



Network for Landscape
CONSERVATION

Advancing the Practice of Conservation at the Landscape Scale

A survey of landscape conservation & stewardship initiatives Summary Analysis

May 2024

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In December 2021, the Network for Landscape Conservation (NLC), in partnership with researchers at the University of Montana (UM), launched an in-depth survey of self-identified landscape conservation initiatives across North America. This survey was designed to help NLC track the growth and development of the landscape conservation and stewardship movement, and to identify challenges and needs facing the landscape community of practice here in North America. The survey builds upon a similar survey that was conducted in 2017—see the [summary report here](#).

Data was collected from December 2021 through March 2022; this report synthesizes data from 263 completed survey responses. The analysis of the survey results was made possible through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

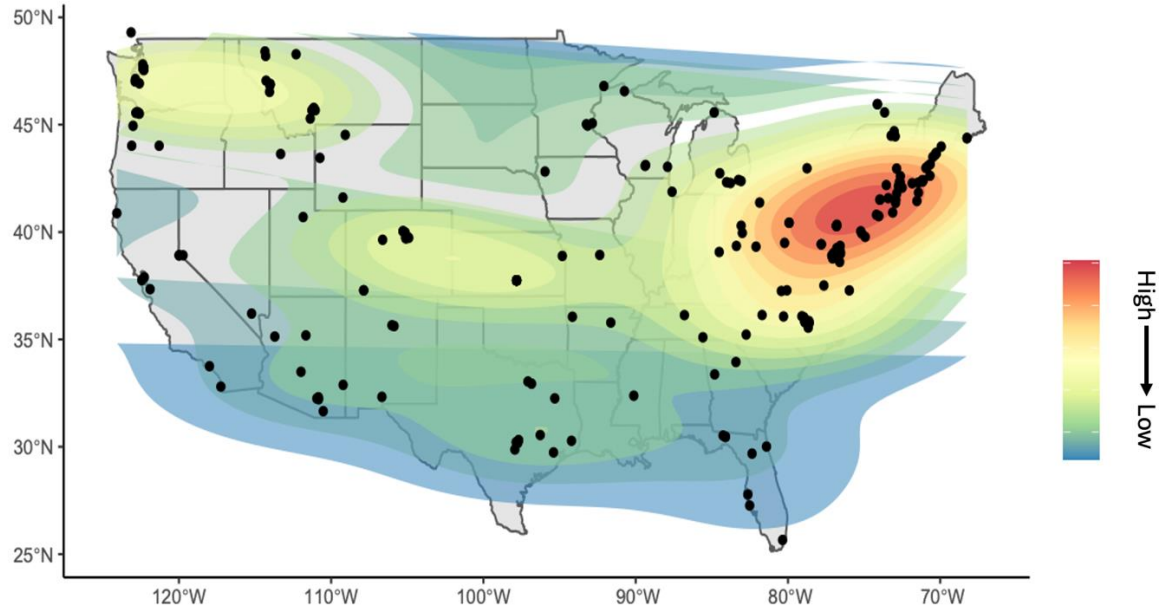
Please note that this report and the survey itself are representative, more than comprehensive. Many existing and emerging initiatives have not been captured, and based on NLC’s knowledge, certain regions are underrepresented. But the results are still illuminating.

What is a landscape conservation initiative?

For the purposes of this survey, we consider landscape conservation initiatives to be efforts that work across jurisdictional boundaries; include multiple stakeholders; and advance the conservation, stewardship, restoration, and/or management of lands and waters—and the services and well-being that these provide. Such initiatives are defined by approach rather than size: initiatives can be found in urban areas with a small geographic extent and can be found in rural areas with an expansive geographic extent. The survey was designed to capture responses from initiatives that are working to achieve a vision for a specific, defined landscape, as well as initiatives that are working to build critical “infrastructure” to accelerate landscape conservation (including, for instance, initiatives that are synthesizing science and data across scales or that are providing technical assistance and/or building capacity for landscape conservation initiatives across a variety of landscapes).

SECTION 1: General Information

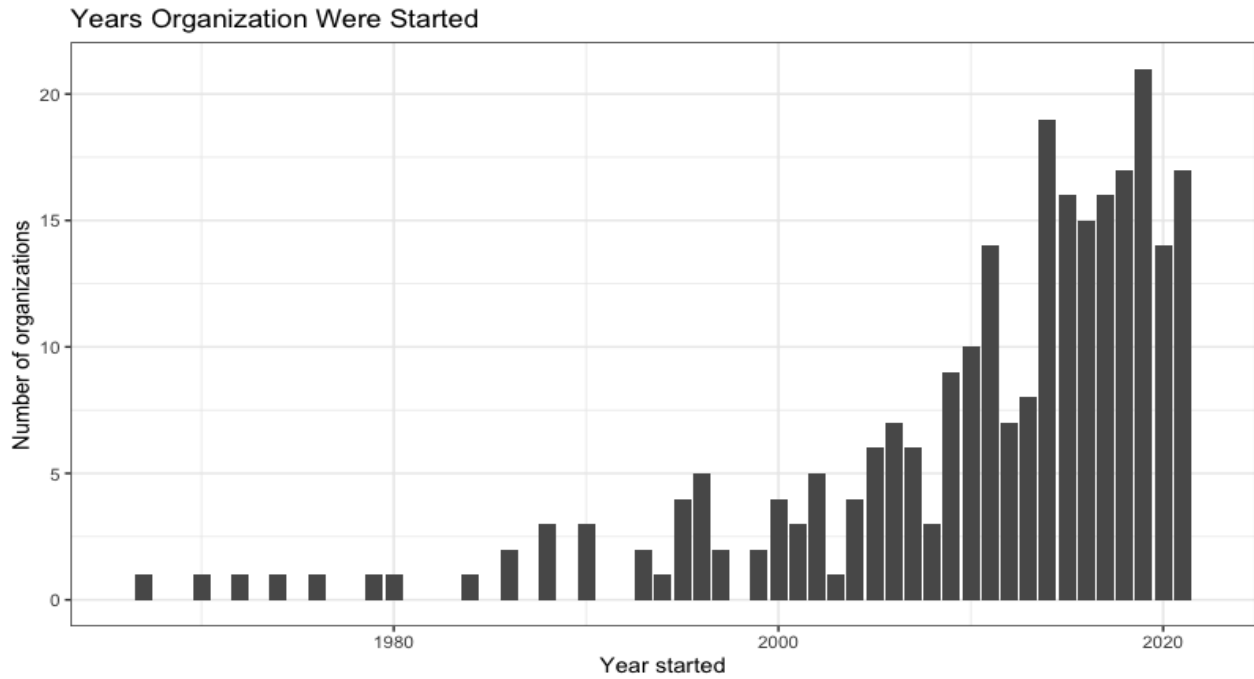
QUESTION: Geographic Distribution of Density of Respondents



The above image is a map indicating the geographic distribution of respondents to the 2021-2022 NLC survey, based on IP address. Participants were asked to identify any states and/or provinces that coincided with their landscapes. This heat map shows the intensity of responses by region with increasing numbers as colors shift from blue to green to yellow to red.

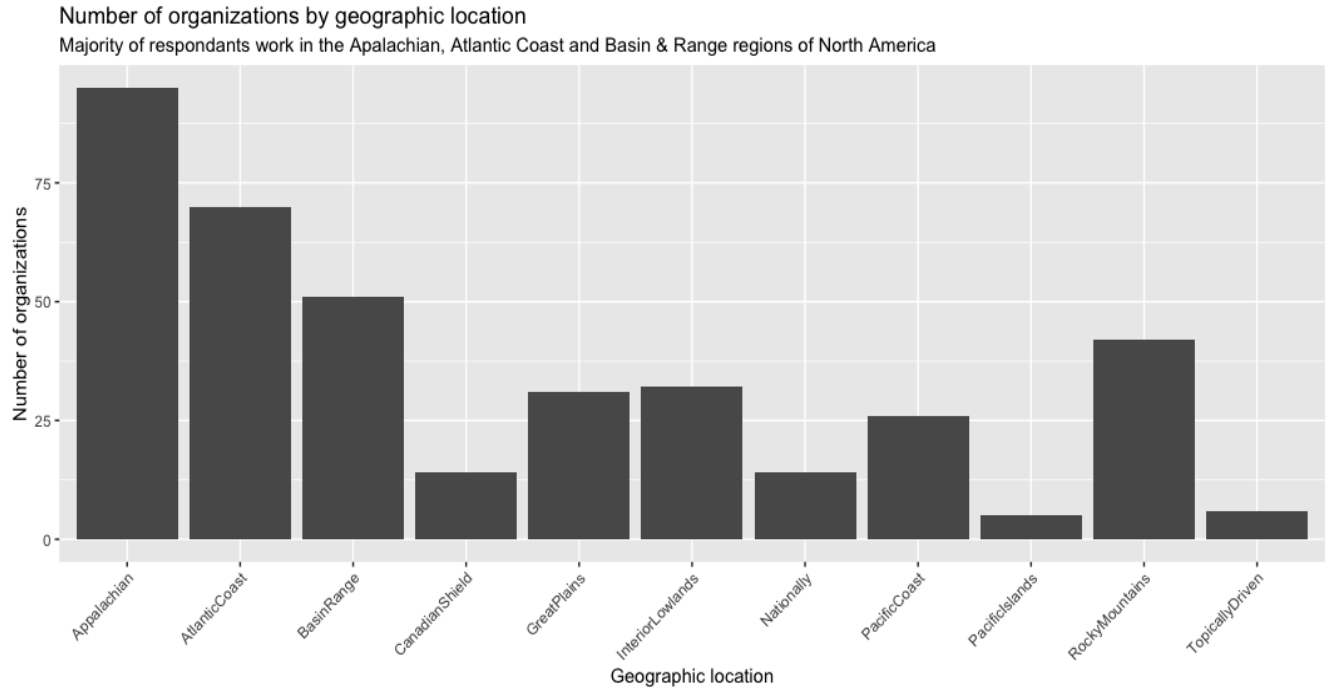
QUESTION: Year that the landscape conservation initiative was started

The vast majority of collaborative initiatives have been formed in the past 20 years. The trend grew from 2000 to 2010 and then peaked in the past decade.



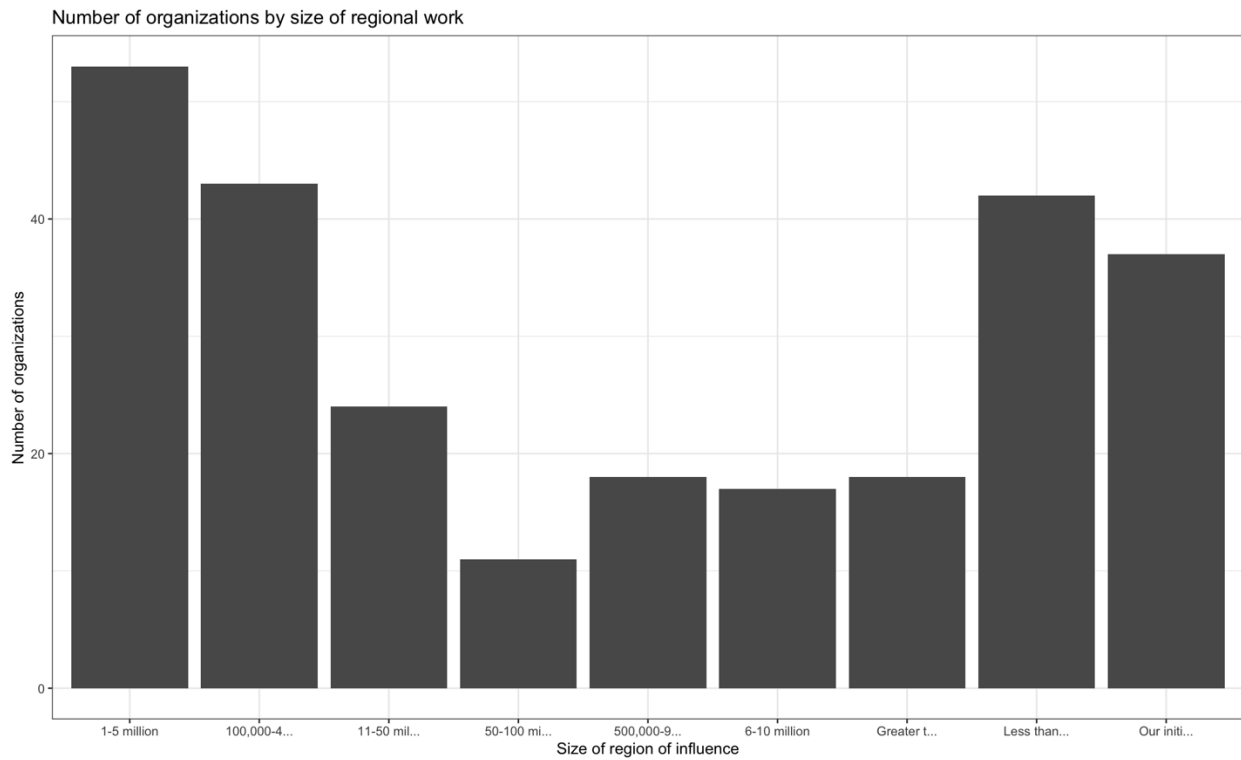
QUESTION: Geographic region where the landscape conservation initiative works

Respondents also had the option of stating that they work nationwide or are focused topically rather than geographically. See [here for how the geographies are defined](#).



Location	Value	Percent
Atlantic Coast	69	19
Pacific Coast	26	7
Appalachian	91	25
Canadian Shield	12	3
Interior Lowlands	30	8
Great Plains	27	7
Rocky Mountains	38	10
Basin Range	49	13
Pacific Islands	4	1
Nationally	13	4
Topically Instead of Based on Geography	6	2

QUESTION: Size (in acres) of the landscape conservation initiative

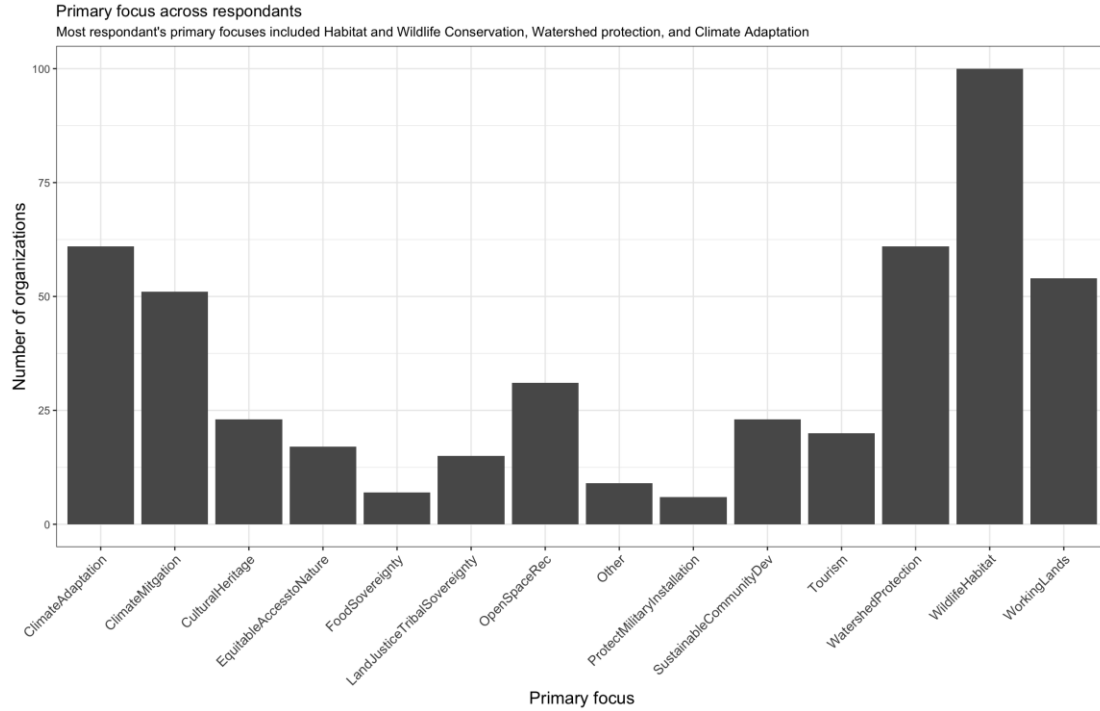


Size	Value	Percent
1-5 million	53	20
100,000-499,999	43	16
11-50 million	24	9
50-100 million	11	4
500,000-999,999	18	7
6-10 million	17	6
Greater than 100 million	18	7
Less than 100,000	42	16
Our initiative does not work in a single discrete landscape (e.g., works regionally/nationally on a topic rather than in a specific landscape)	37	14

SECTION 2: Threats, Priorities, and Progress

QUESTION: Primary focus areas or goals of landscape conservation initiative

Respondents were asked to indicate their primary focus areas or goals. Multiple responses were permitted, but initiatives were encouraged to focus on their top 3-5 focal areas.



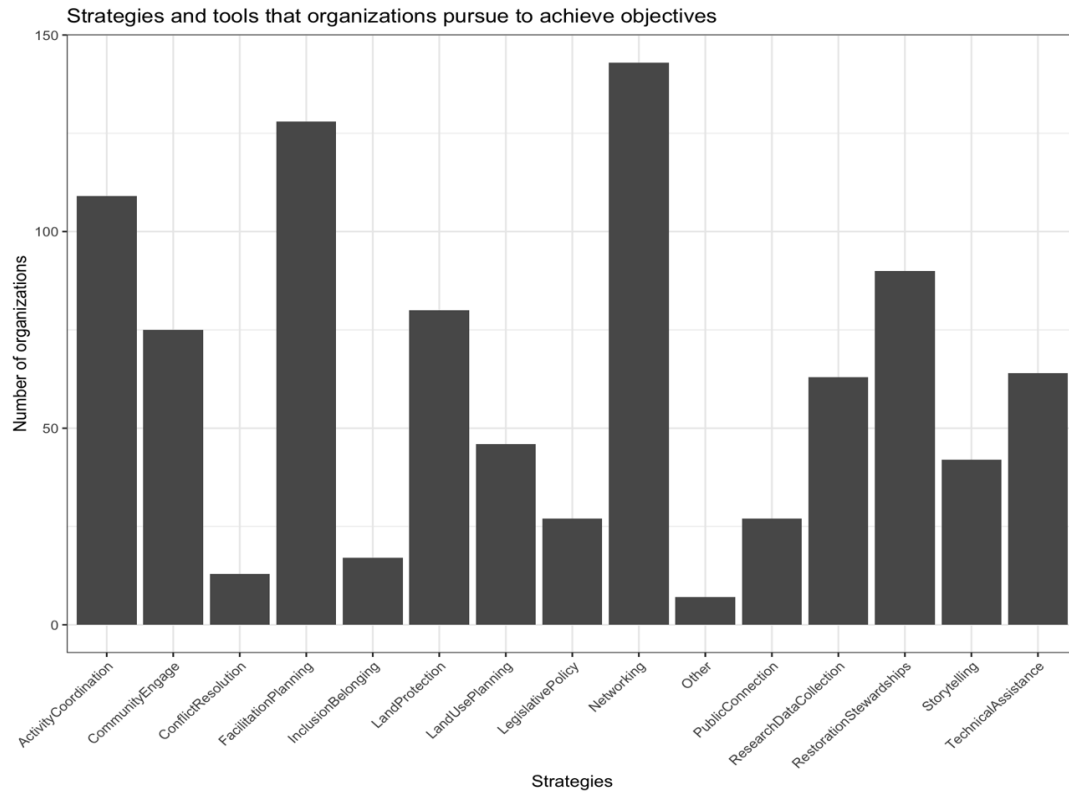
Focus	Value	Percent
Wildlife Habitat	100	21
Watershed Protection	61	13
Cultural Heritage	23	5
Equitable Access Nature	17	3
Tourism	20	4
Working Lands	54	11
Climate Mitigation	51	10
Climate Adaptation	61	13
Open Space Rec	31	6
Sustainable Community Dev	23	5
Land Justice Tribal Sovereignty	24	5
Food Sovereignty	7	1
Protect Military Installation	6	1
Other	9	2

To better understand the results from this question, here is the complete language for the choices offered:

- Open space for outdoor recreation (“Open Space Rec” above)
- Habitat, wildlife, and biodiversity conservation [including wildlife connectivity/corridors] (“Wildlife Habitat” above)
- Watershed protection for water quality and supply (“Watershed Protection” above)
- Cultural heritage and/or historical resources (“Cultural Heritage” above)
- Equitable access to nature (“Equitable Access Nature” above)
- Tourism and scenic values (“Tourism” above)
- Working lands [e.g. agriculture, fishing, timber, and/or grazing] (“Working Lands” above)
- Climate change mitigation [e.g., Nature-based Solutions] (“Climate Mitigation” above)
- Climate adaptation [e.g. forest/wildfire management, flood management, etc.] (“Climate Adaptation” above)
- Sustainable community development (“Sustainable Community Dev” above)
- Land justice and/or Tribal sovereignty (“Land Justice Tribal Sovereignty” above)
- Food security/sovereignty (“Food Sovereignty” above)
- Protecting military installations or operations (“Protect Military Installation” above)
- Other

QUESTION: Primary strategies that organizations use to meet their project goals

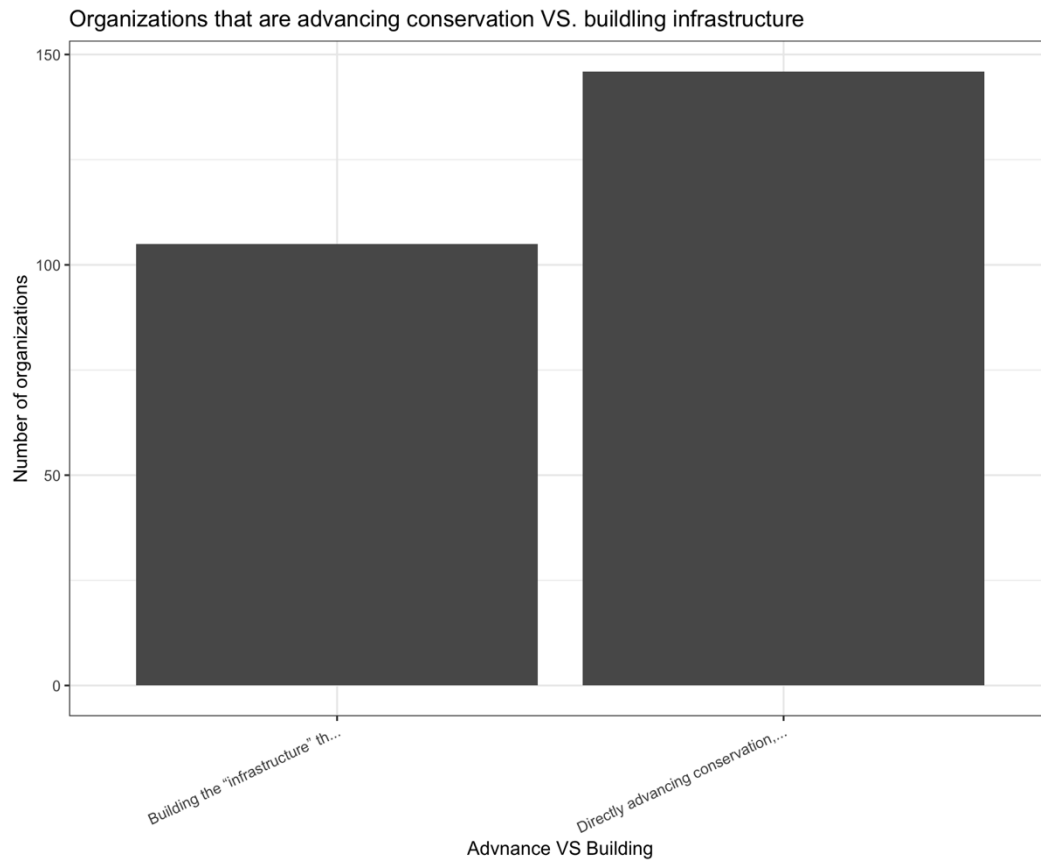
Again, multiple responses to this question were allowed.



Strategies	Value	Percent
Land Protection	80	9
Land Use Protection	46	5
Restoration/Stewardship	90	10
Facilitation/Planning	128	14
Networking	143	15
Storytelling	42	5
Community Engagement	75	8
Technical Assistance	64	7
Research/Data Collection	63	7
Inclusion/Belonging	17	2
Legislative Policy	27	3
Activity Coordination	109	12
Public Connection	27	3
Conflict Resolution	13	1
Other	7	1

QUESTION: Building landscape conservation “infrastructure” vs. directly advancing on-the-ground landscape conservation outcomes

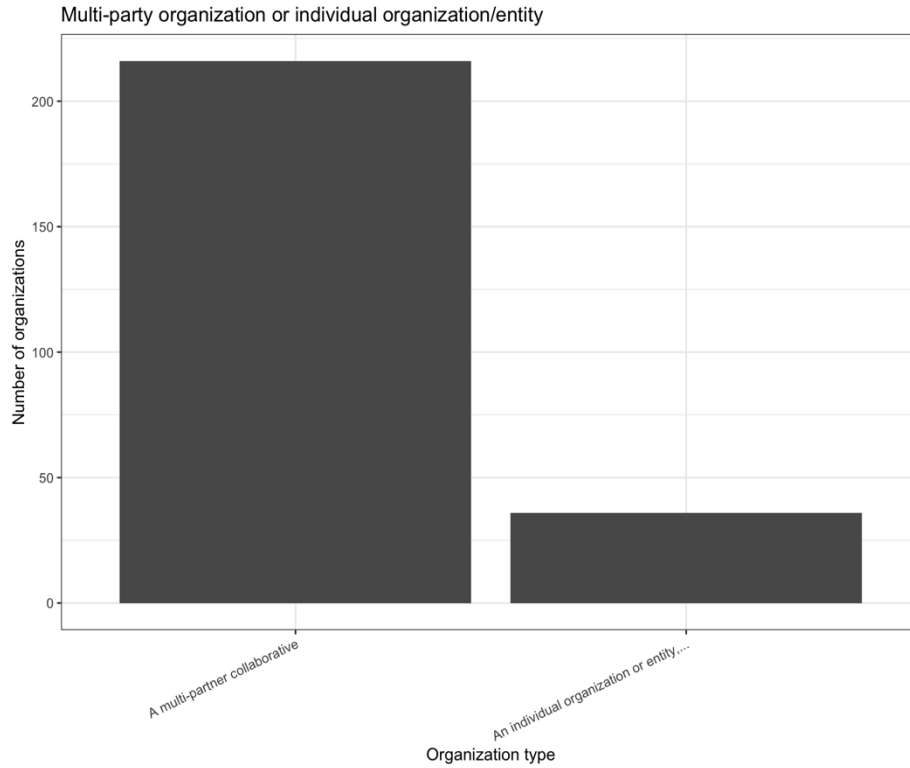
The majority of landscape conservation initiatives are focused on directly advancing conservation but just over 40% consider themselves to be primarily in the business of “building infrastructure.” To illustrate that type of activity, a few examples were provided: “e.g., synthesizing science and data across scales; providing technical assistance and expertise; supporting and building capacity in a range of landscape conservation initiatives, etc.”



Advancing conservation or building infrastructure	Value	Percent
Building the “infrastructure” that is indirectly but critically essential to advancing conservation, stewardship, restoration, and/or management within a landscape [e.g., synthesizing science and data across scales; providing technical assistance and expertise; supporting and building capacity in a range of landscape conservation initiatives, etc.]	105	42
Directly advancing conservation, stewardship, restoration, and/or management actions within a landscape	146	58

QUESTION: Organization type

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they can best be defined as a multi-partner collaborative or an individual organization/entity. The vast majority self-define as multi-partner collaboratives.



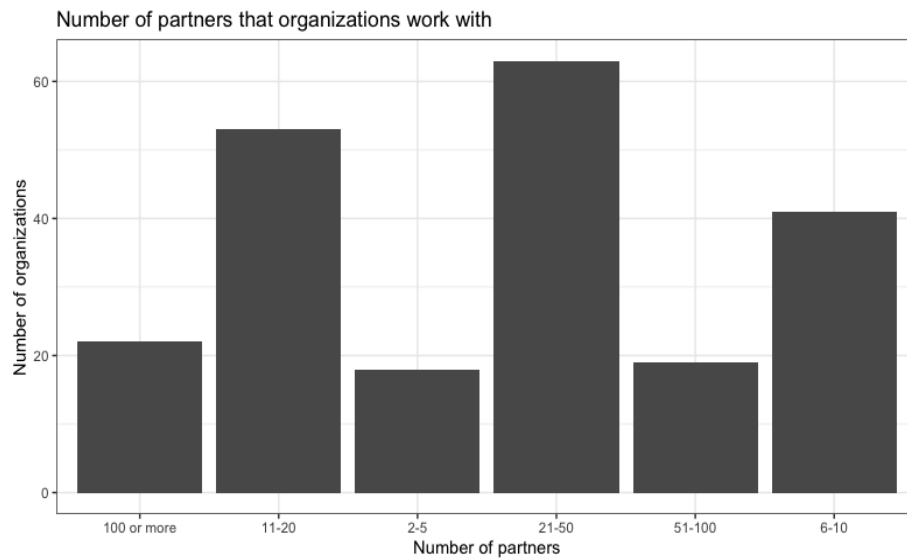
Multi-party or individual organization	Value	Percent
A multi-partner collaborative	216	86
An individual organization or entity, or a program of a single organization or entity	36	14

SECTION 3: COLLABORATIVES

Initiatives that indicated they were multi-partner collaboratives were asked to complete an additional subset of questions, intended to offer greater insight into the continued development and experiences of such collaboratives.

QUESTION: Number of partners participating in the collaborative

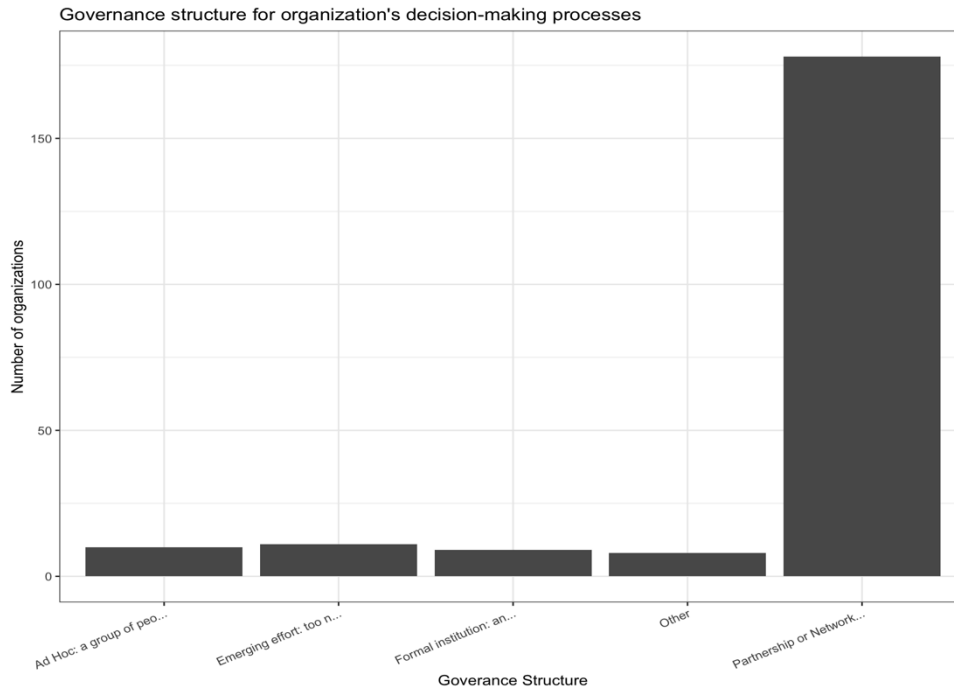
The number of partner entities involved with collaborative initiatives varied over an extremely wide range. Some reported as few as two partners, while 22% reported 100 or more partners.



Partners	Value	Percent
100 or more	22	10
11-20	53	24
2-5	18	8
21-50	63	29
51-100	19	9
6-10	41	19

QUESTION: Governance structure

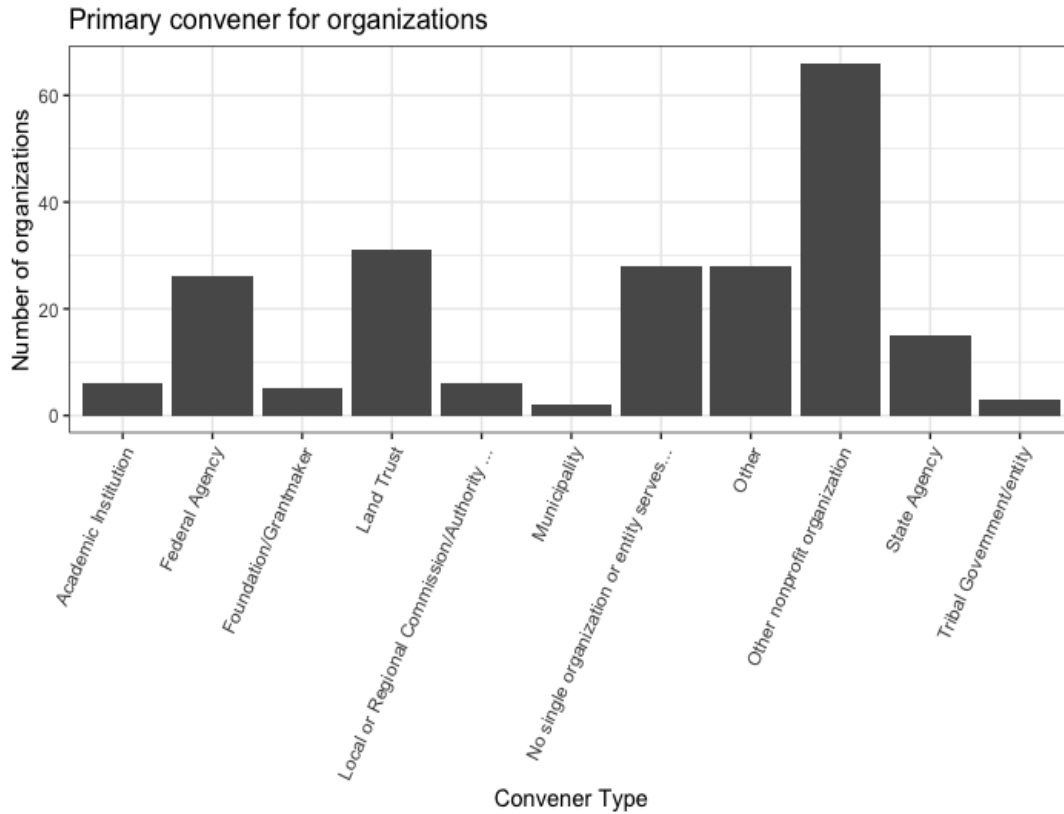
A number of options were provided, including “ad hoc” or a “formal institution” defined by law, but the overwhelming response was a partnership or network consisting of “non-governmental organizations, government agencies, tribes, businesses, academic institutions, and/or other partners working together toward tangible, stated conservation goals.”



Governance structure	Value	Percent
Ad Hoc: a group of people and organizations focused on short-term projects or activities at the landscape scale	10	5
Emerging effort: too new to determine what form the initiative will take	11	5
Formal institution: anything that exists in federal, state, or local law with a specific landscape mandate [e.g., commission, council, agency, legal compact, etc.]	9	4
Other	8	4
Partnership or Network: non-governmental organizations, government agencies, tribes, businesses, academic institutions, and/or other partners working together toward tangible, stated conservation goals	178	82

QUESTION: Convener

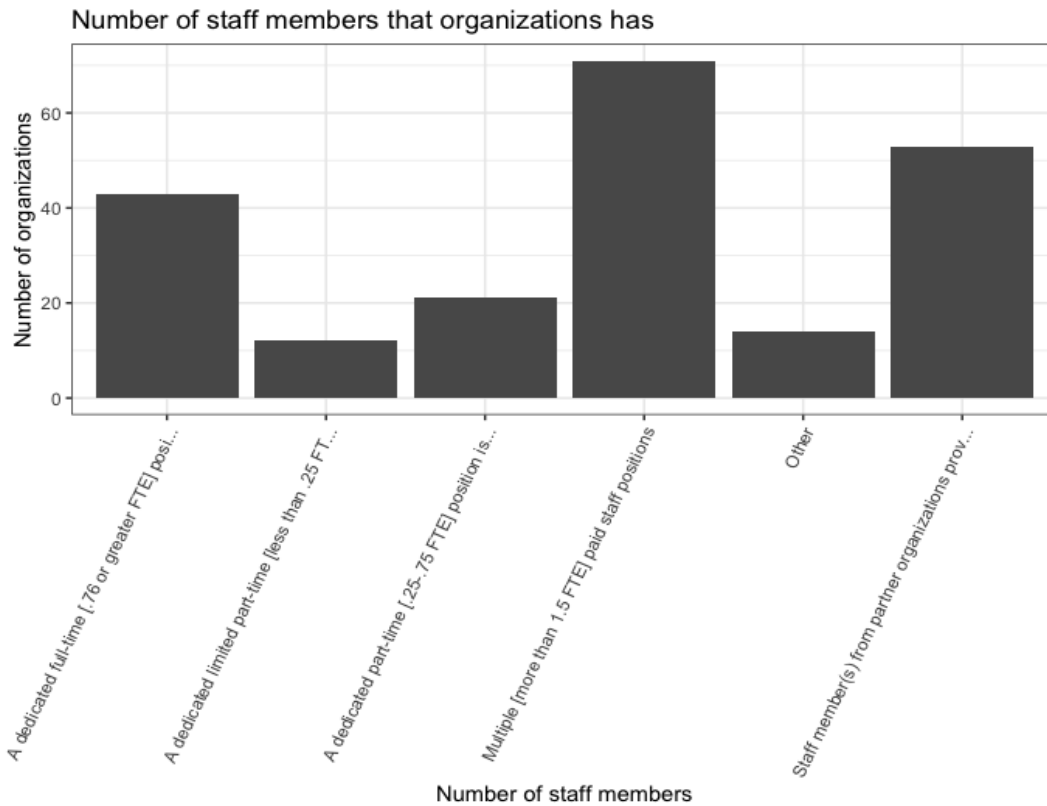
The survey asked what type of organization or entity served as the main convener or host for the partnership. Only 13% of respondents indicated there was no main convener. There were many types of primary conveners.



	Value	Percent
Academic Institution	6	3
Federal Agency	26	12
Foundation/Grantmaker	5	2
Land Trust	31	14
Local or Regional Commission/Authority [e.g., conservation district, water commission, etc.]	6	3
Municipality	2	1
No single organization or entity serves as the main convener and/or host organization	28	13
Other	28	13
Other nonprofit organization	66	31
State Agency	15	7
Tribal Government/entity	3	1

QUESTION: Staffing

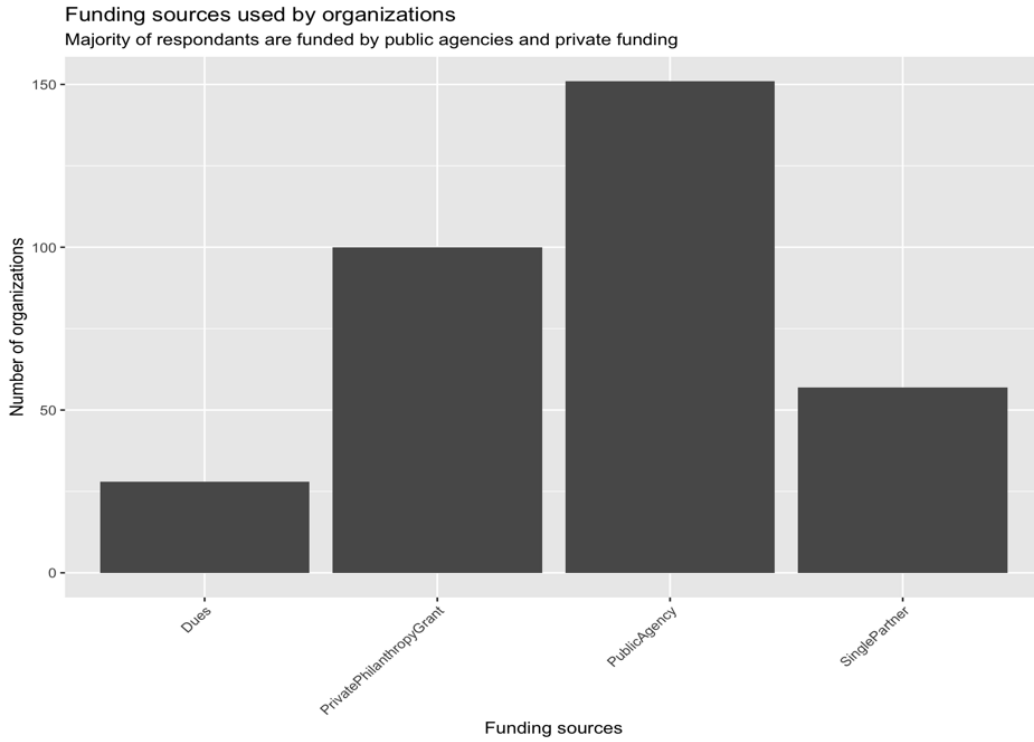
One-third of respondents indicated having more than 1.5 full-time equivalent staff position. It seems probable that organizations with more staff were most likely to respond to the questionnaire, so this percentage may not be indicative of land conservation collaboratives in general.



Staff	Value	Percent
A dedicated full-time [.76 or greater FTE] position is staffed	43	20
A dedicated limited part-time [less than .25 FTE] position is staffed	12	6
A dedicated part-time [.25-.75 FTE] position is staffed	21	10
Multiple [more than 1.5 FTE] paid staff positions	71	33
Other	14	6
Staff member(s) from partner organizations provide part-time, undedicated coordination and staffing support	53	25

QUESTION: Source of funding for the collaborative

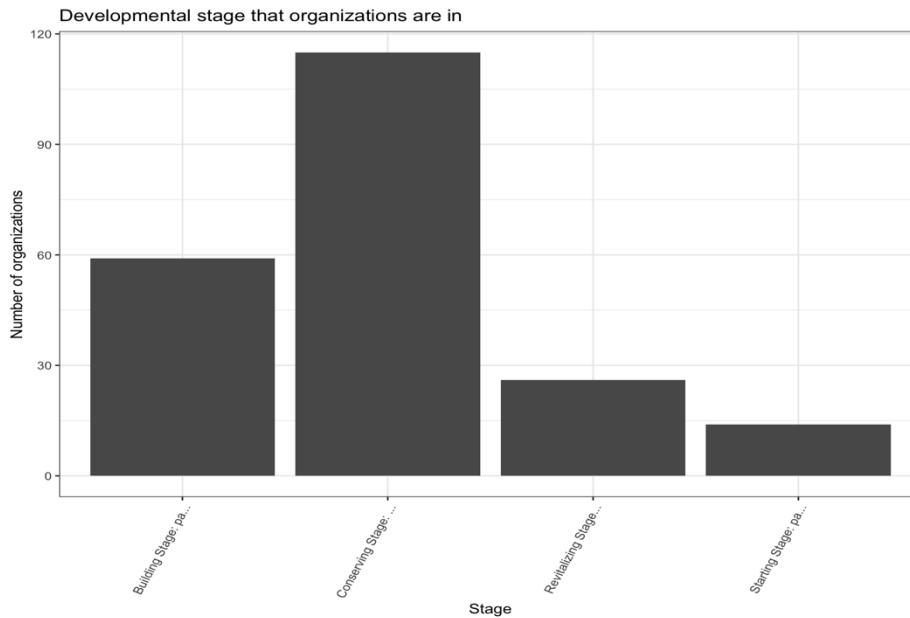
The most common response (45%) was public agencies, with private philanthropy at 30%.



Funding	Value	Percent
Private Philanthropy/Grant	100	30
Public Agency	151	45
Single Partner	57	17
Partner Contributions or Dues	28	8

QUESTION: Current developmental stage

Most initiatives (53%) reported being in a mature “conserving” stage, as opposed to starting, building or revitalizing.



Stage	Value	Percent
Building Stage: partners are continuing to strengthen trust and relationships, and are putting in place the programmatic and structure pieces (e.g. governance, action planning, staff capacity) to facilitate shared work towards achieving the vision.	59	28
Conserving Stage: action accelerates as partners leverage the strong foundation to move forward with shared implementation of the action plan to make progress toward the long-term vision.	115	54
Revitalizing Stage: This stage occurs when and if the initiative faces significant challenges that reduce capacity to achieve or progress towards goals and can lead to membership turnover, loss of funding support, changes in leadership, etc. Initiatives are at a point where they can disband or revitalize and revisit their long-term vision and mission.	26	12
Starting Stage: partners are coming together, developing trust and relationships, exploring whether there is sufficient interest and desire to work together, and building a shared vision and goals for moving forward.	14	7

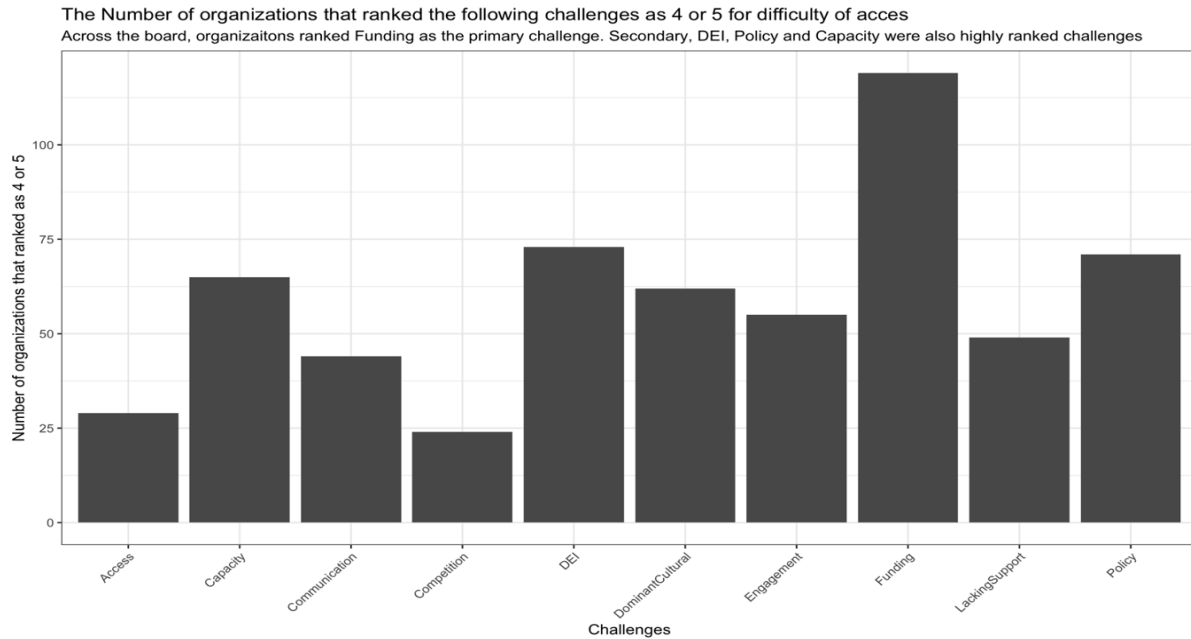
This was the final question in the series focused exclusively on collaboratives.

At this point the survey returned to collect answers from all respondents. The final questions were designed to explore what landscape conservation initiatives need to be more effective.

SECTION 4: Needs Assessment

QUESTION: Principle Challenges

Respondents were asked to identify significant challenges that impact their landscape conservation initiative's ability to achieve its goals. Funding was the number one most difficult challenge. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion ranked second.



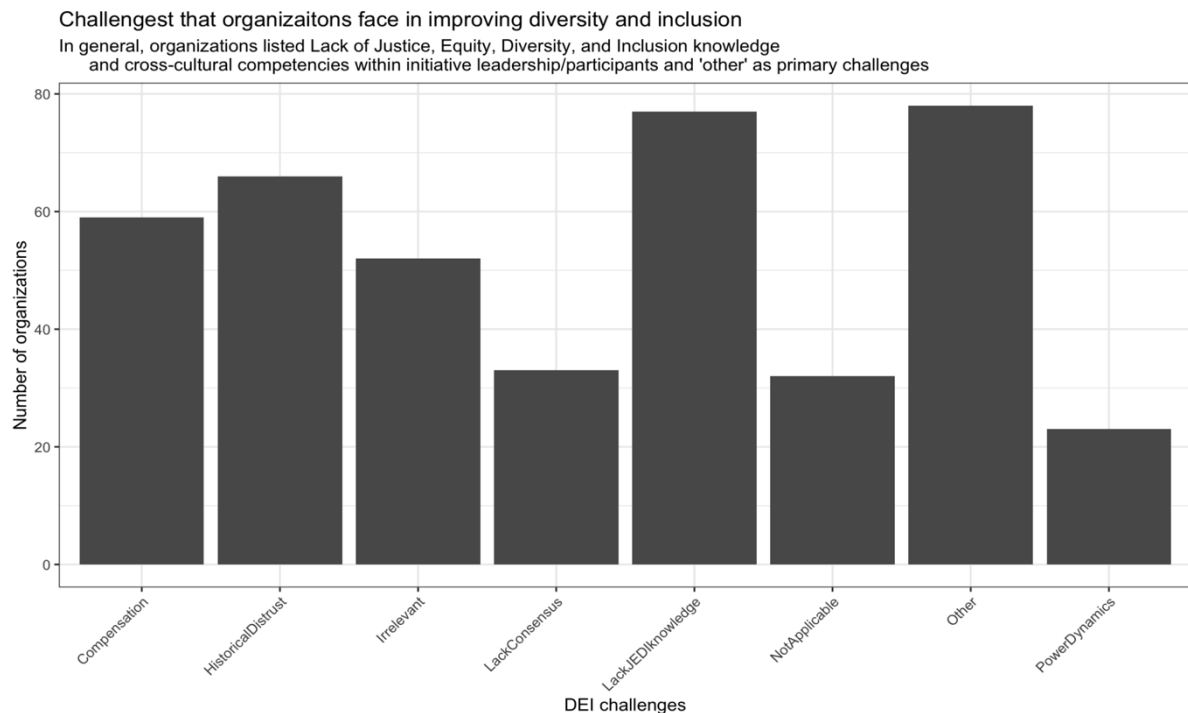
Challenges that ranked as either a 4 or 5 for initiatives	Value	Percent
Policy	71	12
Capacity	65	11
Competition	24	4
Lacking Support	49	8
DEI	73	12
Funding	119	20
Communication	44	7
Access	29	5
Engagement	55	9
Dominant Cultural	62	10

To better understand the results from this question, here is the complete language for the choices offered:

- Poorly designed and/or implemented public policy (“Policy” above)
- Lack of capacity for coordination and/or “backbone” organization support (“Capacity” above)
- Internal conflict or competing interest/priorities/perspectives (“Competition” above)
- Lack of public understanding/support (“Lacking Support” above)
- Difficulty in engaging an inclusive and diverse constituency (“DEI” above)
- Insufficient project implementation funding (“Funding” above)
- Difficulty maintaining communication and information flow internally amongst partners (“Communication” above)
- Insufficient access to geospatial data and/or scientific information (“Access” above)
- Difficulty in engaging key constituents, stakeholders, and/or decision-makers (“Engagement” above)
- The dominant culture system undermines our ability to build collective values around our landscape. (“Dominant Cultural” above)
- Other

QUESTION: DEI challenges

Respondents were asked to identify the challenges they face in pursuing efforts to become more inclusive of diverse voices across their landscape. The responses were wide ranging:



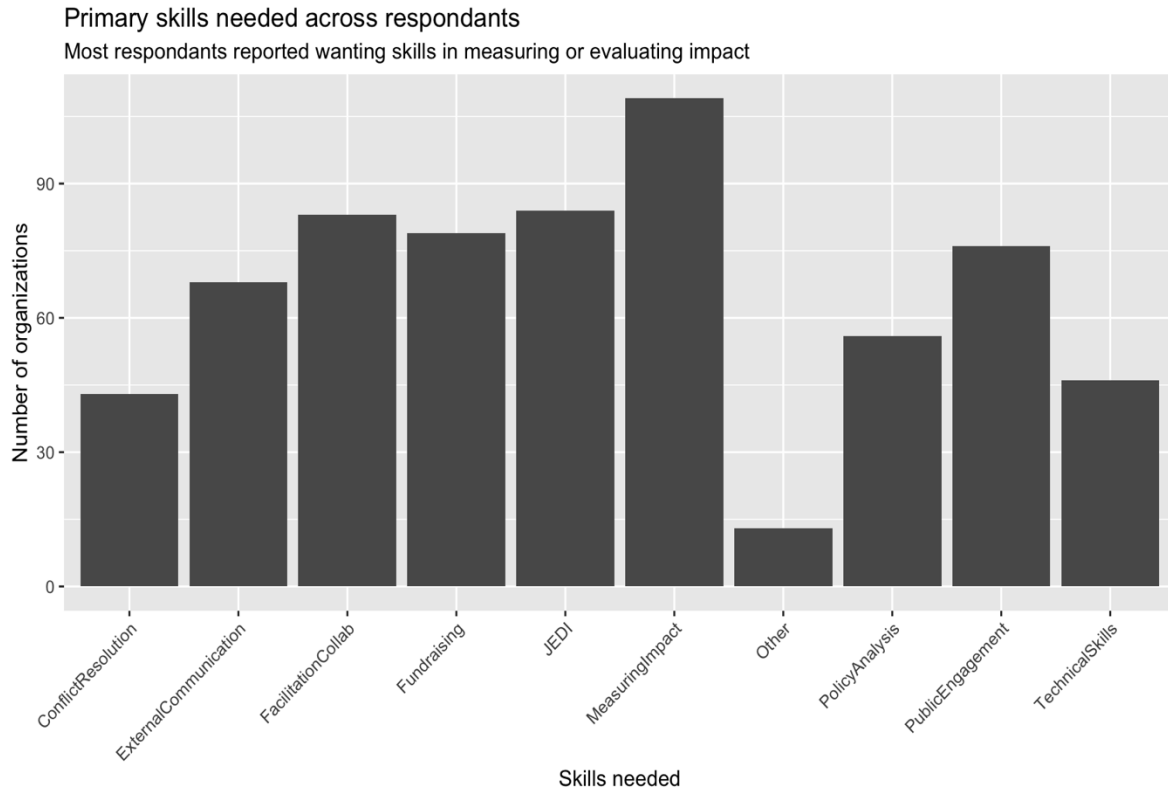
Topic	Value	Percent
Lack Consensus	33	8
Lack JEDI knowledge	77	18
Historical Distrust	66	16
Power Dynamics	23	5
Other	78	19
Irrelevant	52	12
Not Applicable	32	8
Compensation	59	14

To better understand the results from this question, here is the complete language for the choices offered:

- Not applicable: our initiative is led by marginalized communities already
- Not applicable: Our initiative is not pursuing efforts to become more inclusive of diverse voices
- Lack of consensus amongst partners about the importance of doing so (“Lack Consensus” above)
- Lack of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion knowledge and cross-cultural competencies within initiative leadership/participants (“Lack JEDI Knowledge” above)
- Vision and goals of your initiative as currently articulated are not relevant to and/or reflective of all constituents (“Irrelevant” above)
- History of distrust in the landscape due to past behavior by mainstream conservation organizations (“Historic Distrust” above)
- Inability to appropriately compensate participation from marginalized communities (“Compensation” above)
- Power dynamics and unwillingness of key partners to cede and/or share power (“Power Dynamics” above)
- Other

QUESTION: Skill development needed

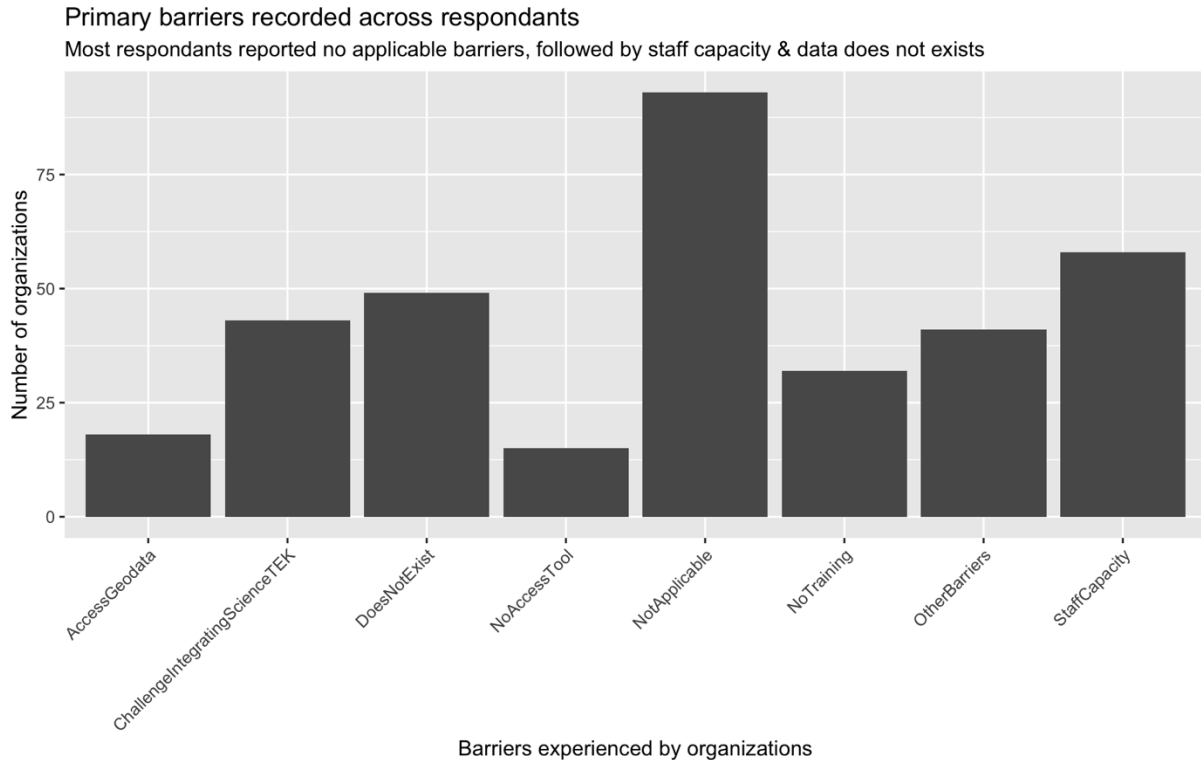
Respondents were asked to consider, on a practitioner level, where their largest needs are for skills building for better positioning them to advance the progress of their landscape conservation initiative. For practitioners, the topmost skill needing development is measuring or evaluating impact.



Needs	Value	Percent
Fundraising	79	12
Public Engagement	76	12
External Communication	68	10
Measuring Impact	109	17
Other	13	2
Policy Analysis	56	9
Facilitation/Collaborative expertise	83	13
Technical Skills	46	7
JEDI	84	13
Conflict Resolution	43	7

QUESTION: Barriers to using geospatial data and/or science

Respondents were asked what if any barriers they faced in using geospatial data and/or science to advance their initiative’s goals. Most respondents reported no applicable barriers; when barriers were identified, “staff capacity” and “data does not exist” were the most commonly cited challenges.



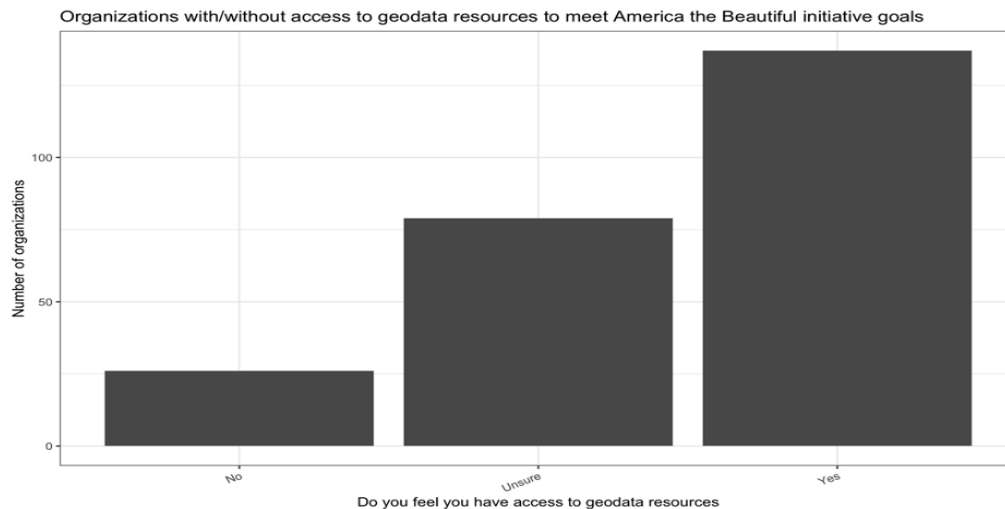
Barriers experienced	Value	Percent
No Access Tool	15	4
Does Not Exist	49	14
Staff Capacity	58	17
Challenge Integrating Science/TEK	43	12
Other Barriers	41	12
No Training	32	9
Not Applicable	93	27
Access Geodata	18	5

To better understand the results from this question, here are the complete language for the choices offered:

- Not applicable--we don't have barriers to using geospatial data and/or science ("Not Applicable" above)
- The geospatial data we want doesn't exist ("Does Not Exist" above)
- The geospatial data exists, but we don't have access to it ("Access Geodata" above)
- We don't have the staff capacity to integrate geospatial data into our work ("Staff Capacity" above)
- We don't have the training or technical assistance to use the geospatial datasets or tools we'd like to use ("No Training" above)
- We don't have access to tools and/or equipment [e.g., GIS software] to integrate geospatial data into our work ("No Access Tool" above)
- Challenges in synergistically integrated geospatial data/scientific ways of knowing with traditional ways of knowing ("Challenge Integrating Science/TEK" above)
- We don't see the value of integrating geospatial data into our work
- Other

QUESTION: Data needs for America the Beautiful goals

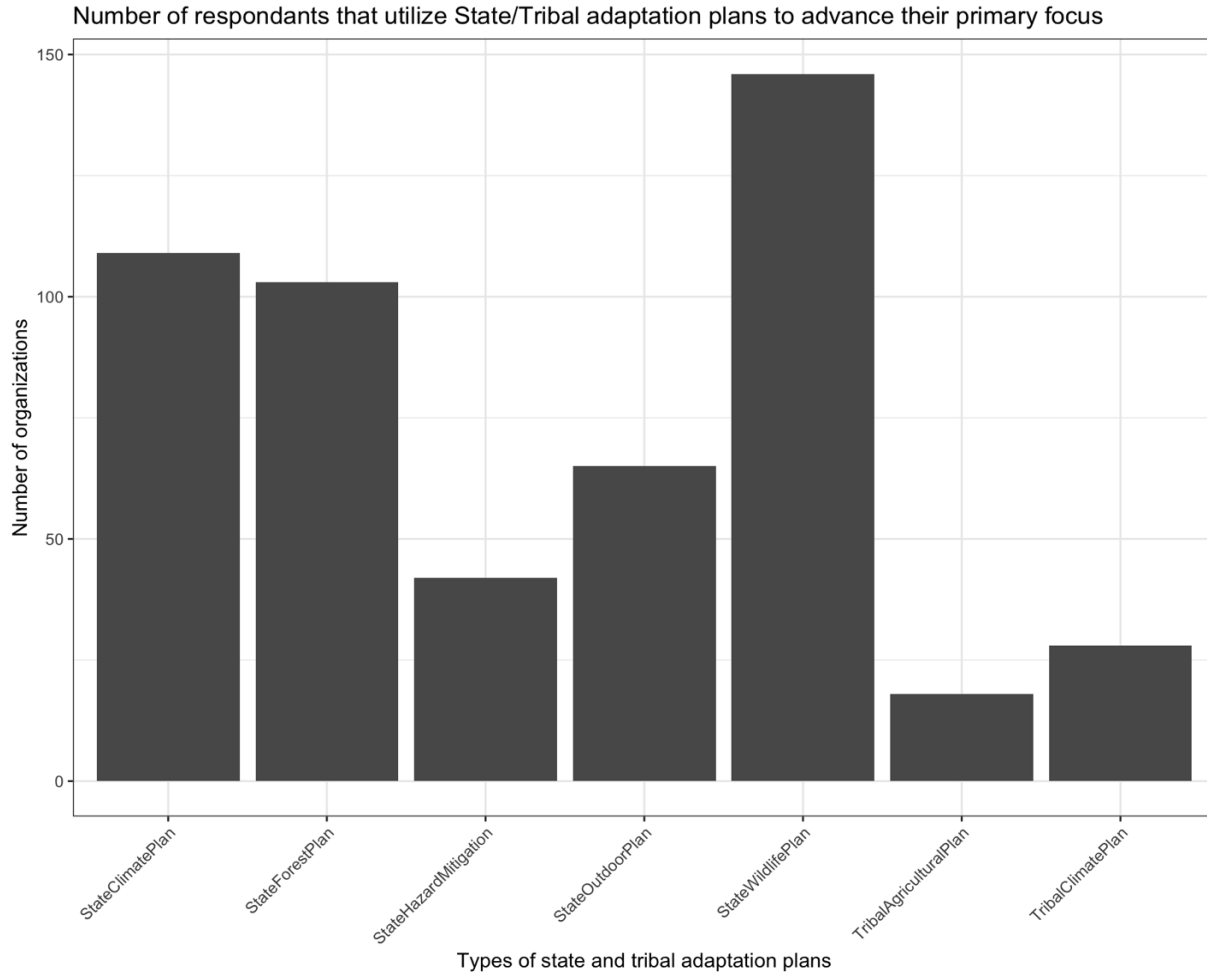
Initiatives were asked if they did or did not (or were unsure whether they had) have access to the necessary geodata resources to meet, specifically, America the Beautiful initiative goals. More than half responded affirmatively.



Geodata access	Value	Percent
No	26	11
Unsure	79	33
Yes	137	57

QUESTION: Utilization of Plans

Initiatives were asked if they made use of state and Tribal plans to advance their work. The most commonly used plans are the State Wildlife Action Plans.



State & Tribal Plans used for advancing mission	Value	Percent
State Climate Plan	109	21
Tribal Climate Plan	28	5
State Forest Plan	103	20
State Outdoor Plan	65	13
State Wildlife Plan	146	29
Tribal Agricultural Plan	18	4
State Hazard Mitigation Plan	42	8

About the author

Molly McDevitt is an applied wildlife research ecologist, educator, and conservation community builder. She is currently finishing a PhD in Fish and Wildlife Biology and holds Masters in wildlife biology and certificate in Natural Resource Conflict Resolution at the University of Montana, in Missoula, MT. Her research focuses in the following areas: (1) understanding how climate, landscape and human factors influence wildlife populations; and (2) understanding how diverse stakeholder collaborations can help sustain both wildlife and rural communities across the American West. Molly is also an instructor at the Wild Rockies Field Institute, where she teaches topics ranging from conservation of wildlife populations to land use ethics and collaboration. In most of her positions, however, Molly works closely with wildlife and landscape conservation organizations, facilitating effective collaborations and applying analytical tools to address complex conservation issues. Molly can be contacted at molly1.mcdevitt@umconnect.umt.edu.

About the Network for Landscape Conservation

The Network for Landscape Conservation advances collaborative, cross border conservation as an essential approach to connect and protect nature, culture, and community. Launched by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (Cambridge, MA) and partners in 2011, and now fiscally sponsored by the Center for Large Landscape Conservation (Bozeman, MT), the Network is led by a 30-person Coordinating Committee of conservation and stewardship leaders in the non-profit, private, public, academic, and philanthropic sectors in the U.S. and Canada. The Network today includes more than 300 organizational partners and 6,000 individual practitioners. Together, this growing community is developing effective tools and strategies and advancing best practices and policies to help people sustain the integrated landscape systems we cannot live without. www.landscapeconservation.org