

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



Photo: NatureBridge

Dear Colleagues,

What an incredibly difficult year 2020 has been! We made unprecedented adjustments this year to create some semblance of normalcy in our lives and work. The reality is that the challenges we faced in 2020 will continue as we head into a new year—a global pandemic, systemic racism, and risks to the survival of the environmental education field. Now more than ever, we need to act together, and act urgently.

Despite moving to an entirely virtual format since March, Blue Sky significantly ramped up programming in response to members' needs for connecting about COVID-19 impacts and recovery—hosting a series of 9 Community Calls in 5 months, culminating in a Virtual Convening in September to discuss and outline a collaborative learning and action agenda for the field.

The pandemic elevated the need for access to nature and green spaces to provide respite, well-being, and a sense of community, and further highlighted the disparities in who has this access. Rethink Outside™ found new meaning, providing a framework to talk about nature as a powerful connector and solution to many new as well as deeply-rooted social and environmental challenges.

It has been gratifying to see the Blue Sky community come together in new and compelling ways this year, cementing the unique role of Blue Sky as connector, convener, and collaborator for funders and practitioners promoting environmental literacy and connections to nature. I am encouraged by what we accomplished despite the challenges. We hope you enjoy our 2020 Annual Report and see your contributions to this powerful community reflected in the following pages.

Guided by the launch of a strategic action plan in early 2021, Blue Sky will leverage our collaborative network in 2021 to inspire, deepen, and expand funding to create a just future for people and nature. We hope you will join us as we embark on a bold plan to support our movement to be more strategic, more equitable, and better resourced.

Wishing you all a happy, healthy, and safe holiday season.

Anupama Joshi
Executive Director, Blue Sky Funders Forum



BOARD

Jason Morris
Pisces Foundation (Chair)

Lois Morrison
Harold M. and Adeline S. Morrison
Family Foundation (Vice Chair)

Lise Aangeenbrug
Outdoor Foundation

Nancy Bales
Gray Family Foundation

Kathleen Doffermyre
George B. Storer Foundation

Kim Moore Bailey
Youth Outside (EGA Board Liaison)

Ann Shulman
Lampert Byrd Foundation

STAFF

Anupama Joshi
Executive Director

Christina James
Program Manager

Blue Sky Funders Forum is a working group of the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA).

Reflecting on our year together

2020 has been a year of growth, learning, and action for the Blue Sky community.



43 REGISTRANTS

For **March 5 Regional Convening in Oakland, CA**, hosted with the Bay Area Environmental Education Funders Collaborative

35

members

6

new members

We asked our members, what are the strengths of Blue Sky?

- "Resources, networking and collaboration."
- "The knowledge of the members."
- "The individuals in the network all have the power to act, and act quickly."
- "Funder and practitioner voices are both included in conversations."



"Relationships are infrastructure for our work and in the work we fund. This type of group is invaluable."

Rachel Szczytko, Pisces Foundation

"The most recent convening has us excited about the future of Blue Sky, and the potential of this network."

Lois Morrison & Madeline Burgess,
Harold M. and Adeline S. Morrison Family Foundation
Feedback on Blue Sky's first virtual convening

3 COFFEE CHATS + 9 COMMUNITY CALLS ON COVID-19 IMPACTS AND RESPONSE



Engaging funders, activating collaboration, showcasing impact

2

FUNDER WEBINARS

(Tracking the Field, May 2020 and Collective Evaluation, July 2020)



Photo: Life Lab

2300+

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS

including

500+ FUNDERS

(116% increase from 2019)



Photo: Big City Mountaineers

\$97M

in environmental literacy funding (2018 grants data recorded in *Tracking the Field*)

"[Blue Sky] is one of the few places for environmental education funders to talk about opportunities."

Alex Hooker
S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

"Several of the webinars have provided thoughtful material on developments in the field that I have incorporated into the development of a Master Plan for a new Wetland Preserve which is being developed for education programming."

Mary Jo Veverka
Veverka Family Foundation



950+

Twitter followers (43% increase from 2019)

8

blog posts published



Photo: Discover the Delaware

Sharing hope, deepening connections, aligning action: a just future for people and nature

Blue Sky Funders Forum convened stakeholders for a Virtual Convening on September 8, 9, and 10, 2020. Together, we learned, networked, and collaborated around opportunities to advance safe, meaningful outdoor experiences for all, and to rebuild healthier communities.

In response to the challenges facing funders and the field because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our conversations centered on collaborative action to:

- ensure the survival and vitality of organizations in this field
- center racial and social equity in our work
- integrate outdoor access and education in preK-college contexts
- pivot toward a new normal

Breakout sessions highlighted opportunities for collaborative action in the Pacific Northwest, Chesapeake Bay, Maine, Bay Area, and Southeast regions. Over 200 funders and practitioners participated in this virtual event.

The [convening summary report](#) summarizes our learnings, ideas, and next steps. Stay tuned for opportunities to engage in our collaborative action agenda in 2021!

Drawing on the theme of Blue Sky Funders Forum’s 2020 Convening, “Sharing Hope, Deepening Connections, Aligning Action,” Blue Sky invited funder and practitioner participants to share stories from the field to inspire hope. This [Inspirations Book](#), a compilation of 16 stories features innovative partnerships, adaptive programming, youth leadership, and emerging areas of opportunity to connect people and nature.



2020 has been a year of compounding crises and challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted life in all communities, and presented disproportionate health and economic impacts for communities of color and under-resourced communities. The violent, ongoing legacy of systemic racism came into greater public focus this year, sparking urgent calls to action among funders and practitioners to advance racial equity and justice. For the Blue Sky community, it is clear that creating safe, readily accessible access to the outdoors for all people is an important step toward building better health and quality of life for all as we address systemic injustices.

In what ways have Blue Sky members modified grantmaking in response to the pandemic? (Responses from 2020 member survey. Additional information on U.S. foundations' responses to COVID-19 has been published by the [Center for Effective Philanthropy](#).)

- 93% reached out to grantees to understand emerging needs
- 86% provided flexibility for using grant funds
- 73% relaxed reporting and/or proposal requirements
- 66% provided rapid response/relief funds

How are Blue Sky members deepening their understanding of and commitment to racial equity and justice? (Responses from 2020 member survey.)

- 75% report that equity is a stated value for their organization
- 75% report that their organization's leadership engage in conversations on equity and how it impacts the communities they support
- 56% report minimizing burdens on grantees through short, concise grant applications

Rethink Outside: Elevating Connections to Nature During COVID-19

In response to requests from funders and practitioners for guidance on how they might best communicate during COVID-19, Blue Sky engaged Seven November Inc., with support from the Pisces Foundation, to develop tailored messages for COVID-19 response and recovery. This recommended messaging amplifies the shared narrative values and centers issues of inequity that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. [This messaging brief](#) draws on best practices in crisis communications and offers examples from Blue Sky partners and national media.

Moving Forward as a Community

Blue Sky responded to the crises of 2020 by amplifying members' [responses to COVID-19](#) and [calls for racial justice](#); hosting a series of community calls for members to discuss strategies and opportunities for collaborative action; and hosting a [virtual convening](#) with funders and practitioners leading to a collaborative learning and action agenda for strengthening the field.

Many unknowns remain about the future of the work that Blue Sky members support. As many as 63% of environmental education providers [are at risk](#) of permanent closure due to impacts of the pandemic. Together with members, advisors, and other partners, Blue Sky looks forward to activating a learning and collaboration agenda in 2021 to support organizations in the field, and to advance racial equity and justice.



Photo: Peralta Hacienda Historical Park Camp

Rethink Outside



Photo: Discover the Delaware

In October 2019, Blue Sky launched [Rethink Outside](#)—a campaign to challenge and transform prevailing notions around time spent in nature and lift up the benefits of time spent outdoors as a basic human right. Rethink Outside promotes a [shared narrative](#) that moves the vital work of connecting people with the outdoors from a nicety to an absolute necessity. Using this narrative as a tool, we can elevate the priority and urgency of our work, bring new resources to the field, and catalyze a cross-sector movement for equitable access to the outdoors and its many benefits.

Throughout 2020, Rethink Outside has mobilized and equipped the funding and practitioner communities to engage new partners, inviting stakeholders to access communications tools, messaging research, and storytelling training. Through Rethink Outside, we can lift up and energize a growing social movement and create a future where everyone has positive experiences outdoors and shares the joy, health, growth, and sense of community that come with it.

By the field and for the field...

“This work is really propelling us forward in Maine in a cohesive shared narrative and helping us build power in the nature-based education sector. Thanks for the explicit focus on equity—it is essential!”

“The research that led to the [Rethink Outside] framework and supporting tools and resources for nonprofits is a great service to the field.”

Rethink Outside stakeholder survey respondents



Photo: Teton Science Schools

Rethink Outside with us.

Now more than ever, we have a shared responsibility to open doors to positive, rewarding experiences outdoors for all people, regardless of where they live or their backgrounds. Take action now at rethinkoutside.org, because when people connect with nature we all benefit.



23

STORIES PUBLISHED
sponsored by 13 funders

Photo: Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

294

pledges made by
95
partners

360+

ORGANIZATIONS
have accessed
Rethink Outside
messaging resources

3

storytelling
workshops,
training

104

practitioners,
sponsored by

20

funders

“The perspective it gave me has really helped me put [my organization’s] impact into a more approachable and exciting context... The diverse stories represented and perspectives given were essential to this learning, and I so appreciate you sharing and putting them at the forefront to be thinking about in our own work.”

Rethink Outside storytelling workshop participant

1400+

Rethink Outside
newsletter subscribers

4

Rethink Outside
webinars
1000+ attendees



Photo: Anna Mar for Ocean Connectors



Blue Sky advisors are nonprofit and academic leaders that contribute vision, guidance, and unique perspective to Blue Sky's staff, board, and members. Advisors act as a critical link for Blue Sky funders to understand stakeholder and field needs, and they provide input on the development of Blue Sky resources and programs.

ADVISORS

Nicole Ardoin
Stanford University

Don Baugh
Upstream Alliance

Judy Braus
NAAEE

Timothy Carter
Second Nature

Milton Chen
George Lucas Educational
Foundation

Kevin Coyle
National Wildlife Federation

Curt Ellis
FoodCorps

Chip Giller
Grist

José González

Kelly Keena
National Environmental
Education Advisory Council

Rue Mapp
Outdoor Afro

Juan Martinez
The Aspen Institute

Jackie Ostfeld
Sierra Club

Allison Price
Lincoln Park Zoo



Blue Sky FUNDERS FORUM

MEMBERS

Photo: Jessica Zamudio for Latino Outdoors

THE ARTHUR M. BLANK
FAMILY FOUNDATION



the David & Lucile
Packard
FOUNDATION

GEORGE B.
STORER
FOUNDATION

Germeshausen
Foundation



Harold M. & Adeline S.
Morrison Family
FOUNDATION

Lampert Byrd
Foundation

Leonard C. and
Mildred F. Ferguson
Foundation



OUTDOOR
FOUNDATION

Parish Family Fund

Peterffy Foundation



Pittman Family
Foundation



S. D. BECHTEL, JR.
FOUNDATION
STEPHEN BECHTEL FUND



The Curtis & Edith
Munson Foundation

THE
REDFORD
CENTER

