

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Colleagues,

As I reflect on 2021, I am struck by the enormity of what we've experienced in the second year of a global pandemic which continues to rage on. And I am humbled and encouraged by the power of connections which nourished us to find joy in each other, and to strive for a more vibrant and equitable future. The Blue Sky community embodied this through the launch of an ambitious strategic plan, robust programming, and support for Rethink Outside™ – a shared narrative campaign to challenge and transform prevailing notions around time spent in nature and lift up the benefits of time spent outdoors from a nicety to a necessity.

Blue Sky's 2021-2024 Strategic Plan is grounded in our commitment to racial equity and justice – reflecting an evolution in exploring racial equity and justice within the Blue Sky Funders Forum. Additionally, it frames our goals to increase funding for the field, funder engagement from allied fields and under-funded geographic regions, and the co-creation of shared tools and resources to strengthen the movement to connect people with nature.

Despite still being entirely virtual, Blue Sky tried and tested various formats to provide useful content while facilitating connections and opportunities for relationship building. We were encouraged to see high participation numbers throughout the year and thrilled to hear positive feedback on the content and framing with equity as a central theme.

We welcomed 20 Rethink Outside™ Fellows in October who are participating in leadership and communications capacity building sessions through March 2022. The fellowship aims to elevate the voices of leaders and storytellers who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color. In the spirit of community building, we are inviting all qualified applicants who are not part of the inaugural cohort to selected trainings and to Rethink Outside™ Storytellers – an online community to connect, share, and access resources.

I hope you enjoy reviewing and reflecting on our collaborative work in 2021 through this annual report. Blue Sky Funders Forum is stronger because of each one of you, and your belief in our vision that every person – regardless of race, identity, or community – has the right and opportunity to experience meaningful connections in the outdoors that improve quality of life, health, and social wellbeing. I appreciate and welcome your phone calls, emails, questions, and feedback – please keep them coming!



Anupama Joshi
Executive Director



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
Justice Outside (EGA Board Liaison)

Ann Shulman
Lampert Byrd Foundation

STAFF

Anupama Joshi
Executive Director

Berkeley Bryant
Program Coordinator

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



Reflecting on our year together

2021 has been a year of connection, co-creation, and action for the Blue Sky community. Despite the virtual nature of all programming and events, we came together to uplift the benefits of time spent outside and to dedicate more resources to philanthropic initiatives that center trust and racial equity and justice.



Annual Convening: June 3-4

- 90 registrants
- 22 Blue Sky members
- 5 allied funder networks
- 21 nonprofits
- 7 non-member funders

38
members

6
new members

\$116M in environmental literacy funding
(10.5% increase since 2017)
(2019 grants data recorded in [Tracking the Field](#))

4 COFFEE CHATS

Indigenous Communities and Environmental Education

Hannah Shulman, (11th Hour Project)

MAY

Public Health and Its Connection to Nature

Sara Espinoza and Vernessa Perry (National Environmental Education Foundation—NEEF)

AUGUST

Progress Update on the 2021-2024 Strategic Plan

(Blue Sky staff)

OCTOBER

Policy Wins and Opportunities for Funders

Liz Houston, (National Wildlife Federation's Early Childhood Health Outdoors – ECHO), Sarah Bodor, (North American Association for Environmental Education), and Jackie Ostfeld (Sierra Club / OAK)

DECEMBER

We asked our members, how has Blue Sky influenced your work in 2021?

"Blue Sky has allowed us to expand our network of funders and partners in the conservation space. It's great to have partners and resources to talk about social equity and the intersection of this lens in the conservation field.

Lisa McClure, National Park Foundation

"The virtual meetings were incredibly well designed, with a focus on equity as the organizing concept. I made important contacts in the breakout rooms and continue to be in touch with several of those attendees."

Kathleen Doffermyre, George B. Storer Foundation

"I'm heartened by the greater public awareness of the correlation between outdoor access and emotional health, environmental literacy and preparedness/resiliency. It gives me hope and drives me to continue working on finding funding for programs related to this."

Veronique Pittman, Pittman Family Foundation

Engaging funders, activating collaboration, showcasing impact



**3-PART LEARNING
SERIES ON
TRUST-BASED
PHILANTHROPY
PRACTICES**

3

FUNDER WEBINARS

Tracking the Field
Preview of the 2021-2024 Strategic Plan
Strengthening Communities Through Advocacy



Photo: Discover the Delaware

The Sum of Us

A conversation with author Heather McGhee and Dr. Gail C. Christopher about the impacts of systemic racism on outdoor access.

“Blue Sky’s strategic plan, and the working sessions around it, have helped us connect with new partners and consider new possibilities for our grantmaking.”

Rachel Szczytko,
Pisces Foundation

3,200+

newsletter subscribers

including 900+ funders
(80% increase from 2020)



Photo: Outdoor Afro



3

blog posts published

“The numerous social justice and equitable access resources have been invaluable to our work.”

Mary Jo Veverka,
Veverka Family Foundation

1,500+

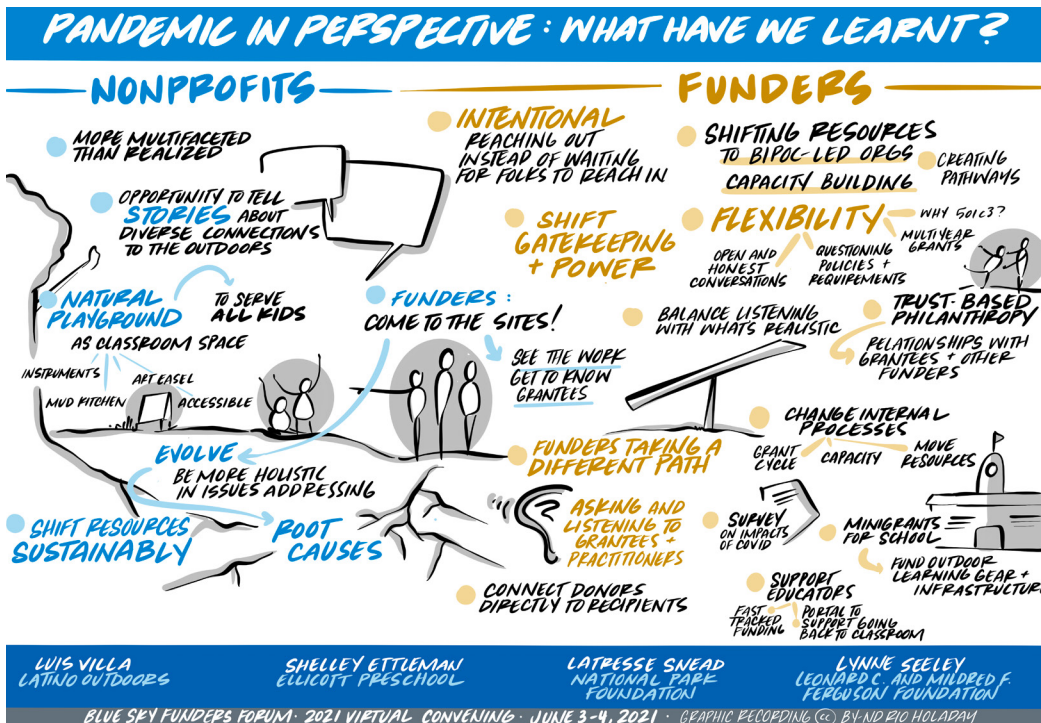
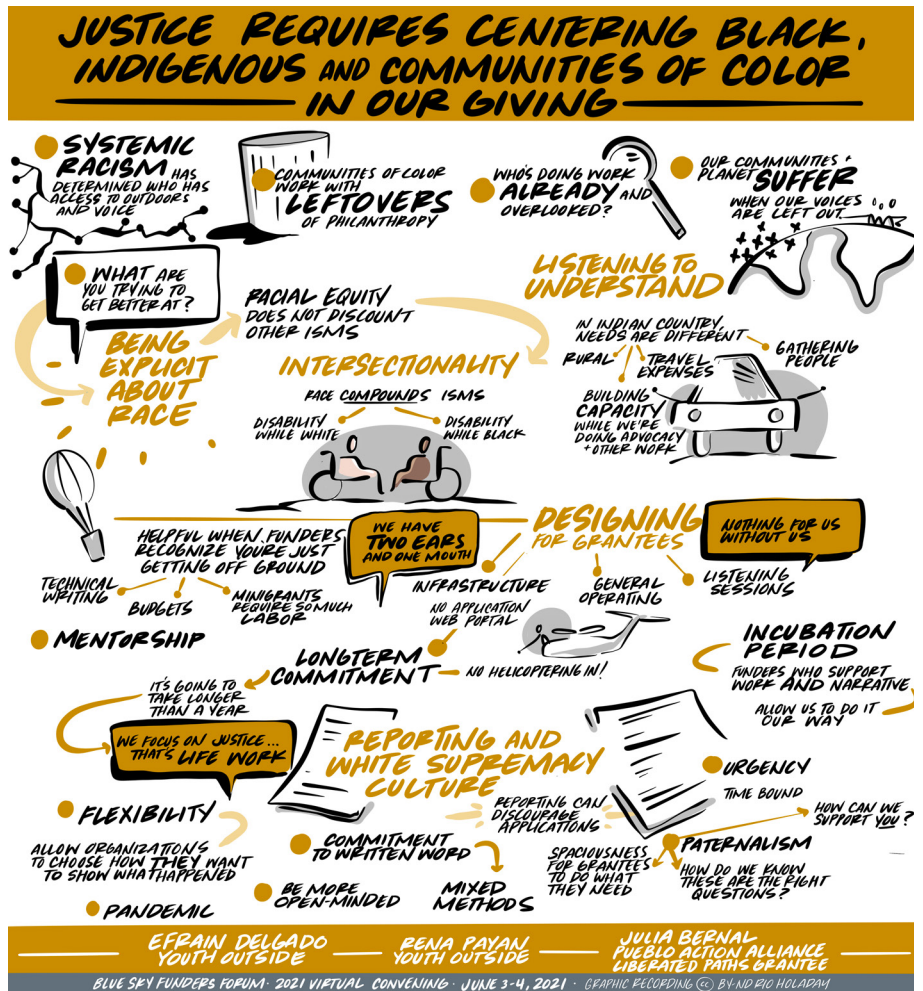
Twitter and LinkedIn followers

(55% increase from 2020)

Photo: Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Co-designing an agenda centering reflections from the pandemic, racial equity and justice, and policy advocacy

90 funders, nonprofits, and experts participated in the 2021 Blue Sky Virtual Convening: *A Just Future for People and Nature*. Together, we reflected on the current state of the environmental literacy and connections to nature fields and envisioned a bold future that brings more funding and focus to Black, Indigenous, and communities of color. The ten ideas co-created at the convening will drive Blue Sky's work as we continue to elevate equitable opportunities for meaningful outdoor experiences and connection to nature. View the 2021 Convening report [here](#).



We are incredibly grateful you chose to spend time with the Blue Sky community in 2021 to connect, align, and take action together. Equitable outdoor access continues to be critical to the mental and physical health of everyone, especially for communities of color and underserved communities. Unfortunately, not everyone is guaranteed the benefits of the outdoors. Blue Sky strives to address this inequity through learning opportunities, ultimately bringing more support to this work.

Blue Sky is strengthened by our members who are committed to centering racial equity and justice, and building capacity for the movement to connect people with nature. We are happy to share a few highlights from the 2021 annual member survey:

A majority of Blue Sky members **(76%) report that equity and justice are organizational values**

General grants or **multi-year funding is offered by 75% of Blue Sky members**

85% of Blue Sky members offer support beyond the check (introductions to other funders and experts, highlighting grantee projects, capacity building opportunities)

70% of Blue Sky members model transparency, power awareness, and vulnerability in relationships with grantees



Members' hopes for Blue Sky's future work:

"The commitment to empower stakeholders to develop shared tools and resources, build capacity, and share best practices to strengthen the movement to connect people with nature."

Shannon Sprague, NOAA

"I'm very excited about efforts to dismantle systemic racism, build philanthropic support and strengthen the movement."

Heather Rossetti, San Diego Foundation

"I'm really excited about our goals in moving the sector toward racial equity and justice. For too long this work has been driven by dominant cultural perspectives and ideas. A shift in environmental education will help shift the whole environmental movement."

Nancy Bales, Gray Family Foundation

It's time to tell a new story



Photo: CuriOdyssey

**rethink
outside™**

Rethink Outside™ was launched in 2019 as a call to action for all who believe that access to the benefits of time spent outdoors is a critical human right. Two years later, we have connected with hundreds of funders, practitioners, and allied fields, unifying our voices to express the benefits of time spent outdoors and to allocate critical resources to this work. Access to green spaces and the outdoors has become even more critical as we continue to grapple with a pandemic, and need the respite that nature provides for mental and physical well-being. Public land use and outdoor recreation has witnessed drastic increases, yet we still continue to see inequities in access to these public services and opportunities, making our work even more urgent. The Blue Sky community has the opportunity to capitalize on the heightened awareness and interest in the outdoors by using the shared narrative – uplifting the benefits of time spent outdoors during the pandemic and beyond to support equitable access.

In 2021, Blue Sky launched the Rethink Outside™ Fellowship, a 6-month capacity and skill-building engagement for leaders and storytellers identifying as Black, Indigenous, and people of color. The inaugural cohort of 20 fellows draw on their own experiences, craft stories, access resources, and co-create the program. Designed intentionally to be diverse and intergenerational, the cohort is enhancing their communications and leadership skills by building community with each other and with experts in the field. Through this experience, fellows will be able to expand their network of supporters and bring in new investments to their work. All qualified applicants to the fellowship have been invited to join an online gathering space to be in community, and share events, resources, tools, and more.

The Rethink Outside™ Fellowship would not have been possible without the support and dedication of numerous community leaders and grantmakers. We invite you to [learn more about the team](#) that made the fellowship a reality.

Rethink Outside with us

Access to the outdoors has never been more critical to the health and wellbeing of communities. As Blue Sky works to create more meaningful outdoor experiences, we invite you to shift the narrative and redefine who is outdoors by taking action at rethinkoutside.org and using the shared narrative.



27

STORIES PUBLISHED
sponsored by 13 funders

Photo: The Student Conservation Association

137

Rethink Outside™
partners

600+

ATTENDEES

at

4 Rethink Outside™
webinars



400+

ORGANIZATIONS
have accessed [Rethink Outside™](https://rethinkoutside.org)
messaging resources

Photo: Education Outside

The narrative is changing! We love seeing the shared narrative activated across the field, like in California Governor [Gavin Newsom's Tweet](#) about the incredible investment in outdoor access, the [Hispanic Access Foundation](#) highlighting how communities benefit from equitable access, or [studies lifting up](#) the connection between mental health and the outdoors.



Photo: Teton Science Schools

1

storytelling
workshop

28

practitioners
trained, including

20

Rethink Outside™
Fellows



Authentic engagement

Blue Sky Advisors are nonprofit and academic leaders who 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. We are incredibly grateful for their guidance. Starting in 2022, Blue Sky will hold space for authentic funder-nonprofit conversations through a Program Committee.

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



Members



THE ARTHUR M. BLANK
FAMILY FOUNDATION



the David & Lucile
Packard
FOUNDATION

Elmina B. Sewall
FOUNDATION



GEORGE B.
STORER
FOUNDATION

Germeshausen
Foundation



Harold M. & Adeline S.
Morrison Family
FOUNDATION



Lampert Byrd
Foundation

Leonard C. and
Mildred F. Ferguson
Foundation



Maxwell | Hanrahan
FOUNDATION



National
Park Foundation



OUTDOOR
FOUNDATION

Parish Family Fund



Pittman Family
Foundation



SFF San Francisco
Foundation

Sand Hill Foundation



The Curtis & Edith
Munson Foundation

The Grossman Family
Foundation

THE
REDFORD
CENTER



WILLIAM PENN
FOUNDATION



Blue
Sky 
FUNDERS
FORUM

blueskyfundersforum.org