Grassroots Funding Partners

Current Funding Partners
As You Sow Foundation
The California Wellness Foundation
California Wildlands Grassroots Fund
Compton Foundation
Firedoll Foundation
Fledgling Fund
The David B. Gold Foundation
Lisa & Douglas Goldman Fund
Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund
Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
David L. Klein Jr. Foundation
Potrero Nuevo Fund
Purple Lady Fund
Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment
San Francisco Foundation

Past Funding Partners
Alfred C. and Erna S. Arbogast Foundation
Environmental Law Foundation
Gaia Fund
John & Marcia Goldman Foundation
LEF Foundation
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
Penney Family Fund
Jane Rogers & Michael Fischer Fund
Sandler Family Supporting Foundation

Grassroots Funding Board

2009 Members
Pamela Allen, co-Chair,
Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund
Arlene K. Wong, co-Chair,
The Bay Institute
Fatima Angeles, The California Wellness Foundation
Bill Center, Planning and Conservation League
Susana De Anda, Community Water Center
Sandra Jerabek, Tolowa Dunes Stewards
Jennifer Sokolove, Compton Foundation

Past Funding Partners
Alfred C. and Erna S. Arbogast Foundation
Environmental Law Foundation
Gaia Fund
John & Marcia Goldman Foundation
LEF Foundation
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
Penney Family Fund
Jane Rogers & Michael Fischer Fund
Sandler Family Supporting Foundation

Grassroots Fund Staff
Karla James, Grassroots Fund Coordinator & Rose Foundation Managing Director
Tim Little, Grassroots Fund co-Founder & Rose Foundation Executive Director
Robyn Herr, Rose Foundation Development Associate

Members Emeriti
Warren Alford, Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign (2006-2009)
Kathy Bailey, Sierra Club (2003-2008)
John Buckley, Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, Founding co-Chair (2003-2005)
Lori de León, Dolores Huerta Foundation (2006-2009)
Jerry Emory, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation (2004-2005)
Amy Lyons, Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund, Grassroots Fund co-Founder (2003-2006)
Suzanne Michell, Compton Foundation, Grassroots Fund co-Founder (2003-2004)
Jane Rogers, San Francisco Foundation (retired), Founding co-Chair (2003-2006)

The Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment is the Grassroots Fund’s host and trustee. Since 1992, Rose has raised and disbursed nearly $15 million in support of community-based environmental and consumer protection projects. Rose also teaches an environmental justice curriculum to high school students in several underserved Bay Area communities, and is active nationally in the growing social investment field.
Bridging the Grassroots Gap

The Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund was launched in 2003 to energize and empower the environmental grassroots through small grants, coaching, training, workshops and other services. At the time, program officers at the Compton Foundation, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, and the Rose Foundation recognized that few foundation grants were penetrating all the way to the grassroots strata of the environmental movement. They created the Grassroots Fund as an avenue for foundations to effectively direct resources to grassroots activists and communities.

Creating a Community-Funder Partnership

In designing the Grassroots Fund, Compton, Goldman and Rose solicited advice from over 100 grassroots environmental leaders in California. Although the Grassroots Fund now channels the support of more than 16 funding partners and has awarded over $1 million in $2,000 - $5,000 grants to small and emerging groups, the Fund remains guided by community leaders, who comprise a majority of its funding board.

Lessons from the Grassroots

The importance of listening to and involving the community in guiding responsive, competitive grantmaking is at the core of the lessons learned in six years of grassroots grant making. But community involvement – and the mutual trust required – is just the starting point. On behalf of all of our funding partners and the hundreds of grassroots grantees, we offer this report as an articulation of emerging best practices at the busy intersection of philanthropy and community.

And, while we offer this report to our colleagues in the funder community, we don’t pretend that it’s the last word. We welcome your reactions, and invite you to share them with us at grassroots@rosefdn.org. Above all, we encourage you to invest in growing the grassroots base of the environmental movement.

Grassroots Grantee Profile

• 3/4 have yearly budgets under $25,000.
• 2/3 are in rural areas that are underserved by most foundation funding.
• 1/3 have never received a grant before.

Average grant size: $4,020. Awards through 2009: 311 grants totaling $1,250,000.

The Sustainable Nations Development Project utilized a grassroots grant to educate 3 generations of native people about food production, seed saving, water efficiency and straw bale construction.

Grassroots Fund an Avenue for Foundations to Effectively Direct Resources to Grassroots Activities and Communities

Grassroots groups are the lifeblood of the environmental movement. They have a direct, personal stake in halting pollution, restoring watersheds, protecting wilderness and open space, and educating the next generation of environmental stewards. They understand their local culture and politics, and are powered by dedicated, passionate volunteers. Yet, most foundations don’t fund these groups because they are too small, too new, or are perceived as being too risky.
Lesson 1: Grassroots groups face unique barriers to foundation funding.

Grassroots groups are not professional. Most have no paid staff, much less a development director. Many have never received a grant before. They don’t know how to write a grant proposal nor how to find out who would fund their work. Besides—they’re too busy to even think about all this because their pressing focus is on what’s needed today. Faced with immediate threats to local ecosystems or their communities’ health, these kitchen table activists often feel overwhelmed by the challenge of raising money.

Small Groups, Big Hurdles

- Are intimidated by the foundation world, convinced that foundations are not sensitive to their local issues.
- Possess neither the time nor the experience to complete complicated grant proposals.
- Lack administrative structure and capacity— for example, they probably don’t have a formal budget or accounting system.
- Suffer from decentralized recordkeeping—since key volunteers often work from home, records may be scattered and it’s difficult to pull together information needed to complete a grant proposal.
- Don’t tell their story cleanly and concisely— they need training in how to articulate big picture strategy, detailed work plans and measurable objectives.
- Function in a state of urgency. Their need is now; they can’t wait several months for a decision on a grant application.
- Face class, culture and language barriers.
- Operate far below mainstream media’s radar screen, especially in geographically far-flung locations.
- Lack 501c(3) status, and may have very limited fiscal sponsorship options (especially in rural areas).

Language, culture and class are often barriers to needed funding. La Asociación de Gente Unida por el Agua Coalition mobilizes Spanish-speaking farmworker communities to protect groundwater from industrial agricultural practices.

Grantee profile: 61% rural, 30% urban, 9% suburban.
Grassroots activists can speak passionately about their issues, and the environmental threats they are facing. But they tend to be so absorbed in the projects at hand that they don’t always think to explain the bigger picture, offer a detailed work plan, or delineate strategic objectives. The Grassroots Fund teaches small groups how to tell their story — of course this helps them raise money, but it also helps them to be more effective in the work they do every day.

Some of the best funding opportunities may be in your backyard. People United for a Better Life in Oakland trains at-risk youth in the logistics and economics of backyard food harvesting and distribution.

Remote and off the radar screen. Rural groups such as Tolowa Dunes Stewards in Del Norte County have a hard time connecting with funders located in urban areas such as the San Francisco Bay Area.

60% of grantees have significant diversity reflected in board, staff, and constituents served.

"It really is very difficult for a small organization with a part-time staff person to spend hours writing a grant application."

Committee for a Better Alpaugh
Lesson 2: Connecting with the grassroots takes a lot of digging.

Most funders focus their support towards national, statewide or regional non-profits. But to be fully effective, these larger organizations often need to partner with much smaller grassroots groups which collectively form the heart, soul, and ultimate power of the environmental movement. These small groups are the key to mobilizing the grassroots base – a crucial component of achieving the objectives of larger environmental organizations and their funders.

How to Connect with the Grassroots

• **Conduct persistent outreach** into diverse, underserved communities and encourage applications from activists who do not necessarily identify themselves as ‘environmentalists.’
• **Tap into existing networks** of wilderness, environmental health and justice, land use, and other issue areas.
• **Regularly ask grantees for referrals.**
• **Continually screen media** for emerging organizations.
• **Establish multiple contacts** with each grantee.
• **Enlist the participation** of community representatives on the funding board to help see past an unprofessional application and identify the real value of an applicant’s work.

Pooling Resources to Grow the Grassroots

Most funders are not equipped to conduct detailed, personalized outreach to potential applicants. Therefore, a pooled fund is the most efficient way for funders to connect with small groups. The Grassroots Fund serves as a finely tuned set of eyes and ears for its funding partners, extending into areas most foundations cannot reach without help potential applicants who lack development experience.

Key Characteristics of a Pooled Grassroots Fund

• **Provides funders an efficient way** to support small groups that complement the work of the funders’ larger grantees.
• **Reduces administrative burden** of outreach to tiny, far-flung organizations.
• **Pools funders’ resources** towards the most strategically effective, “big bang for the buck” grants.

Cultivating community and food security. The California Food and Justice Coalition empowers and trains marginalized communities to advocate for policy changes that will rebuild local food production.

Giving nature a hand. Removing invasive iceplant at the Eureka Dunes Protected Area with Friends of the Dunes.

73% of grantees had expenses of less than $25,000. 32% reported it was their first grant.
From the Desk of **Earl Lui**
The California Wellness Foundation

Through the community members on its funding board, the Grassroots Fund has valuable on-the-ground knowledge of environmental health issues in remote parts of California. One of the reasons The California Wellness Foundation participates in the Fund is that it helps us penetrate into some communities that we would otherwise have trouble reaching.

"It is clear that assisting grassroots activism is a mission for your staff, and not just a job." -Friends of Del Norte

**Training the next generation.**
Right: EarthTeam Environmental Network for Educators and Teens works with high school students from low-income communities at 15 schools.

Far right: A seed saving conference organized by Indigenous Permaculture gave participants practical information on seed saving, dietary health issues, and Genetically Modified Organisms.

56% of Grassroots Fund applications were funded.
Lesson 3: Grassroots groups need more than just money.

Though they devote long hours, kitchen table activists generally do not have much experience with fundraising, let alone long-term planning or building organizational capacity. To realize their full potential, grassroots groups need a user-friendly application process, plus a relationship with funders that provides more than just money.

What Does a Streamlined, User-Friendly Application Process Look Like?

- **Step-by-step application instructions** written in plain language.
- **Hard-copy applications** for non-computer literate applicants, or those in rural areas with limited access to broadband Web connections.
- **A postmark deadline**, which helps groups avoid last-minute stress and expensive overnight shipping charges.
- **Accessible program staff** that encourages questions and provides assistance. The Grassroots Fund helps applicants to define objectives; create prioritized work plans; craft long-term strategic plans; compose mission statements; draw up a budget and financial statement; and methodically measure accomplishments and evaluate outcomes.
- **Fast-turnaround** response through a quarterly granting cycle.
- **Strong chance of hearing a “yes.”** The Grassroots Fund targets outreach so that we are able to fund about 55% of our applicants.
- **Automatic fiscal sponsorship** if needed.
- **Detailed feedback** on why an application is turned down, so that groups can learn how to craft a more mature, fundable proposal in the future.

Getting plugged in. Far left: John Kenyon, adjunct professor for the University of San Francisco’s Masters of Nonprofit Administration, explains effective online fundraising at the annual Grassroots Fund grantee convening

Ask the Experts! Left: A regular feature at Grassroots Fund grantee convenings

61% of applicants said the Grassroots Fund application was easier than anticipated.
Providing More Than Money
Awarding a grant is just the start of the Grassroots Fund's capacity-building support:

• An annual convening provides all grant recipients with workshops on fundraising, accounting, organizing, management, communication, and technology skills.

• Scholarships offer every grant recipient access to trainings on topics such as media, communications, fundraising, accounting, and board development.

• Quarterly updates highlight training opportunities throughout Northern California.

• Networking opportunities encourage peer-to-peer relationships with colleague organizations confronting similar issues.

• Subscriptions to the Grassroots Fundraising Journal and other support materials provide practical tips and advice.

• Grant recipients are encouraged to embrace minority constituencies and broaden the cultural, ethnic, and economic diversity of their memberships.

• Grant recipients are transitioned into direct relationships with funding partners when appropriate.

Worry-free advocacy. Right: 75 grantees learn “The Do’s & Don’ts of Lobbying” from Nayantara Mehta of the Alliance for Justice at the annual Grassroots Fund Convening.

Dialing for dollars. Far right: Grassroots Fund grantees practice their fundraising pitch to donors at a fundraising workshop.

94% of grantees said the process of applying proved valuable in additional, unexpected ways.
Lesson 4: Small grassroots grants have huge impacts.

Since its launch in 2003, the Grassroots Fund has awarded over $1 million to small groups from the Sierras to the Pacific Ocean and the Tehachapis to the Oregon border. The average grant size is about $4,000, and the Fund currently awards approximately 60 grants each year, for an annual total of $240,000. By meticulously tracking outcomes in different geographic and issue areas, the Fund ensures that ongoing grantmaking is balanced and effective.

How Big Can a Small Grant Be? In our grantee’s own words.

Saving Old-Growth Forests
Right: “Saved thousands of acres of old-growth timber in the Klamath National Forest.”
Klamath Forest Alliance

Protecting Watersheds
Right: “More than 20 volunteers have contributed to 300+ hours of monitoring chemical, physical, and biological parameters throughout the Upper Carson River Watershed.”
Alpine Watershed Group

Training Young Leaders
Left: “We constructed a traditional medicine and food garden with the Trinidad Rancheria, and will be teaching traditional plant medicine classes at the garden.”
Sustainable Nations Development Project

Growing Local Food Security
Left: “Though our bicycle rickshaw compost-pickup routes, we diverted over 18 tons of waste from the landfill.”
City Slicker Farms, Oakland

58% of applicants who were unsuccessful on their first try were funded on their second proposal.
From the Desk of

Amy Lyons

Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund, Grassroots Fund co-founder

When we planned the fund, we thought that awarding some of these grants to some pretty scruffy groups might be risky given the low capacity, kitchen table nature of many of these groups, and we anticipated that some of them would fail. But we’ve been pleasantly surprised - the vast majority of grassroots grantees have been extremely effective. I still think that funding on the cutting edge means that you have to be willing to accept some risk, but we’ve seen that carefully targeted small grants result in a tremendous return on the investment.

Helping Communities Find Their Voice
Left: “We rallied people from Lamont, the town where 1,168 people were sickened by pesticide drift, to get involved, to participate in a press conference, organize and mobilize. Hearing these stories compelled the legislature and governor to pass the Pesticide Drift Exposure Law.”
El Comité para el Bienestar de Earlimart

Taking out the Trash
Right: “Conducted seven river clean-ups (Rio Limpio) hauling hundreds of bags and thousands of pounds of trash out of the Tule River watershed.”
WildPlaces Ecological Education and Restoration

Giving Nature a Hand
Far right: “Students removed thousands of individual invasive plants (radish, fennel, mustard, Himalayan Blackberry, etc.), and instead propagated hundreds of native plants (juncus, yarrow, coffee berry, bunch grass, ferns, willows, oaks, coyote bush, etc.).” Wilderness Arts and Literacy Collaborative

68% of grantees increased their income in the years following their Grassroots Fund grant.
Lesson 5: Grassroots groups educate funders, and each other.

Advice from the Grassroots
Applicants and grant recipients bring valuable insights to the table, and we ask them for feedback at every opportunity. This has helped us refine and improve the application and evaluation process, as well as the training programs. Meanwhile, the grassroots leaders on our board have shaped the Grassroots Fund’s direction from the beginning and continue to do so.

As funders, we are constantly learning from the grassroots about emerging ideas and strategies. We also draw inspiration from their can-do spirit.

Grantees Teaching Each Other
Because small groups have a wealth of knowledge to offer each other, we help them meet and exchange ideas – in person and on our website. We solicit their advice and then share selected responses via the website and/or email.

"In addition to the direct monetary support, the grant helped establish the credibility of our then fairly new nonprofit and enabled us to be recognized as a growing force and voice for the community."
- Donner Summit Area Association

In the Valley
Irma Arrollo (left) of El Quinto Sol de America and Teresa DeAnda (right) of El Comité para el Bienestar de Earlimart explain the air pollution problems faced by Central Valley farmworker communities.

At the Convening
Guillermo Vasquez of Indigenous Permaculture talks about changes groups can make in organizational structure to operate more efficiently.

From the Heart
Sandra Garcia of Campesinas Unidos del Valle de San Joaquin shares insights on community organizing as Grassroots Fund board member Lori de León looks on.

For 25% of grantees, the Grassroots Fund grant was the first they ever applied for.
At a Grassroots Fund convening, one community leader told us that their group’s members and other visible leaders had been threatened with dead rats on their door steps and gunshots through their windows. When we hear about billboards showing local environmental leaders being flushed down a toilet, we know that they are facing challenging and potentially dangerous situations in their own communities. They need our support, both financially and to publicize and support the legitimacy of their work to protect their local resources.

**On the River**
Both on the river and on dry land, Friends of the Petaluma River educates and mobilizes hundreds of conservation volunteers. Photo by David Yearsley

**Shared Wisdom from the Community**

“Research the laws and policies and find out what officials CAN do; make requests that are in keeping with their official responsibilities.” **Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center**

“Create allies at the local government agency . . . These are public servants, not the enemy.” **No Wetlands Landfill Expansion**

“People often judge you by not only what you say, but by countenance, body language, and courtesies such as expressing humbleness, acknowledgement of their views, and appreciation for their time.” **Parents for a Safer Environment**

“Seek out tech-savvy members with time to spare who will join your core working group.” **Tulare County Citizens for Responsible Growth**

“Try to learn from others who have similar problems, even if they are from a different region of the state, or of the country.” **Committee For a Better Alpaugh**

“Focus on the positive (‘we want clean air!’) versus the negative (‘air pollution sucks!’).” **Save the Air in Nevada County**

If working in the rural [areas] downplay the “ecological” and “environmental” language and focus on “community development,” “preserving rural lifestyle” or “clean air and water for all.” **Wildplaces Ecological Restoration and Education**

“Have a strong chair of your meeting. Set-up telephone trees and email lists to get your minutes and information out to the public. Have your meeting dates, time and location placed in the local paper.” **Friends of Garrity Creek**

“If environmental groups do not get caught up in the need to be the one who gets the credit, much more organizing with the community is possible.” **Klamath Forest Alliance**

“The place where policies are truly decided, is at the staff level. By the time a permit or policy gets to a hearing… the likelihood of influencing it are slim. Thus, it is imperative to work with the staff of an agency to let them know well in advance of any key meeting or hearing what your concerns are and work collaboratively to identify ways to achieve your goals.” **AGUA-La Asociación de Gente Unida por el Agua**

“Fundraising is a shared responsibility. Get your staff, board or steering committee members, volunteers, and partner organizations involved in the fundraising process.” **SPAWNERS**
Lesson 6: Closing the Grassroots Gap requires funder collaboration and a long-term commitment.

In its initial research, the Grassroots Fund identified the Grassroots Gap – a serious disconnect between organized philanthropy and the grassroots base of the environmental movement. Since that time, with the help of more than 20 funding partners we have built a strong bridge connecting the foundation world to grassroots environmental activists throughout greater Northern California. Without our funding partners, there would be no Grassroots Fund. We are tremendously grateful for their support.

This report celebrates the successful investment of over $1 million of minigrant funding towards building a vibrant, evolving mosaic of very small groups that are solving some of our planet’s biggest environmental problems – and at the same time building local community, and a more diverse and powerful environmental constituency.

The first six years of the Grassroots Fund has been a journey where the Rose Foundation, our funding partners, and our grantees have all learned from one another. Collectively, these lessons are changing our approach to philanthropy. We offer them to the funding community in hopes that others may draw from them as well.

Why Participate in a Grassroots Fund?
The grassroots gap is real, it has been exacerbated by the recession, and it inhibits many foundations’ effectiveness. Yet, a yawning divide still remains between most of organized philanthropy and grassroots activists. Whether funders choose to work through the Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund, another established pooled fund, or utilize the model to create a new fund, this report is a call for action.

Pooled funds are a proven and effective way to strategically target funding to small non-profits (3 great examples are the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund, Global Greengrants, and the Gulf Coast Fund). As funders, we collectively have the resources, experience and responsibility to build the grassroots base of the environmental movement into an unstoppable force for sustainability. If not us, who? And if not now, when?

8 Great Reasons to Invest in Growing the Grassroots

Efficiently expand each funding partner’s reach into underserved communities.

Provide essential services that most foundations do not, or cannot, provide to small, emerging organizations.

Build the capacity of grassroots organizations and leaders through a structured management and technical assistance program.

Sustain an incubator where funding partners can send emerging groups that look promising but need coaching before they are ready for a bigger grant.

Help grantees step up into specific relationships with appropriate funding partners.

Offer funders the rare professional development opportunity to serve on a funding board alongside veteran community activists.

Strategically pool resources while consolidating administrative tasks and minimizing costs.

Find and support the most energetic and creative community-based groups working on a wide range of environmental issues, thereby sowing seeds of community stewardship with tremendous growth potential.

63% of grantees are working to diversify membership and are conducting new outreach to underserved communities.

Investing in the Future
Solar Richmond’s trainees receive green-collar job training in solar photovoltaics and solar thermal, preparing them to enter the solar industry and the green economy.
Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund

Six Year Funding Pattern

**What We Fund:**
- Environmental Education: 12%
- Habitat Preservation: 15%
- Land Management: 14%
- Environmental Health: 20%
- Watershed Protection: 18%
- Sustainable Forestry: 5%

**Where We Fund:**
- North Coast: 15%
- San Francisco Bay Area: 33%
- Sierra Nevada: 18%
- Central Valley: 12%
- Sacramento Valley: 15%
- Central Coast: 4%
- Statewide: 9%
- North Central Area: 5%