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# California Conservation Innovations: Constituency Engagement Strategy Evaluation

March 2020



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# Executive Summary

Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) that works with philanthropists to conserve land, water, and ocean resources while advancing healthy communities and social equity. For 20 years, RLF has made significant achievements in conservation by partnering with nonprofit organizations that can lead the effort to advance conservation benefits in their communities and beyond.

Despite the success that RLF has helped foster, California's environmental policies, institutions, and natural resources face considerable challenges in the years ahead. Conservation policies and funding have not evolved to reflect the interests of California's diverse populations. RLF's California Conservation Innovations (CCI) program, funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, seeks to address this imbalance to better reflect the needs, values, and faces of the entire state. To accomplish that goal, one of CCI's three core objectives is to engage younger and more ethnically diverse people in environmental advocacy and leadership. CCI refers to this objective as its constituency engagement strategy.

In the following report, we evaluate the importance and effectiveness of CCI's constituency engagement strategy. The qualitative and quantitative data laid out in this report are intended to:

- 1) Define CCI's grantmaking approach and impact;
- 2) Help RLF understand the effectiveness of its CCI constituency engagement strategy; and
- 3) Provide RLF with recommendations to enhance its constituency engagement strategy and further improve upon the impact and durability of the conservation outcomes in which it invests.

Through this assessment, RLF is endeavoring to establish a framework for broader, more intentional constituency engagement both for the future of the CCI program and for grantmaking across the entire organization.

## Why Constituency Engagement is Important

Philanthropies have increasingly focused their resources to solve intractable problems like climate change and environmental justice, but only a small percentage of those funds have historically benefited marginalized communities or been used to bridge social equity with conservation. RLF posits that if broader, more diverse coalitions can be built, conservation outcomes will not only be strengthened, but will also better meet the needs of the state's changing demographics. Building the capacity of diverse new leaders and inclusive coalitions will also help overcome barriers that have prevented many communities from effectively advocating for policies and funding that benefit their communities, whether that be equitable access to parks, climate resilience, or efforts to reduce factors that subject them to greater environmental risks.

## Key Findings

### CCI's Grantmaking Approach

- RLF is a **strategic connector**. Stakeholders and grantees describe RLF as playing a unique connective role, bridging and coordinating action across government, academia, community organizations, and the private sectors.
- RLF is a **supportive, strategic thought partner** who meets grantees where they are and works to align environmental and conservation work with their missions. Almost all grantees (90%) reported that CCI funding aligned with their organizational priorities, 86% agreed that RLF was responsive and supportive, and 81% found RLF staff to be valuable thought partners. One grantee reported that “If I want the best strategic advice I can get, I often turn to people at RLF.”
- RLF stands out as an **equity leader**, with grantees describing RLF as “ahead of the curve” when it comes to equity in the environmental and conservation space, especially with the CCI program. On the other hand, some grantees reported that RLF has room to grow in this area within their other grantmaking programs.
- RLF's **collaborative approach** is valued by grantees, and is a contrast to other funders. However, some say that RLF has a tendency, like other grantmakers, to deliver a plan to grantees for implementation without engaging grantees to help determine goals and strategy. Grantees desire early involvement in developing strategy, especially regarding constituency building in their communities.
- RLF provides a **mix of episodic grants and strategic grants**. While RLF achieves success with short-term grantmaking that targets specific objectives, more than half of grantees (51%) reported that longer-term grants would better support their work. To sustain organizational engagement in conservation, grantees and stakeholders made a strong case for RLF investment in ongoing capacity development.

### CCI's Grantmaking Impact

In a survey of 49 grantees, we asked 16 questions to measure the impact of CCI funding and support in three key areas of organizational capacity: skills, priorities, and leadership. All grantees reported growth across all three categories and 16 measures (see page 28 for more detail).

- **Organizational skills.** Survey data show that CCI grant and organizational support have enabled grantees to advance their skills and effectiveness: 69% found RLF staff support helpful; 58% benefitted from connections made by RLF to coalitions, working groups or networks, as well as strategy development to influence policy and funding.
- **Strategic priorities.** As a result of CCI grantmaking, grantees are expanding their core work (in areas such as housing, gentrification, and criminal justice reform) to embrace environmental and conservation work. Organizations participating in coalitions and working groups reported they felt supported in finding an authentic nexus between their community and conservation goals to advance socially equitable environmental solutions.

### Evaluation Methods

The evaluation findings in this report are based on a **grantee survey** completed by 49 of 75 grantee organizations for a 65% response rate, 19 **interviews** with 10 grantees, 2 contractors and 7 stakeholders (policymakers and influencers), and 2 **focus groups** conducted with 11 grantee participants.

- **Environmental/conservation leadership.** Through CCI-funded coalitions like Parks Now and the Climate Justice Working Group, RLF is creating new leaders to advocate for environmental justice in their communities and statewide. This type of grantmaking aims to develop new leaders to expand the boundaries of both conservation and equity work.

## Recommendations

To fully transform the environmental movement, RLF needs to build grantee capacity, hold community organizations up as leaders in the conservation space and help sustain environmental and conservation work that aligns with grantees' community priorities. The following five recommendations will help RLF, and the organizations with which it works, achieve its CCI constituency engagement goals.

### 1: Provide Longer-Term Grants and Supports

RLF's strategic, episodic approach toward policy campaigns is effective among policymakers and influencers. While this approach results in short-term wins, our research indicates that conservation and equity objectives of community organizations would be more easily attained with sustained, strategic RLF engagement and capacity building. Longer grant cycles can provide a better foundation for organizations to build and sustain capacity in order to implement conservation programs with greater, more enduring success.

### 2: Standardize Capacity Building Approaches

Standardizing access to capacity-building support can strengthen environmental and conservation leadership from under-engaged communities. Grantees involved in Parks Now and the Climate Justice Working Group benefitted from consultants with expertise in communications, strategy, and policy work; however, that support was not available to the majority of surveyed grantees (65%) who were not part of those coalitions. Consultant support was highly valued by the groups that received it. RLF should consider a strategy of offering a standardized suite of consultant and in-house expertise to help organizations build capacity.

### 3: Invest in and Support Collaboration

RLF should provide opportunities for community organizations to authentically engage with conservation policy and funding decision makers by involving them earlier and more consistently in the work. RLF should engage grantees earlier to shape the goals, direction, and implementation of the work. Our research also shows that organizations are interested in connecting with other RLF-funded grantees to collaborate on projects and build a network of learning and support. Providing more opportunities for grantees to collaborate strengthens organizations and outcomes.

### 4: Elevate Equity in the Environmental Field

Many CCI grantees are deeply committed to issues of equity and inclusion in their work and value the support they have received from RLF to pursue these goals. Grantees also see the opportunity for RLF to leverage its influence and position in the field to elevate the discussion of equity and inclusion in the traditional conservation movement. However, in order for RLF to be a credible messenger and champion of this work, grantees encourage RLF to explicitly state its organizational stance on equity and inclusion and to share the work it is doing internally as an organization in pursuit of equity.

### **5: Align CCI Goals and Community Priorities**

RLF should be flexible in pursuing priorities that align with grantees' varied issues. Alignment will build longer-term strategies relevant to both CCI priorities and those of the communities in which RLF works. Going a step further, RLF can increase its impact by helping to integrate these issues into the broader conservation movement.

#### **A Framework for Future Grantmaking**

To guide RLF in the implementation of these recommendations, the evaluation team created a framework (page 25-26) that describes grantmaking based on the duration of grants, the degree of collaboration involved in establishing strategy, and the level of capacity building. The framework results in three types of grantmaking—organizational (exploratory, objective-specific grants), strategic (efforts to expand decision making and include diverse constituencies in policy development), and transformational (collaborative, ongoing support that advances emergent, ongoing work to expand the bounds of conservation work). This framework may help RLF and its funders implement a constituency engagement strategy that is increasingly effective in achieving both conservation and community outcomes.

# About the Report

Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) commissioned this evaluation of its grantmaking approach and impact in order to assess its effectiveness at building constituencies, specifically through its California Conservation Innovations (CCI) program. CCI, a multi-year program funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, aims to engage organizations from underrepresented communities to advance policy and funding goals related to parks, water, urban rivers, coasts, energy, and climate change.

Constituency engagement has always been a key element of RLF's work, but CCI is the first RLF program to identify constituency engagement as a specific and deliberate outcome. With this study, RLF seeks to understand the impact of its strategy to engage younger, diverse communities typically underrepresented in the environmental movement, and ultimately to improve outcomes for both CCI, and other RLF programs.

## Methodology

RLF engaged Harder+ Company Community Research to evaluate progress on the constituency engagement strategy of CCI, document strengths, and suggest course corrections to inform CCI's long-term strategy. The report presents findings related to the three core areas of inquiry for this evaluation:

- (1) Effectiveness of RLF's approach to the constituency engagement strategy;
- (2) Changes in grantee capacity to which the constituency engagement strategy contributed; and
- (3) Early impact of the constituency engagement strategy on communities.

To address these evaluation inquiries, Harder+Company conducted one-on-one **interviews** with CCI grantees and RLF staff, administered a **survey** with current CCI grantees and conducted two **focus groups** with grantees across the state. Harder also surveyed the work of other philanthropic conservation organizations to identify strategies and recommendations that other organizations are successfully employing to build capacity and constituency engagement.<sup>1</sup>

**Interviews.** The evaluation team conducted telephone interviews with ten grantees, two contractors, and seven policymakers/influencers (May-July 2019). The interview protocols asked about the effectiveness of RLF's approach to the work, its strengths, program outcomes, and areas for growth or improvement. Prior to these interviews, the Harder team conducted five discovery conversations with RLF staff to understand the work and the grants provided through CCI.

**Survey.** The evaluation team distributed an online survey to 75 recent grantee organizations between May and June of 2019. A total of 49 grantee organizations participated in the survey for a 65% response rate.<sup>2</sup> The survey included questions

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<sup>1</sup> Capacity engagement approaches vary, and include fellowship and coaching models, as well as long-term investing. A specific approach that RLF may consider is a two-phased approach employed by the Kresge Foundation in which the foundation awarded small 9-month planning grants to community-based nonprofits working on climate resilience, followed by larger, multi-year implementation grants for groups that developed viable work plans.

<sup>2</sup> This includes some surveys that were only partially completed. The number of responses for each question is reported separately throughout the report.

about the level of support received from RLF staff, the effectiveness of RLF's grantmaking approach, the impacts of CCI's constituency engagement strategy in the environmental/conservation space, the value of capacity building on their organization, challenges encountered when trying to influence environmental/conservation public funding and policy, and the next environmental priorities facing their communities. Survey results can be found in Appendix A.

**Focus Groups.** The evaluation team conducted two focus groups (one in person, one via teleconference) with a total of 11 participants in September 2019. The in person focus group included only LA-based grantees while the teleconference focus group included grantees from across California. Focus group conversations centered around CCI's role in advancing equity within the environmental/conversation space and grantee organizations' future goals and organizational priorities for their work. Information from these discussions was used to describe and assess CCI's current effectiveness at embracing a diversity, equity and inclusion approach, and advance recommendations on how to improve upon the approach.

## About the Results

We have prepared this report based on the qualitative and quantitative data that Harder+ Company Community Research collected. In it, we analyze RLF's grantmaking approach and impact, then make a series of recommendations to help RLF further evolve its constituency building strategy and outcomes.

**Approach:** In this report, we take a close look at the responses we received through surveys, interviews, and focus groups in order to define RLF's current grantmaking approach through CCI. We identified five key themes that emerged from grantees and stakeholders to characterize RLF's strengths and identify areas in which it can improve.

**Impact:** A key goal of this analysis is to measure the impact of CCI grants. To do so, we asked grantees to rate their organization on a series of 16 activities, approaches, and skills both before and after receiving CCI grants.

**Recommendations:** This report advances five recommendations, based on the data, that can help RLF increase the effectiveness of its constituency engagement strategy. We also developed a framework that RLF can use to guide its constituency engagement strategy in the future.

## About Resources Legacy Fund

RLF is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) that works with philanthropists to conserve land, water, and ocean resources while advancing healthy communities and social equity.

The organization was created in 2000 with funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to help protect more than a quarter-million acres of ecologically valuable land in California. Central to this initial work were efforts to expand the capacity and sophistication of local conservation groups, while generating new policies and funding for conservation.

RLF consistently pushes itself to refine its approach to achieve significant conservation outcomes that benefit people and the planet. RLF is committed to continuing that approach in the future as the best way to increase the durability of

its impact and enhance its effectiveness with new constituencies.

The findings and recommendations in this report will help RLF leadership, staff, board members, and funders augment and evolve their strengths as a partner advancing conservation, climate resilience, and social equity.

## **About California Conservation Innovations**

CCI is a multi-year initiative that seeks to strengthen and diversify the conservation movement in California for generations to come. The program has three core objectives: 1) increase public funding for conservation, 2) advance conservation policies better tailored to the needs of all Californians, and 3) broaden the involvement of younger and more ethnically diverse constituencies in conservation policy and funding. The latter objective is the focus of this report.

Through CCI, RLF is investing in leaders and organizations from communities of color that are working to include those issues most important to their communities into the state's environmental priorities, particularly in the areas of parks, water, urban rivers, coasts, energy, and climate change. These efforts have brought communities of color into the fray long-dominated by traditional environmental organizations, building new leaders and coalitions that are more reflective of today's California. CCI is focused on broadening California's environmental constituency and leadership through investments and initiatives that yield deeper, more consistent, and meaningful engagement by younger and more ethnically diverse citizens. CCI supports organizations to:

- Champion and work on conservation goals meaningful to their communities
- Engage in conservation initiatives and policy discussions
- Take on leadership roles in their communities and the conservation movement
- Organize and connect to coalitions and advocacy networks working to influence policy change
- Leverage additional funding from other donors (e.g., private, philanthropic and public)
- Shape funding and policies

To date, CCI has allocated approximately 60% of the program's grant funds, \$10 million, to organizations that are building diverse constituency engagement in their communities and across the state. Toward this objective, CCI has made more than 260 grants and contracts, geographically distributed in Southern California (23%), Northern California (9%), Central Valley (9%), and statewide (55%).

# Findings: CCI's Grantmaking Approach

Based on 19 interviews, 49 surveys, and two focus groups, the research is clear: RLF is a supportive, sophisticated grantmaker with deep resources and networks. RLF is responsive and supportive, articulates clear goals and objectives, and is invested in the effort to foster more equity with its grantmaking. Furthermore, RLF commands respect and influence in the environmental/conservation field, which proves an asset to grantees. Some grantees expressed a desire to see RLF increase its leadership role in the equity space, particularly among environmental/conservation advocates and funders, as well as increase its efforts to be more flexible or collaborative in its grantmaking approach, rather than directing specific grant outcomes.

Specific to CCI grantmaking, both grantees and policymaker/influencers value CCI's unique approach and the impact it has had on the environmental and conservation movement. From a policymaker/influencer perspective, CCI grantmaking is a "critical programmatic priority, focused on essentially building diverse constituencies and elevating leaders...from these diverse communities [to] actually gain leadership positions in the state and beyond."

## Strategic Connector

RLF plays a connective role in California's environmental and conservation space (Figure 1). Stakeholders commented on RLF's "broad knowledge of all the different organizations and people who are working on these issues, whether it's academics, whether it's the connections to foundations, the connections to federal government, state government, local government, and local nonprofits." RLF uses these ties, one stakeholder said, to "help us connect with what's happening statewide, and I think that's probably their biggest value...their ability to connect and bring resources to bear that support some of the work that we do on a statewide level."

RLF is adept at coordinating action at key times, with clear asks of key decision-makers. RLF, as one stakeholder said, is "able to rally support...and attention when it's needed, and they're very good at...identifying when that attention is needed."

Stakeholders described RLF as leveraging their "political savvy and connections" to move key environmental and conservation efforts forward. RLF effectively coordinates diverse efforts by working largely behind the scenes and "bringing people together, creating engagement, creating connections with funders or funding opportunities and creating structure where they can keep things on track."

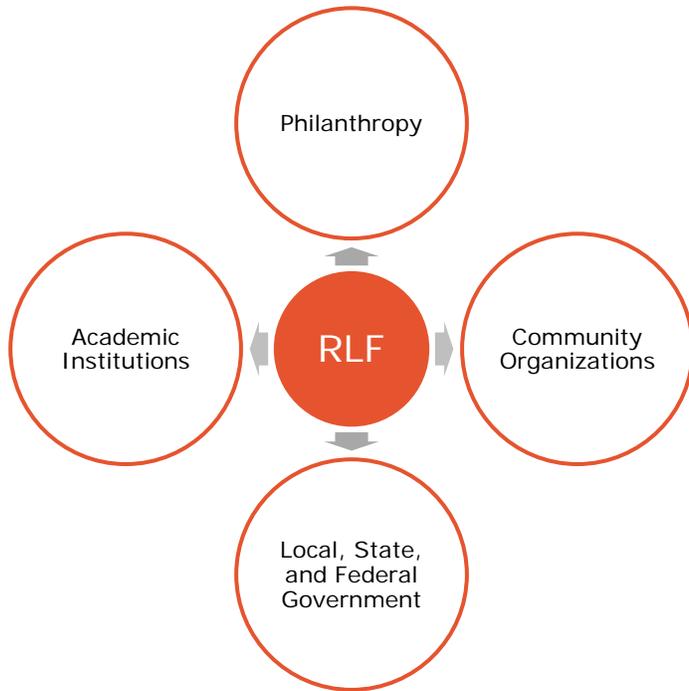
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**"They are an important behind-the-scenes leader at the intersection of philanthropy and nonprofit advocacy and implementation."**

**– Stakeholder**

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**Figure 1. RLF connects diverse organizations and sectors across the state**



Grantees credited RLF for connecting them to important working groups, coalitions, campaigns, and environmental influencers through CCI. For example, one grantee shared how RLF connected them to key activities at the state, county and city levels – “that’s just something we weren’t used to,” they said. Another focus group participant singled out RLF for connecting them to coalitions and state-level campaigns to bring new resources to the environment. “I would say our awareness of different key coalitions and conversations has really increased because of our connection to RLF.”

Stakeholders highlighted RLF staff’s credibility and humility. As one stakeholder said, “I think that RLF’s current way of operating as an intermediary and as a connector of funders and grassroots organizations works quite well and has a lot of credibility.” RLF staff, according to one stakeholder, “are not seeking the limelight for themselves. There’s a lot of humility among the staff and a lot of behind the scenes work and putting other people front and center in discussions. So I think that’s what they do really well, they don’t dominate the conversation. They work with people behind the scenes to get them to express their needs and interests.” This approach affords RLF high credibility as an effective relationship builder.

**Supportive and Strategic Thought Partner**

RLF supports CCI grantee organizations by using its expertise and connections in ways that help grantees. A stakeholder familiar with RLF’s grantmaking highlighted RLF’s strategic support: “I would say they’re providing strategic insight and guidance, identifying tools and resources for their grantees.”

Grantees see RLF as an unparalleled asset in reaching their goals. “There are not a lot of other funders that are as sophisticated and well-informed as they are,” one grantee said. Regarding work on the L.A. River, they said “I see them not only as key funders that help support our capacity to do our work, but also key in the sense that they understand what needs to be done in the river and what [the]

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**“I have gotten funding from other foundations, but I don't have the same kind of sophisticated, strategic conversations that really help inform the work and make it better. If I want the best strategic advice I can get, I often turn to people at RLF.”**

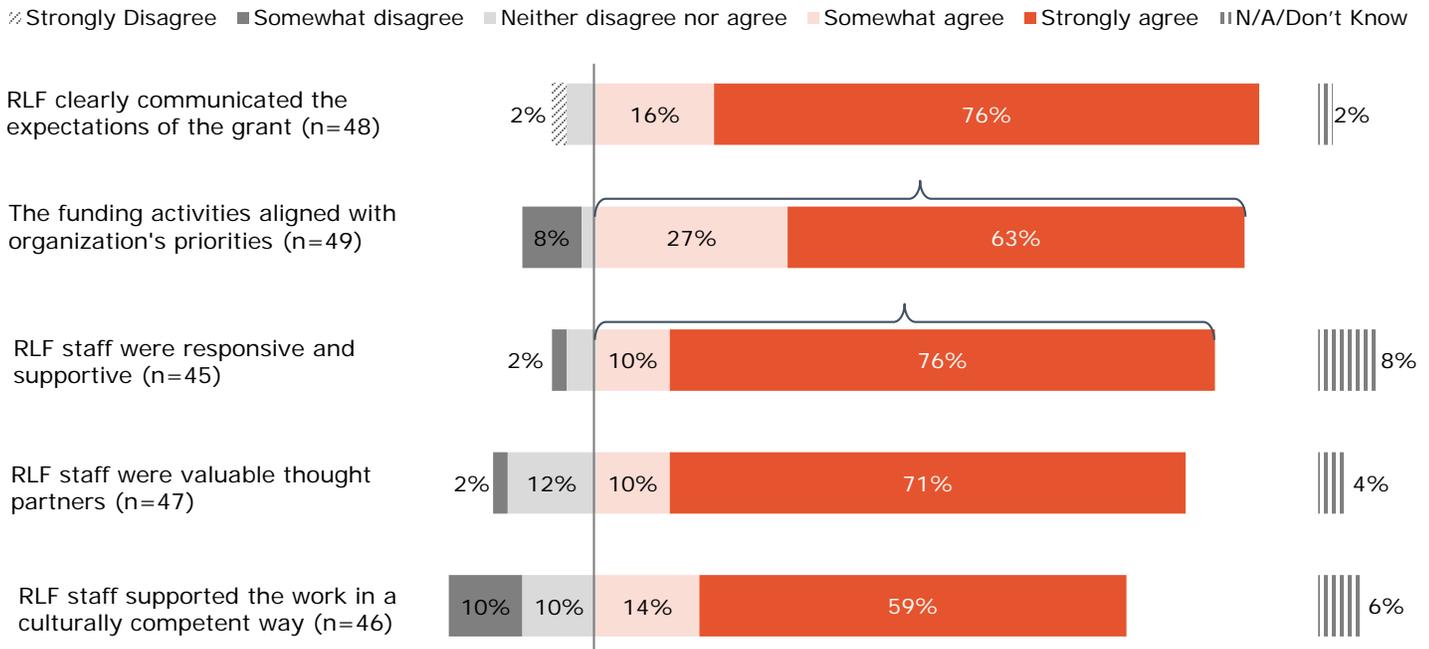
**– Grantee**

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important initiatives [are]...that need to be pushed forward. I don't think that there's that level of understanding and sophistication from any other funder in this space, in L.A.," they continued.

This showed up in survey data too where the vast majority of grantees noted that RLF staff were responsive and supportive (86%), valuable thought partners (81%), and supported their work in a culturally competent way (73%). See Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Grantees report positive experiences with RLF grantmaking approach**



### Equity Evolving as Core Value

Interviewees noted that RLF exhibited an “increased emphasis on equity and environmental justice” over the years, and described RLF as “ahead of the curve” when it comes to equity in the environmental and conservation space. As one stakeholder said, “I think RLF has done a really good job leading on this, and I think that the infusion of equity and inclusion into the broader environmental movement and the policies of [the] state is partially the result of RLF actually focusing on this and prioritizing it.”

RLF's CCI work recognizes that, as one grantee said, “It's not about putting acres and acres in remote far-flung areas; it's really about figuring out how...and where do communities need to access open spaces, and invest in those areas.” The grantee cited this example as a way in which RLF is changing its approach to conservation “in a way that is aligned with California's current population, and the need to work in equity.”

RLF's leadership on equity in the environmental space is more apparent in its CCI initiative than other RLF programs, by design. CCI grantees who have received grants from other RLF programs noted and discussed the distinctions. One grantee said that with CCI grants “the approach is actually rooted in equity and not treating equity as an item to check off a list among a multitude of things that they do.” In contrast, grants through other RLF programs “feel a little bit like the equity and

environmental justice angle is still a bit of one item in a long list of things that needs to be checked off. It's not rooted in equity."

Some grantees saw this as an opportunity for RLF to more fully put equity at the center of all of its work, both external grantmaking and internal practice. This would allow RLF to expand its leadership role in the field of conservation and to demonstrate its authentic commitment to fostering equity and inclusion. One contractor suggested that equity has to be embedded in the culture and that "RLF should do internal training within its program staff on why equity is important and why it's different from equality." This will result in RLF staff understanding "what it means to live and breathe this work, and how naturally that work then starts to come out to its interactions to the grantees and some of the organizations outside of RLF."

### **Collaborative Approach Valued by Grantees**

Grantees report that RLF is a unique environmental and conservation funder. RLF is one of the few funders investing in community organizations in this space, and is viewed as a genuine partner. Grantees described RLF's approach to the work as "a good balance of being a thought partner and a collaborator." In contrast, grantees described other funders as often being overly prescriptive in their approach. One grantee drew the distinction between RLF and other funders this way:

[there is] a big difference between coming in and dictating how the [work] should look versus trying to be helpful, understanding where the expertise already exists, and offering to lend a couple of extra hands to the table. [RLF is] not coming in and saying, 'Hey, you should reach out to X, Y, and Z.' But the approach that I've experienced to date has been more along the lines of 'Hey, if it's helpful, I'm available to brainstorm with you to see if there are other additional contacts that should be part of your outreach list.'

However, some grantees discussed a tendency for RLF to sometimes use a more directive approach. This approach has a tendency to reinforce existing power relationships and risks undercutting grantees' credibility in the communities where they work.

According to one grantee, "If you take too much of those kinds of very directive grants that feel funder driven, grassroots leaders feel like their work is less authentic and, over time, it might erode your ability to do base building if you have a lot of their kind of top down brands."

Another grantee said, "We've gotten feedback from our members that if you just try to turn us out for one standing event, it feels like you're using us for this event instead of bringing us into a bigger conversation and movement. We'll do it as we need to, but the ongoing organization and engagement with the communities we're working with is really important to the change RLF wants to move."

Community organizations and coalitions highlighted a desire to establish a more collaborative, two-way relationship with RLF as they build public support among their own constituents for environmental and conservation issues relevant to their community priorities. One focus group participant suggested that RLF can avoid the pitfall of being overly directive by bringing organizations early into the "co-learning and co-creation processes."

Another grantee acknowledged RLF's broad network and "depth of knowledge in

the policy realm," but would appreciate RLF raising "the issues and needs up front and have it be a co-learning process" rather than a plan already "baked within their own circles." The grantee continued, "there are experiences and needs that they may not be aware of. Then we can again identify all of these different issues from capacity to resources and priorities and then build together a longer term strategy."

### **Episodic Grantmaking Not Conducive to the Long Game**

Focus groups agreed that RLF is a supportive grantmaker, but highlighted the need for longer-term investment to plan and sustain their environmental work. One participant reported that the grant their organization received was small and lacked "commitment to stay on the issue for a couple years. Small organizations can't decide to run the program without commitment around funding. If this is around equity and social justice, the small organizations need additional support."

Longer-term relationships would support ongoing collaboration, shared ownership and two-way collaboration. Grantees understand that RLF often awards modest and time-limited grants in order to achieve policy and public funding outcomes. But grantees suggest the need to work differently with community and environmental justice organizations. One grantee, for example, described how they felt rushed to address a legislative issue:

I think their biggest challenges are around legislative stuff and I guess there's just really quick timelines and turnaround to provide amendments to build or just provide language or recommendations. And so I think that just kind of exacerbated the issue that we were seeing because when they needed feedback within three or four days, we really had no choice but to just provide our own input, and we didn't have a chance to really dive in.

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**"I think one of the things that makes a funder culturally competent is having that understanding and being grounded in the organizational reality, and to think about finding ways to provide long-term support in a way that is sustainable for the organizations over the long term."**

**– Grantee**

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# Findings: CCI's Grantmaking Impact

## Is CCI Moving the Dial?

A key goal of this evaluation is to test and articulate measures of progress in CCI's grantmaking and constituency engagement strategy. In collaboration with RLF, the evaluation team identified relevant capacities and competencies to measure in an online survey among grantees. (See Appendix A for full results.)

The survey questions measured indicators of constituency building across three categories: organizational skills/approaches, strategic priorities, and environmental/conservation leadership.

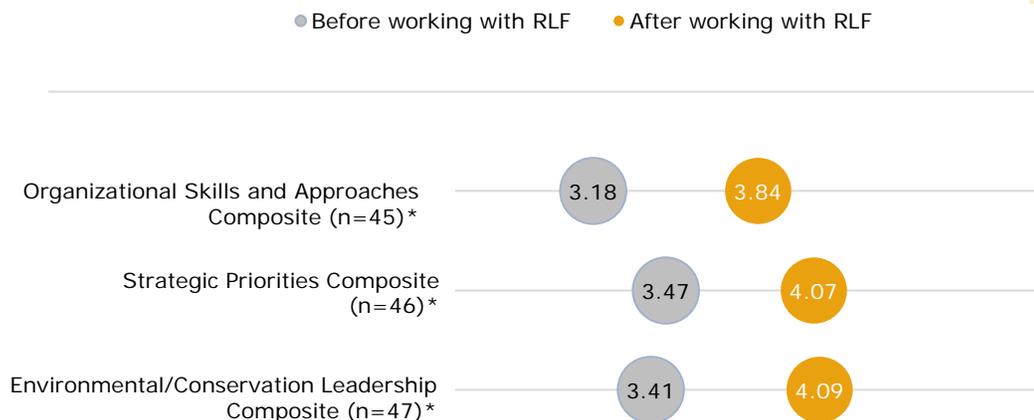
- **Organizational skills/approaches:** the extent to which organizations have been able to build key policy/advocacy competencies, such as formulating campaign strategies, engaging policymakers, developing staff expertise, and leveraging resources for environmental/conservation work.
- **Strategic priorities:** the extent to which organizational goals, resources and activities are oriented to include environmental/conservation work.
- **Environmental/conservation leadership:** the extent to which organizations take active roles in engaging their communities, participating in coalitions, organizing campaigns and assuming leadership roles in the environmental/conservation movement.

Survey participants rated their organizations on a series of 16 activities, approaches, and skills related to their environmental and conservation work (see list of 16 capacities on page 14) before and after working with RLF. Grantees used a five-point scale ranging from "not a focus" to "in the advanced stages" and reported positive change across all 16 capacity measures. Figure 3 shows the level of change aggregated for three categories.

**Rating Scale Options**

1. Not a focus.
2. In the early stages of development.
3. Implemented, but needs strengthening.
4. Functioning well.
5. In the advanced stages.

**Figure 3. Changes in Organizational Capacities**

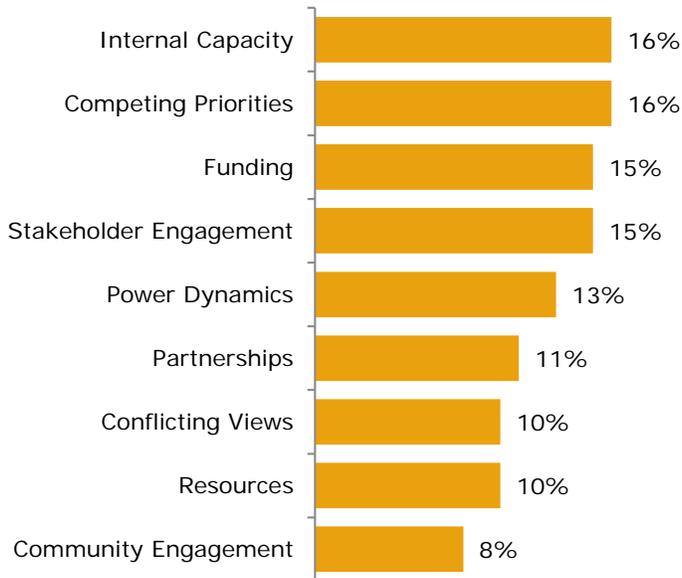


## Organizational Skills

### Sustaining Quality Work

Nonprofits of all sizes, geographies, and focus areas face a number of challenges as they seek to fulfill their missions. CCI grantees identified their top challenges as internal capacity, competing priorities, and fundraising difficulty (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. CCI grantee challenges when trying to fulfill their mission (n=43)<sup>3</sup>**



Grantees reported that CCI funding helped their organizations address some of those challenges by supporting more sophisticated, aligned approaches; capacity to expand reach and engagement; and financial durability. Survey data indicate that CCI supported grantees to address challenges through funding/resources (26%), capacity building (24%), and partnerships (19%).

Grantee interviewees described having to “scrape things together” before CCI funding. RLF expanded the reach and quality of their environmental and conservation work, enabling them to take the work to the next level. One respondent described their work prior to receiving CCI support as “really kind of scrappy and DIY.” “Because of that,” they said, it “didn’t necessarily draw in as much interest as it could have, and so RLF really helped us add capacity for our events and everything that goes along with them. We have become much more sophisticated and far-reaching with RLF’s funds.”

Another interviewee said that CCI funds helped their organization’s education and advocacy departments break down silos: “We were really able to get our departments to work together, and to figure out how our education and community engagement processes can better align with what we are doing on the advocacy side.” Grantees attributed their expanded reach and stakeholder engagement to CCI funding. “We were able to educate more staff and legislators about our issues because of their

<sup>3</sup> Six respondents did not complete this question; more than one response could be selected so the sum exceeds 100%.

### Organizational skills/approaches (related to environment/conservation)

1. Developing campaign strategies.
2. Meeting and working with policymakers.
3. Conducting public education and training sessions with the community.
4. Developing staff expertise in issues areas, legislation, etc.
5. Shaping public funding and policy.
6. Raising or leveraging funds and resources.
7. Achieving benefits for the communities we work in.

### Strategic Priorities

8. Working on environmental/conservation efforts.
9. Linking long-term strategic priorities and outcomes to environmental/conservation goals.
10. Developing specific policy, advocacy goals related to environmental/conservation work.
11. Dedicating staff time and financial resources to environmental/conservation policy and advocacy work.

### Environmental/conservation leadership

12. Taking on leadership roles in the environmental/conservation movement.
13. Educating community members about environmental issues and policies.
14. Organizing our base constituency/community to mobilize around environmental/conservation issues.
15. Organizing campaigns for systemic or structural change related to environmental/conservation goals.
16. Participating in coalitions, working groups or advocacy networks working on environmental/conservation public funding or policy change.

resources. We were able to work with and train more ocean advocates about more issues because of their resources," said one grantee.

Grantees were also able to leverage additional funds to support their environmental and conservation work. Grantees described how CCI grants helped make them more attractive to other funders, including the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Environmental Protection Agency. "Putting down Resources Legacy Fund definitely helped us get those [other] grants," one grantee said.

In response to the open-ended survey question, "Please describe the top 2-3 environmental/conservation benefits that resulted from your RLF-funded project," Over a quarter of grantees (27%) indicated that CCI funding helped them do more and better environmental and conservation work. Responses to this question identified specific wins (e.g., water conservation, park access, safe drinking water), but also included statements about increased capacity like, "being knowledgeable environmental/conservation advocates that represent underserved communities;" "expanding work into new areas;" and "approaching the environment from a new angle."

### Challenges and Considerations

In spite of some organizations being able to leverage funds, financial sustainability remains an intractable hurdle to the work. It's no surprise, then, that over half of respondents (51%) suggested that RLF provide additional funding to support their work.

Grantees also identified capacity development as an ongoing challenge. There is a "steep learning curve for staff to understand how policy decisions are made" in the environmental and conservation space, and a lot of capacity has to be built for organizations to effectively engage in this space.

## Strategic Priorities

### Expanding and Connecting Grantee Work

RLF leverages its statewide connections and expertise to connect grantees to funding and policy processes. It accomplishes this by increasing grantee awareness of and access to mainstream environmental and conservation political processes, connecting them to important stakeholders and raising their profiles in the larger environmental and conservation movement. Such vertical networking supports community organizations to gain legitimacy and open up political avenues for their work.<sup>4</sup>

As one grantee assessed, "A lot of the grassroots organizations that do this work have varying levels of how policy-savvy they are [and] how easily they are able to get meetings with certain representatives. So to the extent where RLF can...share those relationships and provide access to these groups to bring their policies forward and keep them moving [is] a tremendous value add."

Grantees described how RLF helped them explore new work while connecting them to important coalitions, conversations, and policy and funding processes of which they were previously unaware or disconnected. One grantee described how a CCI grant opened the door to policy work and expanded their organizational mission:

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<sup>4</sup> Perez, Alejandro Colsa *et al* (2015). "Evolution of the environmental justice movement: activism, formalization and differentiation." *Environmental Research Letters*. 10 105002

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**"This whole picture looks really different from how it looked 10 years ago and even 5 or 6 years ago. It's much, more diverse. It's younger. It's more energetic. I think it's smart and engaged and that's not all thanks to RLF, but it is RLF recognizing that talent, that energy that desire that is out there."**

**– Grantee**

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**"I think their greatest value is probably three things: one is financial, two is strategic, and three is collaboration."**

**– Grantee**

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"We actually put policy work into our mission because of our involvement in things like [LA's] Measure A and Measure W. We wanted to be more intentional about our involvement in policy because we feel that we're very much in tune with the issue and being involved in policy would give solutions some teeth." Another grantee already engaged on policy described their organization's growth through the CCI-funded work: "Resources Legacy Fund really helped us gain the capacity and experience to be able to engage with issues relating to climate adaptation and resilience. Before, our work had been really focused on climate mitigation strategies."

### **Influencing Legislative and Policy Priorities<sup>5</sup>**

Not only did CCI expand grantees' strategic work efforts, knowledge and connections, but the program has also supported grantees to work with legislators and commissions, influence important policies, contribute to environmental and diversity panels, and work with the media to increase awareness of environmental and conservation issues in their communities. For example, one grantee described how CCI resources enabled them to educate stakeholders across the state about cap and trade legislation (SB 535); specifically, "to provide resources to underserved communities [to] gain access to the available money that's being generated by cap and trade for a variety of different programs including green infrastructure, electric vehicles, affordable housing [and] others." Another grantee shared how they were able to interact more with their county supervisors: "It was really great for us to be able to go before our county supervisors and testify...I think that was our first time that we did that [and] I think it opened up new doors for us to now have a better working relationship with our county supervisor."

Grantees reported that working in new spaces raised their organizational profile and supported their sustained engagement in environmental funding and policy decision-making processes. One grantee described how they are now "included and invited to the table" to work on park, water and land use issues. "Folks are thinking about us as more than just community organizers," they said, "but as a group that carries weight and the voice of a neighborhood that should be listened to." Another grantee described how CCI supported their attendance at conferences, which helped expand their organization's work at the state level. "They've been really instrumental in us being a significant part of putting together the most recent climate adaptation forum for the State of California where we were able to be one of the partners putting together the equity track for that conference."

Policymakers and influencers also noted how increased engagement from diverse community organizations influenced their work. One stakeholder participant described RLF as building an "advocacy base [of] groups that may not have even realized that they can play a role. It actually starts to create an ongoing relationship where...we wouldn't jump into a project without...engage[ment] from this group or from this list to do whatever we're trying to do."

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**"Folks are thinking about us as more than just community organizers, but as a group that carries weight and the voice of a neighborhood that should be listened to."**

**– Grantee**

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<sup>5</sup> CCI grants support organizations to build capacity and conduct outreach, public education, research, analysis, and other related activities. Though many CCI goals involve policy change, CCI funds are used exclusively for non-lobbying, 501(c)3 activities. RLF occasionally uses non-CCI funds to support legislative lobbying activities that complement CCI non-lobbying activities.

### Strategic Engagement Leads to Big Wins on Key Policy Issues

**Prop 68.** Members of the Parks Now coalition helped develop, pass, and implement Prop 68, a statewide parks and water bond. According to one grantee, Prop 68 represented a watershed moment where policy “for the first time, truly and meaningfully, prioritizes disadvantaged communities in a way that hadn't been seen.... And that was as a direct result of a lot of engagement from those organizations that do work in those communities.” Another grantee said, “I think their leadership [RLF's] around Prop 68 helped to create space at the table for many nonprofits.”

**Measure A.** Through the Our Parks coalition, RLF engaged grantees to educate their communities about Measure A, which created new funding sources for Los Angeles conservation and parks in urban areas. Grantees described how their work raised community awareness and shaped Measure A language around community engagement, language access, and implementation.

**Coastal Access.** CCI grantees contributed to discussions about coastal access, specifically around low-cost overnight accommodations. According to one stakeholder, RLF provided nonprofits with guidance to understand “how the state budget process works, how bond funding works for projects, and how they can inject their voices into the decision making around funding for projects.” RLF supported them to develop a group comment letter in response to the Coastal Conservancy's draft overnight accommodations plan.

### Challenges and Considerations

**Activism Fatigue.** Grantees discussed difficulties in sustaining conservation work due to limited resources, but also due to the challenge of maintaining constituents' attention in the face of competition from other important community issues. One grantee described this problem as “activism fatigue.”

There's a sense of a community under siege, [so] that's something I have had to convey to RLF, I'm like, 'Listen, we have an offshore drilling rally on the 8th. And there's a DACA National Day of Action on the 7th. Nobody's going to show up to our drilling thing, just so you know, because people's lives are being destroyed. And so we need to be sensitive about that.' And so that's really the biggest thing right now, that sense of fatigue and that community under siege and attack.

This activism fatigue stifles engagement and diverts energy from environmental and conservation issues. For example, a grantee discussed how environmental work is affected by competing demands in the Asian and Pacific Islander community: “From my conversations with leaders, it's not that they don't care about parks. Parks actually are really important, but it's just that a lot of folks have leaned in on public health or housing or other issues.”

**Long-Term Capacity.** To sustain strategic engagement in the environmental/conservation space, interviewees suggested RLF focus on “investing in ongoing capacity development” and revisiting the scope of its grantmaking to include more general, long-term support. They claim that multi-year grants can have significantly greater impact on grassroots organizations. This allows organizations to plan programs and shift staff time appropriately. One stakeholder said “I think part of really building a lasting set of leaders in groups advocating from outside of the mainstream white affluent groups has to really be focused on capacity building...really providing more flexible funding with a longer time period and really helping build sort of overall capacity.”

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“Community groups are already at capacity, so asking them to work on anything new is a logistical challenge for them.”

– Grantee

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## Environmental/Conservation Leadership

Beyond helping to build organizational skills and supporting strategic development of networks, funding, and policy initiatives, CCI supports grantees to become leaders championing equity and environmental issues in their communities, statewide, and beyond. This type of grantmaking is less about connecting to specific processes and more about transforming the environmental movement by expanding the boundaries of environmental and conservation work to embrace community concerns about equity, environmental justice, and the built environment.

### Bringing Equity to the Forefront

As discussed in the CCI approach section, grantees and stakeholders recognize the unique role RLF plays in the environmental and conservation space, and CCI's strong equity orientation. "I think they are being thoughtful about listening to the equity groups," one interviewee said, "being responsive to their needs, and not dictating their agenda or approach to them."

As a result, some grantees have been able to apply the skills and strategy acquired through CCI to become leaders who, for example, are educating policy makers on the nexus of climate change and equity as a "threat multiplier" in their communities, and why resources should be prioritized for those most vulnerable to climate change. This includes considering "immigration status, your socioeconomic status, where you live, your zip code, your education attainment, your income level, all those things, all the differences in those things can add up to a bigger pain point because of climate change...So that's what I mean by equity. It's not about investing equally to everybody. It's identifying where are the biggest needs and investing in those."

Stakeholders outside of RLF also recognize RLF's investments in work that champion equity. One stakeholder identified an equity toolkit developed by a CCI grantee that provides guidance on how to root grantmaking and policy work in equity as an important investment. They noted that this work is "expanding and pushing forward the dialogue and work that needs to happen generally."

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**"Equity is still not embedded in the traditional environmental movement."**

**– Grantee**

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## Establishing Both Vertical and Horizontal Connections

In addition to making vertical connections between community organizations and policy makers and influencers, CCI supports grantees to make horizontal connections with other community organizations. This networking is particularly strong among CCI-funded working groups like Parks Now and the Climate Justice Working Group, but it also happens organically as grantees expand their work and meet other agencies working in the environmental and conservation space.

Such connections allow organizations to work together, learn from one another, expand their resource base, increase their collective impact, and transcend geographic limitations of grassroots activism.<sup>6</sup> One grantee said, "I always like it when we can kind of expand our reach. I just think it makes our organization that much stronger when you're able to expand your ally base." Another grantee described these new connections as learning about "sister agencies and basically 'the homies'...cut from the same cloth in the neighborhood [but] in a different community." Another grantee said, "I think it's been helpful that they've [connected] us to a network that we normally wouldn't be in or around."

## Expanding the Scope of Work

As grantees work on environmental and conservation efforts, they are situating it within other systemic issues, such as racial equity, housing, gentrification and homelessness. They're asking forward-thinking questions like:

If we build parks, if we restore this river, is it going to create gentrification in the communities that live alongside it and that our mission is built around? How do we all come together to solve these issues, not as nonprofit groups, but maybe band together to push our government agencies to solve it, or to provide more resources for it? And how do we show to the community that we are either helping to advance those conversations, or that we're doing our part in the matter, even if it's not exactly central to our mission?

Grantees described how they are working to push the boundaries of environmental and conservation work to account for their community priorities. They discussed a number of built environment issues facing communities that expand beyond parks, water and climate change. As one grantee said, "There [are] many significant issues, some of them are related to parks, but many of them are related to just other issues in the built environment." Survey data showed that a quarter of organizations plan to address land use (27%), climate change (27%) and sustainable communities (24%) in their future work.

More significant growth was demonstrated among grantees participating in CCI-supported working groups or coalitions, likely because they received ongoing consultant support, connection to sister agencies and more collective learning opportunities. Several of these grantees were able to take holistic approaches to integrate environmental and conservation work into their missions. One organization in the Parks Now coalition, for example, found a "natural nexus between criminal justice reform and the outdoors" by providing intervention services to at-risk youth.

These coalitions not only provide ongoing funding and consultant support, but they frequently bring grantees together to create open-ended, emergent

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**"It was nice to know that there were all these different networks out there that we weren't a part of and that we could participate in, right? We weren't necessarily alone in some of the struggles we were pushing for."**

**– Grantee**

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

opportunities that expand environmental and conservation work to account for community priorities.

### Challenges and Considerations

**Overcoming Silos.** Grantees still desire more connections and partnerships. Grantees suggested that RLF make a concerted effort to bring together CCI grantees working on similar issues or in similar regions. This again demonstrates the positive benefits of forming coalitions, working groups, or something similar.

**Mainstream Assimilation.** Grantees shared common experiences about facing barriers when engaging in the mainstream environmental movement. Navigating the traditional environmental space can be difficult for some grassroots organizations because they bump up against conflicting norms and protocols. Grantees also discussed how they are fighting against the myth that communities of color do not care about environmental issues. A grantee shared their frustration with how the Latino community was portrayed in Sacramento as being “too poor to care and as not knowing how to use reusable bags.” This is contrary to the reality grantees work in. As one grantee said, “Most of us came from our home countries where we already did conservation, so it’s not difficult to talk to folks about conserving water or energy.”

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**“I’ve never found a Latinx person that says, ‘I don’t care about the environment/ocean.’ It’s quite the opposite. It’s baked into our traditions and our culture.”**

**– Grantee**

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### High Growth Organizations: 3 Case Studies

Across the three categories of grant impact—organizational skills, strategic priorities, and conservation leadership—a group of grantees exhibited particularly high degrees of growth as a result of their CCI grants. Of the 49 organizations that completed the 16-question impact survey, five reported an average before/after change score of more than two points on the five-point scale. Below, we take a look at three of these organizations to understand their stories and why they stand out as having experienced such significant growth with CCI support.

- **Azul** was founded in 2011 to bring Latinxs perspectives and participation to ocean conservation. RLF has provided multi-grant support to Azul, through both CCI and other RLF programs, helping grow the organization from a one-person operation to a team of three employees. In the past two years, with CCI support, Azul has honed its skills as a prominent advocate for coastal advocacy, organizing a team of nearly 100 Latinxs Marineros who visit the California state capitol each year to speak with legislators and staff about issues related to ocean conservation and coastal communities.
- **The Greenlining Institute** works to advance economic opportunity and empowerment for people of color through advocacy, community and coalition building, research, and leadership development. With CCI funding, Greenlining participated in the Climate Justice Working Group and led the drafting and passage of crucial polices to improve health and environmental quality for low-income communities and communities of color. The organization maintains dedicated staff who advance equitable climate adaptation policy and practices regionally and across the state.
- **Outdoor Outreach** provides adventure-based youth development programs for youth from underrepresented communities, connecting youth to the outdoors as a space for them to build resilience and confidence in their power to make a difference. Since working with RLF, Outdoor Outreach has connected and partnered with diverse agencies in San Diego and across the state. With support from CCI consultants, the organization has increased its media presence with English and Spanish content. Also, with consultant support, staff have increased their capacity on policy and legislative issues, which has allowed Outdoor Outreach to expand its programs.

# Recommendations

CCI's constituency engagement strategy supports organizations to grow their work, diversify policy and funding decision making, and expand the scope of the environmental and conservation movement to include community concerns. Survey data showed that grantees have improved their capacity to engage in environmental and conservation work, but interview data raised some important considerations for sustaining engagement over the long term.

To achieve CCI's longer-term goal of transforming the environmental movement, RLF needs to continue building grantee capacity, hold community organizations up as leaders in the environmental and conservation space, and help sustain and align environmental and conservation work with their organizational and community priorities.

The following five recommendations can guide RLF as it seeks to continue creating significant, durable, and equitable conservation outcomes through CCI's constituency engagement strategy.

## Recommendation 1: Provide Longer-Term Grants and Support

Sustaining community engagement in environmental and conservation work requires longer-term support and investment. RLF focuses on short-term outcomes, which are effective with stakeholders and have led to many strategic wins. Episodic and targeted engagement, however, is less effective when trying to sustain grantee engagement in environmental and conservation work. One grantee described CCI funding for the work as "piecemeal" and said, "It's very difficult for us to sustain the work at the same level, at the same kind of capacity."

Episodic grantmaking can be an effective and important program investment tool as long as RLF communicates the "when" and "why" of these grants. Such grants should be avoided if they could be perceived as pressuring organizations to work on peripheral issues, pull them off mission or away from community priorities, or undercut their community credibility. Early and honest conversations with grantees should focus on surfacing concerns.

Even if RLF cannot provide more funds, grantees indicated that RLF could still help address the funding sustainability challenge by providing "linkages, introductions and guidance to other funders to develop a more sustainable funding base." Currently, as one survey respondent explained, there is a "lack of long-term funding relationships with some of the 'go to' funders who are still funding environmental/conservation efforts."

## Recommendation 2: Standardize Capacity Building Approaches

Survey data showed that grantees receiving CCI capacity building support found it effective. This was particularly clear with regard to RLF staff support; connections to coalitions, working groups or networks; and strategy development to influence policy and funding (See Figure 5).

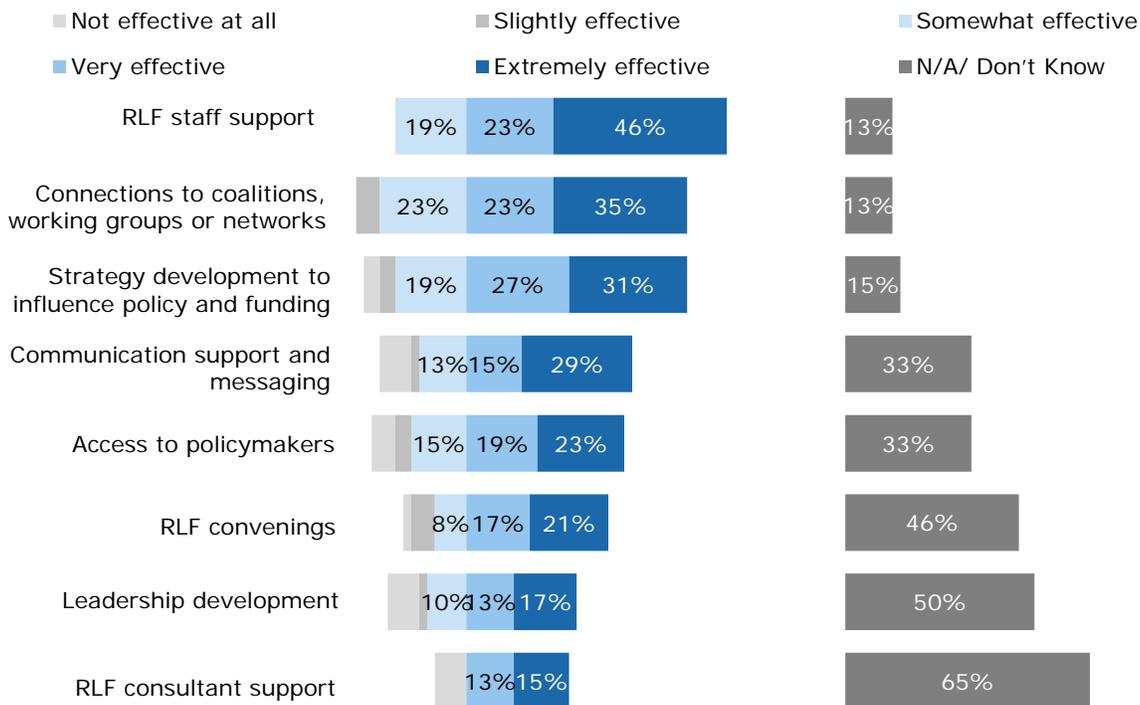
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**"Equity means investing in communities that are more under-resourced, less equipped and further behind. It sometimes takes more resources to be able to do that work."**

**– Grantee**

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**Figure 5. Grantees’ perception of CCI supports (n=49)**



Grantees involved in Parks Now and the Climate Justice Working Group had access to external consultants specializing in communications, strategy, and policy, whereas other grantees that were not formally engaged in those initiatives did not have similar access. Survey results reflect this inconsistency with 65% of grantees reporting that CCI did not make consultant support generally available to them (Figure 5).

Given how helpful and effective consultant support was to grantees, standardizing this assistance for more CCI grantees would offer valuable capacity-building opportunities to strengthen environmental and conservation leadership from under-engaged communities. RLF, for example, could offer consultant support to organizations working on priority issues, or through periodic regional workshops focused on building specific skills.

Expanding access to existing consultant networks or offering workshops might be a quick, less resource-intensive way to enhance CCI grantmaking and support grantee capacity. RLF may also consider slightly different [fellowship or coaching models](#) that periodically convene cohorts of organizations to learn, connect and develop their own action plans that include implementation and fundraising steps.

### Recommendation 3: Invest in and Support Collaboration

With or without formal capacity building, grantees are interested in connecting with one another. RLF can bring together its grantee organizations to build a network of learning and support. “I think we need to create a...think tank,” one grantee said, “that is constantly trying to inform and/or build on the foundations that we have. And it’s about relationship building also.” Another grantee suggested that RLF bring

together its locally funded organizations, “I think it would have been nice for us to be able to connect with...other groups doing work in the same city or jurisdiction, it'd be nice to know what could we do together, right? How do we leverage resources together?” As another grantee described, this would address not only silos, but also the feeling of isolation and loneliness prevalent in the space:

I mean maybe one of the best things that RLF can do is just...get less traditional, more POC [People of Color] led environmental organizations to galvanize around certain issues to build coalitions with each other...The state of California is so big, there's so many different issues that are diverse and difficult and at times, [it] can feel like a pretty lonely place in terms of doing this work because you're in your silo, in your community, in your issue area. So having an opportunity to have just more connection with the field, I think, would be fantastic.

In addition to facilitating collaboration among grantees, some grantees noted that RLF could bring them in earlier to collaborate on project goals and outcomes rather than giving grantees an already-developed plan to implement. Grantees have valuable insight to share, particularly when shaping constituency engagement strategy, and want to establish a two-way relationship to most effectively work in and benefit their communities. RLF has the opportunity to authentically engage community organizations with environmental and conservation policy and funding decision makers by involving them earlier and consistently in the work.

#### **Recommendation 4: Elevate Equity in the Environmental Field**

CCI promotes equity within the traditional environmental field primarily by connecting environmental justice and equity organizations to mainstream funding and policy processes. Grantees see RLF as a bridge between these worlds and strongly encourage RLF to embrace and expand upon that role among traditional environmental funders and stakeholders.

Grantees expressed that they sometimes felt tokenized or like the unicorns in the mainstream spaces. Investing in smaller, non-traditional organizations supports change and helps debunk myths about communities' environmental concerns. CCI grantees are deeply committed to issues of equity and inclusion in their work and value the support they have received from CCI to pursue these goals. However, grantees also see the opportunity for RLF to leverage its organizational power and position to more prominently elevate the discussion of equity and inclusion in the traditional conservation movement.

Grantees recognize the “intent and understanding of the issues of equity and diversity and all this stuff from the [CCI] program officers down,” but wonder what place equity holds in the organization as a whole. This is a good place upon which RLF can build to make an enduring impact, on equity, justice, and conservation fronts. However, in order for RLF to be a credible messenger and champion of this work, grantees encourage RLF to more prominently and explicitly state its organizational stance on equity and inclusion and to share the work they are doing internally as an organization, in pursuit of equity, with other funders and grantees. This would more strongly demonstrate their authentic commitment to advancing equity.

## Recommendation 5: Align CCI Goals and Community Priorities

The evaluation team asked grantees to identify their top organizational priorities for current and future work. With this information, the evaluation team conducted an analysis to identify and describe areas of strong and weak alignment with CCI priorities. Survey data show that grantee environmental and conservation priorities overlap substantially with CCI priorities. Figure 6 captures that alignment.

**Figure 6. Areas of Strong Alignment between CCI and Community Priorities**

CCI Priorities	Grantee Environmental/Conservation Priorities
Climate Change and Adaptation	Climate smart housing, carbon regulation, Green New Deal, rising temperatures
Water	Drinking water (water supply, recycling, groundwater), Los Angeles River (concrete removal, soil remediation), ocean conservation, sea level rise
Policy Implementation	California clean air and climate goals, just transition, implementation of equity funding/policies, shipping impact/tanker bans
Park and Land Access	Access to parks and public lands (joint-use agreements, park development) and industrial land use (oil and plants)

However, grantees also prioritized a number of issues that are not currently shared with RLF, including homelessness, affordable housing, equitable climate resilience, and infrastructure. Expanding CCI priorities to be more inclusive of grantees' priority issues would enable grantees to build longer-term strategies relevant to their communities while also meeting CCI objectives.

Grantees are learning to work in the environmental space, but have to balance that with their organizational considerations when engaging in new work. One grantee summarized the tension organizations face when deciding to continue engaging in RLF's constituency building work: RLF "has indicated ... that there is support available to do climate adaptation and resilience work, but ... we haven't had the opportunity yet to do a full strategic development process to either affirm our current program commitment and priorities or to expand or shift." (In this particular instance, RLF was trying to engage the grantee on key issues, but could have done more to support the organization's alignment between its core work and the conservation work.)

It is important to invest in grassroots organizations because, as one grantee shared, they are "authentic and bring different proximity to environmental issues." At the same time, it is important to recognize that many of the grassroots organizations come from collectivist cultures and that they may work, communicate, and show up in ways that do not fit neatly into mainstream, traditional spaces. Recognizing this difference and working to create spaces that allow organizations to be genuine and not have to fully assimilate to traditional spaces is important for building long-term outcomes and relationships.

## A Framework for Constituency Engagement Grantmaking

To guide the CCI program in the implementation of these recommendations, the evaluation team created a visual constituency engagement framework (See Figure 7). The horizontal axis represents the type and duration of RLF’s grantmaking (episodic or short-term vs. ongoing or longer-term) and the vertical axis represents the degree of collaboration in setting the agenda for the work (directed vs. collaborative priority setting). The resulting quadrants house three types of grantmaking—organizational, strategic, and transformational—that can help RLF be more intentional when structuring grants and developing partnerships (see below for more detail). RLF can also support grantees through increasing capacity building and consultant expertise to develop skills, strategies, and leadership.

**Figure 7. The Grantmaking Framework**



- **Organizational.** These grants will support organizations to play important roles in building environmental and conservation constituencies for CCI priorities. These grants will often be exploratory in nature, supporting organizations that are new to RLF or to environmental or conservation issues, giving them an opportunity to expand their work while advancing CCI priorities.
- **Strategic.** These grants will help CCI connect grantees to timely funding, policy development, and implementation opportunities. This work will focus on opening up environmental and conservation decision making to include diverse constituencies in policy development and ensure that they benefit from those policies.
- **Transformational.** This type of collaborative, ongoing support will expand grantee networks and connect them to partners in different regions, program areas and coalitions across the state. This work will differ from the strategic approach inasmuch as it is more emergent, open-ended, and collaborative than it is directed by RLF. Organizations will be working to advance equity and expand the bounds of environmental and conservation work to include other community issues (e.g., poverty, immigration, and housing).

## Using the Grantmaking Framework

The grantmaking framework can help CCI implement a constituency engagement strategy that is increasingly effective in achieving both conservation and community outcomes. The framework is intended to be descriptive and not prescriptive, with each type of support representing an essential component of the overall constituency engagement strategy. As CCI approaches new funding partnerships, it can identify those organizations with well-aligned missions and build capacity to advance enduring, more equitable conservation outcomes. RLF can use the framework to be more strategic and intentional in structuring partnerships, thinking through the level of work being funded and the corresponding capacity and alignment considerations. For example, RLF may explore partnerships with an organization that partially shares CCI priorities in order to achieve a short-term goal, such as increasing diversity in decision-making processes. Over time, or with some organizations, RLF may determine that more flexibly aligning mutual priorities yields exponentially greater equity and conservation results. As organizations demonstrate strategic progress, RLF may consider ways to further support and sustain their transformational growth.

The idea of this framework is to recognize there are different ways of engaging organizations and that a healthy grant portfolio will include a mix of these grants. Such efforts to intentionally foster partnerships are likely to generate more durable outcomes for healthy, equitable communities as well as environmental progress.

## Conclusion

The CCI program is building a diverse constituency of organizations working on environmental and conservation policy and projects across the state. Grantees across the board are benefitting from CCI's grants, RLF support, and RLF connections.

This evaluation tested measures of constituency engagement that can be integrated into the work moving forward. The survey demonstrated a method of tracking how organizations skills/approaches, strategic priorities and environmental/conservation leadership roles changed since engaging with CCI.

To sustain the benefits, RLF should consider how to couple its effective strategic grantmaking with a more robust capacity building approach that might include increasing access to staff and consultant support and/or bringing together grantees working on similar issues and geographies for collective learning and strategy.

For future program evaluations, RLF may consider tracking the extent to which grantees are connected to policy makers and influencers (vertical connections) and peer organizations (horizontal) as a potentially important indicator of constituency building. More sustained connections may indicate that grantees are being integrated into environmental and conservation structures and sustaining their work in ways that allow them to influence policy and funding decisions.

# Appendix A: Constituency Building Measures

A key goal of this evaluation is to articulate and test measures of constituency building. To identify potential measures, the evaluation team first aggregated a bank of items and measures from a number of different instruments measuring organizational capacities and policy/advocacy competencies (see Sources below). Then, in collaboration with the CCI team, the evaluation team winnowed down the list to account for relevant CCI constituency engagement outcomes in three key areas:

- **Organizational skills/approaches:** the extent to which organizations have been able to build key policy/advocacy competencies, such as formulating campaign strategies, engaging policymakers, developing staff expertise, and leveraging resources for environmental/conservation work.
- **Strategic priorities:** the extent to which organizational goals, resources and activities are oriented to include environmental/conservation work.
- **Environmental/conservation leadership:** the extent to which organizations take active roles in engaging their communities, participating in coalitions, organizing campaigns and assuming leadership roles in the environmental/conservation movement.

The survey asked grantees to rank themselves on a final set of 16 items, which make up the constituency building measures.

## Organizational skills/approaches

1. Developing environmental/conservation campaign strategies.
2. Meeting and working with policymakers about environmental/conservation issues.
3. Conducting public education and training sessions about environmental/conservation issues to the community.
4. Developing staff expertise in environmental/conservation issues areas, legislation, etc.
5. Shaping environmental/conservation public funding and policy.
6. Raising or leveraging funds and resources to work on environmental/conservation efforts.
7. Achieving environmental/conservation benefits for the communities we work in.

## Strategic Priorities

8. Working on environmental/conservation efforts.
9. Linking our long-term strategic priorities and outcomes to environmental/conservation goals.
10. Developing specific policy, advocacy goals related to environmental/conservation work.
11. Dedicating staff time and financial resources to environmental/conservation policy and advocacy work.

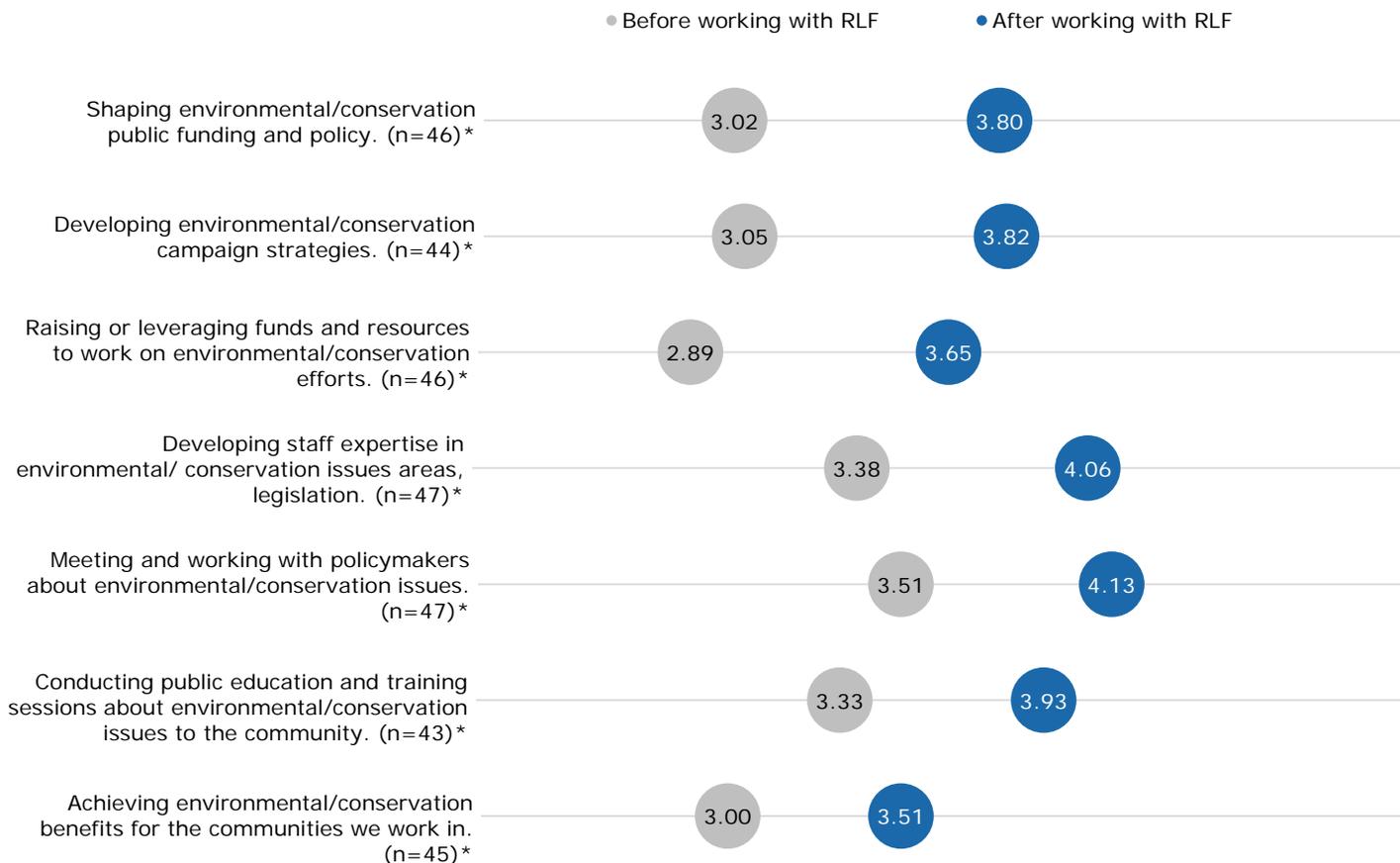
## Environmental/conservation leadership

- 12. Taking on leadership roles in the environmental/conservation movement.
- 13. Educating community members about environmental issues and policies.
- 14. Organizing our base constituency/community to mobilize around
- 15. Organizing campaigns for systemic or structural change related to environmental/conservation goals.
- 16. Participating in coalitions, working groups or advocacy networks working on environmental/conservation public funding or policy change.

### Rating Scale Options

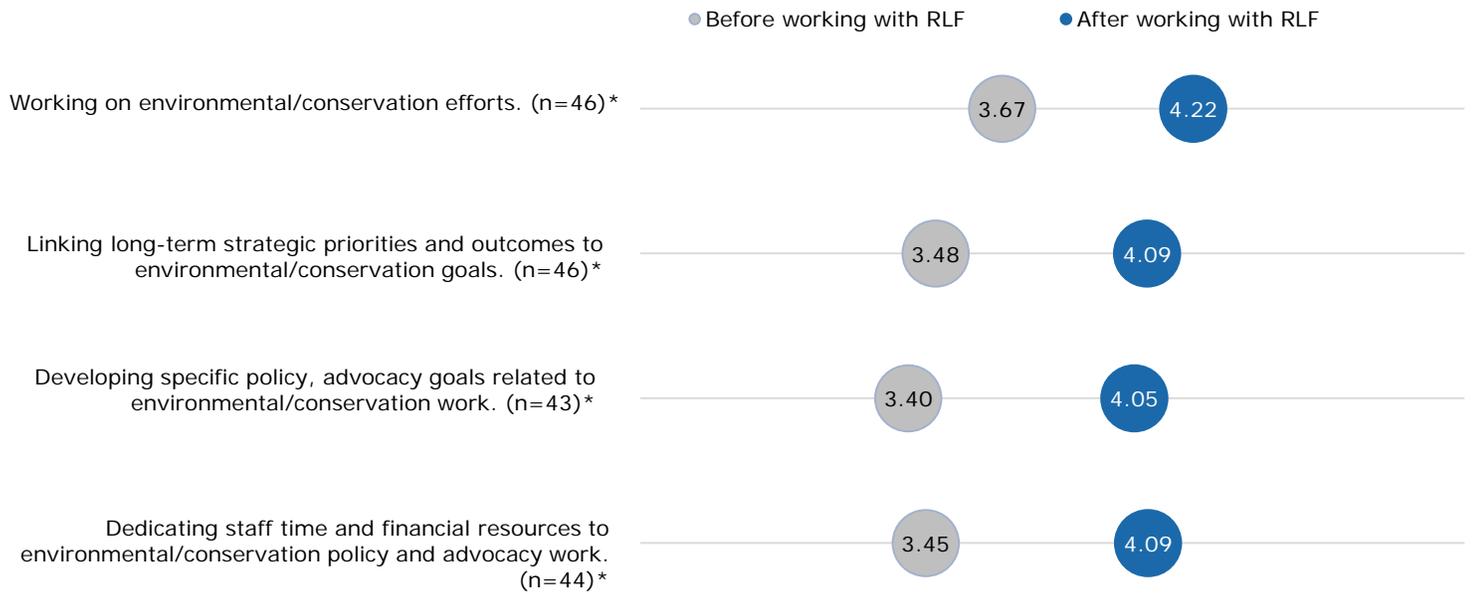
- 1 Not a focus.
- 2 In the early stages of development.
- 3 Implemented, but needs strengthening.
- 4 Functioning well.
- 5 In the advanced stages.

**Figure 8. Organizational Skills and Approaches**



\*Statistically significant with over 95% confidence using paired sample t-tests.

**Figure 9. Strategic Priorities**

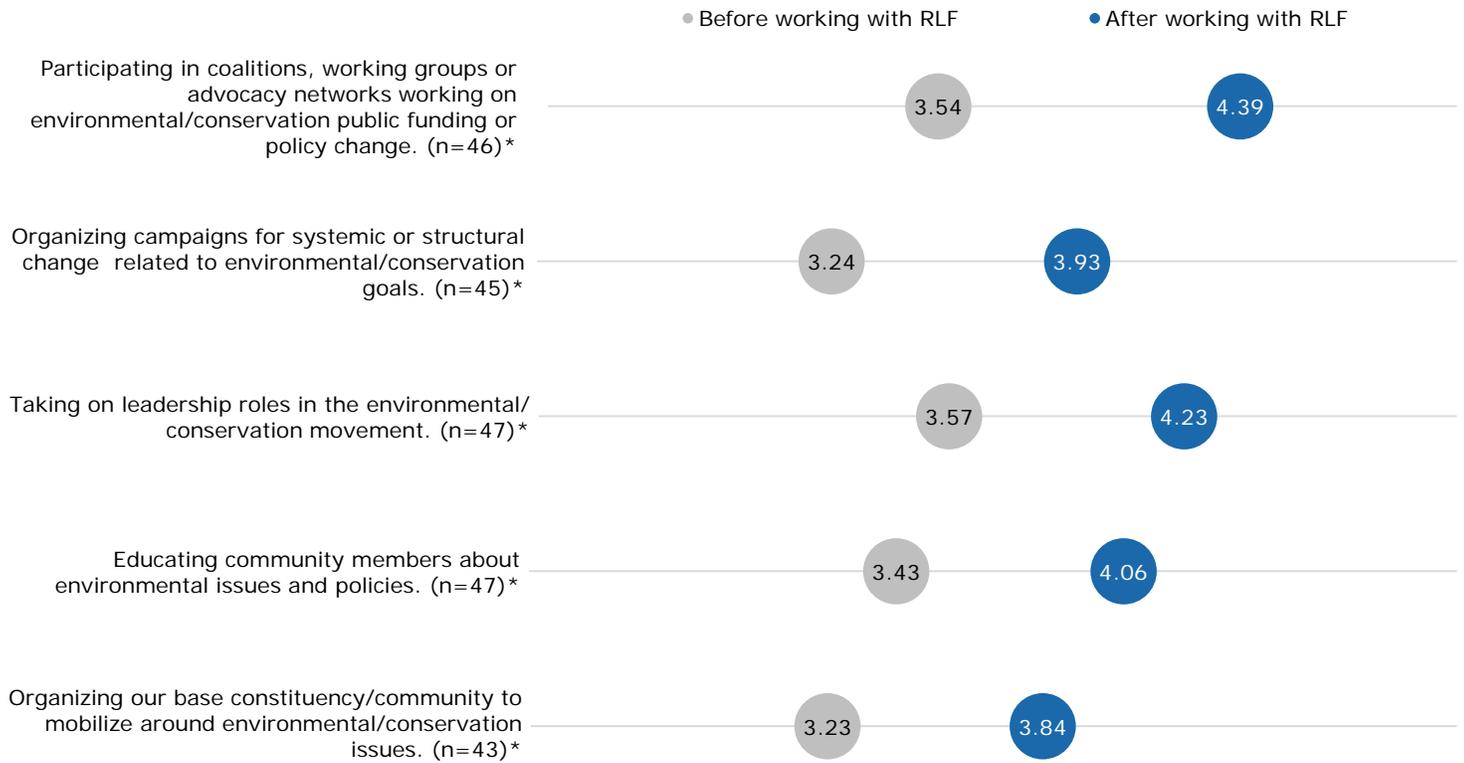


\*Statistically significant with over 95% confidence using paired sample t-tests.

**Rating Scale Options**

- 1 Not a focus.
- 2 In the early stages of development.
- 3 Implemented, but needs strengthening.
- 4 Functioning well.
- 5 In the advanced stages.

**Figure 10. Environmental and Conservation Leadership**



\*Statistically significant with over 95% confidence using paired sample t-tests.

### Rating Scale Options

- 1 Not a focus.
- 2 In the early stages of development.
- 3 Implemented, but needs strengthening
- 4 Functioning well.
- 5 In the advanced stages.

# Appendix B: List of Organizations who contributed to data collection

- Active San Gabriel Valley
- Anahuak Youth Sports Association
- Audubon California
- Azul
- Brown Girl Surf
- California League Conservation Voters Education Fund
- California Council of Land Trusts
- California Environmental Justice Alliance
- Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment
- Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy
- Climate Resolve
- Coalition for Clean Air
- Communities for a Better Environment
- Conservation Corps of Long Beach
- Conservation Lands Foundation
- East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
- Environment California Research & Policy Center
- Environmental and Energy Consulting
- Environmental Justice Coalition for Water
- Fathers & Families of San Joaquin
- Fresno Building Healthy Communities
- Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries
- Fresno Metro Ministry
- Friends of the Los Angeles River
- Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice
- Greenlining Institute
- Groundwork San Diego - Chollas Creek
- High Country News
- Incredible Edible Community Garden
- Leadership for Urban Renewal Network
- Local Government Commission

- Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust
- Los Angeles Waterkeeper
- Low Income Investment Fund
- Move LA
- Nature for All
- Outdoor Outreach
- Pacoima Beautiful
- PolicyLink
- Priority Strategies Inc.
- Public Advocates, Inc.
- Public Counsel
- River LA
- Resource Media
- Rural Community Assistance Corporation
- Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
- Southeast Asian Community Alliance
- Special Service for Groups, Inc.
- Stand Earth
- Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)
- Trust for Public Land
- UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability
- University of Southern California Program for Environmental and Regional Equity
- Water Foundation
- West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project

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