



Network for Landscape  
CONSERVATION

*Advancing the Practice of Conservation at the Landscape Scale*

**LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION CATALYST FUND**  
**Applicant Guidance Document: 2021 Funding Round**  
**March 15, 2021**

*This document is intended to clarify for applicants whether they are a strong fit with the Fund and to equip applicants to present compelling proposals that address the Fund's purpose.*

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**WHAT MAKES A STRONG CATALYST FUND PROPOSAL?**

Strong proposals to the Catalyst Fund will demonstrate how a modest strategic investment will have significant impact in solidifying momentum, building a more robust Partnership, and accelerating progress towards achieving the group's conservation goals.

**A portion of the Fund is dedicated to supporting Indigenous-led Partnerships. A strong Indigenous-led Partnership proposal will:**

- Emerge from and be supported by the Indigenous community(s)—its purpose, design, and actions will originate from the Indigenous peoples the Partnership serves;
- Promote and reflect leadership and decision-making that directly serve the Indigenous community(s) involved in the Partnership;
- Integrate and support Traditional Knowledge and the cultural lifeways of the community;
- Build capacity in the Indigenous community(s) to advance the conservation goals of the Partnership in the longer term.

**For all proposals to the Catalyst Fund:** The Fund makes investments in (a) Landscape Conservation Partnerships that are (b) at pivotal points in development. The following offers further details to help potential applicants understand whether they will fit these parameters:

**A. THE LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

**As noted in the RFP:** *The Catalyst Fund focuses its investments on Landscape Conservation Partnerships that reflect the following characteristics: place-based; long-term conservation purpose; collaboratively governed; community grounded and inclusive; and informed.*

## **ADDITIONAL DETAIL**

The emphasis on Landscape Conservation “Partnerships” is not indicative of a specific focus on a fixed type of inter-organizational structure; rather, “Partnership” is used as an umbrella term—representing a variety of differing structures and degrees of formality for individuals and entities coming together in collaboration—that includes partnerships, collaboratives, coalitions, networks, working groups, etc. The Fund focuses on Partnerships that come together to co-create a conservation vision for their landscape that they work towards in a fully collaborative fashion and not organizations “partnering” to achieve their own work.

Each of the characteristics are explored in greater detail here:

**PLACE-BASED:** *Focuses on the conservation of a geographically explicit landscape.*

The emphasis here is on Partnerships that are working within a readily identifiable and specific *landscape*—an interconnected geographic area that exceeds jurisdictional boundaries yet functions as and is perceived as a single unit because of ecological, geographical, cultural and/or other societal reasons. The landscape should be sufficiently large in scale to span parcel and political boundaries, and encompass a diversity of landowner types, conservation issues, jurisdictions, and stakeholder interests; but specific and contained enough that a community-grounded approach is feasible, and partners can work in ways that build enduring social capital within the landscape. We welcome proposals from Partnerships working in all types of landscapes, including urban, suburban, rural, working, wild, and combinations thereof.

Examples that DO NOT align with this place-based characteristic:

- A Partnership that focuses on a general geography (e.g., “across the western United States,” “throughout the Northeast,”) or that is defined by the boundaries of a single state. NOTE: Indigenous-led Partnerships defined by the political boundaries of a Sovereign Tribal Nation ARE eligible for funding.
- A Partnership that focuses on a single issue or solution (e.g., building wildlife crossings, increasing green infrastructure, or creating model planning or easement language) irrespective of geography.
- A Partnership that focuses only on a specific “type” of land within a landscape (e.g., working only on public lands within the landscape).
- A Partnership that focuses exclusively on a single property or unit (e.g., a state park or a national forest).
- “Umbrella” proposals from an organization or collaborative that supports/serves a network of Landscape Conservation Partnerships in a variety of landscapes but is not itself pursuing a specific vision for a defined landscape.

**LONG-TERM CONSERVATION PURPOSE:** *Pursues a long-term and multi-issue conservation vision and purpose for the defined landscape, with clearly identified conservation goals and outcomes that encompass people and nature.*

The emphasis here is on Partnerships that are positioned to be enduring vehicles for achieving conservation goals in a landscape. Short-term, project-specific Partnerships are not an appropriate fit. Key here too is an emphasis on Partnerships that are multi-issue, focusing on

sustaining the ecological integrity and resilience of the landscape and its communities as a whole.

Note: The Fund broadly interprets “conservation” to be a focus on sustaining or improving ecological integrity and functionality. The Fund is open to proposals from Partnerships that are working across all dimensions of conservation and stewardship.

Examples that DO NOT align with this long-term conservation purpose characteristic:

- Short-term, project-specific collaborations (e.g., a specific parcel acquisition or implementation of a specific land management activity).
- A Partnership convened for a specific, narrowly defined conservation objective, e.g.:
  - Advancing a single solution (e.g., building wildlife crossings) or a narrow objective (e.g. increasing wilderness designation) within the landscape;
  - Conserving a single species or ecosystem type (e.g., subalpine meadows) within the landscape;
  - Addressing a specific threat (e.g., invasive species) within the landscape.Note: single species conservation efforts ARE eligible for funding for Indigenous-led Partnerships that are centering landscape conservation efforts around a species of spiritual or cultural significance.
- Partnerships convened to share information, allow for networking amongst practitioners, and/or provides capacity-building training within the landscape, but are not action-oriented toward achieving a shared conservation vision.
- Partnerships structured solely around defensive campaigns against specific actions (e.g., opposition to a proposed mine or pipeline).

**COLLABORATIVELY GOVERNED:** *Embraces collaborative leadership that ensures participatory engagement from the breadth of partners.*

The emphasis here is on Partnerships that work in a fully collaborative fashion. While one (or a few) organizations may play a lead convening or coordination role, inter-organizational leadership and proactive participatory engagement should be clearly evident, with the breadth of partners co-creating vision, purpose, and progress.

Examples that DO NOT meet this collaboratively governed characteristic:

- Programs of a single organization, even if additional partners are engaged to achieve program objectives (e.g., a land trust’s conservation program that regularly relies on partnering to complete conservation deals).

**COMMUNITY-GROUNDED AND INCLUSIVE:** *Engages a breadth of stakeholders on the landscape, and bridges sectors, interests, and cultures to find common ground.*

The emphasis here is on Partnerships that are working *within* landscape and place, engaging authentically in a community-grounded fashion to build a collective voice for the future of the landscape—rather than outside entities or individuals striving to chart the course for the landscape. The emphasis too is on Partnerships that are proactively engaging the breadth of perspectives within a landscape, building bridges across cultures, interests, perspectives, and sectors to pursue a shared conservation vision for the future of a landscape.

Examples that DO NOT meet this community-grounded and inclusive characteristic:

- A Partnership driven by external entities or individuals that do not engage at the community level within the landscape.
- A Partnership comprised of too few partners. There is not a precise size criterion here (the context of any landscape is unique) but the Partnership should engage a broad range of stakeholders and perspectives.

**INFORMED:** *Uses ecological, cultural, traditional, and/or social information to inform its work and build a shared foundation of knowledge.*

The emphasis here is on using knowledge to inform action. The expectation is that a Partnership’s conservation work should be grounded in robust science and knowledge—recognizing that knowledge sources are not limited to western ecological science but include Traditional Knowledges and additional cultural and social knowledges.

Examples that DO NOT meet this informed characteristic:

- A Partnership that focuses primarily on research (as opposed to the action-oriented implementation of a science-informed conservation vision).

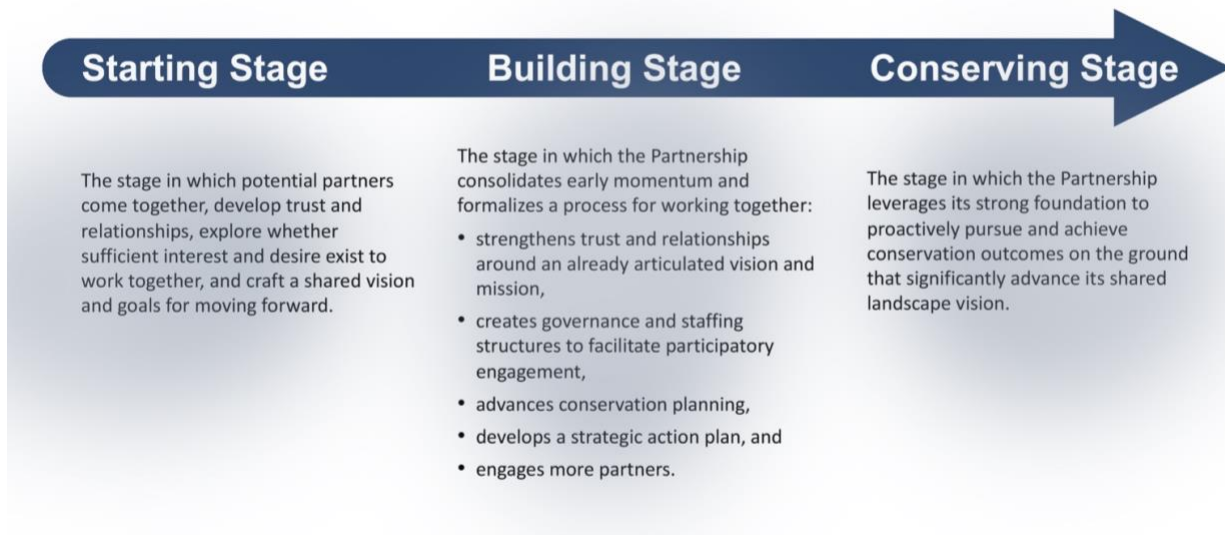
## **B. PIVOTAL POINTS IN PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

**As noted in the RFP:** *The Catalyst Fund specifically targets Partnerships at pivotal points in their development where modest investments in collaborative capacity and process can shift the trajectory of conservation outcomes in the landscape.*

*Specifically, the Catalyst Fund prioritizes the transition from collective vision to collective action. The relationship- and trust-building of partners uniting around a co-created conservation vision most successfully emerges from the combined efforts of the broader group of participants. Yet there often comes a point where backbone organizational support and capacity to bring people together is necessary to move from vision to action. Investments in coordination staffing and/or the collaborative process at this point can overcome this common barrier to success and can significantly accelerate forward progress on conservation outcomes.*

### **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND**

Although every Partnership must respond to the unique context of its landscape and there is no cookie-cutter solution to building a Partnership, many follow similar progressions of development. A generalized framework can be drawn of three developmental stages for Partnerships: “Starting,” “Building,” and “Conserving” (see diagram below). This framework should be thought of primarily as a heuristic, as in practice the stages are unlikely to be entirely discrete nor is the relationship between stages necessarily linear.



The Catalyst Fund prioritizes the transition from collective vision to collective action. At this inflection point, participants have already demonstrated a commitment to the Partnership through a significant investment of time to build relationships and establish the foundation of trust necessary for working together. Early forward momentum is evident around the developing of the purpose of the shared work, with partners establishing vision/mission and goals. Carrying this momentum forward into implementation and action though requires increasing time and energy, and a barrier to success here can be the lack of backbone organizational support and coordination capacity. In the generalized Partnership development framework above, this is the “Building” stage.

Because Partnership development IS individualized, Partnerships are welcome to submit proposals designed to help them accelerate progress through other pivotal points in development. Applicants are encouraged to reach out the Catalyst Fund Manager prior to doing so to ensure fit. A critical question—for any proposal but especially proposals from more advanced Partnerships—will be whether a modest investment will have significant impact on the Partnership’s capacity to achieve its conservation goals.

The Catalyst Fund does not invest in launching new Partnerships. Partnerships currently in the process of forming and coming together—Partnerships in the Starting stage—should look to the Catalyst Fund in future years when forward momentum has accrued and when a small investment can accelerate the Partnership forward on its path to conservation impact.

## **APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND ON FUND PURPOSE**

**As noted in the RFP:** *The Catalyst Fund aims to accelerate the pace and practice of collaborative landscape conservation across the United States. The Fund makes strategic investments in strengthening the collaborative capacity and process of place-based, community-grounded Landscape Conservation Partnerships—building in landscapes across the country the enduring collaborative infrastructure and social capital that is necessary to achieve bigger and better conservation over the long term.*

### **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND:**

Landscape conservation is an approach that brings people together across geographies, sectors, and cultures to collaborate on conserving our important landscapes and the myriad ecological, cultural, and economic benefits they provide. This highly collaborative practice embraces the complexity of working at scale to connect and protect irreplaceable landscapes—across public and private lands, and from our cities to our wildest places.

The Catalyst Fund emerged from a series of observations:

- The 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges we face—climate change, accelerating land-use conversion and landscape fragmentation, the biodiversity crisis, and more—are existential and systems-level, and working at the landscape scale is essential for scaling our response to the match the scale of these challenges;
- Extensive and enduring collaboration is essential to achieving successful conservation across whole landscapes;
- Building and sustaining effective collaboration requires dedicated time and resources, and a specific skillset and thoughtful approach—all of which requires strategic and dedicated investments;
- Yet funding and capacity-building investments to directly support and advance collaboration are scarce and difficult to acquire.

This is the disconnect: it has become almost universally understood that successful landscape conservation is predicated on collaboration, and yet little funding is available to landscape conservation initiatives for strengthening their process of collaboration. The Catalyst Fund is designed to address this critical disconnect directly, providing financial and capacity-building support to allow broad-based, enduring Partnerships to strategically invest in their collaborative capacity and process. These investments are intended to catalyze growth and better position Partnerships to achieve long-term landscape conservation success.