



# Increasing Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure for Landscape Stewardship

California Landscape Stewardship Network

August 2022





### Acknowledgments

This paper was commissioned by the California Landscape Stewardship Network. The authors would like to thank the California Landscape Stewardship Network [Steering Committee members](#), as well as Jaimie Baxter, Shawn Johnson, Dr. Amy Mickel, Michelle O'Herron, Susan Tasaki, and Kevin Wright for lending their expertise and assistance to this effort. The authors are also grateful to our network participants who shared their feedback on an early draft at our June 2022 Convening. In addition, the recommendations in this paper were informed by the perspectives of the following people, whom the authors thank deeply for their time and generosity: Angie Avery, Dr. Patrick Bixler, Keali'i Bright, Lisa Brush, Karen Buhr, Wylie Carr, Emery Cowan, Deb Davidson, Karen Dibari, Ali Duvall, Bridget Fithian, Debbie Franco, Anna Friedman, Karyn Gear, Doug Johnson, Nuin-Tara Key, Jonathan Kusel, Alan Kwok, Ron Milam, Jen Norris, Jon Peterson, Armando Quintero, Tahnee Robertson, Corrinne Scieszka, Kris Tjiernell, Katherine Toy, Lynn von Koch-Liebert, and Patrick Wright.

### About the California Landscape Stewardship Network

The California Landscape Stewardship Network (CLSN) is a “network of networks” formed to advance and innovate the practice of collaborative landscape-scale stewardship across the state. The CLSN was formed in 2016 by six regional networks representing 192 organizations to facilitate exchange and relationships, develop solutions to barriers inhibiting landscape-scale operations, efficiencies, and impacts, share tools and integrate best practices, meet discrete collective priorities, and promote innovation among landscape stewardship practitioners, funders, policymakers, and their local communities. The CLSN works closely with the Network for Landscape Conservation to stay connected to the national community of practitioners and stakeholders, including other regional peer exchange networks.

### Cover Photo

Paul Myers

### Recommended Citation

deSilva, S., Farrell, S., Knoblock, G. (2022). *Increasing collaborative capacity and infrastructure for landscape stewardship* [White paper]. California Landscape Stewardship Network.

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# What Are Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure and Why Do They Matter?

Most current natural resource plans and policies focus on the need for collaborative management. Indeed, the complexity and intersectionality of today's biodiversity, environmental justice, and climate change challenges require collaboration with diverse governmental and non-governmental partners at many scales. However, multi-benefit, cross-sector, and cross-boundary collaboration is an emerging field, one in which practices continue to evolve. While California's leaders have expressed strong support for collaboration, agencies and legislators are seeking to identify specific roles that the state and federal government can play to activate and sustain this work at a regional scale (Wright, 2020).

This paper provides [an overall approach as well as specific recommendations](#) for how state and federal agencies can support the building and sustaining of local and regional collaboration necessary to advance landscape-scale stewardship. These recommendations build upon the findings of two California Landscape Stewardship Network (CLSN) publications – [Capacity Building for Collaboration](#) (Goldberg, 2018) and [Advancing Collaboration in California](#) (Wright, 2020). The CLSN's recommendations, the related publications noted in Appendix B, and the sample capacity-building grant program guidelines in Appendix C incorporate interviews with state leaders, surveys with regional network practitioners, analyses of recent publications (including peer-reviewed research), and forums held with national organizations.

The recommendations presented here are tailored to meet three fundamental requirements for durable, equitable landscape stewardship outcomes:

1. Funding for collaborative capacity and infrastructure.<sup>1</sup>
2. Support for tactics and strategies that promote justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
3. Prioritization of cross-sector work and intersectional approaches.

To optimize its potential, a collaborative<sup>2</sup> must remain adaptable and become durable. This requires building the adaptive, leadership, management, and operational/technical capacities identified as essential for all organizations (Connolly & York, 2003). Nonprofits and other organizations can build capacity in these four areas through the seven elements illustrated in the Nonprofit Capacity Framework (Figure 1) that are needed for an organization to perform, and endure (McKinsey & Company, 2001).

**Collaborative capacity is critical to delivering stewardship projects and programs that meet the ambitious goals of California's 30x30 initiative and the national America the Beautiful initiative (see Appendix B for other examples).**

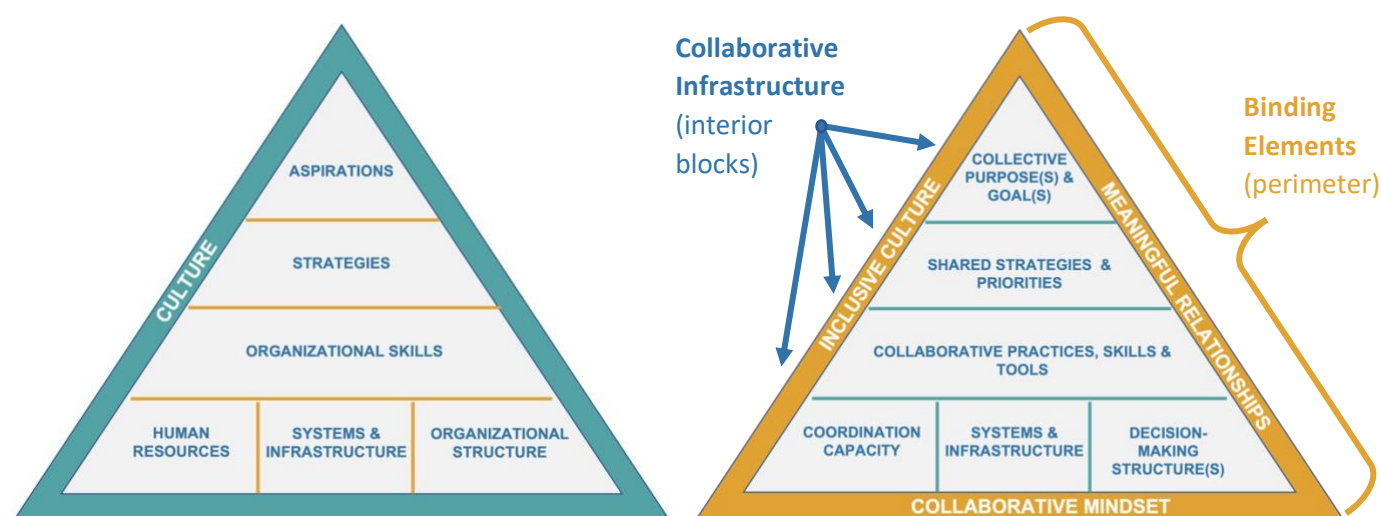
Moreover, for partnerships, these capacity-building elements can be adapted and categorized as "structural" or "binding." **Structural capacity-building elements represented inside the triangles in Figure 1 are fundable** and provide the scaffolding needed for a collaborative to function. The **binding** capacity-building elements represented on the perimeter of the triangle are best described as the mortar that holds the pieces together

<sup>1</sup> See [Appendix A](#) for definitions of these and other terms.

<sup>2</sup> This paper uses collaboration, partnership, and networks interchangeably to refer to cross-boundary and/or cross-sector partnerships working at a landscape, watershed, seascape, or regional level. Fundamentally, these are human-powered endeavors advanced by both formal and informal social structures.

and makes it possible to meet a collaborative's capacity needs. Without binding elements, an organization can function but won't meet its full potential (Mickel, A.E., July 2022). This Collaborative Capacity Framework (Figure 1, right triangle) has nine capacity-building elements that are essential for producing durable and inclusive environmental and social outcomes

Only when a partnership has the necessary level of collaborative capacity can it develop and implement the kinds of inclusive, equitable, and scalable impacts needed to meet state and federal goals, as well as its own collective purpose (Mickel, A.E., July 2022). A partnership's collaborative capacity is additive to the capacities that may already exist within individual partner organizations; simply adding new people or new projects to an existing way of working does not lead to *effective* or *inclusive* collaboration. Indeed, collaborative capacity depends on having the necessary **collaborative infrastructure**, which includes backbone staffing support, technical services, collective goals and priorities, community engagement, relationship development, and more.



Nonprofit Capacity Framework

Collaborative Capacity Framework

Figure 1. The building blocks of an effective organization shown in the Nonprofit Capacity Framework (left) are analogous but different from those for a collaborative shown in the Collaborative Capacity Framework (right). The fundable, structural elements of collaborative capacity (often referred to as collaborative infrastructure) represented inside the right triangle are held together by the binding elements of inclusive culture, collaborative mindset, and meaningful relationships on the outside. Much like bricks and mortar, one cannot stand without the other, and both the quality and quantity of each part make huge differences in what can be built. (See Appendix A for more detail on these components of collaborative infrastructure, plus definitions.)

Research and practice have clearly shown that when the appropriate structural elements of collaborative capacity are resourced—and the quality and performance of the binding elements are strong—collaboratives can produce greater, more durable environmental and social outcomes than any individual organization can achieve on its own. It is critical to emphasize that for investments in collaborative capacity to pay off, the right conditions must be in place. For example, while having the funding to hire a coordinator

checks the box for an important element of collaborative infrastructure, without engaged, committed leadership, a clear vision, or an inclusive approach, the coordinator will struggle to be effective.

Government support is just one crucial part of the overall financial and policy framework within which partnerships operate. Inside this framework, collaborative infrastructure elements can be discretely funded based upon a particular partnership's needs, capacity, and development phase. For example, a well-developed regional partnership may require funding for sustained backbone and coordination support, whereas a newly developing partnership may need funding to convene, develop community trust, or create a shared strategy and priorities.

Following are real-world examples of binding collaborative infrastructure elements (Figure 1, right). These are examples for which agency investment can support essential leadership training, peer exchange, or competency/skills development to help advance collaborative stewardship.

- Qualified and objective collaborative facilitator(s)/convenor(s) perceived by all as fair, transparent, and inclusive.
- An effective and equitable partnership governance and decision-making structure.
- Abilities and tools that foster and facilitate connections, relationships, and trust that enable collaborative problem-solving.
- Equitable inclusion of systemically marginalized communities as core participants.

## The Case for Increasing Collaborative Capacity Support

### The Current Status

To date, the 21st century has been defined by dynamic and challenging social, economic, and natural resource issues, including increased wildfire fire intensity; unpredictable weather patterns; and a deepening, necessary societal reckoning around equity and justice priorities. The scope and scale of these interrelated dynamics require new and creative approaches to land conservation and stewardship. This includes innovative cross-boundary collaboratives supported by adaptive network and partnership models (Mickel & Farrell, 2021). This way of working has been gaining traction nationwide thanks to the tangible results it has demonstrated over time.

**Without dedicated and sustained funding for collaborative capacity and infrastructure, opportunities to increase the scale of cross-boundary stewardship will remain limited, even as the scale and complexity of the problems continue to increase.**

A 2013 national survey found that stewardship and conservation partnerships varied dramatically in identity, scope, capacity, governance structure, and scale—from fewer than 10,000 acres to nearly 500 million acres (McKinney & Johnson, 2009). They also change over time. Since its founding in 2016, the CLSN has grown from six to approximately 34 regional collaboratives spanning about 40% of California.<sup>3</sup>

While many successful regional collaboratives exist, far too many lack sufficient, reliable resources to build and sustain the operational, management, adaptive, and collaborative capacities necessary to effectively do their

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<sup>3</sup> See CLSN's participant networks map: <https://calandscapestewardshipnetwork.org/map>

work at scale. As outlined in [Appendix B](#), investments in building and sustaining the collaborative processes and structures that underpin successful collaboration are prerequisites to success (Goldberg, 2018).

Also, regions lacking strong collaboratives as well as Indigenous communities and communities of color seeking to lead these efforts would benefit from additional resources to grow effective and inclusive partnerships. Moreover, sufficient collaborative-capacity support—especially through grantmaking—would enable community-based organizations and Tribes to take direct advantage of newly available, competitive funding for conservation, restoration, and stewardship work.

Given this demonstrated need, a growing number of state programs have begun to design grant programs explicitly to support regional collaborative capacity. The Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program, administered by the California Department of Conservation, encourages cross-boundary collaboration among diverse partners through its block grant program, in recognition of the fact that the complexities of wildfire resilience and forest health cannot be sufficiently addressed by any single entity. Many existing philanthropic foundations and non-governmental organizations also provide grants for communities to achieve place-based, landscape-scale conservation, restoration, and stewardship through increasing operational, management, and collaborative capacities. Durable collaboration can be achieved when networks have access to multiple funding sources like these, which can be combined to meet diverse project and operational needs while weathering times of change and uncertainty.

The demand for these grants is overwhelming. The national [Network for Landscape Conservation's Catalyst Fund](#) has provided \$1 million in collaborative-capacity grants to community and Indigenous-led partnerships over the past three years. Overall, the Catalyst Fund has received 450 applications and has only been able to fund 10% of the proposals, with less than 5% of that funding going to California's regional collaboratives. Similarly, the demand significantly exceeds available resources for collaborative-capacity funding administered through federal partners, such as the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) and the [National Forest Foundation](#).

## How Supporting Collaboratives Meets State and Federal Goals

A recent survey of the CLSN's constituent networks revealed that they are coordinating cross-boundary work and forging multi-benefit solutions in ways that are well aligned with both state and federal plans (California Landscape Stewardship Network, 2022). Furthermore, they often use a multidisciplinary, holistic approach that weaves in key state and federal priorities such as ecological health, cultural heritage, natural-resource-based economics, health and recreation benefits, and/or other landscape values important to their stakeholders and communities.

They apply this approach to the wide range of challenging yet critical ecological issues facing California and the rest of the country, such as climate change adaptation and resilience, wildlife corridors, biodiversity protection, ecosystem restoration, wildfire risk reduction and response, prescribed and cultural burning, carbon sequestration, forest and watershed health, fisheries conservation, climate-smart agriculture, and more. Similarly, these same networks are also working toward equitable social outcomes for those who rely on long-term resource stewardship for clean air and drinking water, cultural resource protection, access to recreational opportunities, and place-based economies (e.g., local tourism and workforce connections) (California Landscape Stewardship Network, 2022).

Based on what it has learned over time, the CLSN has created the following core tenets for how to increase collaborative capacity in ways that can help these partnerships do even more to meet local, state, and national socioeconomic and ecological goals:

- Well-resourced collaboration, whether at the local or regional scale, leads to more effective project engagement, design, and implementation, as well as to more durable outcomes.
- Truly effective and lasting landscape stewardship collaboration must focus on equity, justice, and authentic community relationships.
- New funding practices and creative financing pathways must be developed to support the human-powered elements of effective collaboration.
- The multifaceted and varied natures of effective collaboratives can make it a challenge to understand their components and practices; investment is needed to further study and share lessons learned.

**The guiding approaches and recommendations presented in the next section are designed to help decision-makers apply these tenets to supporting landscape stewardship and conservation collaboratives.**

These apply to partnerships at all phases—from nascent to established, high-functioning networks—as they strive to meet agency goals for water, biodiversity, wildfire and forest health, and climate resilience goals, while honoring the principles of equity and inclusion.



## Guiding Approaches and Specific Recommendations for Increasing Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure

The following guiding approaches and specific recommendations are an invitation to state and federal agencies to work together<sup>4</sup> to unleash the power of partnerships to achieve shared goals for natural resource conservation and restoration, and to build a more equitable stewardship movement.

Based on data collection, literature reviews, and expert interviews, three fundamental needs emerged for more effective, inclusive landscape stewardship in service of state and federal goals—especially, bold visions such as the 30x30 Initiative, which require voluntary, community-led solutions to biodiversity loss and climate-change threats:

- 1) Fund collaborative capacity and collaborative infrastructure.
- 2) Support tactics and strategies that promote justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- 3) Prioritize cross-sector work and intersectional approaches.

**To achieve the stewardship and conservation outcomes we hope to accomplish, investment in collaborative capacity and collaborative infrastructure is needed for partnerships in all stages of development.**

The CLSN recognizes, however, that landscape stewardship collaboratives across California currently exist in various stages of readiness to act with such investment. Some collaboratives are nascent, others mature, and some have evolved to focus on cross-sector priorities that meet complex ecological, social, economic, and other needs. The following guiding approaches and recommendations apply to all.

### Guiding Approach 1: Strategically Invest in Stakeholder Collaborative Capacity and Fund Collaborative Infrastructure

Fundamentally, the strategies required to protect and restore landscapes and improve community health transcend any single government entity's purview. Instead, they require partnerships among non-governmental organizations, businesses, community-based organizations, local governments, Indigenous communities, and the people who live and work within the region. Additionally, regional coordinators' knowledge, training, and ongoing leadership are foundational to unlocking greater efficiencies and scaled-up landscape stewardship benefits. *Sufficient collaborative capacity ties all of this together.*

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<sup>4</sup> The CLSN also stands ready to support state and federal agencies in implementing these recommendations over time, as well as to help strengthen the already excellent work agencies are doing to advance landscape-scale stewardship practices. It is important to note that, while the following recommendations were crafted in the context of the unique roles and opportunities that exist for stewarding California's landscapes, they are also applicable to federal agencies, regional and local partners, and landscape stewardship practitioners. Furthermore, they must be implemented in partnership with those outside of state government who play important roles in effective regional collaboration.

- **Recommendation 1: Fund all stages of collaboration.**

The CLSN recommends that state funding be directed to (1) add collaborative capacity and infrastructure where it is missing for collaboratives at any stage; (2) sustain existing, functional collaboratives; and (3) support mature collaboratives in evolving to take on more cross-sector or intersectional approaches, such as solutions to climate threats that are nature-based and include socioeconomic benefits.

Collaborations in all stages can benefit from capacity support; however, agencies can play an important role in ensuring that resources and funding flow to those that most need it. This can be done in part by revising existing grant programs and developing new ones that support durable collaborative infrastructure; improving the accessibility of these funds with more responsive eligibility requirements; and consistently integrating funding principles and mechanisms relevant to collaborative infrastructure across department, board, and conservancy funding programs. ([Appendix C](#) provides a template set of grant guidelines to this effect and shares the principles and mechanisms that could be consistently incorporated across a variety of programs.)

- **Recommendation 2: Increase collaboratives' ability to evolve toward more durable, inclusive partnership models by supporting peer learning and technical services.**

Agencies can play a leading role in sharing best practices and facilitating continued adaptation and learning that help strengthen existing collaboratives and provide a roadmap for nascent ones. In addition to peer-exchange opportunities and technical services for stakeholders and grantees, agencies should ideally also extend these same resources to government staff and programs focused on collaborative approaches.

*Bright Spot: Several examples of peer exchange models are offered within government and by networks and non-governmental organizations, such as the [Network for Landscape Conservation](#), the National Forest Foundation, and the Watershed Research Training Center. These could be replicated or scaled to support collaborative landscape stewardship practices.*

- **Recommendation 3: Support the development of durable and inclusive collaborations rooted in justice and equity.**

A starting point for this could be to prioritize funding and technical assistance for collaboratives that include diverse, broadly representative leadership and use decision-making processes that are community-led and/or inclusive of low-income, Indigenous, and other communities facing disinvestment.

In addition, agencies should ensure that funding flows to where there are gaps in equitable inclusion. Based on findings gathered by implementing Recommendations 5 and 6, they could ensure that funding opportunities prioritize networks that bridge local needs, honor community expertise, include diverse perspectives, and meet state and federal goals.

*Bright Spots: In California, numerous pieces of legislation have attempted to codify policies and programs that connect regional networks to government programs and agencies that promote watershed, landscape, or regional stewardship goals through the practice of inclusivity. One example, AB 9 (introduced by Assemblymember Jim Wood in 2020 and signed into law by the governor in 2021), established the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program, which directs departments within the California Natural Resource Agency to collaborate with community organizations, local government, Tribes, the Office of Emergency*

*Services, and others to build local and regional capacity to plan for and implement multi-benefit wildfire resilience projects.*

- **Recommendation 4: Support development of regional metrics that demonstrate the specific (and unique) impacts collaboratives can achieve.**

As described previously, collaborative approaches are foundational to meeting agency priorities. Metrics help demonstrate how networks achieve these outcomes, enable accountability for public funds, mark important areas for improvement, and allow successes to be replicated. Agencies and collaboratives should work together to develop performance measures that not only meet these goals but that also reflect outcomes relevant to local communities.

Many collaboratives rely on public funds from programs that already include accountability metrics for agency goals and plans. Regional collaboratives must therefore adhere to those metrics in their project design and implementation. However, their social license to operate comes from being accountable to their communities and shared landscape stewardship goals. They are best suited to define functional metrics that are meaningful to local communities as well as describe how public funds support impact.

By supporting regionally developed metrics, the state can promote three important outcomes: (1) more equitable processes for grantmaking and meaningful program evaluation; (2) increased demonstration and learning around specific collaborative impacts, which can build efficacy and inclusion; and (3) power shifts that allow agencies and stakeholders to work in true partnership. Additionally, reporting unanticipated beneficial outcomes, innovation, and adaptation is important for capturing emergent ideas and lessons.

*Bright Spot: Because many state funding and technical assistance resources are tied to specific grant programs, community needs and priorities often go unanswered if their plans and projects do not align with program requirements. In partnership with the Institute for Local Government, the Strategic Growth Council's pilot Boost Program helps under-resourced communities navigate the broad range of available state funding opportunities and technical assistance resources. It uses a new, flexible, and responsive technical assistance approach that helps build local capacity, develop equitable plans, identify meaningful projects, and secure adequate funding to advance climate action and address community needs.*

## Guiding Approach 2: Invest in Government's Own Collaborative Capacity

Collaborative approaches can support solutions across many sectors within a region, such as water, climate resilience, flood control, wildfire, and biodiversity, to name just a few. By investing in government's own capacity to engage across multiple regions, agencies can more effectively galvanize collaboratives that are advancing critical stewardship work grounded in equity and inclusion.

- **Recommendation 5: Invest in tools, procedures, and infrastructure that support collaboration, such as cross-boundary data sharing.**

Dedicating staff time, funding, and other resources to interagency coordination around data sharing requires establishing director authority and associated budget allocations. While data sharing is a pressing need, several other elements of government capacity could evolve to better support collaboration, including diversity-and-equity training for department staff, new administrative authorities, and new conservation planning tools.



*Bright Spot: Through its work on the California Water Plan and its efforts to advance multi-benefit projects at scale, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) is making headway in sharing data across agencies. DWR envisions locally led networks supported by the state that include participation by both. These networks would potentially bolster coordination across programs like the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program and the Integrated Regional Water Management Program to advance multi-benefit projects at the watershed scale.*

- **Recommendation 6: Provide agency funding for staff to actively participate in regional landscape collaboratives.**

Strategically supporting agency staff in assessing, building, and sustaining the collaborative infrastructure necessary for regional partnerships can help meet a wide range of agency goals. This could include additional staff to participate in collaborative efforts. It could also create new programmatic focal areas to analyze existing landscape stewardship network efforts; identify gaps; and tailor funding programs, staff positions, and policies to boost and sustain collaborative growth.

*Bright Spot: The Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) has developed "Regions Rise Together," a high-road vision for inclusive and sustainable economic development across California's diverse and interconnected regions. In addition, the OPR has created the Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program, which is designed to develop a cohesive and coordinated response to the impacts of climate change across the state.*

- **Recommendation 7: Coordinate across equity-focused lead staff of the California Natural Resources Agency and its departments and programs.**

This will allow the agency to collaboratively develop equity-focused priorities for landscape stewardship and to share best practices and ongoing learning with other state and federal agencies. Newly appointed leadership are already coordinating their efforts in this area. By formalizing and supporting their work, the state can ensure that funding programs and enabling conditions are primed to include and leverage the expertise of communities of color and low-income and rural communities.

*Bright Spots: The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, the National Forest Foundation, and Sustainable Northwest recently engaged with collaboratives to understand how the U.S. Forest Service could fulfill congressional support for collaboration through a capacity funding program. The resulting report notes, "Collaboratives can be valuable partners [to agencies] in developing tracking and reporting plans that are achievable and meaningful at the local level," and that strong relationships with agency staff, co-designed programs, technical support, and other mechanisms of collaboration are critical to support equitable outcomes. Another bright spot includes the Strategic Growth Council's Regional Climate Collaboratives Grant Program. This program is specifically designed to assess and address capacity disparities in climate-change-focused, cross-sector networks working in California. The program centers the expertise of under-resourced communities to help grow partnerships and to access funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation projects.*

- **Recommendation 8: Provide funding and guidance to regions across the state to self-assess representation and inclusion disparities in their collaborations, identify specific barriers, and support region-led work to address these issues.**

The success of conservation and stewardship outcomes hinges on designing more equitable, inclusive models. An appropriate role for government may be to work with mature and diverse collaboratives to co-create a roadmap of ways to include and leverage the expertise of communities of color and low-income and rural communities to advance landscape stewardship work through state programs.

Ideally, the stewardship movement will aspire to design projects that address justice concerns or use cross-sector partnership to begin addressing systemic problems that have combined social, economic, and ecological underpinnings. We have work to do to connect with communities, learn together, and solve problems through partnership and the redistribution of power and resources. By looking at the needs of regions where capacity gaps and other barriers to collaboration exist—and by developing equity-focused priorities for stewardship actions as called for in Recommendation 7—agencies can provide effective, targeted support to build a more inclusive stewardship movement.

*Bright Spots: The Sierra Nevada Conservancy’s Watershed Improvement Program, which relies on holistic, cross-sector approaches to problem solving, is led by coordinated staff who actively seek to break down silos and engage wide-ranging perspectives. Also, the State Coastal Conservancy’s JEDI Guidelines in Action calls for the implementation of the Tribal Liaisons Program, which enables each of the agency’s regional work groups to focus on relationship-building with California’s Indigenous communities. In both examples, the state learns from regions and stakeholders where opportunities exist to support inclusive stewardship models and where disconnection may stymie progress.*

- **Recommendation 9: Explore how collaborative networks could serve as “hubs” to connect agencies to communities.**

Through the CLSN’s work to coordinate our own statewide network, we recognize that the diversity of communities and landscapes across this large and populous state makes coordination challenging. Regional hubs are good solutions to support coordination between state and federal agencies, regions, and local stakeholders. Relying on networks as hubs of coordination would support the implementation and tracking of state equity goals, related policy changes, and even restorative decision-making, all of which are challenging for agency staff to do outside the context created by meaningful, place-based relationships informed by trust. By acting as a nexus for regional collaboratives across existing government programs, agencies could explore developing policies and funding that would efficiently promote landscape-scale collaboration toward a variety of socioeconomic and ecological goals.

Allocating operational resources and staff to network assessment, participation, and support would allow both agencies and stakeholders to explore pathways for efficient network-participant connections and fill in regional gaps while avoiding overly prescriptive plans and preserving capacity.

*Bright Spots: The California Ocean Protection Council’s draft Equity Plan includes the recommendation to “[e]xplore pathways for establishing a peer-to-peer network of previous, existing, and new grantees to serve as a collaborative learning exchange program.” The California State Coastal Conservancy’s [Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \[JEDI\] Guidelines](#) call for sharing resources and networking opportunities with relevant agencies to improve equitable outcomes and ensure environmental justice along the California coastline.*

- **Recommendation 10: Explore developing policies and funding support that could efficiently connect regional networks to each other across existing government programs and sectors.**

Sometimes, several collaborations are working on similar topics within the same geographical area, as we see happening in parts of California today. The risk of engagement fatigue is real, as individuals and groups need to participate in a wide variety of collaborations that touch on their various interests. With the allocation of operational resources and/or staff to network assessment, participation, and support as described, agencies could explore pathways to enable participants from different networks to efficiently connect and fill regional gaps. Alternately, agency staff could themselves serve as network-weavers, facilitating connectivity between partnerships working in different regions or sectors (e.g., connecting public health and recreation-focused networks).



## Appendix A - Defining Collaborative Capacity and Collaborative Infrastructure

The following definitions are provided for all forms of capacity discussed in this paper, as well as for **collaborative infrastructure**, which are the fundable components that facilitate collaborative capacity. These definitions are derived from Connolly & York (2003), Mickel (2022) and our own grant-funded research as well as our work creating a variety of white papers on these topics, extensive discussions and convenings with practitioners and government representatives, and direct partnership experience.

### Definitions

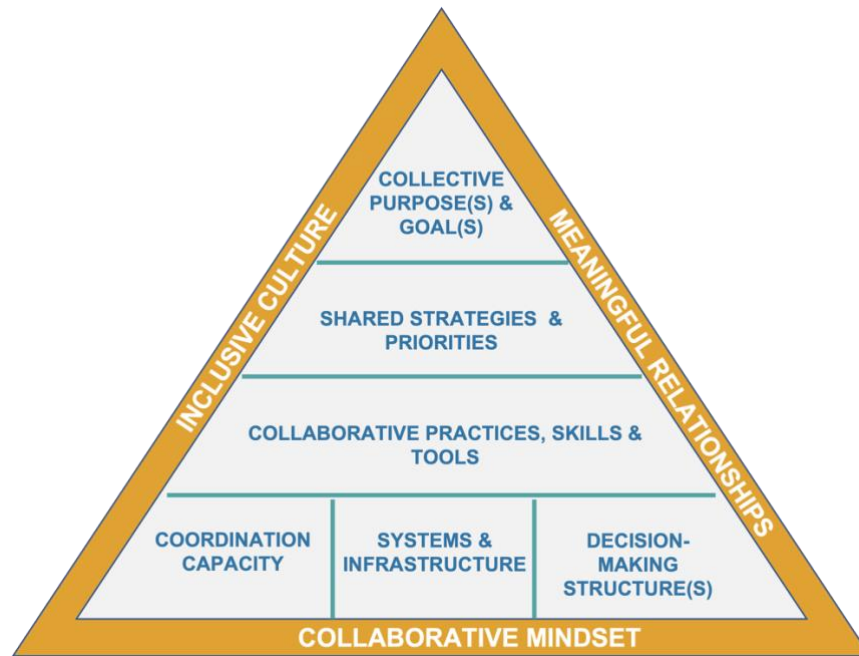
#### Four Types of Organizational Capacities

1. **Adaptive Capacity** is an organization's ability to monitor, assess, and respond to internal and external changes.
2. **Leadership Capacity** is the ability of organizational leaders to inspire, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction, and innovate.
3. **Management Capacity** ensures the effective and efficient use of resources.
4. **Operational Capacity** is how an organization implements key functions to achieve collective outcomes through structure, systems, staffing, and competencies required to meet project and program goals.

Fundamentally, local and regional partnerships require the same **adaptive, leadership, management, and operational capacities** that are foundational to the effectiveness of all types of organizations, including corporations, non-governmental organizations, and public institutions (Connolly & York, 2003). These capacities function at multiple levels: among individuals, at the organizational scale, within a partnership, and across systems.

However, working within a multi-organizational partnership also requires **collaborative capacity**, which represents the *collective of needs* of the four other capacities cited above. This determines a collaborative's ability to perform and develop, support, and implement collective, inclusive, equitable, and scalable impacts. It also includes the ability to collaborate, influence others, and share leadership (Mickel, A.E., July 2022). Collaborative capacity requires investment from public and private sources to support specific collaborative infrastructure elements.

Organizations build the four areas above through capacity-building elements, which are the either "structural" or "binding" pieces needed for an organization to perform and endure (Mickel, A.E., July 2022). Structural elements are defined as those that provide the essential scaffolding necessary to meet capacity needs. Binding capacity-building elements are best described as the mortar that holds the pieces together and help a partnership move from basic functioning to optimal performance. These organizational capacity-building elements can be adapted for partnerships as illustrated in the Collaborative Capacity Framework in Figure 2.



## Collaborative Capacity Framework

Figure 2. The fundable, structural elements of collaborative capacity and infrastructure represented as bricks in the interior of the triangle are necessary to deliver results.

Structural capacity-building elements include:

### Coordination Capacity

- Backbone and administrative capacity via dedicated staff or an organization that provides essential facilitation, meeting management, communications, progress tracking and measurement, collective administrative needs, and more.

### Systems and Infrastructure

- Communications and data-sharing systems for dissemination of resources (e.g., information and tools).
- Cross network/partnership connectivity resources to deliver facilitated in-person and virtual multistakeholder convenings, develop plans, and build trust and community connections.
- Evaluation and measurement tools to gauge and grow partnership impact and health.
- Fiscal management support to oversee collective business needs.
- Fundraising and grant-writing support to enable planning, design, and implementation of collective goals.
- Support for equitable participation and engagement to ensure responsive, durable project or program design.

## Decision-Making Structures

- Strong governance models that steer a cocreated vision and ensure equity and accountability.
- Technical services and support to meet science, technology, engagement, and other project- and program-specific needs.

## Collaborative Practices, Skills, and Tools

- Skill-building and competency-based training opportunities to build key collaborative leadership abilities and culture.

## Shared Strategies and Priorities

- Strategic plan and/or roadmap development to outline the collective vision, goals, work plans, actions, and activities that provide a shared understanding of partners' roles, resources, and capacities.

## Collective Purpose and Goals

- Agreements (e.g., MOU, etc.) to outline partnership's collective vision, purpose, and desired collective impacts, including partner roles.

**The enabling characteristics of high-functioning collaboratives listed below create the binding elements** (e.g., inclusive culture, meaningful relationships, and collaborative mindset) **represented on the perimeter of the triangle in Figure 2.** These characteristics influence and often optimize the performance of each collaborative capacity element and are sometimes referred to as **enabling conditions**. These include the following:

- Ground capacity building in equity through inclusion of systemically marginalized communities as core participants and as a foundation for partnership culture.
- Enable transparent decision-making at a collective scale through effective and equitable partnership governance and decision-making structure that adds to, rather than replaces, existing relationships, functions, and capacities.
- Grow and support a collaborative culture that increases skills and tools needed to facilitate the connections, relationships, best practices, behaviors, and trust that enable collaborative problem-solving.
- Facilitate partnership with collaborative mindset and leadership by having a qualified and objective facilitator/convenor who is perceived by all as a fair, transparent, and inclusive collaborative leader.
- Co-create partnership outcomes to reflect shared priorities that are central to what is accomplished collectively, not just for highly resourced or politically astute partners better placed to compete for resources and focus more successfully.
- Commit to aspects of long-term success, including ongoing attention to sustaining collaborative capacity, infrastructure, culture, and leadership as well as continuous learning and evolution in response to the complex and dynamic issues and people/organizations involved.
- Demonstrate and communicate successes and lessons on how collaborative capacity leads to on-the-ground environmental, social, and economic regional outcomes.



## Appendix B - How Surveys and State Plans Support the Need for Increasing Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure

The need for increased regional collaborative capacity to meet environmental, economic, and social goals is identified in a number of recent State of California plans, such as the [Pathways to 30x30: Accelerating Conservation of California's Nature](#) (2022). The [California 2030 Natural and Working Lands Climate Change Implementation Plan](#) (2019) also emphasizes the need for collaborative activities and recognizes the lack of resources to support them. This plan further acknowledges that California's lands encompass many jurisdictional boundaries, and that capacity building, technical assistance, and collaborative planning are critical to implementing the scale of ecologically meaningful activities the state is targeting. It notes that funding is often lacking for these coordinating activities and that, to the extent feasible, the state should make funding, resources, and staff available to support collaborative processes and planning.

The California Resilience Partnership recently published [Climate Crossroads: California's Readiness to Act on Climate Resilience](#), which includes both results and recommendations from its statewide climate-resilience landscape analysis. The recommendations are based on interviews; focus groups; and surveys with regional collaboratives, non-governmental organizations, Tribes, agencies, and others. They include the critical need to increase organizational and collaborative capacities (e.g., dedicated staff, time, and training) necessary to develop and implement regional goals. The report found that local and regional governments, as well as their nonprofit partners, lack core funding and capacity to focus on and prioritize climate resilience. It further recommends that state leaders "should prioritize funding for staff capacity, which has a direct impact on the ability of existing and new resilience practitioners to engage in activities to cultivate adequate responses to climate change." This can be accomplished by "setting aside a portion of multiyear, unrestricted, and flexible funds for capacity building."

The Western Collaborative Conservation Network's paper – [Institutionalizing Collaborative Problem-Solving As A Way Of Doing Business with Federal Natural Resources Agencies](#) (Western & Johnson, 2019) identified five tools for federal agencies to inclusively address complex issues, three of which are specific to collaborative capacity and funding. These include, (1) institutionalizing collaborative problem-solving, (2) encouraging collaboration as a way of doing business, and (3) increasing collaborative skill set development. The paper acknowledges that increased capacity—both for agency staff and partner organizations—is necessary advance the field of collaborative conservation.

The Water Solutions Network recently convened a group of high-level land and water leaders to guide development of the [WSN Watershed Framework](#). The Framework supports a cross-sector, collaborative, watershed-scale path toward climate resilience. Its recommendations include creating block grants across state funding programs that incentivize regional collaboratives to integrate from the ground up. These programs could coordinate and facilitate cross-department and cross-agency grantmaking that catalyzes, rewards, and builds capacity for ground-up, cross-sector, cross-jurisdictional action. The Framework also encourages aligning state, federal, local, and philanthropic dollars to build local and regional capacity.

Additional surveys and national listening sessions held by other organizations in 2022 are yielding similar themes. For example, the [Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition](#), the [National Forest Foundation](#), and [Sustainable Northwest](#) engaged with forest and conservation collaborative practitioners in California, Oregon, Washington, and the Southwest. Feedback from a wide range of participants, including Tribes, non-

governmental organizations, collaborative facilitators, research institutes, small businesses, and agencies emphasized the need for “built-in flexibility to allow grants to support collaboratives’ self-identified needs, rather than requiring applicants to adapt their proposals to meet narrow funding criteria.” Participants also cautioned against trying to prescriptively define collaboration, instead encouraging a focus on functions or outcomes. This leads to the conclusion that federal funding should incorporate and center equity considerations, with an emphasis on ensuring that benefits reach collaboratives that are emerging, have limited capacity, or are working in under-resourced communities.

Finally, this need for collaborative capacity is also being echoed in current statewide surveys, such as a recent query of regional stewardship collaboratives participating in the California Landscape Stewardship Network. The results of this survey revealed that these collaboratives are coordinating cross-boundary actions and forging equitable and inclusive multi-benefit solutions in alignment with state and federal plans.

**Approximately 90% of the survey respondents affirmed that, when provided with increased collaborative capacity and infrastructure support, partnerships were able to noticeably change the pace, scale, and impact of their project development and delivery.**

Moreover, they were able to meet collective goals that no single entity could accomplish alone. Notable accomplishments included completing regional LiDAR and fine-scale vegetation maps through leveraging public-private funding across 30 partners (One Tam and the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network); developing regional forest health and wildfire risk-reduction strategies and implementing cross-boundary vegetation treatments (North Coast Regional Partnership, Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network, One Tam); accomplishing joint NEPA/CEQA compliance and landscape-scale ecosystem restoration on thousands of acres of public lands (Redwoods Rising); and expanding implementation of instream and uplands restoration (Western Klamath Restoration Partnership).

# Appendix C - Landscape Stewardship Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure Grant Guidelines

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## Background

California is seeking to prioritize investments of its recent General Fund surplus to support high-impact and shovel-worthy projects. At the same time, state agencies are increasingly recognizing the importance of working at a landscape scale to address critical climate and natural resource challenges in ways that are rooted in equity and justice. The California Landscape Stewardship Network (CLSN) believes that the state can make significant progress in meeting these goals through investments in “collaborative infrastructure” funding (see Appendix A for definitions), while also using this opportunity to evaluate the impacts of those investments to inform future budget decisions.

The CLSN offers the following draft grant guidelines for a pilot “Landscape Stewardship Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure Program” to direct funding toward collaborative capacity to help achieve landscape stewardship project results at a greater pace and scale. **Based on our research, investments in collaborative infrastructure result in more efficient, inclusive, and cost-effective implementation of restoration and stewardship projects that address important state goals for natural resource conservation, climate resilience, and more.**

Finally, the CLSN recognizes that landscape stewardship collaboratives currently exist in various stages of readiness to act with such investment. The CLSN recommends that state funding be directed to add collaborative capacity and infrastructure where it is missing; sustain existing, functional collaboratives; and support mature collaboratives in evolving to take on more cross-sector or intersectional approaches.

## Landscape Stewardship Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure Program

### At-a-Glance About the Program

Administered by [Agency Name], the Landscape Stewardship Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure Program:

1. Supports collaborative capacity to increase and sustain landscape stewardship work within watersheds and regions and across jurisdictions.
2. Funds the interdependent and specific capacity components of networks and collaborative frameworks necessary to deliver impact.

3. Leverages the deep expertise of California’s diverse communities, fosters more inclusive partnerships, and generates more equitable project outcomes.

## Grant Guidelines

### Section 1 - Introduction

- Include a short synopsis of program purpose.
- Include key dates, such as guidelines/RFP release month and year, pre-application or full application deadline, total funding available for current grant cycle, and current contact information for staff consults/questions.

### Section 2 - Program Background

#### **Program Purpose**

- Articulate key points, including the following:
  - The purpose of the grant program is to invest in the collaborative infrastructure components of landscape stewardship to ensure that they will be successful, deliver project impact at scale, and be implemented more equitably.
  - The program invites applications that will help catalyze and sustain collaborative infrastructure to achieve greater landscape stewardship results.
  - Collaborative, bottom-up approaches unite federal, state, Indigenous, local, and regional government entities, special districts, conservation organizations, private landowners, community groups, and business interests to co-create a collective vision and to identify and implement strategies for coordinating community-driven projects across shared landscapes, seascapes, and watersheds.
  - This program commits to building and supporting the capacity of regional networks and landscape or watershed collaboratives to drive and sustain impact on the ground.
  - Collaborative capacity and infrastructure at the regional or landscape/watershed scale leads to better and more inclusive project design; increased pace of implementation; stronger connection to community priorities; and, eventually, faster, more cost-effective implementation of state goals and plans.
  - Describe the relevance of the capacity-building program to your agency’s strategic plan or natural resource plan. *For example, SGC’s Regional Climate Collaboratives Program notes that it “[f]unds mutually reinforcing capacity-building activities to drive and sustain equitable climate action.”*
  - This program prioritizes support for regional networks that bridge local needs, honor community expertise, and meet state and federal goals to further advance intersectional, equity-focused projects and outcomes.
- Include the grant program timeline in further detail here, including RFP release date, webinars/pre-consultation opportunities, preproposal and full proposal deadlines, technical/agency review period, award decision date, and timing to disburse funds.

- Describe the total funding amount available and, if anticipated, maximum award amount.
- Include a list of program priorities or elements required for successful applications.

### **Program Details**

- Start with **applicant eligibility**:
  - Grant proposals are submitted by backbone organizations on behalf of a diverse group of partners with a cocreated vision that is greater than any single organization's mission.
  - Partners, including applicants, may include community-based organizations representing communities of color and/or low-income communities, Indigenous communities and Tribal governments, resource conservation districts, fire-safe councils, non-governmental organizations, and so forth.
    - Note: Flexibility to award contracts or share award funding with subgrantees is important to support collaborative partners in advancing the proposed scope of work.
  - Applicants must demonstrate that their landscape collaborative or regional network includes all the following elements:
    - **It is place-based.** A defined and geographically explicit area of focus that encompasses a diversity of landowner types, conservation issues, jurisdictions, and stakeholder interests. (Landscape conservation partnerships can occur in all types and mixes of landscapes, including urban, suburban, rural, working, wild, and combinations thereof.)
    - **It focuses on a shared vision.** An articulated a long-term vision or a plan that relies on the applicant's track record or best available science to address the health and vitality of the defined landscape in a way that encompasses both people and nature.
    - **It is collaboratively governed.** A formal or informal governance structure or decision-making policy that fosters collaborative leadership and participatory engagement of the partners.
    - **It is inclusive.** An approach that emphasizes inclusive outreach and dialogue with various landscape stakeholders, informed by multiple interests and perspectives.
    - **It is well informed.** Committed to building the shared foundation of knowledge necessary to achieve its goals (e.g., ecological, cultural, traditional, and social information).
- Under **project eligibility**, ensure that each proposal includes the following:
  - Two or more of these critical collaborative infrastructure elements or activities:
    - Backbone and administrative capacity via a dedicated coordinator.
    - Governance planning/support (e.g., strategic decision-making structures and plans that steer collective vision and ensure accountability).



- Communications and data-sharing systems for dissemination of information and tools.
- Fundraising and grant-writing capacity to implement collective goals.
- Skill-building and competency-based training opportunities to practice collaborative leadership.
- Evaluation and measurement tools to gauge partnership impact and health.
- Technical services and support, including environmental consultants, permitting/regulatory expertise, or equity and inclusion training.
- A durable vision that ideally includes multiple sectors (e.g., workforce issues, public health, social justice) and beneficial outcomes (e.g., improved biodiversity, climate resilience, recreation access, emergency access).
  - Note: For collaboratives with an emergent strategy approach that is adapting to needs and evolving priorities, a long-term vision may not be appropriate. For these applicants, an evidence-based plan (using the applicant’s track record or relying on the best available science) should articulate intended multi-benefit results of the proposal or longer-term goals.
- The self-identified landscape within which they are working, and the under-resourced communities where their grant-funded work will be focusing.
- Specific under-resourced communities within the broader region where grant-funded activities will be focused. (Applicants do not need to include every community that meets the definition of “under-resourced” in their geographic areas of focus.)
- How funding for collaborative infrastructure elements will increase partnership capacity to enable more efficient, timely project delivery within the collaborative vision, as compared to timeline scenarios if funding is not made available.
- Specific barriers to initiating an early landscape or watershed-scale collaboration or continuing an existing collaborative that has experienced barriers to growth and success.
- Community engagement, education, and/or training conducted by one or more of the participating network members that supports the purpose of the proposed work and speaks to a list of the agency’s desired engagement, education, and training outcomes (e.g., developing a regional plan, meaningful engagement of relevant communities in developing a plan, engaging more diverse participants).
- Support for peer exchange and best practice and knowledge sharing across and between collaboratives and regional networks.

### Section 3 - Grant Administration

#### **How to Apply**

- Ensure that application processes are not overly burdensome and accommodations are made so the application and submittal process is broadly accessible.

### **Evaluation Process**

- Ensure that the evaluation process is transparent, clearly articulated, and speaks directly to the program priorities and requirements as previously noted.
- If possible, share the scoring criteria that will be used by the proposal-review team.
- The program will provide 50% of its available funding to initiating landscape collaboratives in parts of the state where they are nascent or don't currently exist.
- For functioning, mature landscape collaboratives and regional networks, 50% of its available funding will be dedicated to grants that support restructuring collaboratives to include or center (as appropriate) leadership and decision-making by people of color, Indigenous and Tribal government leaders, and/or leaders of low-income and/or rural communities.

### **Terms and Conditions**

- Stipulate terms and conditions of the award.
- Describe legal and funding statute requirements.
- Provide a glossary to define frequently used terms and acronyms.
- Consider interim and final project check-ins with applicant entities in lieu of rigorous, costly, and time-consuming reporting requirements.
- Create succinct program requirements (including funder acknowledgement requirements, ineligible projects, relevance to state plans and goals, contracting and procurement requirements, and so forth); avoid technical language.

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