



DEAR BLUE SKY COMMUNITY,

After almost a year of listening and reflection, surveys and conversations, we are thrilled to share Blue Sky's new strategic plan which will drive our work over the next three years.

Racial equity and justice are the central frame of our new strategic plan and served as a guide in the planning process. The bold vision outlined in the plan is informed by your valuable input and responds to the emerging needs of the movement. We hope you will see your contributions in the updated mission and vision, goals, and objectives. We could not have reached this milestone without you, and truly hope you'll stay engaged, joining us in the journey to ensure 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.**

Building from a 2015 strategic framework, the three-year strategic plan (2021-2024) is responsive to our evolution as an organization in exploring racial equity and justice within the Blue Sky Funders Forum – our community of members, leadership, programs, events, communications, and operational processes. In 2020, we conducted an equity and inclusion audit which has guided the goals and objectives outlined in the plan. Blue Sky board and staff worked from March 2020 to March 2021 to develop this strategic plan, inviting more than 100 stakeholders (including members, non-member funders, advisors, and nonprofits) to provide input and suggestions on future community needs.

We grounded our planning in this input, refining our mission, creating an updated vision for the future, and developing these four strategic goals for the Blue Sky Funders Forum:

1. **Inspire Philanthropy.** Connect and convene funders to build philanthropic support for meaningful outdoor experiences and connections to nature.
2. **Champion Racial Equity and Justice in Philanthropy.** Highlight and advocate for dismantling systemic racism that limits access to funding and opportunities for power-building in the field.
3. **Facilitate Learning and Collaboration.** Facilitate connections, empower stakeholders to develop shared tools and resources, build capacity, and share best practices to strengthen the movement to connect people with nature.
4. **Strengthen and Thrive.** Ensure that Blue Sky has the resources, talent, and processes to advance its strategic priorities.

As a philanthropic community, Blue Sky is united in the belief that meaningful outdoor experiences are a human right. We welcome your thoughts and feedback on the future direction for Blue Sky and look forward to your continued partnership and engagement.

Onward!

Anupama Joshi
Executive Director

Jason Morris
Board Chair



OVERVIEW

The Blue Sky Funders Forum undertook a robust visioning process over the past year to guide future activities and growth. The strategic planning process was led by the Blue Sky board and staff and facilitated by HunterKemper Consulting.

The planning process incorporated learnings from the first six years of Blue Sky's creation and development, reflections on future aspirations and priorities, and robust input from stakeholders. A total of 139 stakeholders, including Blue Sky members, non-member funders, Blue Sky Advisors, and nonprofits responded to an electronic survey, which informed the plan. Blue Sky members and Advisors were engaged further through targeted calls to gather additional context on the survey input.

The Blue Sky board was actively involved in the planning process and their generosity with time, insights, vision, and commitment to the movement are sincerely appreciated.

The board identified various factors that have contributed to Blue Sky's success and that are essential to maintain while planning for ongoing growth:

- **Authentic relationships.**
- **Commitment to engaging funders, nonprofits, and researchers collaboratively.**
- Broad interest in the **movement and co-generation.**
- Professionalism and integrity.
- Willingness to **think broadly, explore creative new approaches**, and respond proactively.
- **Clarity of purpose** and connecting role of Blue Sky.



Blue Sky's new strategic plan codifies how racial equity and justice is centered within the Blue Sky Funders Forum, increasing funding for the field, establishing connections within the broader context of health, wellness, and thriving communities, and co-creating shared resources and tools for strengthening the movement. The mission and vision statements are updated to reflect these changes, and the strategic goals and objectives provide direction for action areas.



STRATEGIC PLAN

Mission

To inspire philanthropy that supports thriving communities by advancing equitable opportunities for meaningful outdoor experiences and connections to nature.

Vision

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.

STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



Connect and convene funders to **build philanthropic support** for meaningful outdoor experiences and connections to nature.

1. Increase funding for the field through aligned priorities and funder collaboration.
2. Increase the number of funders engaged in Blue Sky from allied sectors, and under-funded geographic regions.
3. Expand funder awareness and understanding of the need for and impacts of funding for the field.



Highlight and advocate for **dismantling systemic racism** that limits access to funding and opportunities for power-building in the field.

1. Develop a call to action among Blue Sky funders to collectively commit to advancing racial equity and justice through their philanthropy.
2. Provide concrete solutions and tools to facilitate learning, action, and accountability towards racial equity and justice within philanthropic organizations and grantmaking.
3. Facilitate understanding and adoption of trust-based philanthropy principles to address power and build equity to achieve justice.
4. Elevate voices and stories of individuals and organizations that are led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color in the field.



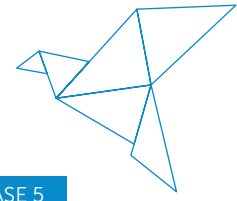
Facilitate connections, empower stakeholders to develop shared tools and resources, build capacity, and share best practices to **strengthen the movement** to connect people with nature.

1. Promote, assess and build capacity to use a shared narrative with Rethink Outside.
2. Build community and facilitate authentic funder and nonprofit conversations, including through Blue Sky Advisors.
3. Collect and share best practices and policies, develop resources and tools, and provide learning opportunities on stakeholder-identified topics and needs.
4. Support establishment of new and partnerships with existing regional funder collaboratives.

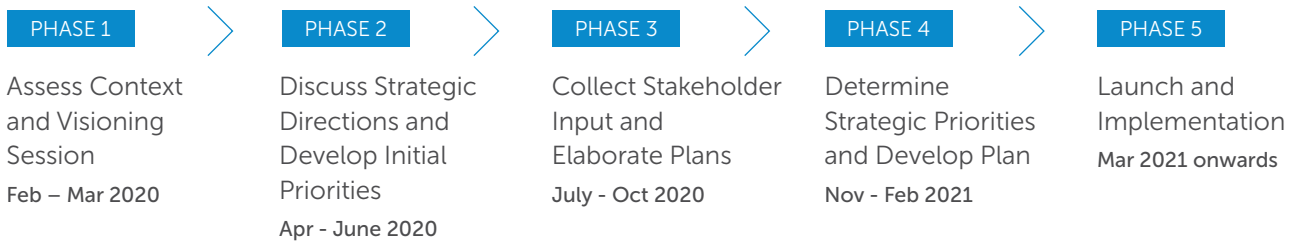


Ensure that Blue Sky has the **resources, talent, and processes** to advance its strategic priorities.

1. Expand Blue Sky impact through a robust membership with increased racial diversity, types of funders, sectors, and geographic regions.
2. Ensure that organizational policies, programs, and communications reflect Blue Sky's commitment to racial equity and justice.
3. Implement a funding plan that diversifies revenue sources and supports staffing and infrastructure for accomplishing strategic goals.
4. Build an active, diverse board with robust governance practices, recruitment and engagement plans.



PLANNING PROCESS



The year-long process of listening, reflection and visioning resulting in the Blue Sky strategic plan was facilitated by HunterKemper Consulting. Key components of the plan included:

Leadership Engagement: All seven board members were actively involved in the planning process, along with the executive director. Planning sessions were conducted in March, May, and December 2020, board member task forces met in January and February 2021, and the board approved the strategic plan in March 2021.

Stakeholder Engagement: Informed by two initial visioning sessions, the Blue Sky board prioritized collecting feedback from key stakeholders to inform the identified strategic goals. A total of 139 people responded to the survey and completed all or part of the questionnaire. Responses by stakeholder groups included the following:

- Members:** 16 individuals/15 funders (44% of 34 total members).
- Non-member funders / prospective members:** 21 individuals/17 funders.
- Nonprofits:** 96 individuals (51 with input; 45 with contact info only).
- Advisors:** 6 individuals (43% of 14 Advisors).

Stakeholder surveys were conducted between August 10 – September 20, 2020. The survey explored perceptions of Blue Sky’s mission and impact; involvement with and services of Blue Sky; reflections on advancing racial equity; ideas for future directions for Blue Sky; and demographic information about respondents.

Stakeholder surveys indicated strong support and affirmation of Blue Sky Funders Forum among respondents. Blue Sky was seen as serving a vital role for members, nonprofits and researchers, and the broader movement. The following graphic reflects the words that survey participants used in describing Blue Sky Funders Forum.



Funding Planning: Information related to finances and growth forecasts was compiled and a funding plan was developed with input from board leadership.

Equity & Inclusion Audit: Blue Sky conducted an equity and inclusion audit in 2020. The audit was conducted in partnership with Youth Outside and was aimed at assessing current alignment with the stated equity commitment, and identifying internal opportunities to center racial equity and justice. Findings and recommendations from the audit have informed the strategic plan.

ABOUT BLUE SKY FUNDERS FORUM

Established in 2014, Blue Sky Funders Forum exists to expand the amount of philanthropic investment and the community of funders supporting equitable access to meaningful outdoor experiences and connections to nature. What started six years back as a hopeful idea is now a vibrant network, drawing a wide range of funders and partners, sparking meaningful collaborations, and providing strategic vision for a stronger, more unified field.

Blue Sky **engages** and convenes funders to expand philanthropy that supports the many benefits of a stronger connection to nature. By connecting funders, practitioners, and researchers in the field, Blue Sky **activates** funder collaboration to advance shared goals. And Blue Sky **showcases** successful programs, strategies, and innovative partnerships to enrich and inform members' grantmaking.



OUR IMPACT

1. Funder Engagement

Blue Sky membership has doubled since the early years (17 in 2014-15 to 35 in 2021), with more than 500 funders engaging in programs or events hosted.

2. Funding

Overall funding trends for environmental literacy and outdoor experiences are on the rise with \$98 million in grants listed in the *Tracking the Field* database¹ for 2018. The proportion of environmental literacy grantmaking to overall environmental grantmaking has remained steady at approximately 5 percent over the years. Positive upward trends are reported for the total number of grants and the median amount of grants provided. An overall increase in general operating grants is also reported, representing a maturity in grantmaking for the field.

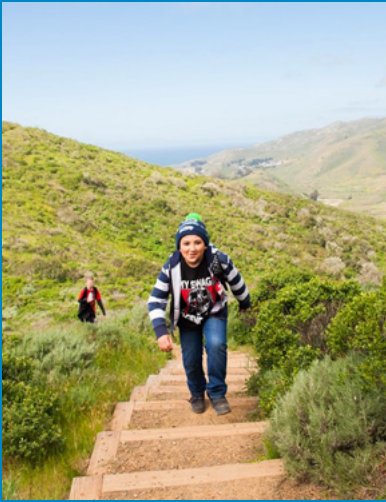
- **Impact Areas:** Education and Conservation are consistently the highest impact areas tagged for grants in the Blue Sky Tracking the Field database, followed by Youth Development, Social Justice, and Health & Wellness.
- **Age Groups:** A significant proportion of funding is allocated for school-age (grades K-12) with the least to early childhood (ages 0-5).
- **Geography:** The Pacific Coast and Northeast receive the highest amount of funding with the Gulf Coast receiving the least, as well as representing the lowest number of funders. The Southeast region reports the lowest median grant size.

3. Collaboration and Alignment

- **Outcome Areas Articulation:** In 2015, Blue Sky commissioned a series of research briefs that articulate the benefits of environmental literacy under five outcome areas – conservation, education, social justice, youth development, health & wellness. These outcomes areas have since been used by leading networks in the field such as the North American Association of Environmental Education (NAAEE), the Children & Nature Network, and other collective outcome efforts, facilitating consistency and understanding of the collective impact of this work.
- **Shared Narrative and Messaging: Rethink Outside™** is the first collaborative initiative undertaken by Blue Sky members – a shared narrative that moves the vital work of connecting people with the outdoors from a 'nice to have' to an absolute necessity. Launched in October 2019, the narrative was co-generated through a multi-year, inclusive process engaging close to 700 individuals. It is a call to action to amplify the growing movement to lift up the benefits of time spent outdoors as a basic human right, reshape the prevailing public narratives around time spent in nature, and engage new partners and allies. The first year of Rethink Outside engaged 100+ partners, developed 25 stories highlighting the narrative, trained 104 practitioners in strategic storytelling, and connected with thousands of people through webinars, events, and social media engagement.

¹ *Tracking the Field* is a searchable grants database hosted by the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA). Since 2015, Blue Sky Funders Forum has partnered with EGA to tag grants with an environmental literacy focus.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS IN BLUE SKY FUNDERS FORUM 2021-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN



- Deep commitment to centering racial equity and justice; elevating voices and stories of representatives and organizations that are led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color.
- Broadened focus from environmental literacy to meaningful outdoor experiences and connections to nature to engage funders in allied fields, and include all age groups from early childhood through adulthood.
- Increase place-based partnerships with regional funder collaboratives to address geographic gaps in geographic distribution of funding.
- Emphasize a trust-based philanthropy approach to build authentic relationships and power-sharing.
- Develop shared resources and tools such as the messaging framework through Rethink Outside to build capacity for impactful storytelling or other needs identified by stakeholders.

BLUE SKY 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

BLUE SKY STAFF

Anupama Joshi

Executive Director

Berkeley Bryant

Program Coordinator

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

