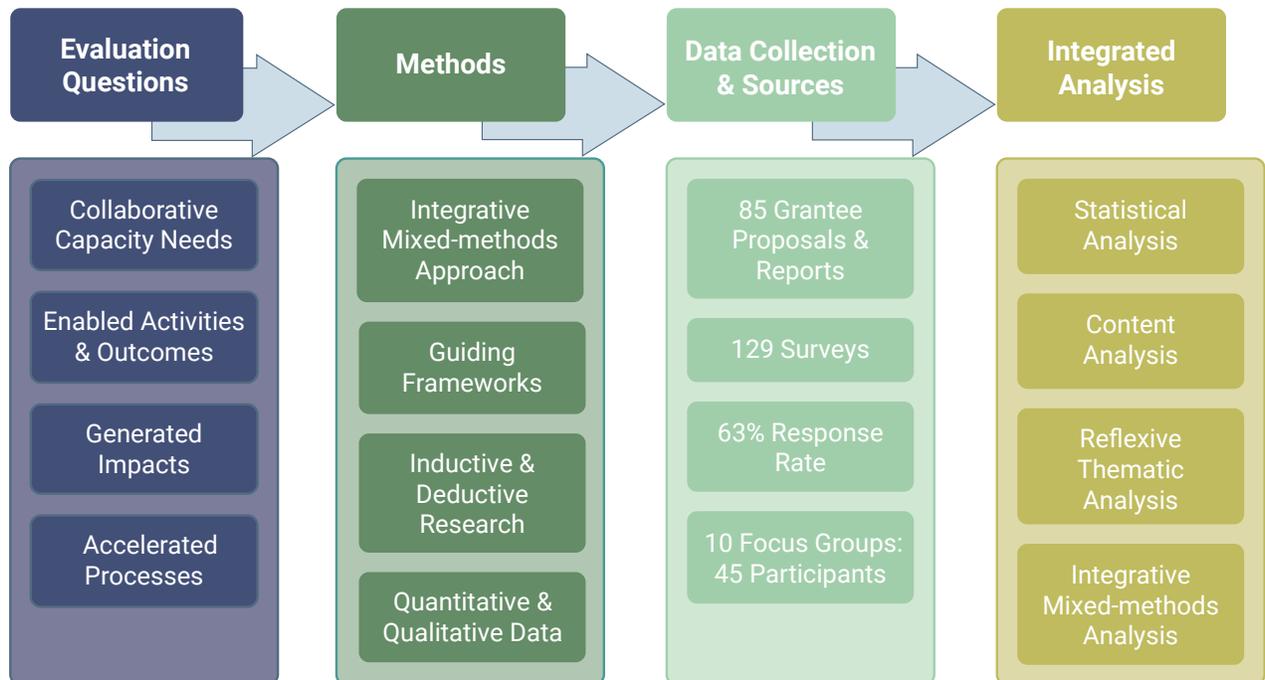
Methodology

Because of its complexity, this evaluation was approached through an integrative mixed-methods research lens.

The methodological approach to this program evaluation is described in this section. This research was complex because the 85 funded collaboratives in this assessment included groups at very different stages, ranging from newly awarded grantees to those several years past their grant closure. Therefore, an integrative mixed-methods research approach, incorporating deductive and inductive methods, was applied (see Appendix B for more background on methods).

With input from Catalyst Fund program staff, the author formulated evaluation questions focused on topics related to how funding met collaborative capacity needs, what collaboratives were able to accomplish through enhanced capacity, and how funding furthered Catalyst Fund program objectives and learning goals. (The complete list of evaluation questions can be found in Appendix E.) An overview of this evaluation's methodology is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Methodology Overview



Data Sources & Collection

Previously mentioned, 85 Catalyst Fund grantees are part of this analysis (see Appendix F for the list of grantees). A wide range of data sources inform findings, including data specifically collected for this evaluation. Focus groups and surveys were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data.⁵

A total of 45 individuals participated in one of ten focus groups held virtually (see Appendix A for list of participants). Because they had the most familiarity with the Catalyst Fund, individuals who had participated in the peer learning cohorts were invited to partake in the focus groups.

An online survey was used to capture insights from multiple perspectives, including those who did not participate in the peer learning program. A total of 129 people completed the survey, for a response rate of 63%. Survey respondents included current and former coordination leads (coordinator, director, or equivalent) and partners (members of leadership team, steering committee, and/or working group). Other respondents included government and Tribal leaders, extended network members, and consultants. Thirty-three percent of the respondents had direct knowledge of the Catalyst Fund, while the remaining were knowledgeable about the collaborative but not about the specific grant award. (See Appendix G for information about survey distribution, respondents, and questions.)

Grant proposals and final reports (for those grantees that had closed their grant periods) were another valuable source of data, in addition to 20 supplemental documents internal to NLC.

Data Analyses

Because multiple data sources and types were used, data analysis techniques included statistical, content, reflexive thematic, and inductive/deductive hybrid thematic analyses (Proudfoot, 2023). (See Appendix H for more information on data analyses.)

For quantitative data originating from surveys, basic statistical analyses (e.g., frequencies and percentages) were calculated. Content analysis was used for qualitative data from sources such as open-ended survey questions, focus group summaries, and documents.

Reflexive-thematic analysis techniques were employed to generate themes from the qualitative data; inductive/deductive hybrid thematic analyses were used for comprehensive analysis of the vast amounts of data collected and analyzed.

⁵ It is worth noting that each data collection method has its benefits. Surveys afford the opportunity to collect quantitative and qualitative expeditiously; and focus groups effectively promote discussions around both individual and shared experiences.

HOW FUNDED COLLABORATIVES GENERATED IMPACTS

The Catalyst Fund’s core premise is that strategic investments in collaborative infrastructure and coordination strengthen how collaboratives function, improving their ability to achieve long-term conservation and stewardship goals. Evaluation findings affirm this premise, showing that capacity support is linked to on-the-ground outcomes and clarifying the pathways through which stronger capacity leads to better results

Findings are organized around four key themes that explain these pathways and mirror the process of generating collaborative impacts. Each theme starts with “in a nutshell” followed by supporting quantitative and qualitative data.



Theme 1: Understanding Funded Collaboratives’ Capacity Needs

- 1.1: Catalyst Fund Collaboratives Differed
- 1.2: Catalyst Fund Grants Addressed a Range of Capacity Needs
- 1.3: Flexibility in Fund Use Is Essential

Theme 2: Activities & Outcomes Resulting from Catalyst Fund Support

- 2.1: Collaborative Development & Functioning
- 2.2: Collaborative Projects & Programs

Theme 3: Positive Impacts Generated by Funded Collaboratives

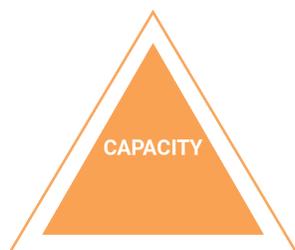
- 3.1: Foundational Impacts—Building Relationships
- 3.2: Operational Impacts—Functioning Efficiently & Effectively
- 3.3: Outcome Impacts—Achieving Results
- 3.4: Integrated Impacts—Institutionalizing Approaches

Theme 4: Impact Processes Advanced through the Catalyst Fund

- 4.1: Collaborative Development & Functioning
- 4.2: Project & Program Implementation
- 4.3: Network Expansion



Theme 1: Understanding Funded Collaboratives' Capacity Needs



IN A NUTSHELL

- ▶ Catalyst Fund grantees varied in their collaborative structures and were at different stages of development.
- ▶ Funded collaboratives most often used Catalyst Fund support to invest in coordination capacity, shared strategies and priorities, and collaborative practices and skills.
- ▶ Funded collaboratives used funds in different ways to meet similar collaborative capacity needs; flexibility in how funds can be applied is essential.

1.1: Catalyst Fund Collaboratives Differed

One important finding is that funded collaboratives represented a breadth of diversity. Specifically, funded collaboratives often differed across five collaborative design elements: purpose, structure, composition, function, and processes (Mickel & Farrell, 2025). Further, funded collaboratives were at various points in their stage of development, with most being in start-up or earlier building stages of development at the time of applying—although a limited number were in a maintaining stage.

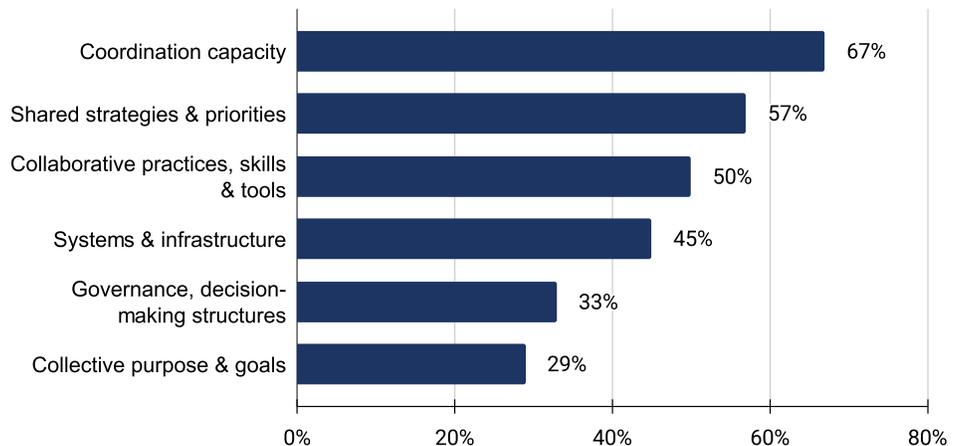
This diversity speaks to the reality that collaborative development is individualized, and collaboratives should respond to the unique biophysical and sociocultural context of its landscape.

1.2: Catalyst Fund Grants Addressed a Range of Capacity Needs

While collaboratives differ, they typically share a common set of capacity needs. The *Collaborative Capacity Framework* (de Silva et al., 2022) (see Appendix C) is a helpful way to conceptualize those similar needs. To determine which capacity-building elements were funded, coordination leads were asked to identify these elements in a survey; the elements were then categorized using the *Collaborative Capacity Framework*. The percent of capacity-building elements are shown in Figure 8, and the elements are described here.

- ▶ **Coordination capacity** includes backbone and administrative staff or contractors who provide facilitation, meeting management, communications, progress tracking and measurement, collective administrative needs, collective project and communication coordination, and more.
- ▶ **Shared strategies and priorities** include strategic plans and/or roadmaps for the collective vision, goals, work plans, actions, and activities that provide a shared understanding of partners' roles, resources, and capacities.
- ▶ **Collaborative practices, skills, and tools** include competency-based training opportunities, resources, peer-to-peer exchanges, etc., to build key collaborative leadership abilities and culture.
- ▶ **Systems and infrastructure** include communications, reporting, and data-sharing systems for the collaboratives' activities; intracollaborative resources; facilities and equipment; and more.
- ▶ **Governance and decision-making structures** include a collaborative's organization (e.g., leadership teams, steering committees, working groups) and associated decision-making processes that help steer its vision and support accountability.
- ▶ **Collective purpose and goals** include agreements (e.g., MOUs, charters) to outline and codify a partnership's collective vision, purpose, and desired impacts, including partner roles.

Figure 8. Funded Capacity-Building Elements



Coordination capacity; shared strategies and priorities; and collaborative practices, skills, and tools were reported most frequently by 42 coordination leads.

“ I honestly don't think the group would function in the same way or maybe even exist without a coordinator. This makes a strong case for continued investment in that role. With a coordinator in place, we've been able to move forward on new initiatives, deepen relationships, and have someone consistently representing the collaborative in external meetings and work groups. It adds a level of formality, continuity, and momentum that wouldn't be possible otherwise.

GRANTEE (SURVEY)

1.3: Flexibility in Fund Use Is Essential

It is clear that a formulaic approach to funding collaborative capacity is often not useful. While funded collaboratives shared similar capacity needs, how they used their funds were contingent upon their life cycle and design. The Catalyst Fund's flexibility was described as a strength. Therefore, a more thoughtful, flexible funding approach that recognizes the individualized nature of the collaborative is beneficial.

“*We had the freedom to use the funding however we wanted, like feeding and taking care of the communities we serve. This is pretty unique.*

LEADERSHIP TEAM (SURVEY)

A really powerful piece to this Catalyst Fund is the open-ended use of funds—not having funds be restricted dollars. NLC seems to really get the importance of this.

COORDINATION LEAD (SURVEY)

The list below includes a range of examples to show how collaboratives differed and applied the Catalyst Fund support to meet their capacity needs and desired outcomes.

Coordination capacity

- ▶ Coordinator position(s) to support the collaborative's development, operations, and work (Green Space Alliance).
- ▶ Facilitation services to support convenings, governance, and strategic planning (Upper Arkansas Watershed Partnership).
- ▶ Consulting services to support inter-Tribal and Tribal-non-Tribal capacity needs (Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed, Green Heart of the Everglades).
- ▶ Grant writing to increase and leverage funds for collaborative projects and programs (Lowcountry Native American Heritage Corridor Coalition).

Shared strategies & priorities

- ▶ Strategic plan and work plan development, often involving input from the local community (Metrowest Conservation Alliance).

Collaborative practices, skills & tools

- ▶ Assessments of collaborative health and function and addressing areas that needed improvement (Yampa River Collaborative).

Systems & infrastructure

- ▶ Geospatial tools, data modeling, and interactive story maps (Delmarva Restoration and Conservation Network).
- ▶ Continued online access to decision support tools, data, reports, and other informational items to partners and the public (Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership).

Governance & decision-making structures

- ▶ Forming leadership teams, determining organizational structures, defining and agreeing on partner roles and expectations (Ribbons of Life, Russian River Confluence).

Collective purpose & goals

- ▶ Establish or refine vision, mission, and goals (Pueblo Caja del Rio Coalition).



Theme 2: Activities & Outcomes Resulting from Catalyst Fund Support



IN A NUTSHELL

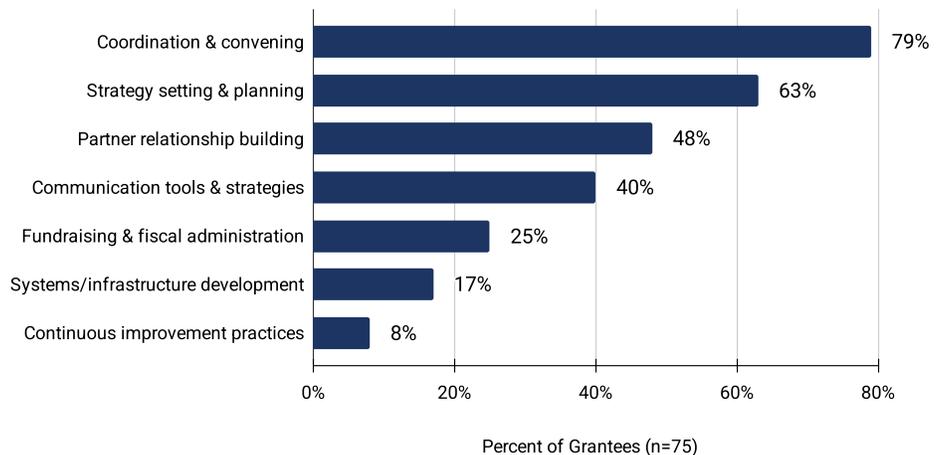
- ▶ During the grant period, funded grantees engaged in numerous activities and produced many outcomes.
- ▶ These clustered into two main categories: collaborative development/functioning and collaborative projects/programs.

Collaborative activities and outcomes are best described as the direct and more immediate results enabled by increased collaborative capacity. Grantees described accomplishing numerous activities and outcomes in their final reports, focus groups, and responses to open-ended survey questions. They clustered into two main categories: (1) those related to the internal development and operations of the collaborative and (2) those related to the projects and programs activities that the collaborative carried out.

2.1: Collaborative Development & Functioning

Seventy-five grantees (out of the 85) reported applying their Catalyst Fund awards to support seven different collaborative development and functioning activities (Figure 9). These activities were reported in grantee applications and final reports. Many grantees reported carrying out multiple activities with their grant awards.

Figure 9. Activities: Collaborative Development & Functioning



Nearly 80% reported using funds for coordination and convening, 63% for collective strategy setting and planning, 48% for partner relationship building, and 40% for communication tools and strategies.

Coordination and Convening

Hiring dedicated collaborative coordinators or professional facilitators to support: (a) coordination for convening facilitation and management (e.g., agendas and materials development, event planning and communication with participants) and (b) collaborative's governance needs, systems and infrastructure management, and collaborative activities.

*This grant helped the **High Divide Collaborative** move toward the 'building' phase of collaboration through the support of a dedicated coordinator, who took on the time-consuming administrative elements of collaboration, as well as streamlined communication within the partnership.*

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Strategy Setting and Collective Planning

Creating clear overarching goals and collective strategy setting to guide the collaborative's direction and investments. Identifying shared problems and generating multibenefit solutions. Administering plans, protocols, and agreements that shape and guide a collaborative's governance structure.

The Salt Valley Watershed Collaborative secured the services of a strategic planning consultant firm and collaborated with key conservation partner organizations to create a strategic plan for our convening organization that complements and enhances the strategic plans of our collaborating organizations.

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Partner Relationship Building and Collaborative Expansion

Performing outreach and engagement activities with current collaborative partners to strengthen ongoing interpersonal relationships and develop cohesive group identity. Building trusted relationships with prospective partners to engage new partners and expand the collaborative.

*This grant supported travel for five Indigenous individuals to participate in three separate in-person gatherings and steering committee meetings, which resulted in their long-term engagement with the **Northwest Boreal Partnership**.*

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Communication Tools and Strategies

Creating new tools and strategies for internal and external communication. Facilitating these internal and external communication pathways such as intranets, listservs, website calendars, blogs, websites, and newsletters commensurate with collaborative's needs and goals.

*The Partnership Coordinator supported **Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance's** communications, publishing five blogs, keeping the website updated, and sending quarterly newsletters to website subscribers.*

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Fundraising and Fiscal Administration

Establishing funder relationships and identifying grant and other funding sources to meet collaborative goals. Developing and administering restricted financial accounts, grant agreements, tracking deliverables, and complying with grant and contract guidelines. Creating and implementing sustainable funding structures.

*Thanks to the support from the Catalyst Fund, this project enabled the **Staying Connected Initiative** to identify and take initial steps to implement a sustainable funding structure for our partnership's core functions.*

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Systems and Infrastructure Development

Providing and maintaining collaborative systems and infrastructure development such as data sharing and other internal platforms needed to sustain the collaborative's effectiveness and efficiencies.

*The **Cacapon Watershed Collaborative** used the Catalyst Fund for the development of an online member portal to store and easily share information and data, and coordination of logistics for monitoring activities, such as stream health data collection.*

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Continuous Improvement Practices

Promoting a continuous improvement culture through embracing adaptive management strategies. Conducting assessments to evaluate both collaborative and partner health and performance through a continuous-improvement lens.

*Support from the Catalyst Fund gives the **Siuslaw Coho Partnership's Chair** the capacity to produce annual reports that benefit our adaptive management objectives by serving as a resource for tracking strategy effectiveness; this will allow us to evaluate annual metrics over time. The reports also help our partners feel connected.*

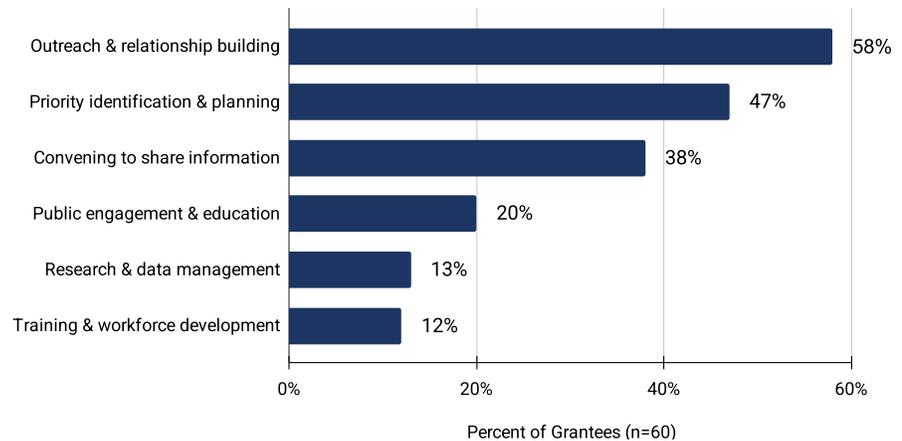
GRANTEE (REPORT)

2.2: Collaborative Projects & Programs

In addition to the collaborative development and functioning activities, 60 grantees reported applying their Catalyst Fund awards to support six different activities related to on-the-ground projects and programs (Figure 10). Again, many grantees reported carrying out multiple activities with their grant awards.

Figure 10. Activities: Projects & Programs

58% of collaboratives reported using funds for outreach and relationship building, 47% for project and program priority identification and planning, and 38% for convenings to share information.



Targeted Outreach and Relationship Building

Conducting audience-specific outreach and engagement to foster relationship building, increase trust and credibility, and encourage the support and implementation of mutually beneficial projects.

The Driftless Area Conservation Partnership created a plan for participatory engagement that will feature one-on-one conversations with different parties in the Driftless Area to introduce more organizations to the Wisconsin Driftless Conservation Plan and share how they can use it and be involved in the partnership's activities.

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Project Priority Identification, Planning, and Adaptation

Designing decision-making approaches and strategies that help identify project and program priorities, inform project sequencing, and plan projects alongside relevant parties. Approaching obstacles that limit effective project implementation with an adaptive mindset when developing multibenefit solutions.

*By supporting the **Natural Treasures Alliance**, the funding supported the creation of a priority map and strategy development for working lands in the tri-state greater Chattanooga region. Strategies include: Empowering working lands to maximize their production, economic and regional value; Reducing the rate of loss of working farms and forests; Fostering connectivity for working land stakeholders throughout the region.*

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Convenings for Information Sharing and Exchange

Connecting and convening relevant parties to identify collective needs and opportunities, strategize and plan for the region, share best practices and applicable resources, and learn new techniques and approaches.

Cold Hollow to Canada convened two meetings among conservation partners to discuss priorities, opportunities, and constraints for conserving land in the region. This provided a platform to get to know one another, understand strengths and priorities, and discuss ways to better engage with and work with landowners in the region. These meetings were attended by representatives from 11 NGOs and agencies.

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Public Awareness, Engagement, and Education	
<p>Performing general community outreach, engagement, and education to build public awareness about the collaborative, projects, and programs, and to generate support toward collaborative's goals.</p>	<p><i>The Piscataway Land Collaborative will host convenings, cultural presentations, listening sessions led by Tribal leaders and knowledge keepers for federal, state, and private land holders to deepen their understanding of Indigenous values, knowledge, priorities, and consultation needs.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">GRANTEE (PROPOSAL)</p>
Research, Monitoring, Data Management, and Analysis	
<p>Generating, acquiring, analyzing, and managing data to support a collaborative's work, including effective project and program implementation or monitoring strategies. Conducting research, synthesizing findings, and preparing reports.</p>	<p><i>Catalyst Fund support allowed the Swinomish Wildlife Co-Management Partnership to draft a technical report of our research findings for wolf recolonization and its effects on the western Greater North Cascades Ecosystem. The support enabled us to prep the data for analyses, perform the analyses, and incorporate those results into the report draft.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">GRANTEE (REPORT)</p>
Training, Mentoring, and Workforce Development	
<p>Supporting professional development through training, internships, mentoring, peer learning and exchange, and resource guides. Assessing workforce needs and gaps and developing programs to address those gaps.</p>	<p><i>Because of the Catalyst Fund, the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership recruited two apprentice Nipmuc Cultural Stewards, and they were mentored during the grant term along with a third steward, receiving 109 hours of training in total.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">GRANTEE (REPORT)</p>

Theme 3: Positive Impacts Generated by Funded Collaboratives



IN A NUTSHELL

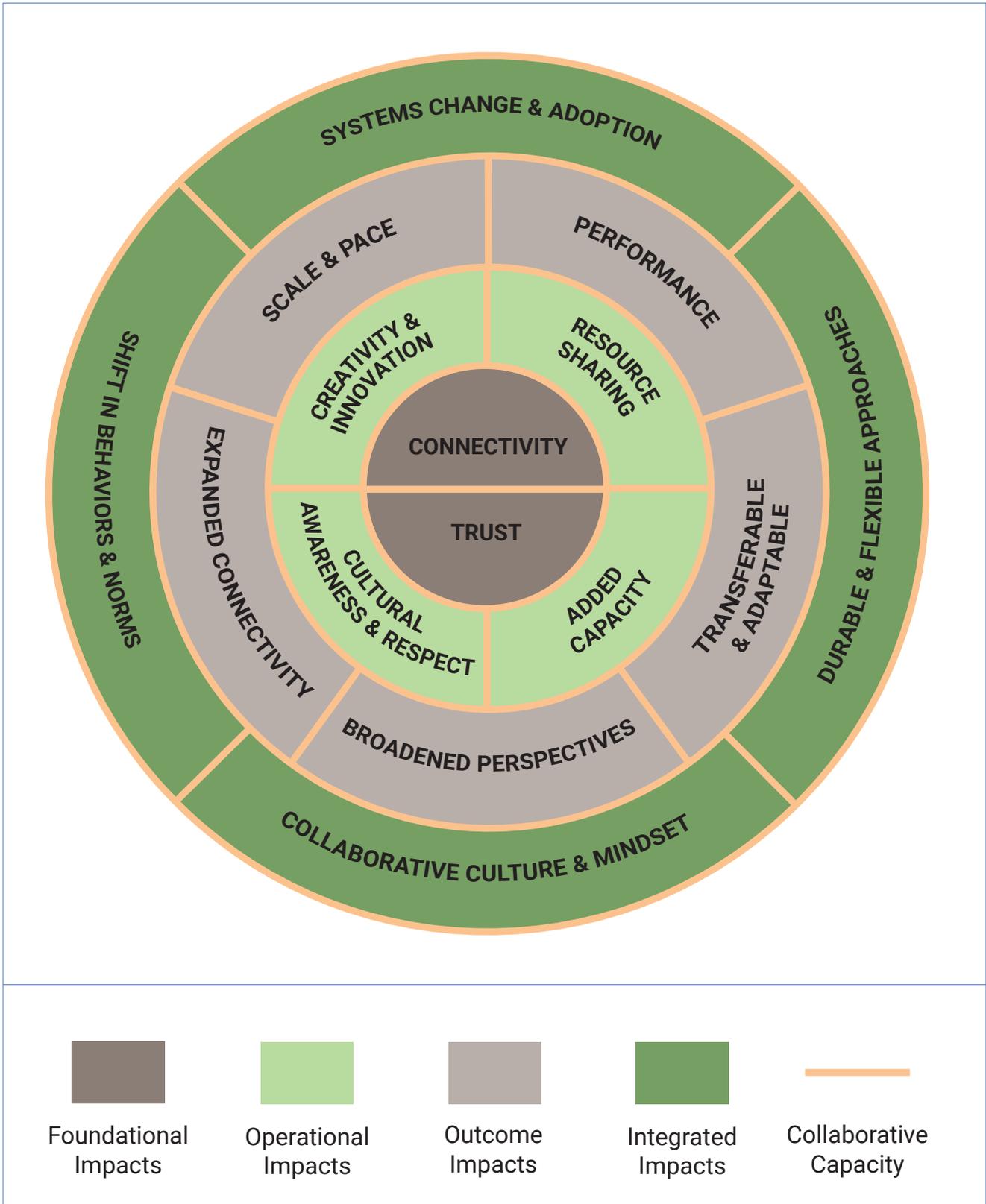
- ▶ During the two-year grant period, funded collaboratives generated a number of positive impacts thanks to Catalyst Fund investments in collaborative capacity.
- ▶ These impacts clustered into two main classifications: foundational and operational.
- ▶ These impacts better positioned Catalyst Fund grantees in the post-grant phase to eventually generate outcome and integrated impacts.

The *Collaborative Capacity Impact Model™* (Mickel & Farrell, 2025) was used as a guiding framework to determine impact types generated by increased capacity (see Appendix E). Enabled by the activities and outcomes described earlier, current and former Catalyst Fund grantees collectively generated 15 types of impacts, represented as an interdependent, scalable system (Figure 11). Previously noted, impacts differ from activities and outcomes because they indicate change over time.

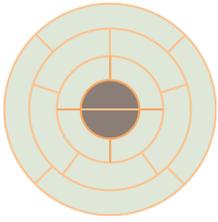
Increased collaborative capacity made it possible for funded collaboratives to produce foundational and operational impacts, which better positioned a subset of collaboratives to generate outcome and integrated impacts in their post-grant phases.



Figure 11. 15 Collaborative Impacts™



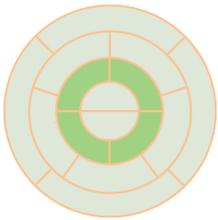
FOUNDATIONAL IMPACTS



Connectivity: Enhancing the quality and quantity of connections for collaborative members, partner organizations, local communities, and a collaborative's extended network.

Trust: Increasing trust within a collaborative and among its extended network members, which enables deeper engagement and sustained action.

OPERATIONAL IMPACTS



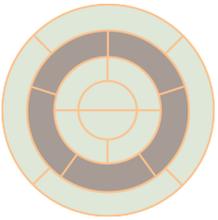
Creativity & innovation: Forming and implementing inventive processes, practices, programs, and solutions.

Resource sharing: Sharing human capital, knowledge and expertise, systems and physical infrastructure, data, and funding.

Added capacity: Increasing collaborative functions; generating and leveraging funding; and amplifying partners' existing systems, relationships and expertise.

Cultural awareness & respect: Helping collaborative and extended network members understand, respect, and leverage their differences.

OUTCOME IMPACTS



Scale & pace: Increasing collaborative development and functioning as well as project and program implementation.

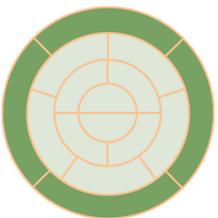
Performance: Producing high-quality outputs through enhanced performance at the collaborative, partner, and individual levels.

Transferable & adaptable models: Developing, implementing, and refining models and tools that can be applied and adapted across organizations and geographies.

Broadened perspectives: Enabling collaborative and extended network members to recognize alternate possibilities, understand a broader context, and engage in expansive thinking.

Expanded connectivity: Growing and linking regional networks by serving as conveners, regional activity hubs, and centralized information portals.

INTEGRATED IMPACTS



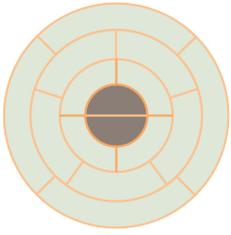
Systems change & adoption: Initiating and integrating proven methods and techniques at a systems level, which can produce paradigm shifts.

Durable & flexible approaches: Integrating sustainable approaches at a scale that can be adapted and refined to accommodate complexity, evolving situations, and different contexts.

Collaborative culture & mindset: Normalizing collaboration as a valued and effective way to address complex problems and foster meaningful, enduring relationships.

Shift in behaviors & norms: Changing actions and expectations across local and regional communities, expanded geographies, and fields of practice.

3.1: Foundational Impacts—Building Relationships



Connectivity: Enhancing the quality and quantity of connections for collaborative members, partner organizations, local communities, and a collaborative’s extended network.

Trust: Increasing trust within a collaborative and among its extended network members, which enables deeper engagement and sustained action.

Catalyst Fund collaborative capacity support enabled funded collaboratives to engage in activities that served to produce two foundational impacts—enhanced connectivity and increased trust (see Figure 11, page 34). **These impacts are foundational because they are essential for building the relationships that undergird effective collaborative work and increase the likelihood of realizing other positive impacts.** Succinctly stated by a focus group participant, “the impact of increasing trust and making connections is foundational to being able to do all the other types of impact, including those on the ground.”

“*The impact of the Catalyst Fund goes far beyond deliverables. It’s about people who didn’t know each other developing working and trusting relationships. It’s about new friendships and sharing challenges knowing no one will be judged. It’s about turning over prospective projects to other partners and knowing their own missions will be advanced, and not worrying about who gets credit as long as the work is moving forward. It’s laying the groundwork for the Heart of Maryland Collaborative’s future through a shared vision of the landscape and trusting that the partnership is there for them.*

GRANTEE (REPORT)

The value of trust and connectivity cannot be overstated, especially in forming a collaborative entity. One grantee explained in a focus group, “building a conservation collaborative is different than building a traditional conservation organization—there is no existing model or defined structure. Building a partnership with partners who have not sat at the same table before takes time. It is often said and is true, ‘work can only be accomplished at the speed of trust.’”

“Because of the Catalyst Fund, we have many partnership-building successes that have established a solid foundation for implementing **Moloka'i Wetland Partnership's** conservation vision. Moving forward, this strengthened collaboration will drive our efforts in wetland restoration, allowing us to achieve long-term conservation goals and make a lasting impact.

GRANTEE (REPORT)

I just want to reiterate that the **Alliance for Mystic River Watershed** is a very special organization. It focuses on building trust across its partners and within the community. Funding collaborative capacity was and is essential to building and maintaining relationships.

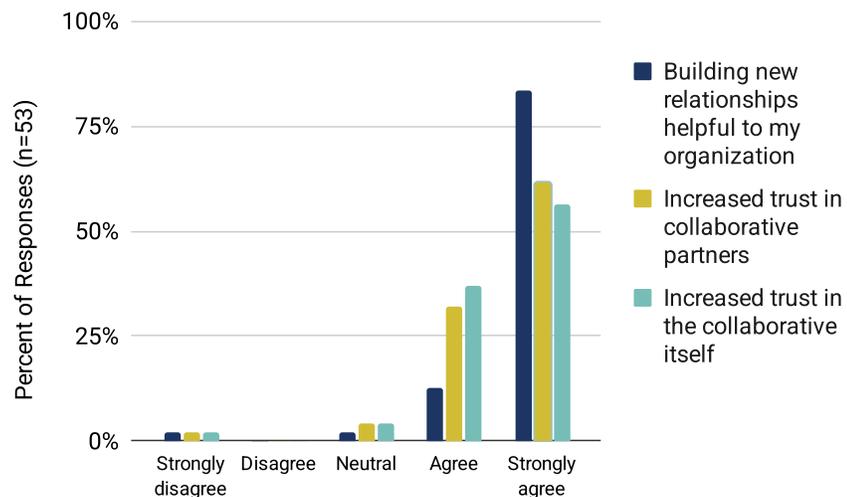
NETWORK MEMBER (SURVEY)

Thanks to collaborative capacity support, funded collaboratives were able to enhance connectivity and trust through outreach and other activities. These foundational impacts are critical to meeting collective goals.

The impacts of enhanced connectivity and increased trust are supported by survey data in which 53 collaborative partners⁶ reported their levels of agreement (strongly disagree to strongly agree) with the prompt, “I (or my organization) have experienced the following benefits as a result of the increased collaborative capacity” (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Enhanced Connectivity & Increased Trust

95% of collaborative partners confirmed that increased capacity enhanced connectivity through building new relationships and increased trust among partners and in the collaborative.



6 Collaborative partners include leadership team and working group members.

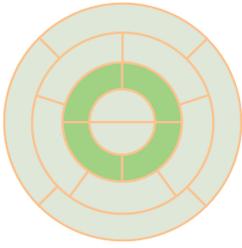
In the Spotlight: The Greenspace Alliance

The Greenspace Alliance is an excellent example of how the Catalyst Fund contributed to expanded connectivity. Serving urban and rural communities in the greater Cincinnati area spanning Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana, the Greenspace Alliance used the Catalyst Fund award to hire a manager who serves in a coordinator role. In a short period of time, this added capacity has made the Greenspace Alliance a trusted professional network of conservation practitioners that continues to expand, including individuals that have never seen themselves as part of conservation work in the past. Noted by a leadership team member, “within the Greenspace Alliance alone, there have been monthly hikes at various conservation organizations. The last one alone had approximately 30 people attend, only 5 of whom I had seen before.”

“*We expanded stakeholder outreach, growing the membership body by adding over 20 new connections, including frontline community members. Through targeted personal outreach to conservation partners and adjacent groups like local planners, city officials, and community organizations, we have increased participation at monthly Greenspace Alliance meetings by an average of 18%.*

GRANTEE (REPORT)

3.2: Operational Impacts—Functioning Efficiently & Effectively



Creativity & innovation: Forming and implementing inventive processes, practices, programs, and solutions.

Resource sharing: Sharing human capital, knowledge and expertise, systems and physical infrastructure, data, and funding.

Added capacity: Increasing collaborative functions; generating and leveraging funding; and amplifying partners' existing systems, relationships and expertise.

Cultural awareness & respect: Helping collaborative and extended network members understand, respect, and leverage their differences.

Operational impacts (see Figure 11, page 34) are those that help a collaborative and its partners function more effectively. Operational impacts build upon foundational impacts; because of the enhanced trust and connectivity, collaboratives are able to function more effectively in their operations.

With the Catalyst Fund support, funded collaboratives were able to advance a range of activities that produced four operational impacts—higher levels of creativity and innovation, increased resource sharing, added capacity, and enhanced cultural awareness and respect.

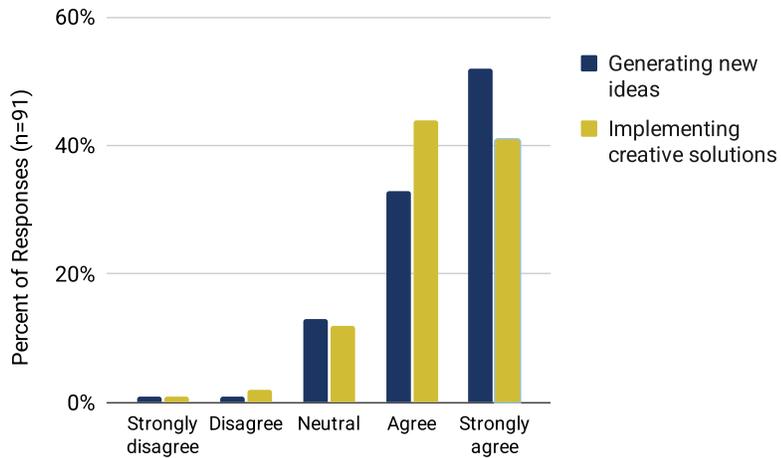


Operational: Creativity & Innovation

Creativity and innovation help collaboratives function more effectively and are especially valuable for successfully navigating complex and dynamic situations. Funded collaboratives reported increased creativity and innovation in generating fresh ideas and solving problems. In the survey, 38 coordination leads and 53 partners reported their levels of agreement with statements about creativity and innovation through the prompt, “Because of funding collaborative capacity, we are more effective in...” (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Boosted Creativity & Innovation

85% of coordination leads and collaborative partners indicated that their collaborative more effectively generates new ideas and implements creative solutions because of capacity funding.



In the Spotlight: Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition

In 2023, the Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition and partners launched the **Maryland Climate Crew Network**—a green workforce development pilot program. This innovative program is designed to address restoration and resilience challenges in urban communities. The program does so by equipping young adults and unemployed individuals from these communities with comprehensive green job training, hands-on field experience, and industry connections.

The Catalyst Fund is credited for instilling confidence in GBWC’s coordinator to be bold and innovative and encourage their partners to do the same. This green workforce development program is just that—bold and innovative. It fosters a new generation of environmental leaders while advancing green infrastructure and restoration projects. This creative program has the potential of being replicated in other regions and sectors.

“*The Catalyst Fund gave me the skills and space to understand emergent thinking and the confidence to speak the big, bold ideas that were in my head—and encourage partners to do the same.... Early on, we realized a lot more people were needed to do the on-the-ground work. To do this equitably, we thought it best to stop asking people to volunteer and to actually pay them. Ideally, we want to train and pay people from urban communities who aren’t well represented in the conservation and restoration world.*”

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

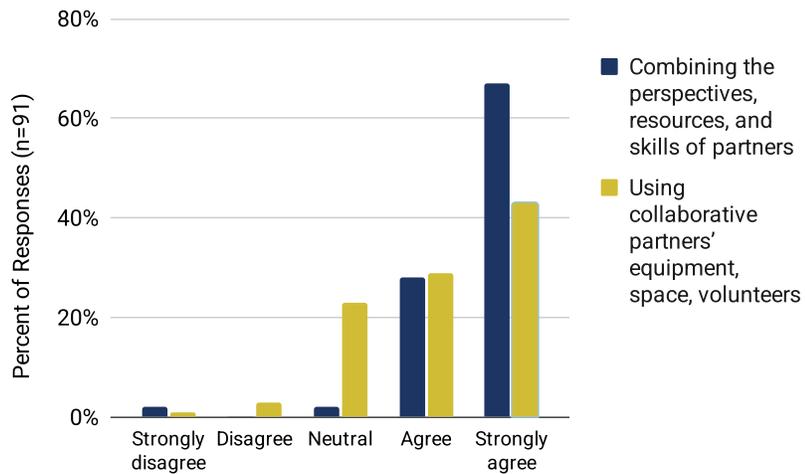
Operational: Resource Sharing

By bringing partners together, collaboratives create opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness through shared resources—allowing each partner to contribute without bearing the full burden and enabling the group to leverage its collective strengths in ways that would not otherwise be possible. This is certainly the case for Catalyst Fund grantees.

In the survey, 38 coordination leads and 53 partners indicated levels of agreement about resource sharing based on the prompt, “Because of funding collaborative capacity, we are more effective in...” (Figure 14). They reported observing increases in how their collaboratives were able to share specialized expertise and knowledge among partners, exchange data and information, make use of one another’s equipment and space, and share staff and volunteers.

Figure 14. Increased Resource Sharing

95% of coordination leads and collaborative partners acknowledged their collaboratives are more effective in combining partners’ perspectives, resources, and skills because of increased collaborative capacity.



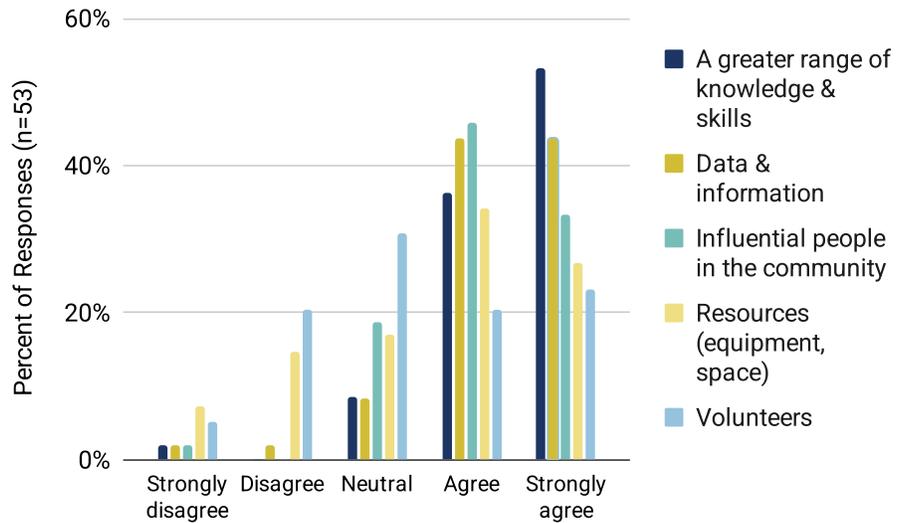
“Because of the trust within our partnership, partners feel comfortable calling each other up and asking how to do something. Now, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Partners don’t need to spend the time and money on figuring out how to do something. Because of this, they are more efficient.”

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

The survey also captured data from the vantage point of partner organizations within a collaborative. When prompted, “My partner organization has experienced the following benefits as a result of the increased collaborative capacity,” the level of agreement on how partners benefit was clear (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Increased Access to Resources

Almost 90% of respondents reported an increase in their partner organization’s access to a greater range of knowledge, data, and information.



Operational: Added Capacity

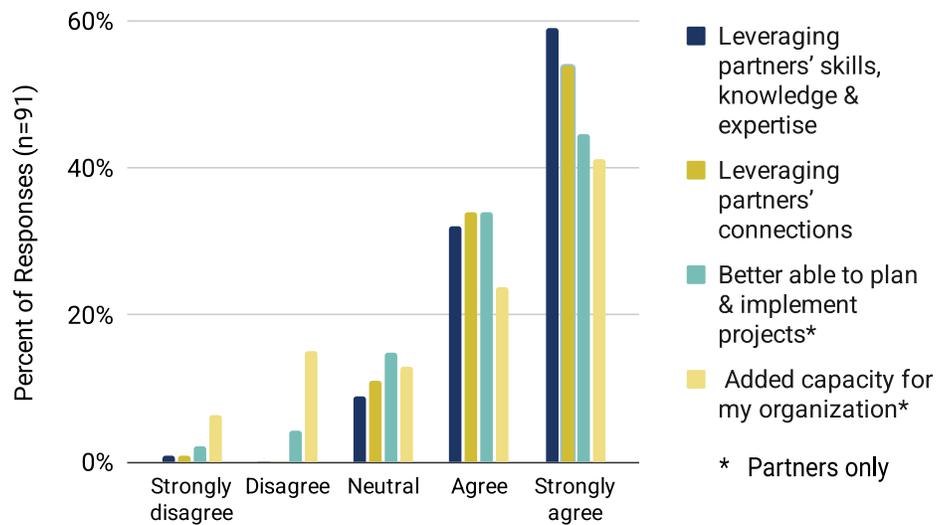
Simply put, collaboratives need added capacity to function. Funded collaboratives were able to use Catalyst Fund grants (and leveraged funding) to add capacity to their respective collaboratives and partner organizations in different ways: hiring collaborative employees, including coordination leads; pooling resources; generating new funding sources; and leveraging partners’ existing funds or specialized expertise, knowledge, and skills.

According to one grantee, “the Catalyst Fund’s support gave us the critical capacity to build relationships and trust within the community that got this project off the ground. We are now better positioned to apply for and receive implementation funds.”

In the survey, 38 coordination leads and 53 partners indicated their levels of agreement about added capacity and leveraging resources in their responses to the prompt, “Because of funding collaborative capacity, we are more effective in...” To understand benefits collaborative partners experience, partners indicated their levels of agreement about added capacity through the prompt, “My partner organization has experienced the following benefits as a result of the increased collaborative capacity” (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Added Capacity

90% of coordination leads and collaborative partners affirmed that their collaborative is more effective in leveraging partners’ skills, knowledge, expertise, and connections because of increased capacity.



“*The connectivity conservation work we do as a part of the **Triangle Connectivity Partnership** plays a major role in regional biodiversity conservation. We used the Catalyst Fund to hire a coordinator that put together a planning process, producing a Strategic Action Plan. Contributing capacity to our partnership’s efforts remains a priority. Capacity for this effort is now built into strategic and individual work plans.*

LEADERSHIP TEAM (SURVEY)

*In 2024 and 2025, the **Heart of Maryland Collaborative** secured more than \$11 million in funding to power our cooperative efforts. We are leveraging partner funds with new sources of funding to accelerate conservation and restoration beyond what we imagined possible a few years ago. The Catalyst Fund helped us achieve this.*

LEADERSHIP TEAM (SURVEY)



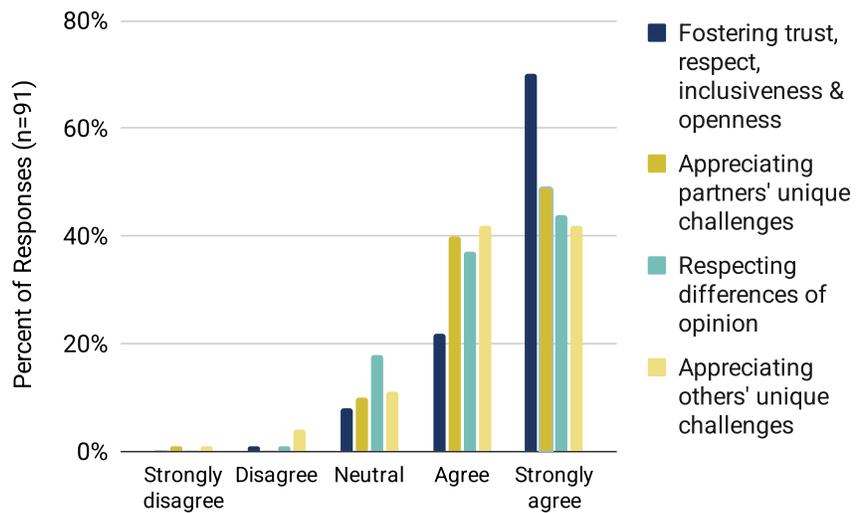
Operational: Cultural Awareness & Respect

Many grantees reported observations that underscored how collaborative capacity investments through the Catalyst Fund supported a set of activities that built cultural awareness and respect within the collaborative as a whole and among individual partners. This emergent operational impact is important because it helps foster a sense of belonging that enhances engagement and participation. According to a focus group participant, “we uphold a very strong belief around the equal valuation of ways of knowing. It doesn’t matter if you have PhD, Tribal ecological, or land-based knowledge, everyone is honored and respected for what they bring to the table.”

In the survey, 38 coordination leads and 53 partners reported their levels of agreement with statements about cultural awareness and respect through the prompt, “Because of funding collaborative capacity, we are more effective in...” (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Enhanced Cultural Awareness & Respect

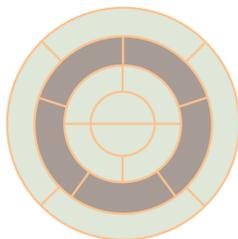
Approximately 90% of coordination leads and collaborative partners confirmed that increased capacity has enhanced cultural awareness and respect.



“More than anything, this grant has helped all of us at the Taos Valley Watershed Coalition recognize the humanness of our ecological crisis, and appreciate and respect the values and opinions of our diverse partners, regardless of their professional or social bona fides.

GRANTEE (REPORT)

3.3: Outcome Impacts—Achieving Results



Scale & pace: Increasing collaborative development and functioning as well as project and program implementation.

Performance: Producing high-quality outputs through enhanced performance at the collaborative, partner, and individual levels.

Transferable & adaptable models: Developing, implementing, and refining models and tools that can be applied and adapted across organizations and geographies.

Broadened perspectives: Enabling collaborative and extended network members to recognize alternate possibilities, understand a broader context, and engage in expansive thinking.

Expanded connectivity: Growing and linking regional networks by serving as conveners, regional activity hubs, and centralized information portals.

Outcome impacts (see Figure 11, page 34) are those that involve achieving results that move a collaborative forward towards fulfilling its core purpose. These impacts include those envisioned by collaborative partners when they are coming together to form a collaborative—and also include unanticipated impacts.

This evaluation suggests that funded collaboratives were able to generate foundational and operational impacts during their two-year grant periods, but outcome impacts emerged over time. A subset of Catalyst Fund grantees generated outcome impacts in the years following the Catalyst Fund grant period. Of particular note, a number of former grantees reported an increase in the pace and scale at which they are able to realize projects and programs.

Increased scale, pace, and performance demonstrate that investments in collaborative capacity result in on-the-ground conservation and stewardship outcomes.

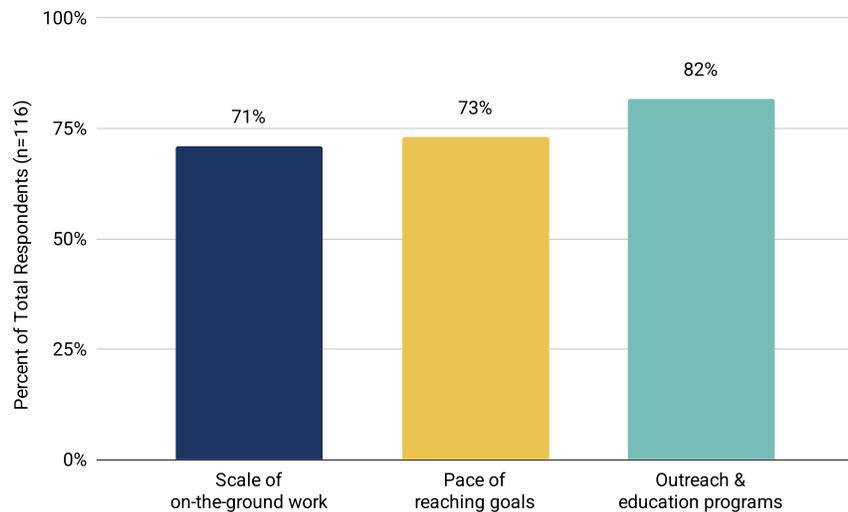
Outcome: Scale/Pace/Performance—Projects & Programs

Former Catalyst Fund grantees reported increases in the scale, pace, and quality of project and program implementation. This finding is supported by a large majority of survey participants. As noted by a leadership team member, “landscape-scale watershed restoration and fire-adapted landscape projects are achieving increased on-the-ground implementation—more projects, acres, stream footage, etc.”

Figure 18⁷ represents the percent of survey participants indicating they have observed increases based on the following question: “Within the past 6 years, what changes have you observed related to the following collaborative activities?: scale of on-the-ground work (increase in acres, miles, feet); pace of reaching stewardship and conservation goals (faster, more efficiently); and outreach, education, and other types of programs.”

A total of 116 survey participants responded to these questions; they include 38 coordination leads, 53 partners, and 25 external network members.

Figure 18. Summary of Observed Changes



More than 70% of survey respondents reported observed increases in the scale of on-the-ground work and in the pace for reaching goals; 82% reported increases in outreach and education programs.

⁷ Graphs showing a more detailed breakdown of the responses can be found in Appendix I.

In the Spotlight: Shoal Creek Watershed Consortium

The Shoal Creek Watershed Consortium exemplifies a funded collaborative that was able to increase scale of on-the-ground work and scale of outreach and education programs, accelerating the pace of reaching its goals. Launched in 2020, it received a Catalyst Fund award in 2022. Working to promote conservation practices that reduce nutrient runoff and improve watershed health in the often-neglected Southwest Missouri watershed, the Shoal Creek Consortium made significant progress towards its stewardship goals.

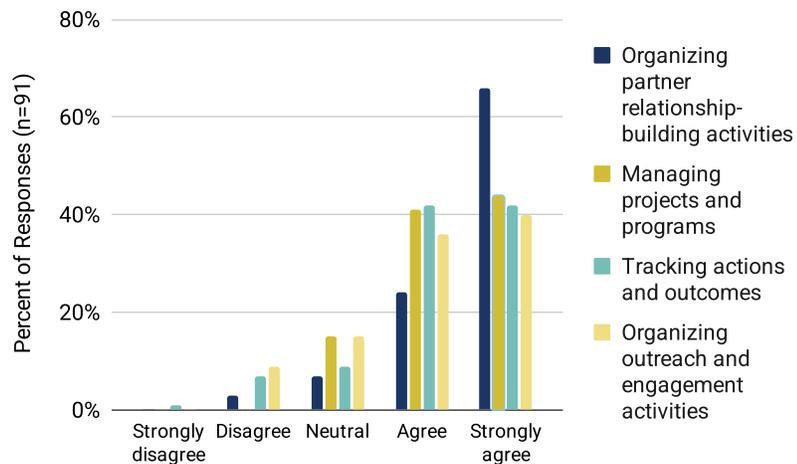
“We planted over 2,000 native trees (37 species) at the partnership’s 35-acre Hickory/Shoal Creek Confluence site with the support of over 100 volunteers from local high schools, businesses, and community garden groups; established relationships with local farmers who own over 1500 acres of active farmland along Shoal Creek; engaged local high schools through outdoor conservation education programs; and collaborated with local colleges in tree planting and inventories as well as outdoor laboratories on soil science and agriculture conservation practices.

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Observed increases in pace and scale are likely related to how capacity support from the Catalyst Fund allowed collaboratives to enhance the effectiveness of their activities. Fifty-three coordination leads and 30 partners indicated their levels of agreement with increased effectiveness of activities through the prompt, “Because of the Catalyst Fund grant funding collaborative capacity, we are more effective in...” (Figure 19).

Organizing partner relationship-building activities (90%), managing projects and programs (85%), and tracking actions and outcomes (84%) were mentioned most frequently, followed by public outreach and engagement activities (76%).

Figure 19. Enhanced Performance: Project and Programs



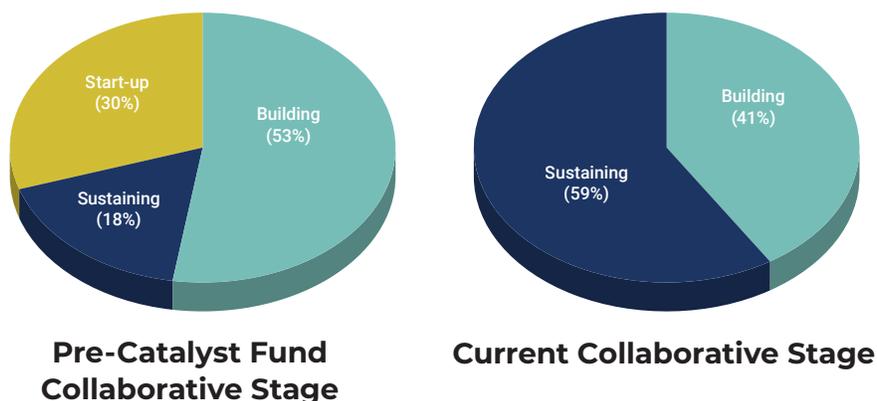
Outcome: Scale & Pace—Collaborative Development & Functioning

Data from Catalyst Fund grantees indicate that the pace and scale of collaborative development and function also increased. Pace is illustrated in reported shifts in development stages from pre-Catalyst funding to the present. Scale is reflected in the expansion of a collaborative (e.g., increase in number of partners, geographic range) and increased partner member engagement. This has implications for enhanced collaborative performance, including on-the-ground impacts.

In the survey, coordination leads were asked the following questions: “Prior to applying for the Catalyst Fund grant, how would you describe the phase of this collaborative/partnership?” and “From your perspective, has the phase of your collaborative/partnership changed?” As illustrated in Figure 20, the pace of collaborative development and functioning has increased.

Figure 20. Increased Pace of Development: Comparison of Collaborative Stages

Prior to receiving Catalyst funding, 18% of the grantees noted being in the sustaining stage. Now, 59% identify as being in the sustaining stage.



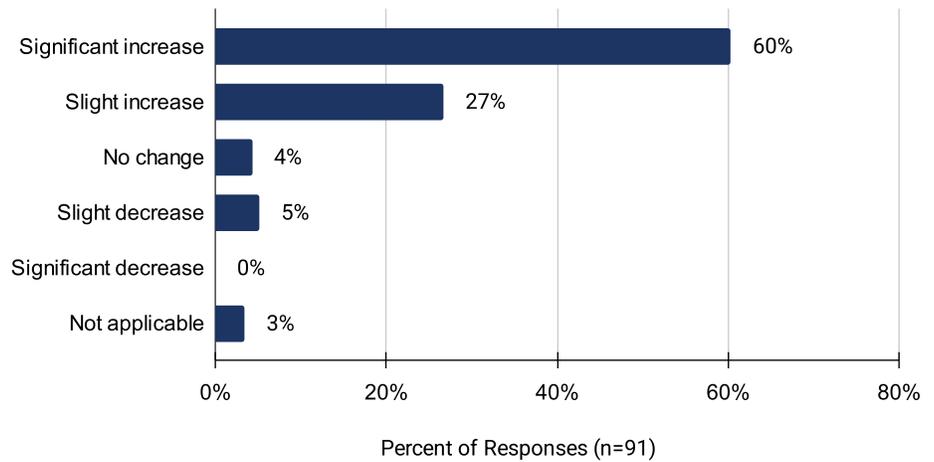
Numerous grantees credited the Catalyst Fund as being instrumental for them to become recognizable entities. “The Catalyst Fund has literally catalyzed our small collaborative by allowing us to go from a loosely-spun collaborative to having someone clearly leading the direction of the group, which enabled us to move our mission forward. The support was crucial in launching the **Wishpush Working Group** from planning into action mode. We are becoming a known entity for people to contact for problem solving and restoration opportunities.”

Regarding the expansion of collaboratives, 73% of coordination leads indicated expanding the number of partners participating in their collaboratives since receiving Catalyst Fund grants. Of those reporting increased partner membership, 46% reported adding 2-5 new partners; 21% reported adding 6-10 partners; 26% reported adding 11-29 partners; and 7% reported adding 30-50 partners

Because of the Catalyst Fund, the scale of partner member engagement also increased. According to a grantee, “the **Lands Between Partnership** has built up and strengthened Tribal member engagement over the past few years due to a strong partnership and leadership from National Parks Conservation Association and Bears Ears Partnership. Those Tribes include Hopi, Zuni, and Acoma Pueblos, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and Navajo Nation.”

Thirty-eight coordination leads and 53 partners responded to the following question, “Within the past 6 years, what changes have you observed related to partner member engagement in the collaborative and its activities?” (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Observed Changes: Partner Member Engagement



87% of coordination leads and collaborative partners observed increases in partner member engagement thanks to the Catalyst Fund.



In the Spotlight: Escalante River Watershed Partnership

The Escalante River Watershed Partnership is a shining example of how the Catalyst Fund increased partner member engagement, which has produced on-the-ground impacts. The Partnership received a Catalyst Fund award in 2023 and used it to provide Tribes the support they needed to attend events and get to project sites.

The Catalyst Fund has led to an immediate increase in Tribal engagement, with Tribal participants from Navajo, Hopi, Hualapai, and Paiute bands attending recent events, such as the three-day annual Grand Staircase Escalante Symposium.

“*The Catalyst Fund provided Tribal participants the opportunity to engage with ancestral lands in an area that would otherwise be fairly inaccessible to them due to financial constraints. The impact of this cannot be overstated. The Escalante River Watershed is very remote due to the topography of the region; additional financial burdens often disproportionately impact Tribal partners who travel from Arizona to Utah around Lake Powell in order to be present at partnership meetings and events.*

I personally was able to witness the incredible work that was implemented as a direct result of the Catalyst Fund. Tribal participants from both Hopi and Paiute bands completed two separate work trips in the Escalante River watershed. During the first trip, a barbed wire fence was installed around a unique spring site that provides ample resources for wildlife, including mountain lion, elk, mule deer, and over a dozen bat species. In the second trip, the crew built a 400-foot long post-and-pole fence around a historic spring site, Stump Springs, to provide relief from excessive livestock grazing. They did this under a day and a half despite inclement weather.

LEADERSHIP TEAM (SURVEY)

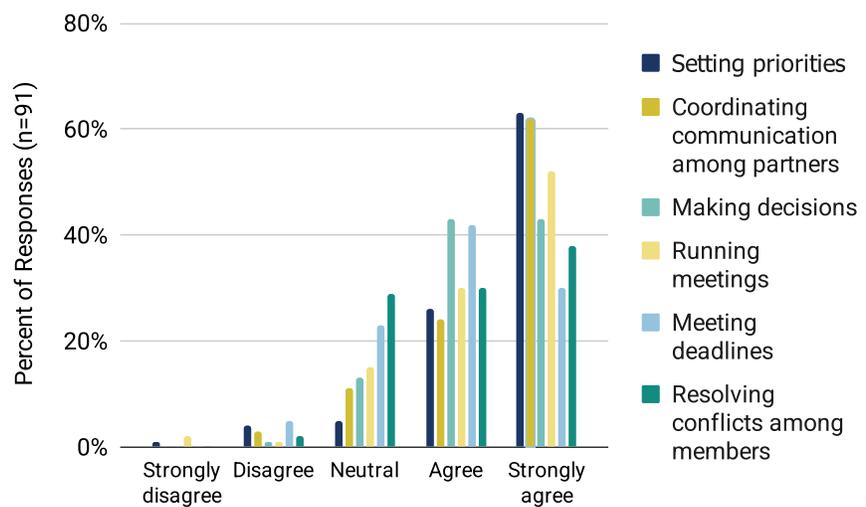
The Catalyst Fund also contributed to enhanced performance for funded collaboratives, their partners, and peer learning program participants.

Outcome: Performance—Collaboratives, Partners, and Peer Learning Participants

Catalyst Fund Collaboratives

Data underscored that funded collaboratives observed increased performance in operations and overall functioning as well as in plans to sustain their collaborative efforts. In the survey, those familiar with their respective collaboratives' functioning (i.e., 38 coordination leads and 53 partners) reported levels of agreement with the prompt, "Because of funding collaborative capacity, we are more effective in..." (Figures 22 and 23).

Figure 22. Enhanced Performance: Collaborative Functioning



Setting priorities (89%), coordinating communication (86%), making decisions (86%), and running meetings (82%) were the most frequently reported areas of increased effectiveness, followed by meeting deadlines (72%) and resolving conflicts (68%).

In the Spotlight: Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor Partnership

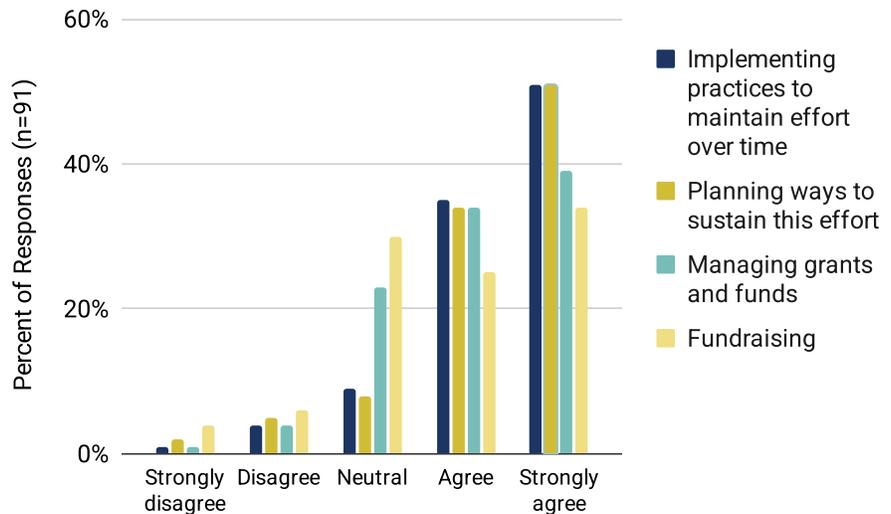
A 100-mile long, 1.6-million acre landscape of public and private lands in Florida, the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor (O2O) connects the Ocala and Osceola National Forests which provide habitat for a number of threatened species. The O2O Partnership was formed in 2017 and received a Catalyst Fund award in 2019. The award enabled the Partnership to address one of its significant challenges—internal and external communication.

“Communication has drastically increased during this grant timeframe. The Partnership now has its own website to operate as a go-to place for information about the O2O wildlife corridor for all partners and the public. The O2O Newsletters and O2O Exciting Tidbits provide updates to the partners, and the website helps with public outreach. The Catalyst Fund award truly elevated the Partnership to a new level. With a dedicated employee to focus on communication (among other things), the Partnership grew stronger.

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Figure 23. Enhanced Performance: Planning to Sustain Efforts

Implementing practices to maintain collaboration over time (86%) and planning ways to sustain efforts (85%) were the most frequently reported areas of increased effectiveness, followed by managing grants and funds (73%) and fundraising (59%).



In the Spotlight: Lake Superior Collaborative

The Lake Superior Collaborative is a network of organizations committed to efforts that protect and restore the Wisconsin portion of the Lake Superior watershed. Formed in 2018, the Collaborative received a Catalyst Fund grant in 2019. The funding enabled the Collaborative to finalize its governance structure, implement its action plan, secure funding for a website and geodatabase, and explore long-term funding options. Since then, the Collaborative and its partners have successfully planned for sustaining its efforts. Partners are integrating the Collaborative’s goals and strategies into their planning processes and work.

“Since receiving the Catalyst Fund grant, the Wisconsin Lake Superior Collaborative has made significant progress in building momentum and strengthening regional coordination. We kicked off the Headwaters to Coast Initiative. Wisconsin Basin partners have also initiated Nine Key Element watershed planning efforts and have successfully secured several major grants such as the NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge grant, which is supporting climate-focused, cross-partner work across the landscape. In addition, partners are actively integrating the Collaborative into their planning processes.

COORDINATION LEAD (SURVEY)

Partners

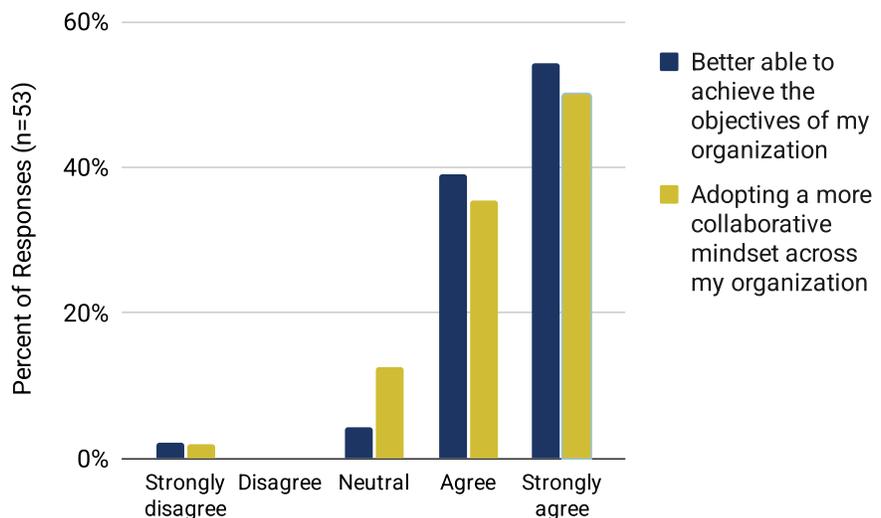
Partner organizations also saw enhanced performance. This suggests that there is a ripple effect beyond collaboratives to the partner-organization levels. Participating in a collaborative enables partner organizations to perform more effectively.

There has been a ripple effect—enhanced performance extends beyond collaborative performance to partner organizations engaged with the collaboratives.

Fifty-three individuals representing their partner organizations on steering committees, leadership teams, and working groups indicated levels of agreement with the following prompt, “The partner organization I represent has experienced the following benefits as a result of the increased collaborative capacity....” (Figure 24).

Figure 24. Enhanced Performance: Partner Organizations

The overwhelming majority of partner representatives affirmed that their respective organizations are better able to achieve their objectives (93%) and are adopting a more collaborative mindset (85%).

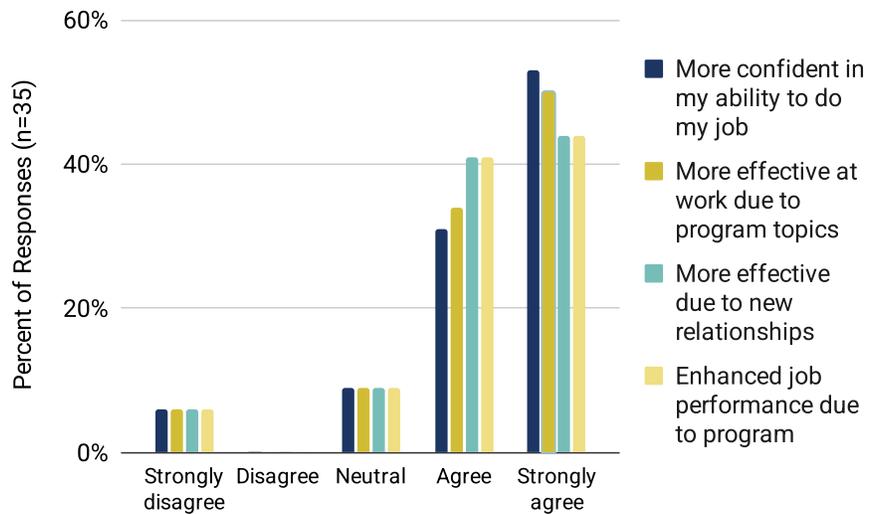


Peer Learning Program Participants

As previously mentioned, peer learning is a unique component of the Catalyst Fund, and collaborative leads of funded collaboratives participated in peer learning cohorts facilitated by NLC. The 38 collaborative leads who responded to the survey were asked questions about the peer learning program and its impact on their performance and professional life. Thirty-five indicated their levels of agreement to the following prompt: “I have personally experienced the following benefits as a result of participating in the Catalyst Fund Peer Learning Program” (Figure 25).

Figure 25. Enhanced Performance: Individuals

85% of participants confirmed their overall job performance and confidence increased because of participating in the Catalyst Fund peer learning program.



From the perspectives of the participants, the peer learning program afforded them opportunities to learn new skills, gain confidence, and access resources—all of which enhanced their professional growth and performance. As shared by a focus group participant, “the peer learning program was very beneficial to me personally and professionally.”

“The program really boosted my confidence, which is really important for those of us in this position. We have to communicate what we are trying to do and help partner organizations understand why it’s important for them to work together. Sometimes we are also a referee when we don’t want to be, such as dealing with bad actors. You need confidence to do these things.”

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

In the focus groups, peer learning participants described learning through multiple pathways—from guests with content expertise, from the facilitators through modeling, and from one another. Participants most frequently pointed towards skills related to relationship building and facilitation as valuable in terms of improved skill development. Participants identified new content knowledge and language around collaborative mindset, how to build a collaborative model, and how to confront challenges as being especially helpful.

“Guests: *Some really valuable people came to our sessions that helped us build actual skills.*

Facilitators: *The peer learning facilitators have been role models in how to forge strong bonds, be thoughtful, and facilitate meetings.*

Peers: *The learning was amazing. I learned so much from this group. We share a unique blend of challenges, and it was so helpful to think about new possibilities.*

Skills: *Coming from a science background, I was lacking a lot of skills. Through this experience I learned intangible soft skills and how to be an effective facilitator.*

Knowledge: *The first year was focused on knowledge sharing. I learned there is a whole vernacular, and I learned how to lead the development of my partnership in a way that is more explicitly focused on a collaborative mindset, which involves truly a different way of working.*

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS



Outcome: Transferable & Adaptable

Transferable and adaptable approaches are key to scaling up conservation and stewardship work within and across regions. A number of Catalyst Fund grantees demonstrated how collaboratives can generate impacts around transferable and adaptable approaches.

Approaches with these qualities can range from restoration-effort tools to mechanisms streamlining collaborative operations. Mapping tools are one example of transferable and adaptable outcome impacts. As described in a grantee report, **The New York Highlands Network** has completed its Land Parcel Tracker. “All partners populated the Tracker, and we are now tracking 388 parcels across 203 projects. The Tracker works well for partners, and New York State Parks is now considering using it for all of its projects.”

In the Spotlight: The Yuba Forest Network

A recipient of a 2022 Catalyst Fund grant award, the Yuba Forest Network strengthens connections within the network by establishing a space for discussion on forest health and affiliated projects within its region. The Network also maintains a mapping tool that is transferable and could be adapted by other regions prone to natural disasters such as wildfire or flooding.

Prior to applying for the Catalyst Fund grant, the Network shifted its priorities to meet the challenges many fire-prone areas in California face. Expanding forest health is one strategy that the Network embraced to increase resilience to major disturbance events. Because land in this region is owned and stewarded by many different entities, the need for cross-boundary collaboration is great. To help identify and connect individuals in this region, the Network (in partnership with its county’s Office of Emergency Services) promotes resources such as the Stakeholder Mapping Tool, a living map for stakeholders and the public to learn about forest health fuel treatment projects within the Yuba and Bear River watersheds.

“We have a big GIS tool that identifies specific projects within the landscape. The map enables people to better understand what and where work is happening. It also helps identify gaps and opportunities for collaboration across boundaries.... We are really satisfied with the kind of the stability that the Catalyst Fund award brought us.

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

Outcome: Broadened Perspectives

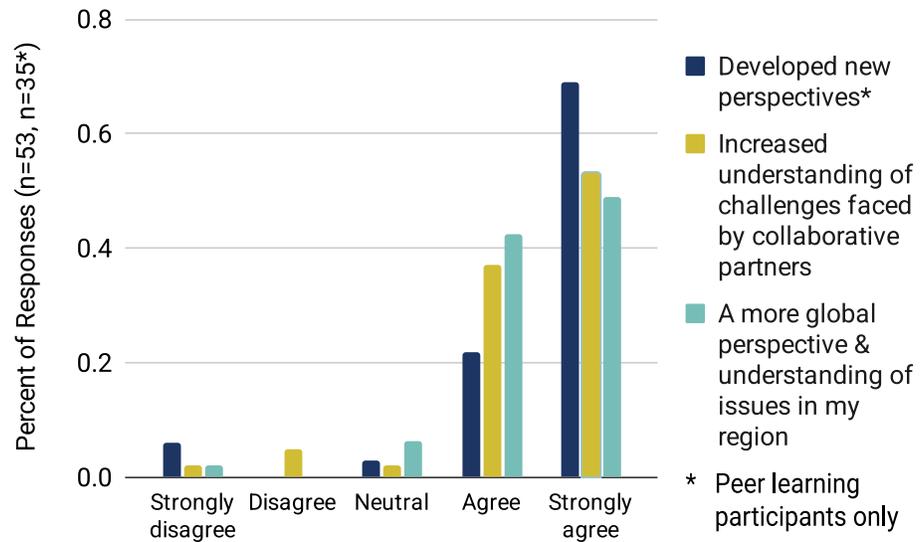
Broadened perspectives enable practitioners and organizations to understand their work within a fuller context. Because collaboratives unite diverse partners to address needs and opportunities spanning jurisdictions, an expanded perspective is especially valuable in achieving meaningful collaborative results.

Through dialogue generated in the focus group sessions, Catalyst Fund grantees shared that they have a much broader perspective on conservation and stewardship in regional and even national contexts, beyond their specific areas—a finding that is further supported by survey data.

Fifty-three partners indicated levels of agreement to the following prompt: “The partner organization I represent has experienced the following benefits as a result of the increased collaborative capacity...” (Figure 26). Thirty-five partners indicated their levels of agreement with the following prompt, “I have personally experienced the following benefits as a result of participating in Catalyst Fund Peer Learning Program...” (Figure 26).

More than 90% of peer learning participant and partners developed new and more global perspectives, where partners increased understanding of regional issues and challenges faced by other partners.

Figure 26. Broadened Perspectives



Focus group participants also described broadened perspectives resulting from the peer learning experience. Participants were able to draw from others’ insights, knowledge, and experiences beyond their regions. Expanded perspectives helped participants meet their own challenges by equipping them with the skills to see and solve problems through different lenses. As described by one participant, “being connected with people outside of your area of location, of knowledge, or of experience gives me a much bigger understanding of situations, communities, and ways of thought. It helps me more effectively bring others together in our region.”

“*The space I occupy is in a Tribal context, and our work looks slightly different than non-Tribal entities. The peer learning program helped me go across these imaginary boundaries that we draw—between us and them. It also provided me the chance to share with people who aren’t Indigenous and help them learn more about Tribal entities, such as why we need capacity to spend time cultivating relationships.*”

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

Outcome: Expanded Connectivity

Expanded connectivity emerged as the final outcome impact in this evaluation. A number of funded collaboratives created networks within and across regions. For example, this happened within the Catalyst Fund peer learning cohorts and across grantees’ respective regions as evidenced by Catalyst Fund grantees’ descriptions of serving as centralized hubs and conveners at differing scales. The Heart of Maryland Collaborative is an excellent example of serving as a centralized hub, and the Kali’uokapa’akai Collective exemplifies how a collaborative can serve as a convener for its landscape and beyond.

In the Spotlight: Heart of Maryland Collaborative

In 2019, the Heart of Maryland Collaborative used the Catalyst Fund to support its evolution from a start-up to building stage in its collaborative development. Designed to preserve the beauty and character of Maryland’s Blue Ridge region, this collaborative has matured and now operates as a centralized hub for information in its region.

“*The best example of this is our Heart of Maryland Green Pages, an online directory of partners and their areas of operation. It regularly performs intake from interested landowners and the general public, and directs people to the partner best aligned with their interests. This addressed a major challenge among all partners: responding to general public inquiries, only to redirect inquirers to the appropriate partner or resource. Some partners noted they might spend five hours a week responding to queries unrelated to their agency or organization. The Green Pages has helped alleviate that burden. More importantly, getting to know what each partner does has streamlined the referral process when calls do come.*”

GRANTEE (REPORT)

In the Spotlight: The Kali'uokapa'akai Collective

The Kali'uokapa'akai Collective was created in 2017 to identify and establish a common agenda for advancing the stewardship of Hawai'i's wahi kūpuna (ancestral places). In 2021, the Collective received a Catalyst Fund grant, which provided it the support to build capacity for catalyzing a transformative change in safeguarding wahi kūpuna. The Collective serves as a convener, bringing people together from around the globe.

“Since receiving funding, our collaborative has hired a second coordinator, hosted online and in-person workshops and trainings, welcomed four new members to our steering committee, and hosted a Summit with 110 individuals from Hawai'i, First Nations, and Aotearoa New Zealand to collectively work towards the protection and stewardship of our cultural and natural resources.

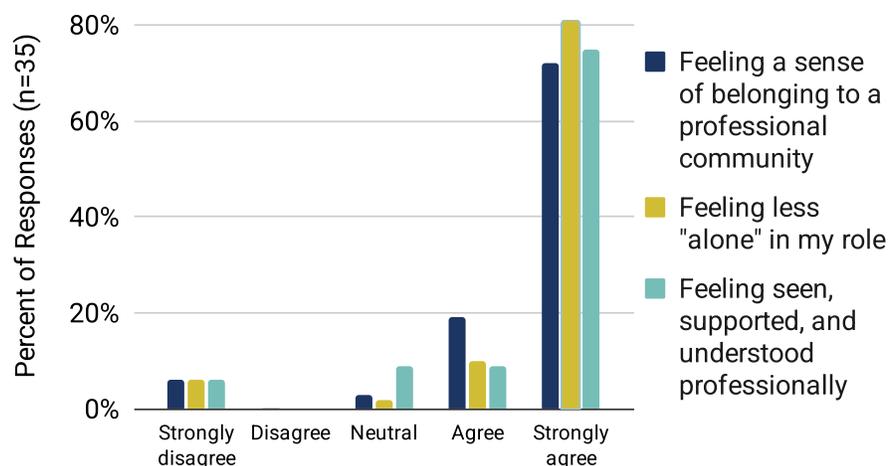
COORDINATOR LEAD (SURVEY)

Through the peer learning program, participants' professional connections were also expanded. These connections helped participants feel seen, supported, and professionally understood, such that they feel less 'alone' in their role and that they have a sense of belonging to a professional community. As articulated by a focus group participant, "it's so nice knowing that you're not alone out there crying in the wilderness; everyone has the same struggles and challenges. It is kind of like a support group, which was really refreshing."

Practitioners that had participated in the peer learning component of the Catalyst Fund were asked to indicate their levels of agreement with the following prompt, "I have personally experienced the following benefits as a result of participating in the Catalyst Fund Peer Learning Program ..." (Figure 27).

Figure 27. Individuals: Expanded Professional Connections

Of those participating in the peer learning program, more than 90% agreed to feeling a sense of belonging and feeling less "alone" in their roles; in addition, 84% felt seen, supported, and understood.

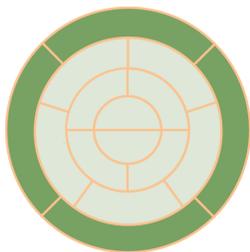


“*Being the sole coordinator of a partnership can feel really isolating and lonely. When working with multiple organizations, you are the glue holding it all together. The peer learning cohort is so helpful because you are able to meet other coordinators, learn from them, and feel less isolated.*”

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)



3.4: Integrated Impacts—Institutionalizing Approaches



Systems change & adoption: Initiating and integrating proven methods and techniques at a systems level, which can produce paradigm shifts.

Durable & flexible approaches: Integrating sustainable approaches at a scale that can be adapted and refined to accommodate complexity, evolving situations, and different contexts.

Collaborative culture & mindset: Normalizing collaboration as a valued and effective way to address complex problems and foster meaningful, enduring relationships.

Shift in behaviors & norms: Changing actions and expectations across local and regional communities, expanded geographies, and fields of practice.

Integrated impacts (see Figure 11, page 34) happen after foundational, operational, and outcome impacts have increased, and they also have most significant long-term consequences (Mickel & Farrell, 2025). They are especially powerful because they are oriented towards institutionalizing approaches and shifting paradigms. An example would be collaborative approaches that have become operationalized or institutionalized within a partnership or at different geographic scales.

A subset of former grantees generated four integrated impacts: systems change and adoption, durable and flexible approaches, collaborative culture and mindset, and/or shift in behaviors and norms. Similar to outcome impacts, these integrated impacts emerge over time and evidence of such impacts followed the Catalyst Fund grant periods.



Integrated: Systems Change & Adoption

Changing systems is one of the most significant impacts generated by a handful of funded collaboratives.⁸ Initiating and integrating proven methods and techniques at a systems level is an effective way to catalyze and support paradigm shifts. The Chilkat Valley Working Group is an example of a former Catalyst Fund grantee who has created a systems-level change, and the Alabama River Diversity Network is an example of initiating one.

In the Spotlight: Chilkat Valley Working Group

The Chilkat Valley Working Group was an inaugural Catalyst Fund grant recipient in 2019. Its main goal is to maintain and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the Chilkat Valley in southeastern Alaska for future generations. It does so by working together to minimize negative impacts from industrial mining.

Despite having a shared vision, this Tribal-led partnership was facing some challenges. The Working Group identified a gap in cultural understandings and barriers to effective communication with its non-Indigenous partners. This led to trust issues and questions around how to best amplify and support Tlingit rights without pushing a western conservation agenda.

The Catalyst Fund grant was used for Indigenous-led trainings designed to help non-Indigenous partners understand how colonization and the western worldview impede effective collaboration, and how partners can collectively navigate these impacts to ensure conservation actions are grounded in social, ecological, and economic justice.

“*Thanks to the Catalyst Fund, partners express more concern for each other’s physical and mental health, and stand ready to help if the need arises. We are better able to see above the fray and keep our eyes on the prize—long-term, meaningful protections for our landscape, with recognition of the traditional rights of the Indigenous Chilkat and Chilkoot Tlingit peoples. We now find ourselves thinking bigger and being more courageous in our outreach and actions. We are broadening the reach and scope of our outreach and making allies from the local to the national and even international level.*”

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Fast forward to 2024, five years after receiving the Catalyst Fund grant, the Working Group was able to clearly move forward and is making changes at a systems level. The 2035 Haines Borough Comprehensive Plan—a community-driven tool that provides direction to community leaders, residents, and other partners—was adopted September 2024.

⁸ Mickel (2021) explains that systems share three characteristics: (1) system units are interconnected, (2) units are interdependent—they affect each other, and (3) systems are dynamic in nature. Systems change is described as both a process of doing and a desired outcome pertaining to long-lasting change at a systems level.

In the Spotlight: Alabama River Diversity Network

The Alabama River Diversity Network is dedicated to conserving and preserving the Alabama River basin's unique biodiversity, human history, and cultural diversity. A 2020 Catalyst Fund award was used to hire its first coordinator, which was vital to advancing this Network at a critical time as partners pursued a National Heritage Area designation for the Alabama Black Belt.

“*The irrefutable, long-term advantage of the Catalyst Fund's investment in the Network's collaborative process has been securing a coordinator which is the first step to centralizing operations and building a team that provides an organizational structure around our collective vision.*”

GRANTEE (FINAL REPORT)

The coordinator was crucial to building the Network and its governance structure, as well as ensuring all necessary documentation for the National Heritage Area designation was gathered. On January 5, 2023, the Alabama Black Belt was designated by Congress as a National Heritage Area, a place of cultural, historical, and natural significance. This recognition will create a systems-level change for this area and its communities. Not only will it receive federal funding, the Black Belt will attract tourists worldwide to experience the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement, home to ancient Native American settlements, and a land rich with biodiversity.

The Alabama River Diversity Network continues to play an important role in Alabama's Black Belt and its conservation efforts. It received one of four prestigious 2024 Confluence Grants from The Conservation Alliance for a project that empowers historically excluded communities in protecting their cultural heritage, while restoring and stewarding their landscapes.

Integrated: Durable & Flexible Approaches

Integrating sustainable approaches at scale—while accommodating complexity, evolving conditions, and diverse contexts—is critical for collaboratives to achieve their core purposes and sustain long-term change. With increased capacity funding, some funded collaboratives reported adopting more durable and flexible approaches to their work such as the Wishpush Working Group’s adaptive management strategy.

In the Spotlight: Wishpush Working Group

Wishpush (beaver) are a culturally important species for the Yakama Nation in modern-day Washington state; this culturally significant animal has shaped the landscape and been integral to the ecology of the Tribe’s homelands since time immemorial. Led by the Yakama Nation, the Wishpush Working Group has transformed from a group of four volunteers to a recognizable collaborative thanks to receiving a Catalyst Fund award in 2020. Since then, the Working Group has developed an adaptive-management strategic plan that is durable and flexible enough to work within future statewide beaver management frameworks.

“*The core of the strategic plan—a georeferenced matrix—is functional and adaptive. It is continually being improved upon and added to as we collect new information, helping us to assess opportunities for restoration, relocation, and in-place management and to better understand the presence/absence of beaver populations in our watersheds. The structure of our adaptive management strategy is in place. It is now being fleshed out and refined as needed and time/resources allow. Our strategic plan will eventually work within a larger (nascent) statewide beaver management framework.*

GRANTEE (REPORT)

Integrated: Collaborative Culture & Mindset

As the field of practice normalizes, values, and embraces collaboration as an effective way to approach conservation and stewardship work at scale, conversations and energy can shift from why collaborate to how can we most efficiently and effectively work together. The Catalyst Fund has helped catalyze and infuse collaborative cultures and mindsets throughout grantees' respective regions. As noted by one grantee, "I've noticed a shift in how our group approaches on-the-ground work—moving from a more competitive mindset to a more strategic, collaborative one."

“Our Network is made up of small non-profits that each have less than 12 staff who tend to focus on a different scope of work; this often results in a ‘silo’ effect. Since the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network formed, there has been an amazing show of staff working together to solve problems we share, and come up with more complex and effective solutions we wouldn’t have otherwise been able to do on our own. We have also recovered from a perpetual scarcity mentality by including our partner members in grants, so that each person is not single-handedly attempting to fund their own work. This has allowed us to think beyond our immediate funding picture and think about longer-term strategies, in addition to engaging with community groups we haven’t historically worked with.

COORDINATOR LEAD (SURVEY)

Integrated: Shift in Behaviors & Norms

Similar to collaborative culture and mindset, there are a set of behaviors and norms that shape conservation and stewardship work. Findings suggest funded collaboratives are starting to change actions and expectations across local and regional communities. For example, the current paradigm where performance is measured solely through acres and miles is being challenged. A more expansive perspective of this work (e.g., trusting relationships) as indicators of success is being elevated.

The peer learning program provided participants with the time and space to reflect on how to intentionally shape behaviors and norms within their collaboratives. For example, providing space for emergent thinking in their partnerships was daunting and created a ‘messy middle.’ Through the peer learning, participants learned the value of emergent thinking and how to do it. One person stated: “Before the Catalyst Fund, I never really understood the world of emergent thinking. This amazing space requires time and a hands-off approach. At first, some partners were frustrated with my lack of structure in our meetings, but nine times out of ten, it was the least structured meetings where the really creative ideas came from.”

HOW FUNDED COLLABORATIVES GENERATED IMPACTS

Another notable shift in grantees is the growing emphasis on relationship building, which has influenced how they approach conservation and stewardship within their regions. This shift was attributed to the Catalyst Fund’s emphasis on foundational impacts of trust and connectivity. According to one grantee, “one of the things our cohort has talked a lot about is building relationships—which is a really big thing.”

“*Building collaborative relationships takes time, consistency, persistence, patience, listening, learning, and understanding. Having Catalyst Fund support dedicated specifically to relationship building on a landscape level has helped to reinforce these truths both by allowing space to ‘be’ partners and by encouraging us to focus on the unique value of the partnership.*”

GRANTEE (REPORT)



Theme 4: Impact Processes Advanced through the Catalyst Fund

IN A NUTSHELL

- ▶ Former Catalyst Fund grantees advanced multiple impact processes that cluster into three areas: collaborative development and functioning, on-the-ground program and project implementation, and network expansion.
- ▶ The quality of collaborative functioning and collaborative performance are intertwined.

To summarize, Catalyst Fund investments enhanced collaborative capacity which enabled funded collaborative to carry out activities and outcomes that generated four types of impacts. For many funded collaboratives, **foundational impacts** (i.e., relationship building) and **operational impacts** (i.e., effective and efficient functioning) happened during the Catalyst Fund grant period. For a smaller subset of post-grant collaboratives, **outcome impacts** (i.e., achieving results towards core purpose) and **integrated outcomes** (i.e., institutionalized approaches) emerged in the years following the grant period. Collectively, these impacts build upon one another to scale up, accelerate, and sustain collaborative impact.

The *Collaborative Capacity Impact Model* illustrates the dynamic nature of generating, scaling up, accelerating, and sustaining collaborative impact over time (Mickel & Farrell, 2025). The model is applied here to show how these processes unfolded for funded collaboratives in three areas:

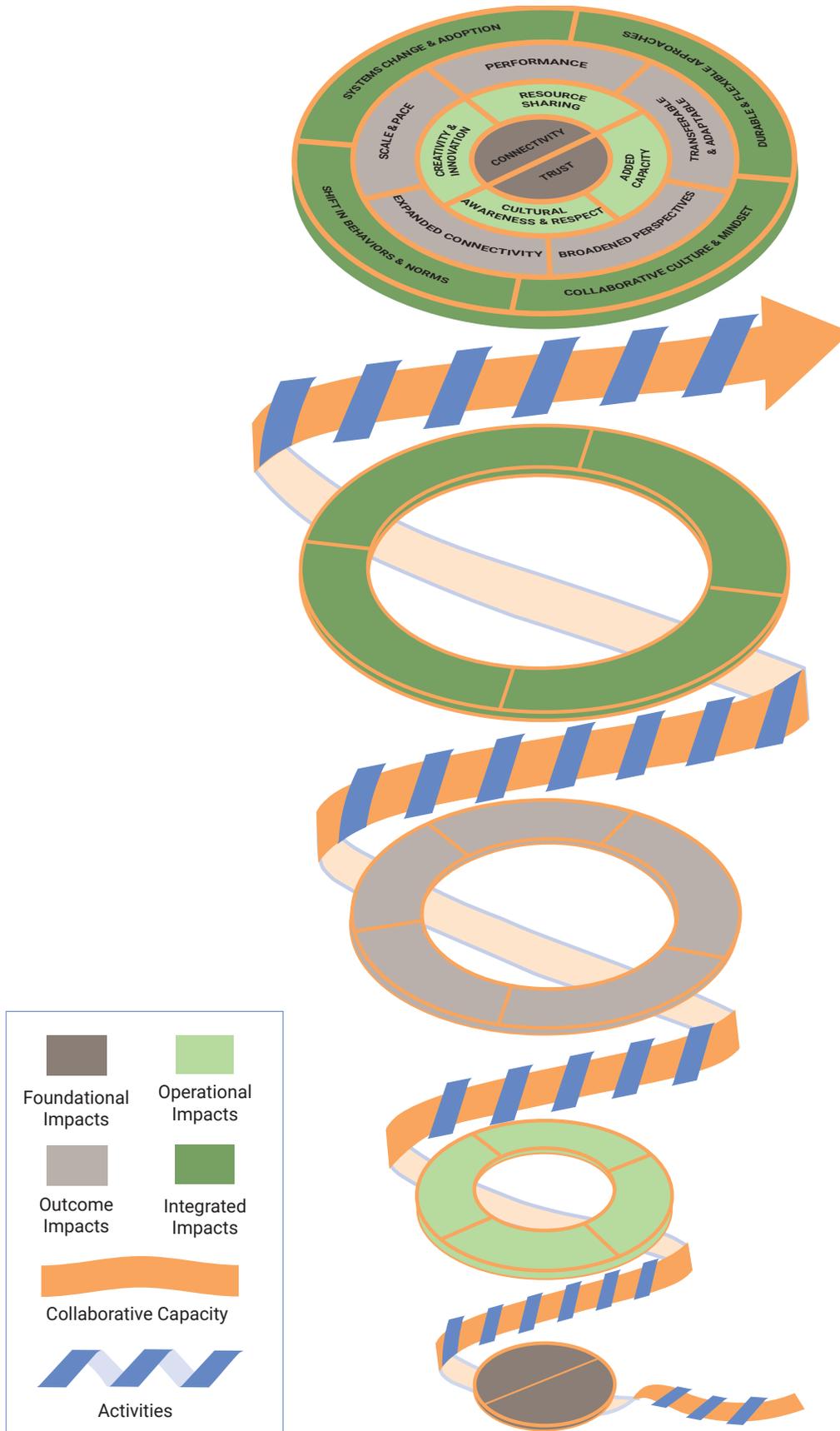
- ▶ Collaborative development and functioning;
- ▶ On-the-ground conservation and stewardship project and program implementation; and
- ▶ Network expansion.

Collaborative capacity (represented in **orange** in Figure 28) serves an ongoing and vital role in scaling up, accelerating, and sustaining collaborative impact over time. It enables activities and outcomes (represented in **blue**) that generate foundational, operational, outcome, and integrated impacts.

The quality of collaborative functioning (i.e., how effectively and efficiently the collaborative operates) and collaborative performance (i.e., the delivery of work on the ground) are inextricably intertwined.

HOW FUNDED COLLABORATIVES GENERATED IMPACTS

Figure 28. The Process of Scaling Up, Accelerating, and Sustaining Impacts™



4.1: Collaborative Development & Functioning

Increased collaborative capacity enables collaboratives to undertake activities that generate and scale up foundational (e.g., connectivity and trust) and operational impacts (e.g., resource sharing, added capacity, creativity, cultural awareness/respect). When this happens, a collaborative is more likely to mature and enhance its ability to function effectively at an accelerated pace. The Blackstone Watershed Collaborative illustrates how this process unfolds.

In the Spotlight: Blackstone Watershed Collaborative

With its headwaters in Worcester, Massachusetts, the Blackstone River travels into Rhode Island where it transitions to the Seekonk River and then the Narragansett Bay. Historically, there has been a lack of funding to support coordinated stewardship efforts in the Blackstone Watershed. However, that has all changed over the past four years. The Blackstone Watershed Collaborative is an excellent example of how the Catalyst Fund has contributed to the acceleration of collaborative development and functioning of its grantees.

In 2021, the Collaborative formed with one staff member under a fiscal host, and in 2022, it received a Catalyst Fund award to support coordination capacity needed to advance the Collaborative and its work. Two years later, the Collaborative began working independently as a 501c3 nonprofit and now has three staff members managing over \$1.6M of committed funds and a dozen subawards to support partners.

The Catalyst Fund enabled the Collaborative to engage in a range of collaborative development and functioning activities, including those related to developing an organizational structure with an advisory group, establishing strategies and priorities, fundraising, responding to technical assistance requests from communities, and relationship building. These activities generated enhanced connectivity and trust with the Narragansett Indian Tribe and Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band, in addition to social justice and health-focused partners. Acting as an umbrella organization, the Collaborative is currently composed of over 120 partners from non-profits, state and federal agencies, Tribes, municipalities, consultants, universities, and others.

The Collaborative was also able to leverage the Catalyst Fund grant award to generate additional private and federal funding, helping it add additional capacity. According to a focus group participant, “the Catalyst Fund was instrumental in us partnering with another private funding source that allowed us to hire a second staff person in our second year. Having another staff person allowed us to better facilitate this complex network of partners and serve our communities.”

With added capacity and an expanding network, the Collaborative was developing at an accelerated pace. The Catalyst Fund peer learning program played an important role in supporting the Collaborative to function effectively. Ranging from brainstorming whether the transition from a fiscal host to a 501c3 was the right move to sharing information such as group agreements and example organizational policies, the Catalyst Fund peer learning program is credited for supporting its development and effective functioning.

“*We took specific resources from that peer learning, like the group agreement and mimicked them for our own organization.... The cohort took the time to listen and workshop the idea, providing feedback and helping me make the final decision to become a 501c3. As a nonprofit, we are now able to get large grants, be a fiscal sponsor for others, and invest money back into the Collaborative.*”

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

4.2: Project & Program Implementation

Findings suggest that for a subset of grantees, enhanced collaborative capacity has indeed contributed to increasing the pace and scale of on-the-ground conservation and stewardship projects and programs. As with collaborative development and functioning, these processes occurred as the groups generated and scaled up foundational impacts (e.g., connectivity and trust) and operational impacts (e.g., resource sharing, added capacity, creativity, cultural awareness/respect).

In the Spotlight: Upper Willamette Stewardship Network

Made up of four watershed councils, a land trust, soil and water conservation district, and a conservation nonprofit, the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network launched in 2018 and received a Catalyst Fund grant in 2020. The Network intentionally shifted from a historically individualistic and competitive approach to a coordinated, collaborative approach based on shared vision, values, and priorities. The award was used to support increasing foundational impacts of trust and connectivity, with an emphasis on Tribal engagement to gain a deeper understanding of Tribal values, priorities, and interests for the Upper Willamette watershed.

“One of our long-standing goals as an organization and a Network was to form more long-lasting and effective relationships with Tribes. We have made tremendous strides in this direction just in the past three years by working together as a Network.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Because of positive relationships, the Network is accomplishing work at an accelerated pace and scale.

“Staff and leadership feel more connected. We now have meaningful engagement with Tribal partners. Momentum and the work we are able to accomplish has grown. We have exponentially increased the efforts and reached goals that were not even dreamed of prior to the collaboration.

COORDINATOR LEAD

Today, the Network has made significant progress in all five of its main program areas because of successful fundraising and leveraging one another's expertise and resources.

“Fundraising and resource sharing: By working together, we have seen a notable increase in successful funding proposals. Increased capacity has enabled us to leverage our collective work to secure substantial project implementation funds, accelerating progress toward our stewardship goals. Resource sharing has improved, and we are engaging Indigenous groups more frequently in restoration initiatives.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Restoration projects: We have accelerated the pace of implementing large-scale restoration projects. Projects are bigger. There are more of them and more people available to help with the implementation of the work throughout the partnership.

WORKING GROUP MEMBER

Working lands: The working lands programs is increasing landowner engagement. Because of the Network-wide farm conservation program, partners are able to provide focused programming to prospective landowners across boundaries. This has increased the pace of project identification, and has quadrupled our programmatic reach and increases engagement that ultimately benefits partner organizations.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Urban waters: Because there is more capacity, the pace of implementing urban green infrastructure has increased.

WORKING GROUP MEMBER

4.3: Network Expansion

One of the most noteworthy impacts of the Catalyst Fund is how the peer learning program is advancing a national coordinator network. Within each cohort, the peer learning program fostered an environment where peer-to-peer connections developed and solidified. In many ways, NLC (through the program) is serving in a backbone role for these cohort-based networks of collaborative coordinators.

This impact is not simply happening nationally within the Catalyst Fund context. Funded collaboratives are also creating and expanding broader networks at local and regional scales. Described earlier, the added capacities have resulted in increased relationships, including broader networks where grantees are serving as regional hubs and capacity builders. Some, such as the Climate Science Alliance's Tribal Working Group, are accelerating network building within their regions.

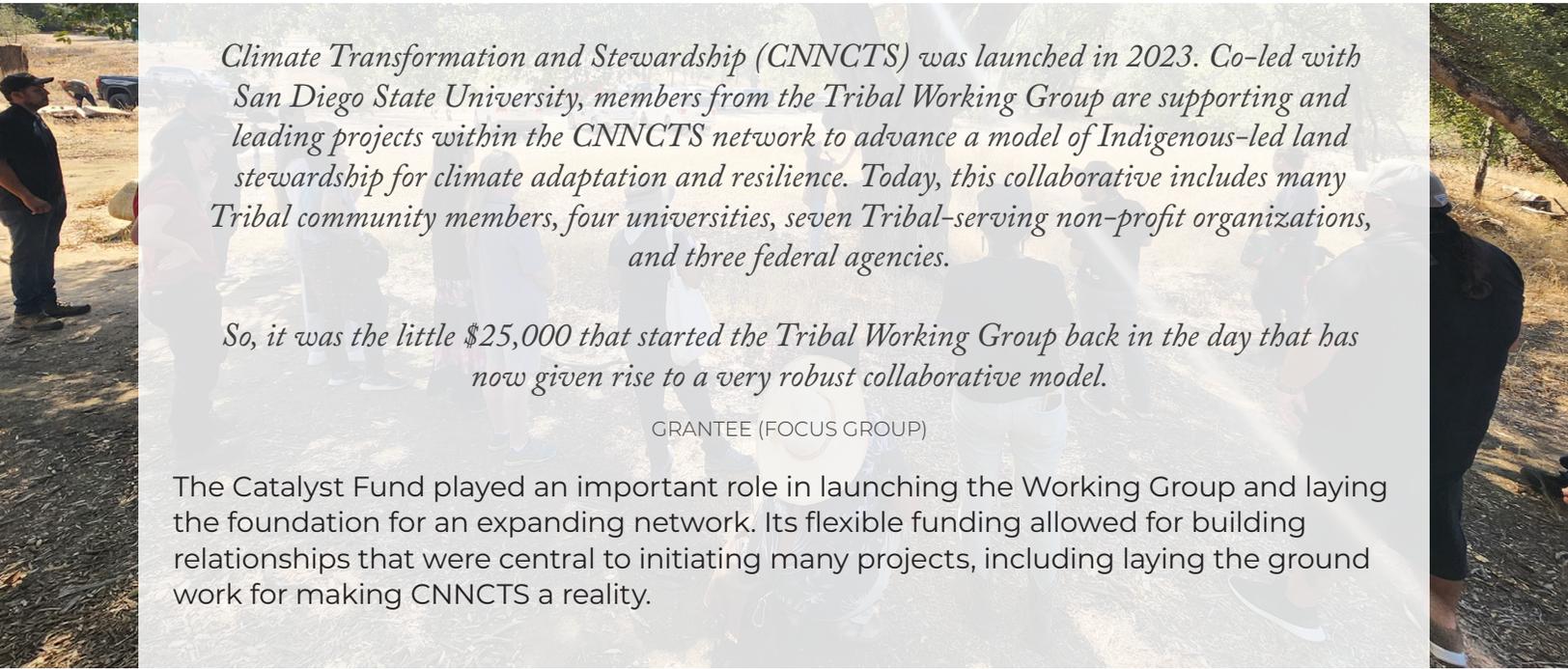
In the Spotlight: Climate Science Alliance's Tribal Working Group

Created in 2015, the Climate Science Alliance is dedicated to safeguarding natural and human communities in the face of climate change in Southern California and beyond. In 2017, the Climate Science Alliance's Tribal Working Group formed, but lacked resources. It was one of the first grantees to receive a Catalyst Fund award in 2019, which enabled the Working Group to identify and prioritize strategies, develop and advance a work plan, and engage in outreach and relationship-building efforts to Tribes across Southern California. The grantee elaborates on this process in a focus group.

“*The Tribal Working Group received one of the very first Catalyst awards, and it really was the launch of this working group—which is pretty amazing. That little seed funding was so critical at the time; we had the freedom to use it how we wanted to use it. It gave our team the time to show up to community events, provide food at meetings, and just be in community. Having the time to build relationships was really important. People have to get to know you and see that you are sincere and that you really care. Without this time to be present, it would have taken a lot longer to foster trust with our Tribal colleagues.*”

These relationship-building activities laid the foundation for the Climate Science Alliance to listen to and learn from partners and to focus activities on the actions the communities and Tribes wanted to see. Years of relationship building grew into a shared vision to form a collaborative that stretched across southern California and included Tribal and non-Tribal partners working together on shared goals.

“*We have now launched our big dream. We were able to bring all of our relationships under one very big intentional umbrella of activity—to uplift the priorities and work that people were doing by getting groups to shift away from a competing mindset and to focus more on collaboration and resource sharing. The Collaborative of Native Nations for*”



Climate Transformation and Stewardship (CNNCTS) was launched in 2023. Co-led with San Diego State University, members from the Tribal Working Group are supporting and leading projects within the CNNCTS network to advance a model of Indigenous-led land stewardship for climate adaptation and resilience. Today, this collaborative includes many Tribal community members, four universities, seven Tribal-serving non-profit organizations, and three federal agencies.

So, it was the little \$25,000 that started the Tribal Working Group back in the day that has now given rise to a very robust collaborative model.

GRANTEE (FOCUS GROUP)

The Catalyst Fund played an important role in launching the Working Group and laying the foundation for an expanding network. Its flexible funding allowed for building relationships that were central to initiating many projects, including laying the ground work for making CNNCTS a reality.

CLOSING REMARKS

Investing in both collaborative and individual capacities is a powerful way to better position collaborative models to achieve their landscape conservation and stewardship goals.

The Catalyst Fund plays a valuable role in advancing landscape conservation and stewardship in the United States and transboundary geographies. Its trust-based approach to funding collaboratives in pivotal stages of development is innovative. The Catalyst Fund has impacted the landscape conservation and stewardship movement and helped to support on-the-ground conservation and stewardship impacts within specific landscapes.

It is important to highlight that the Catalyst Fund as the whole—not simply the financial grant awards but also the peer learning component of the program—is driving such impacts. The unique value of the peer learning component of this program shines through as an innovative way of building individual capacity alongside the efforts to build capacity within collaboratives.

The adaptable nature of collaboratives means that they are well equipped to meet the dynamic nature of today’s most complex challenges. However, they need to remain durable to optimize their performance and maximize their potential. This requires sustained investments in collaborative and individual capacities. The findings of this evaluation underscore the way in which the Catalyst Fund has modeled an approach to providing seed investments—but longer-term investments are needed. It is clear that building upon the successes of the Catalyst Fund will require collaboratives and funders within and well beyond the United States to explore innovative ways to invest in these capacities. Ultimately, we all benefit from the vital work of collaboratives and their members to conserve and steward our landscapes while building a more resilient and just future for our communities.



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- Page 68: Kaitlin Martin, Escalante River Watershed Partnership
- Page 76: Bill Kane

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Appendix A: Focus Group Participants

- Amber Pairis, Climate Science Alliance Tribal Working Group
- Amy Crouch, Little Sioux Watershed Conservation Partnership
- Anne Marie Holt, Yuba Forest Network
- Ashley Traut, Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition
- Autumn Crowe, Safe Water Conservation Collaborative
- Bill Kane, Bristol Bay Guardians
- Brooke Massa, Triangle Connectivity Partnership
- Bryan Murphy, Yampa River Collaborative
- Carolyn Dillian, Lowcountry Native American Heritage Corridor Coalition
- Claire Carlson, Greenspace Alliance
- Connor Jandreau, California Central Coast Joint Venture
- Dan Murphy, Delmarva Restoration and Conservation Network
- Darren Ranco, Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship
- Dave Erickson, Cold Hollow to Canada
- Destiny Williams Levy, Alabama River Diversity Network
- Dorinda Kewan, Kodiak Archipelago Regional Leadership Forum
- Estelle Thomson, Stewarding the Asqinaq
- Gini Breidenbach, Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership
- James Calabaza, Tri-Pueblo Coalition
- Jeanette Burkhardt, Wishpush Working Group
- Jennifer Albertine, North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership
- Jessica Lax, Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaborative
- Jessie Levine, Staying Connected Initiative
- Jodie Pixley, Western Klamath Restoration Partnership
- John Bilderback, Natural Treasures Alliance
- Jordan Lubetkin, Ohio River Basin Restoration Partnership
- Kate Conlin, Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts
- Katie Marsh, Shoal Creek Watershed Consortium
- Kevin Berend, Escalante River Watershed Partnership
- Kimberly Tillman, Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor Partnership
- Kyle Magyera, Lake Superior Collaborative
- Latonna Spotted Eagle, Iinnii-Waterton-Glacier Working Group
- Lindsey Taylor, Driftless Area Conservation Partnership

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- Marika Suval, Cacapon Watershed Collaborative
- Mike Perrin, Metrowest Conservation Alliance
- Natalie Allio, Upper Arkansas Watershed Partnership
- Olivia Porter, Southern Appalachian Landscape Coalition
- Oona Heacock, Russian River Confluence
- Samantha Nellis, Obtawaing Biosphere Region Partners
- Stefanie Convino, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative
- Sydney Nilan, Upper Willamette Stewardship Network
- Tim Moffett, Siuslaw Coho Partnership
- Tracy Stanton, Emerald Alliance for People, Nature, and Community
- Tracy Stephens, Ribbons of Life
- Travis Jensen, Salt Valley Watershed Collaborative

Appendix B: Integrative Mixed-Methods Approach

An integrative mixed-methods research approach (Proudfoot, 2023), which incorporates deductive and inductive methods, was applied in this evaluation. A deductive approach is best described as ‘top-down,’ beginning with a pre-existing theory or framework about a topic and collecting data to confirm or deny assumptions or hypotheses. An inductive approach works from the ‘bottom-up,’ beginning with collecting data, looking for patterns and regularities, sometimes collecting more data, and then generating conclusions. In short, a deductive approach is narrower and more concerned with confirming hypotheses, and an inductive approach is more open-ended and exploratory. A deductive/inductive hybrid thematic analysis combines the two.

Guided by existing frameworks (Appendices C and D), the author developed survey and focus group questions to evaluate the Catalyst Fund and its impact via a deductive approach. Because funding collaborative capacity is a non-traditional approach to conservation and stewardship work, the author also applied an inductive approach by remaining open to unanticipated themes that might emerge through focus groups, open-ended survey questions, and grantee proposals and reports.

Appendix C: Collaborative Capacity Frameworks

The *Collaborative Capacity Framework* (deSilva et al., 2022) and findings from a follow-up study (Baxter & Land, 2023; Land et al., 2025) were applied in this evaluation, serving to conceptualize capacity-building elements and collaborative activities and outcomes. The framework outlines key collaborative-capacity-building elements and identifies which of these are fundable. Research and practice have demonstrated that when appropriate structural elements of collaborative capacity are resourced—and the quality and performance of the binding elements are strong—collaboratives can produce greater, more durable environmental and social outcomes than any individual organization can achieve on its own.

The *Collaborative Capacity Framework* was the outcome of more than 25 interviews with state leaders, surveys with regional network practitioners in California, analyses of recent publications (including peer-reviewed research), and multiple forums held with national organizations. It builds on the *Nonprofit Capacity Framework*, which illustrates the capacities needed for an organization to perform and endure (McKinsey & Company, 2001). It describes the six fundable, structural elements of collaborative capacity (often referred to as collaborative infrastructure) represented inside the triangle depicted on the left of Figure 29, with the three binding elements of inclusive culture, collaborative mindset, and meaningful relationships on its perimeter.

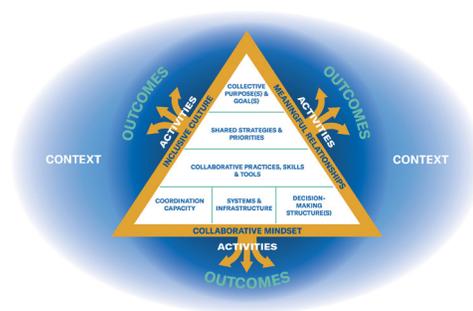
The *Collaborative Capacity Framework* is currently being used by funders, including the Network for Landscape Conservation, and by practitioners nationwide to evaluate and fund capacity needs.

What Does Collaborative Capacity Make Possible? (Baxter & Land, 2023) further analyzes what collaborative capacity is and how it leads to improved conservation and stewardship outcomes. Based on expert perspectives gathered from in-depth interviews and focus groups with practitioners, leaders, and funders across the United States, it affirms the *Collaborative Capacity Framework* as well as a list of activities capacity elements enable. The study articulates why consistent, long-term investment in these elements is needed, and emphasizes contextual factors that affect collaboration.

Figure 29. Collaborative Capacity Frameworks



deSilva et al., 2022



Baxter & Land, 2023

Appendix D: Collaborative Impact Frameworks

The *Collaborative Capacity Impact Model*TM (Mickel & Farrell, 2025) and the *Partnership Impact Model*TM (Mickel & Goldberg, 2018) are used as guiding frameworks for classifying the impacts generated by Catalyst Fund grantees (see Figure 30).

The *Collaborative Capacity Impact Model* is highlighted in a recent article titled: *Do more, better together: Investing in collaborative work to make a difference*. Used to evaluate the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction program, this model adapts⁹ and expands the *Partnership Impact Model* (described below) by adding a fourth impact classification—integrated. In addition, the *Collaborative Capacity Impact Model* increases the number of interdependent impacts to 15 and highlights the vital role of collaborative capacity. This model has additional practical implications for collaboratives and funders seeking to understand how investments in collaborative capacity can generate, accelerate, and sustain collaborative impacts and optimize collaborative performance.

The *Partnership Impact Model* is the outcome of a four-year study designed to identify the complex elements of partnership impact. A multimethod approach was employed; surveys, interviews, and field observations were used to collect data. Statistical, content, and social network analyses were used to analyze these data.

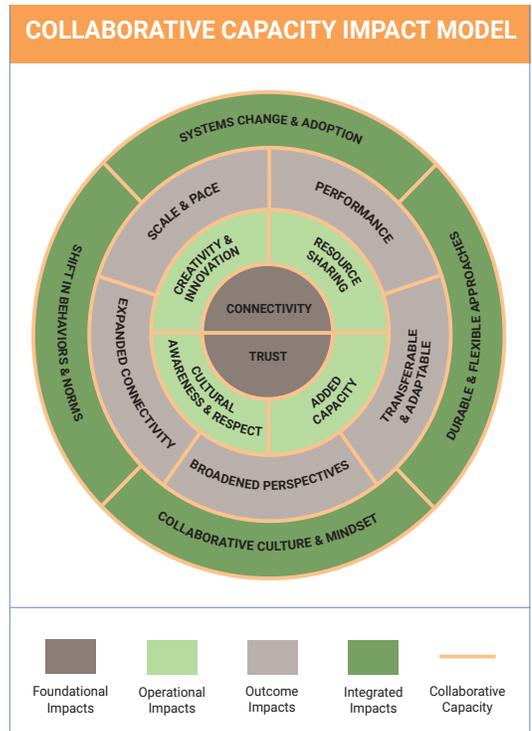
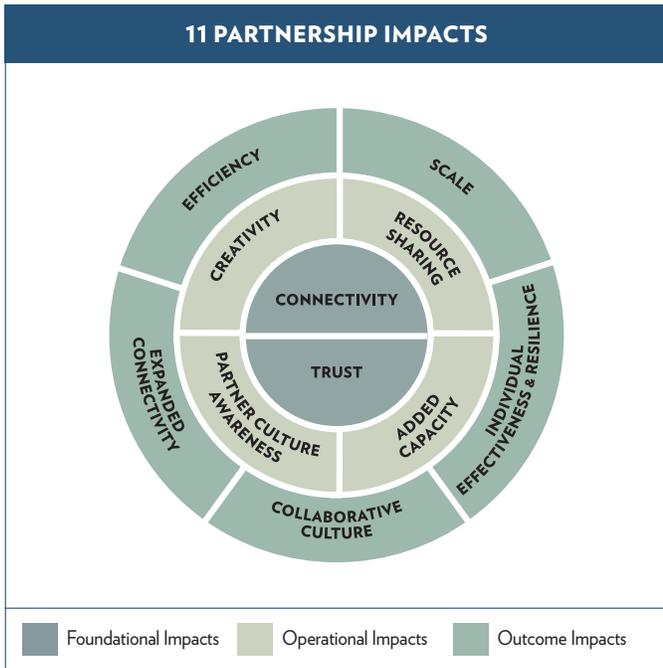
The focus of the research was One Tam, a landscape-scale, multistakeholder partnership committed to stewarding the lands on and adjacent to Mount Tamalpais in Marin County, north of San Francisco. This model has already proven useful for a number of landscape stewardship partnerships and networks seeking to more accurately capture, assess, and communicate their value, including [The Stewardship Network](#) and the [Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent](#) (Mickel & Farrell, 2021).

The *Partnership Impact Model* includes a suite of concepts and processes that partnerships might consider when it comes to delivering, measuring, evaluating, and communicating the value of their collaboration. The *Partnership Impact Model* includes three impact classifications: foundational, operational, and outcome.¹⁰ These encompass a system of 11 interdependent, scalable impacts essential to starting, building, and sustaining partnerships. This model has practical implications for collaboratives and funders seeking to understand, describe, and optimize partnership impact.

9 The original Partnership Impact ModelTM outcome impacts and the operational impact of awareness are recharacterized.

10 The Partnership Impact ModelTM was created by Amy Mickel, PhD, and Leigh Goldberg based on the work and impact of the One Tam partnership and findings from a four-year partnership study. The project was funded by the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, commissioned by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, guided by One Tam Director Sharon Farrell, and supported by One Tam agency partners. This model was first published in the study’s final report, *Generating, Scaling Up, and Sustaining Partnership Impact: One Tam’s First Four Years* (Mickel & Goldberg, 2018).

Figure 30. Impact Models



Appendix E: Learning Goals & Guiding Questions

LEARNING GOAL #1: Identify and capture insights, impact, and unique contributions resulting from the Catalyst Fund.

- In what ways does the Catalyst Fund investment in collaborative capacity further its primary objectives to: (a) better position Partnerships to achieve long-term conservation and stewardship success, (b) accelerate the pace and practice of collaborative landscape conservation and stewardship across the United States, and (c) advance Tribal-led Partnerships?
- What else does this increase in capacity enable the Partnerships to accomplish (i.e., activities, outcomes, and impact) over time? Which of these might be transferable to other Partnerships?
- What are the primary benefits of investing in collaborative capacity (compared to other grants)? What unintended consequences (positive or negative) emerge from this type of investment?
- What are the primary benefits of the Catalyst Fund's peer learning program and what types of impact does it generate?

LEARNING GOAL #2: Bolster the body of evidence behind the connection between collaborative capacity investments and on-the-ground outcomes and share key findings with the broader field of practice to elevate our collective work.

- Which findings should be highlighted as evidence that can elevate collaborative landscape conservation and stewardship across the United States?
- How do investments in collaborative capacity affect the types of activities, outcomes, and impact accomplished by partnerships?

Appendix F: 2019–2024 Grantees

- Alabama River Diversity Network (Alabama)
- Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaborative (Transboundary: Network York to Ontario, Canada)
- Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed* (Connecticut)
- Bears Ears Partnership* (Utah)
- Bi-State Tribal Natural Resource Committee* (California & Nevada)
- Black River Network (South Carolina)
- Blackfeet Conservation Collaborative* (Montana)
- Blackstone Watershed Collaborative (Massachusetts)
- Bristol Bay Guardians* (Alaska)
- Butte Creek Watershed Restoration Collaborative* (California)
- Cacapon Watershed Collaborative (West Virginia)
- California Central Coast Joint Venture (California)
- Camas to Condors Partnership (Oregon)*
- Chilkat Valley Working Group* (Alaska)
- Climate Science Alliance Tribal Working Group* (California)
- Cold Hollow to Canada (Vermont)
- Cooper River Task Force (South Carolina)
- Delmarva Restoration and Conservation Network (Virginia)
- Driftless Area Conservation Partnership (Wisconsin)
- East Yellowstone Collaborative (Wyoming)
- Emerald Alliance for People, Nature, and Community (Washington)
- Escalante River Watershed Partnership (Utah)
- Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition (Maryland)
- Greater Chilkat Watershed Advisory Group* (Alaska)
- Green Heart of the Everglades* (Florida)
- Greenspace Alliance (Ohio)
- Heart of Maryland Collaborative (Maryland)
- High Divide Collaborative (Montana)
- Innnii-Waterton-Glacier Working Group* (Transboundary: Montana to Alberta, Canada)
- Kali'uokapa'akai Collective* (Hawaii)
- Kittatinny Coalition (Pennsylvania)
- Kodiak Archipelago Regional Leadership Forum (Alaska)

*Tribal-led collaborative

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- Moloka'i Wetlands Partnership* (Hawaii)
- Natural Treasures Alliance (Tennessee)
- Nesika Wilamut* (Oregon)
- New York Highlands Network (New York)
- North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (Massachusetts)
- Northwest Boreal Partnership (Alaska)
- Obtawaing Biosphere Region Partners (Michigan)
- Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor Partnership (Florida)
- Oconee Watershed Partnership (Georgia)
- Ohio River Basin Restoration Partnership (Ohio River Watershed—14 states)
- Piscataway Land Collaborative* (Maryland)
- Pueblo Caja del Rio Coalition* (New Mexico)
- Ribbons of Life (Colorado & New Mexico)
- Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance (Montana)
- Russian River Confluence (California)
- Safe Water Conservation Collaborative (West Virginia)
- Salt Valley Watershed Collaborative (Nebraska)
- San Juan-Chama Watershed Conservation Partnership (Colorado & New Mexico)
- Santa Cruz Watershed Collaborative (Arizona)
- Shoal Creek Watershed Consortium (Missouri)
- Siuslaw Coho Partnership (Oregon)
- S'Klallam Conservation Partnership* (Washington)
- Southern Appalachian Landscape Coalition (Tennessee & North Carolina)
- Staying Connected Initiative (Transboundary: Northern New England to Atlantic Canada)
- Stewarding the Asqinaq* (Alaska)
- Swinomish Wildlife Co-Management Partnership* (Washington)
- Taos Valley Watershed Coalition (New Mexico)
- Tásmam Koyóm Land Partnership* (California)
- Texas Hill County Conservation Network (Texas)
- Triangle Connectivity Partnership (North Carolina)
- Tribal Alliance for Pollinators* (Oklahoma)
- Tri-Pueblo Coalition* (New Mexico)
- Tulare Basin Watershed Partnership (California)
- Upper Arkansas Watershed Partnership (Colorado)
- Upper Willamette Stewardship Network (Oregon)
- Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship* (Maine)
- Western Apache Working Group* (Arizona)

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- Western Klamath Restoration Partnership (California)
- Wind River Water & Buffalo Alliance* (Wyoming)
- Wind River Conservation Office* (Wyoming)
- Wishpush Working Group* (Washington)
- Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts (Massachusetts)
- Yampa River Collaborative (Colorado)
- Yuba Forest Network (California)

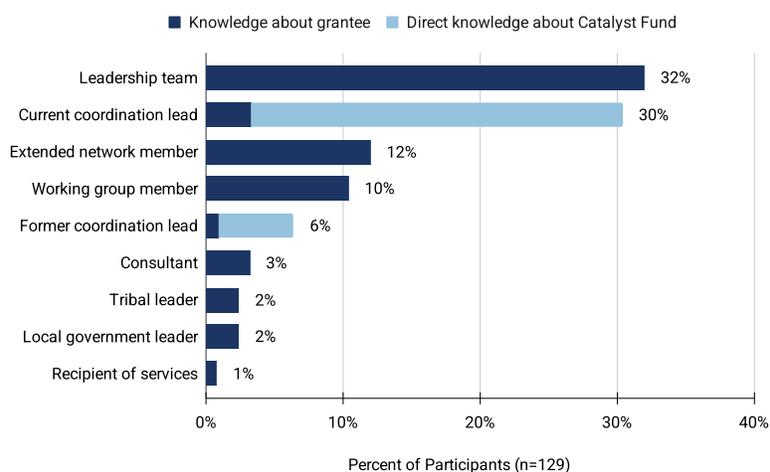
Appendix G: Surveys

Survey Background

The list of potential participants was generated by asking coordination leads of funded collaboratives to provide names of individuals familiar with their collaborative work. Two hundred six individuals were identified and sent a request to complete the online survey.

A total of 129 people completed the survey for a response rate of 63%. Participants were asked to indicate their roles and whether they had direct knowledge about the Catalyst Fund (see Figure 31). They were also asked how many years they had been affiliated with the collaborative, and the average was five and half years.

Figure 31. Survey Respondents



Survey Questions

The online survey used a branch approach; depending on participants' roles, they received different subsets of questions.

ROLES: Questions for everyone

What is your relationship to this collaborative effort?

- Current coordinator, director, partnership lead, grant lead, or equivalent
- Former coordinator, director, partnership lead, grant lead, or equivalent
- Member of steering committee, leadership team, or equivalent
- Member of a working group, project team
- Fiscal sponsor
- Local/regional government leader

- Member of collaborative's network
- Other (explain)

BRANCH LOGIC: Questions for everyone

What type of knowledge do you have?

- I have direct knowledge about Catalyst Fund grant & activities it funded.
- I participated in Peer Learning component of Catalyst Fund program.

CAPACITY FUNDED: Questions for coordination leads only

Which capacity needs were funded (in part or in full) through the Catalyst Fund grant? (check all that apply)

- Coordination capacity (i.e., paying people such as coordinator, program director, committee members, staff)
- Collective purpose & goals (i.e., purpose statements, MOU, charter development)
- Governance structure and/or decision-making processes
- Shared strategy & priorities (i.e., strategic plans, roadmaps, priority-setting processes, work or action plans)
- Systems infrastructure (i.e., websites, data sharing tools, fiscal management, BMP tracking)
- Physical infrastructure (i.e., computers, facilities, materials)
- Collaborative skills or professional development (i.e., trainings, workshops, peer mentoring)
- Other

COLLABORATIVE PHASE/SIZE: Questions for coordination leads only

- *Prior to applying for the Catalyst Fund grant, how would you describe the phase of this collaborative/partnership? Nonexistent, start-up, building, conserving*
- *From your perspective, has the phase of your collaborative/partnership changed?*
- *Since receiving Catalyst Fund grant, how has the number of partners participating in the collaborative effort changed? Increase/decrease, by how many*

COLLABORATIVE IMPACT: Questions for coordination leads (current and former) only

Likert-scale question (strongly disagree-strongly agree)—Because of grant funding collaborative capacity, we are more effective in:

- Running meetings
- Setting priorities
- Tracking actions and outcomes
- Making decisions
- Meeting deadlines

- Coordinating communication among collaborative partners
- Organizing relationship-building activities within the collaborative
- Fundraising
- Managing grants and funds
- Managing projects and programs
- Resolving conflicts among members
- Creating an environment where differences of opinion can be voiced
- Fostering respect, trust, inclusiveness, and openness among collaborative members
- Combining the perspectives, resources, and skills of partners
- Using collaborative partners' equipment, space, volunteers
- Leveraging partners' different skill sets, knowledge, and/or expertise
- Leveraging partners' connections and influence
- Appreciating the unique challenges facing partners
- Appreciating the unique challenges of subgroups (e.g., different landowners, etc)
- Generating new ideas
- Implementing creative solutions
- Organizing outreach and engagement activities with people and organizations outside of this effort
- Planning ways to sustain/maintain this effort post-Catalyst Fund grant
- Implementing practices to help ensure this effort endures over time

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT: Questions for coordinators who participated in peer learning program only

Likert-scale question (strongly disagree-strongly agree)—I have personally experienced the following benefits as a result of participating in the Catalyst Fund Peer Learning Program:

- Feeling a sense of belonging to a professional community
- More effective in my work due to topics covered in the program
- Increased credibility with people from other organizations as a result of participating in this collaborative
- Developed new perspectives and see things differently
- More confident in my ability to do my job
- Feeling less “alone” in my role
- Feeling seen, supported, and understood professionally

PARTNER ORGANIZATION IMPACT: Questions for partners (leadership team, working group members) only:

Likert-scale question (strongly disagree-strongly agree)—The partner organization I represent has experienced the following benefits as a result of the increased collaborative capacity:

- Better able to achieve the objectives of my organization
- Building new relationships helpful to my organization
- A more global perspective/understanding of issues in my region
- Increased trust in the collaborative itself
- Increased trust in collaborative partners
- Adopting a more collaborative mindset across my organization
- Added capacity for my organization (i.e., funding, staffing)
- Increased understanding of challenges faced by collaborative partners
- Increased access to influential people in the community
- Increased access to a greater range of knowledge and skills
- Increased access to volunteers
- Increased access to resources (equipment, space)
- Increased access to data and information
- Increased ability to plan and implement projects & programs

ACCELERATION: Questions for everyone

Likert-scale question (significant decrease-significant increase): Within the past 6 years, what changes have you observed related to the following activities?

- Partner member engagement in collaborative and its activities (*coordinator & partners only)
- Outreach, education, and other types of programs
- Scale of on-the ground work (increase in acres, miles, feet, number, etc.)
- Pace of reaching conservation & stewardship goals (faster, more efficiently)
- * *When an increase was chosen, participants were asked to explain or provide an example of the changes you have observed.*

BENEFITS/DRAWBACKS: Questions for everyone

- *Please describe additional benefits you have observed from strengthened collaborative capacity.*
- *Please describe any drawbacks or challenges with funding collaborative capacity.*

INSTITUTIONALIZATION: Questions for everyone

- *What else has this collaborative accomplished since receiving the Catalyst Fund grant? Accomplishments might include aspects related to partnership development, landscape outcomes, outreach, convening/meetings, etc.*
- *In your opinion, which of the practices described above are transferable to other collaborative efforts?*

Appendix H: Data Analyses

Written content was the focus of the analyses of the qualitative data associated with grant proposals and reports, focus group transcripts, and open-ended survey questions.

Information that could identify participants was removed prior to analysis. The data were then exported into spreadsheets and NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software tool). Well-established methods were used to analyze this collection of qualitative data. The author started with the familiarization stage through a holistic reading of all data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A method for generating, identifying, and analyzing themes within qualitative data, thematic analysis was applied (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was used by the author who has decades of experience analyzing qualitative data.

Using this iterative process, themes were generated based on their recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). The author subsequently developed a coding scheme for the emergent themes from the reflexive thematic analysis. The coding scheme was put into a codebook.

The scheme was then applied by open-coding the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The “thought” units (i.e., main ideas contained in a phrase, sentence, or paragraph) were the basic analysis unit. A sentence or paragraph was given two or three codes if it included more than one theme.

The detailed grantee proposals and reports were thoroughly read and coded by the author and research assistant. The focus group transcripts and open-ended surveys were also coded by the author and research assistant.

Appendix I: Impact-Related Graphs

Figure 32. Observed Changes: Scale of On-the-Ground Work

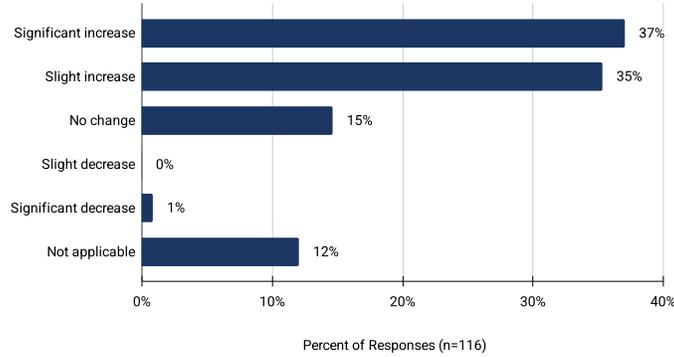


Figure 33. Observed Changes: Pace of Reaching Conservation & Stewardship Goals

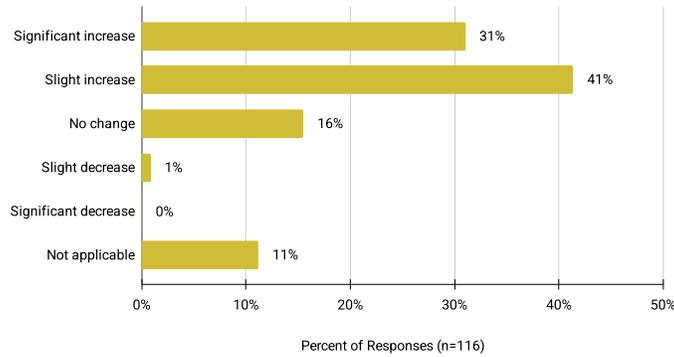
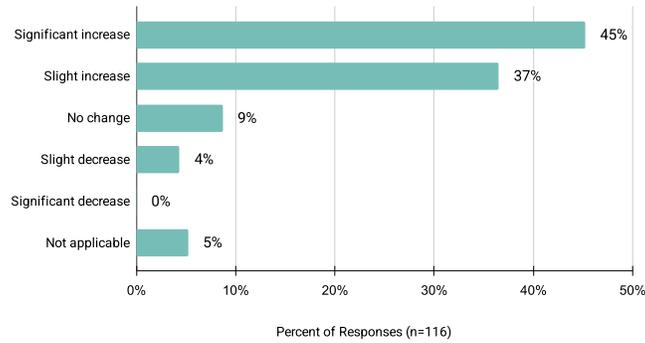


Figure 34. Observed Changes: Outreach, Education & Similar Programs



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Advancing the Practice of Conservation at the Landscape Scale