

The Next Generation of Environmental Leaders: Opportunities for Investment and Action in the Northwest

By Michelle Zeidman, Special Projects Manager, The Brainerd Foundation

March 2016

Executive Summary

Introduction

For two decades, the Brainerd Foundation has invested in the capacity and leadership of environmental organizations to build power for conservation. We provide small grants to train up-and-coming young leaders within our grantee community; give general support grants to conservation advocacy and journalism organizations with programs for young people; and support training in academic settings and professional development programs.

As we prepare to sunset, our foundation is committed to strengthening the bench of new talent for the conservation movement with a robust Emerging Leaders Initiative. To help develop this initiative, Brainerd staff asked:

How can we best build the next generation of conservation leaders in the Northwest?

In the fall of 2015 and winter of 2016, Brainerd staff contacted 25 conservation and progressive organizations across the Northwest.¹ We interviewed 50 senior- and junior-level staff, asking questions developed in consultation with the Bullitt, Harder, and Wilburforce foundations, as well as experts in the field of nonprofit leadership. The results were analyzed against a set of assumptions about the gaps and barriers for the advancement of emerging conservation leaders. Our key findings and recommendations are provided in the following sections.

Key Findings

While some results reinforced our initial assumptions, others revealed unexpected opportunities and challenges for strengthening the next generation of conservation.

- Young people² held about three out of every five paid staff positions at the groups we surveyed.
- More than 60 percent of all jobs at surveyed conservation groups were identified as mid-level positions, making it difficult for new talent to enter the sector and for mid-level leaders to advance.

¹ See Appendix A for a list of participating organizations and abbreviations.

² In this research, we used the term “young people” to refer to people in their twenties and thirties.

- The conservation groups surveyed were adding jobs more quickly than nonprofits nationwide.
- Staff turnover at most surveyed organizations was lower than at nonprofits in general.
- The majority of surveyed groups with interns either paid them or provided a stipend.
- Professional development, mentoring, and networking were seen as critical next steps for young people looking to advance their careers.
- Some young people are serving on the boards of other environmental and progressive nonprofits as a professional development strategy.
- Many organizations identified the need to diversify³ their staffs and boards, and are taking concrete steps to address this need.

Recommendations

Brainerd staff believes that the following recommendations will best cultivate the next generation of conservation leaders, while simultaneously building broad support for conservation in the Northwest. These recommendations focus on what to do, rather than how to do it.

Welcoming Young Leaders

- ✓ *Enhance existing internship and fellowship programs.* This might include incorporating mentoring and professional development; providing competitive pay to increase the diversity of candidates; and developing cohort-style programs.
- ✓ *Strengthen post-internship connections* between nonprofit staff and interns/fellows to enable young people to stay engaged and find employment in the conservation field.

Providing Leadership & Growth Opportunities

- ✓ *Encourage professional development opportunities for younger staff that go beyond their current job functions.* Focus on providing skills to prepare emerging leaders to step into leadership roles, including leadership training and coaching, fundraising, communications, personnel management, and strategy.⁴
- ✓ *Support mentorship of emerging leaders* to cultivate and sustain professional satisfaction, and help young people understand potential career pathways.
- ✓ *Increase networking opportunities for young people* so they can support each other and build relationships with environmental leaders.

³ In this research, we asked organizations to define what diversity means in the communities where they work and the populations impacted by the conservation issues they seek to address.

⁴ A 2015 study found that a lack of learning and growth opportunities was the number one reason why nonprofit leaders left their organizations, and the lack of mentorship and support was the second reason for leadership turnover.
http://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_nonprofit_leadership_development_deficit

- ✓ *Increase the number of young people on nonprofit boards. Consider board membership as an opportunity for emerging nonprofit leaders to develop new skills and as an avenue for engaging young professionals outside the conservation or nonprofit sector.*⁵

Welcoming People from Diverse Backgrounds⁶

- ✓ *Support nonprofits that are systematically working to increase the diversity of their staffs and boards. Recognize grantees for their achievements and encourage them to continue this work.*
- ✓ *Prioritize leadership development trainings and networking opportunities for entry- and mid-level employees from diverse backgrounds.*
- ✓ *Encourage organizations to share their strategies to diversify their staffs, boards, internships, and memberships. This will enable grantees to learn from each other.*
- ✓ *Encourage grantees to partner with organizations that represent the Rising American Electorate⁷ and to reach out to such groups as grantees recruit new staff and board members.*

Next Steps

This research allowed us to test some of our initial assumptions about what is needed to strengthen the next generation of conservation leaders. As the Brainerd Foundation moves forward with its Emerging Leaders Initiative, we intend to evaluate grant-making opportunities and needs within our regional focus areas. We will also examine how these recommendations relate to the distinct needs of emerging leaders in the advocacy, legal, and communications fields. Our Emerging Leaders grantmaking program will seek to partner with colleague funders and balance the cost implications of various recommendations.

⁵ A 2016 “pulse” survey by Nonprofit Quarterly found that nonprofit boards were concerned about board governance as demographics change, and identified “boards as training grounds for leadership of marginalized communities.”

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2016/03/11/what-are-nonprofit-boards-concerned-about-in-2016>

⁶ The Brainerd Foundation encourages its grantees to reflect the diversity of the communities where they work and the populations impacted by the conservation issues they seek to address. As we think about the future, Brainerd staff and grantees are cognizant that the demographics of the Rising American Electorate are different than previous generations.

⁷ The “Rising American Electorate” refers to groups including unmarried women, African Americans, Latinos, other people of color, and millennials who constitute the new majority in the United States. <http://www.voterparticipation.org/the-rising-american-electorate>

The Next Generation of Environmental Leaders: Opportunities for Investment and Action in the Northwest

By Michelle Zeidman, Special Projects Manager, The Brainerd Foundation

March 2016

Detailed Report

Introduction

For two decades, the Brainerd Foundation has invested in the capacity and leadership of environmental organizations to build power for conservation. We provide small grants to train up-and-coming young leaders within our grantee community; give general support grants to conservation advocacy and journalism organizations with programs for young people; and support training in academic settings and professional development programs.

As we prepare to sunset, our foundation is committed to strengthening the bench of new talent for the conservation movement with a robust Emerging Leaders Initiative. To help develop this initiative, Brainerd staff asked:

How can we best build the next generation of conservation leaders in the Northwest?

About This Research

In the fall of 2015 and winter of 2016, Brainerd staff contacted 25 conservation and progressive organizations spread across Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. We interviewed 50 senior- and junior-level staff, and collected data from 24 organizations via an online survey. These organizations included almost every statewide environmental policy group funded by the Brainerd Foundation and the majority of our legal and place-based conservation grantees, plus a few organizations receiving grants from the Bullitt, Harder, and Wilburforce foundations.

We asked questions developed in consultation with the Bullitt, Harder, and Wilburforce foundations, as well as experts in the field of nonprofit leadership. The results were analyzed against a set of assumptions about the gaps and barriers for the advancement of emerging conservation leaders. Our key findings and recommendations are provided in the following sections.

We thank all of the organizations and individuals for their participation in this study. A list of participating organizations along with a profile their characteristics in aggregate can be found in Appendices A and B of this report. We also thank the staffs of the Bullitt, Harder, and Wilburforce foundations and our consultant experts for assistance in this research.

Emerging Leaders Defined

In this research, we used the term “emerging leaders” to refer to people in their twenties and thirties who are poised to take on substantial leadership roles at environmental nonprofits in the next ten to fifteen years. Some of these young people have already emerged as leaders; others have the potential to be environmental leaders if the requisite learning opportunities and leadership roles become available.

While other foundations and even some of our grantees include high school age and younger people in their definitions of emerging leaders, this research does not. Neither did this research focus on people entering the environmental movement as a second career.



Findings

The following is a summary of the findings from our interviews and online survey.⁸ Some of them surprised us; others reinforced our initial assumptions. These findings have been grouped into three sections: (1) Welcoming Young Leaders, (2) Providing Leadership and Growth Opportunities, and (3) Welcoming People from Diverse Backgrounds.

1. Welcoming Young Leaders

There are many ways to welcome young leaders into the conservation movement. We questioned whether there are enough opportunities for young people to engage in environmental work. We asked if young people are connected to existing job and board opportunities. And we wondered if young people have the skills they need to get hired by environmental nonprofits. We found that the answers to these questions are nuanced and that emerging leaders currently face challenges on all three fronts.

Providing Opportunities for Young People to Engage

Entering into this research we were concerned that too few young people were employed by environmental nonprofits in the Northwest. We assumed that this stemmed in part from a lack of entry-level jobs and paid internships; our findings provided a more nuanced understanding of these issues. We also anticipated that few young people currently serve on the boards of environmental nonprofits, which we found to be true. Below are all of our findings in this area.

⁸ These findings cannot be generalized to environmental nonprofits across the Northwest, as they are based on data from a limited sample of organizations that were selected for their relationships with specific funders.

Finding 1.1. There are many young people employed by most of the environmental groups surveyed.

- About 3 out of 5 staff at surveyed groups were under age forty, including the 22% of employees who were under age thirty.⁹
- Surprisingly, this held true at the legal groups we surveyed where one might expect to see a predominance of older lawyers.
- Only two of the organizations surveyed employed no people under age thirty.

Finding 1.2. There are few entry-level job opportunities in conservation.

- Less than 1 in 7 of all the jobs at surveyed nonprofits were entry-level positions, making it difficult for new talent to enter the sector.
- This was corroborated by the younger staff interviewed who nearly unanimously reported that finding an entry-level job in conservation was very difficult.
- Earthjustice is one of the few places for entry-level, early-career nonprofit legal opportunities.

“In terms of other nonprofit legal shops, there aren’t a lot of entry-level, early-career options. As a bigger organization, Earthjustice is able to provide those opportunities. You could fill a spot if foundations were to fund fellowship attorneys for 2–3 years for folks just out of law school or those who have done a clerkship. The need is great for [job opportunities for] early career lawyers.” (Matt Bacca, Earthjustice)

- Internship and fellowships that enable younger people to step directly into mid-level positions could supplement the low number of entry-level positions in the environmental movement.

Finding 1.3. Most groups offer internships, and the majority either paid or provided nominal stipends to their interns.

- However, one in four nonprofits did not consistently pay their interns.
- Several interviewees noted that interns were not adequately paid, which effectively narrowed the candidate pool. Younger interviewees shared that they worked multiple jobs or relied on family

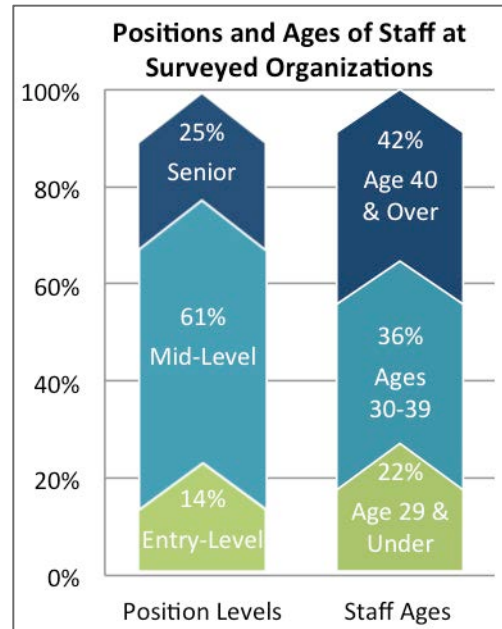
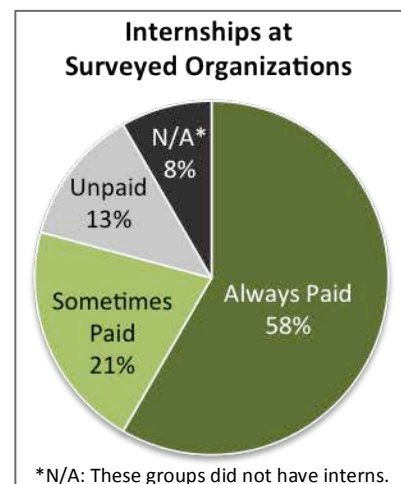


Figure 1. Percentage of employees at surveyed environmental groups within each age group and position level.



*N/A: These groups did not have interns.

Figure 2. Intern Compensation Practices of Surveyed Organizations

⁹ For this survey, staff *excluded* paid interns and fellows. Our data also did not distinguish between full-time and part-time employees; therefore it’s unknown whether younger people were more likely to have part-time positions.

support so they could intern with environmental groups.

- A few interviewees expressed a desire to pay their interns higher wages, but noted that their nonprofits lacked the financial resources to do so.
- Eight of the surveyed organizations offered fellowships, which tended to be for graduate students and older adults. All but one group paid their fellows.

Finding 1.4. Few young people serve on the boards of surveyed organizations.

- Less than 25% of board members at surveyed organizations were under age forty.
- Only four groups had board members under age thirty.
- Four of the 24 organizations surveyed had no board members under age forty.
- Notably, OEC established a separate advisory body, its Emerging Leaders Board, to enable people under age thirty-five to share their skills to support its mission.
- Also, ACE's Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA) program is supported and led by a statewide advisory board that consists of teens, AYEA graduates, and adult mentors. The younger members of this advisory board are often recruited to serve on ACE's board of directors.

Connecting Young People to Existing Opportunities

Another aspect of welcoming young leaders into the conservation movement is helping them connect to existing job opportunities. This portion of our research investigated potential challenges faced by young people trying to find employment with nonprofit environmental groups, and found that young people struggle to connect with job opportunities in the environmental movement for several reasons.

Finding 1.5. Few organizations proactively help their conservation interns and fellows to find permanent employment in the conservation movement, either at their organization or other conservation organizations.

- Interviews revealed that most nonprofits weren't actively involved in helping their former interns and fellows find permanent jobs in conservation.

Strategies for Connecting Young People to Opportunities

ACE enables young people of all ages to get engaged via its Trailside Discovery Camp, Alaska Youth for Environmental Action program, and conservation internships. Together these programs provide a pipeline with multiple on-ramps to bring young people into the conservation movement.

OLCV helps its interns build their resumes and find jobs in conservation post-internship, some of whom have gone on to become campaign managers. OLCV engages its interns socially via Happy Hours in the hope that they will want to continue to be involved with the organization after their internship ends.

Another way that nonprofits can continue to engage former interns and fellows is by offering them a free one-year membership to the organization. **ONDA** does this and believes it helps their interns stay on top of things with the organization, while providing an easy venue for sharing information and job openings.

Renewable Northwest connects with colleges, universities, and community colleges to generate applicants for its internship opportunities. The organization has developed relationships with engineering and business schools.

WA Bus proactively helps its interns and fellows take the next step in their career paths. Its internship program serves as a feeder to their paid fellowship program and annual surveys are used to keep track of fellows. The WA Bus also hosts alumni events to encourage networking, and connects fellows with alumni for informational interviews.

- Many organizations relied on informal connections or friendships with former interns to share job openings and served as professional references only when the intern made a special request.

Finding 1.6. Few young people transition from an internship or volunteer role to a permanent job with the same nonprofit conservation organization.

- Almost all the environmental groups surveyed had at least one employee who had formerly been an intern or volunteer at the organization; these individuals accounted for about 1 in 10 of all staff employed by the groups surveyed.
- Still, many young people and senior staffers alike believe that interning or volunteering is a good strategy for finding employment with an environmental nonprofit. This type of career guidance is problematic as the vast majority (90%) of current staff at surveyed conservation nonprofits did not previously volunteer or intern with the organization where they work today and it is unclear whether this pathway will provide better opportunities for permanent employment in the future.

Finding 1.7. Competition for environmental jobs is fierce.

- Many of the senior staff interviewed noted that they generally receive an abundance of applications for job openings.
- Younger staff reflected that competition for conservation jobs had required them to “do whatever it takes” to get in the door, including moving to other cities and states, and accepting unpaid internships while simultaneously working in the retail and service sector in the hopes their unpaid internships would lead to permanent jobs.

Finding 1.8. Conservation organizations aren’t well connected to the top academic programs educating future environmental leaders.

- Interviews with senior staff at most organizations revealed that they weren’t sure which academic programs are doing a good job preparing young people to be strong leaders for the conservation community.
- Since most organizations surveyed had low staff turnover, hiring only one or two new employees per year, connections with academic programs were sometimes seen as a low priority.

Connections to Academic Programs

MEIC has consistently fielded staff from the **University of Montana’s Environmental Studies program.**

Climate Solutions, Sightline, and WEC have hired several alumni from **UW’s Evans School of Public Policy and Governance.**

Trustees for Alaska has recruited from **Lewis & Clark Law School’s Environmental Law program.**

ICL has had interns referred to them from **Boise State University’s Master of Public Administration program.**

of

Skills and Training Gaps

In the early design of this research, we heard concerns that young people lack the skills needed to be competitive for conservation jobs. The following section considers possible gaps in skills and training.

Finding 1.9. Interns and fellows are given opportunities to gain valuable skills and experiences, but networking opportunities are rare.

- Existing internship and fellowship programs provide opportunities for young people to demonstrate many of the skills required for entry- and mid-level conservation jobs, including communications, policy, legal, campaign strategy, and fundraising.
- Cohort-based internship and fellowship programs provide valuable networking and collaboration opportunities, but few organizations are able to provide this type of experience.
- The majority of organizations offer too few internships each year to warrant a formal internship program, and those that do rarely provide forums for interns or fellows to network with peers or potential mentors outside the organization.

A New Fellowship Model in Boise, Idaho

In Boise, the Progressive Table sponsored a cohort of fellows by granting funds to three nonprofits: ACLU, Conservation Voters for Idaho, and Planned Parenthood. These organizations hired fellows who learned organizing skills as they worked on a specific project that needs more staff to “push it over the edge.”

The fellows met weekly for trainings provided by staff of the host organizations. Fellows also received a stipend of \$2,000 for 10–15 hours/week of work over a two-month period in the summer. 2015 was the program’s first year and CVI staff anticipated it would continue in 2016.

Finding 1.10. Most young people have the skills required for entry-level conservation jobs.

- The number of young people currently working at conservation organizations and the large applicant pools for job openings indicate that sufficient numbers of young people meet the required skill-set for entry-level jobs at most surveyed organizations.
- When asked about the skills they use most in their current positions, the younger employees we interviewed noted that communications, interpersonal, and collaboration skills were critical to their success.
- In addition, at least 20% of the young people interviewed noted that their data analysis skills, ability to see issues from multiple perspectives, and professional networks enable them to excel in their current jobs.

2. Providing Leadership & Growth Opportunities

As important as it is to bring new people into the conservation movement, the Brainerd Foundation is also concerned about whether young people can grow and advance within environmental organizations. Embarking on this research, we considered the role of staff development, the availability of higher-level jobs, and the clarity of environmental career paths as elements that would make it possible for young people to develop into leaders for the movement.

Supporting Staff Development

For entry-level staff to advance into leadership roles in the conservation community, they need opportunities to enhance their skills and develop their leadership capacities. The following section summarizes staff development opportunities and challenges for emerging conservation leaders, finding that there are several ways in which young staff can be better supported.

Finding 2.1. The majority of conservation groups provide their staff with some opportunities for training and development, such as attending an outside training or conference.

- Interviewees noted that staff training opportunities were generally supported when requested by younger employees, but many young people struggled to find time to attend trainings.
- Most conservation groups reported that they had a budget for staff training. A few organizations specifically allocate training funds to each employee.
- Many of the organizations surveyed received funds from the Wilburforce Foundation and were eligible for Training Resources for the Environmental Community (TREC) trainings. Younger staff at some of these organizations lamented the limited number of spots in TREC trainings, sharing that “while someone from their organization attends TREC each year, many others are still waiting their turn.” Those interviewees who had attended a TREC training reported that it was valuable.

Finding 2.2. There is a difference between training employees for their current job and developing the next generation of conservation leaders.

- Younger employees shared that while they could attend trainings related to their current job functions, they sometimes lacked encouragement or approval to learn the skills required to advance their careers.
- Few organizations created annual development plans with each employee, and several interviewees noted that conversations with staff about their professional development were ad hoc and could be more systematic.

Finding 2.3. Emerging leaders need leadership development opportunities, fundraising experience, stronger communication and management skills, and self-confidence.

- Younger interviewees consistently identified the following skills and experiences as ones they need to advance their careers.

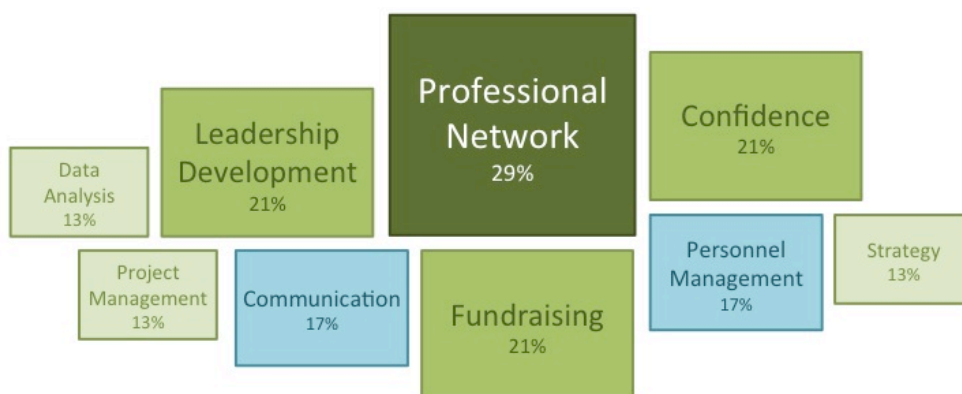


Figure 3. Percentage of younger staff interviewed who identified these skills and experiences as essential for their career advancement.

- While attendance at legal conferences is a great way to gain knowledge on substantive issues, some necessary skills for taking on leadership roles are hard to come by in junior-level positions. One younger staff attorney observed,

“Leadership and strong interpersonal and communication skills are the most important attributes of people heading organizations, but it’s hard to find opportunities to work on them.”
- Several young people shared that they didn’t have much exposure to fundraising and that this would be an important skill for advancing their careers and taking on further leadership roles within their organizations. In contrast, ACE makes a special effort to provide development training to its staff.

“Emerging leaders also need fundraising skills. Fundraising is siloed in our organizations and yet it is so critical, and it’s essential for becoming an executive director.” (Polly Carr, ACE)
- Twenty-one percent of the younger/newer employees interviewed revealed that they need more confidence to move up within their organization. Some noted that confidence would help them advocate for mid-career leadership opportunities. Another interviewee shared that confidence would enable her to participate more fully in strategic planning exercises.

Finding 2.4. Mentoring opportunities for younger employees are rare.

- Most of the surveyed junior-level staff of policy groups identified networks and mentorship as important tools for their career progression, and that they were not readily available within their existing organizations or communities.
- Legal groups were seen as doing a good job of mentoring their young staff in their roles as lawyers, but few young lawyers interviewed felt that they or their peers were being mentored towards leadership roles within their firms.
- Exception: Younger interviewees at ONDA, Sightline Institute, TU, and Wildsight reported strong mentorship by their older and more senior colleagues.
- At several organizations, including Ecojustice, Sightline, and WA Bus, senior leaders were working to prioritize mentorship and development opportunities for staff.

Finding 2.5. Young people need a strong professional network to advance.

- Almost every younger or newer employee interviewed noted the importance of networking and having strong relationships with their peers and established conservation leaders as a key to their success and career advancement. One young person of color explained,

“Your network is the biggest resource that you’ll ever have. And not having that network can be one of the biggest barriers to success overall. The more opportunities you have to network outside silos, make quick connections, and ask

Mentoring & Networking

Devon Page of **Ecojustice** shared that his organization was creating an internal mentoring program for young lawyers and an internal assessment to determine staff development needs.

A few helpful Northwest networks identified by younger interviewees include: **Boise Young Professionals**, OEC’s **Emerging Leaders Board**, and **Environmental Professionals of Color** with its chapters in Seattle, Portland, and elsewhere.

people for feedback and advice—that’s going to be the best way to push through and succeed in your career and with the issues you work on.”

- Young lawyers also noted that they lacked opportunities to connect with environmental leaders from the broader conservation movement, outside the legal sector.

Finding 2.6. Younger employees tend to be less satisfied than their senior staff with the opportunities they have for professional development via their organizations.

- At more than one-third of the conservation groups surveyed, senior staff believed they were doing a good job of providing staff development opportunities, while their younger employees did not agree.

Finding 2.7. Some young people are serving on the boards of other environmental and progressive nonprofits as a professional development strategy.

- One young interviewee shared that she is on the board of a couple of organizations where she has had opportunities to get additional training and valuable learning experiences, like overseeing an executive director transition.

“Serving on a board is an especially good path to leadership in the conservation community.

Boards are a way for young people to get engaged at a higher level without getting paid.”

- Some senior leaders encourage their junior-level staff to serve on the boards of other environmental organizations as a way to get experience outside the organization that they can’t get inside it.

Finding 2.8. Organizations rely on a few training programs for their staff, and are often unaware of other options.

- Many of the organizations surveyed relied on TREC and trainings provided by the League of Conservation Voters to provide professional development for their younger staff and emerging leaders.
- Several young employees couldn’t name a training they would like to attend, even though they identified skills they wanted to develop.

Managing Emerging Leaders

What’s Not Working? At about half of the organizations studied, there was a disconnect between what senior- and junior-level staff perceived to be the opportunities for younger staff to develop professionally. These organizations shared some sub-optimal practices:

- Staff training opportunities were provided on an ad hoc basis, and required junior-level staff to identify and request funding for trainings.
- Although most organizations had a training budget, supervisors didn’t set aside time for staff to attend trainings.
- Annual reviews did not include a conversation about entry- or mid-level staff’s desired career progression, or what steps would be needed to achieve it.

Promising Practices. Organizations that were most appreciated by junior-level staff for their approach to professional development, applied these approaches:

- Drafted staff development plans and talked with staff about each employee’s career trajectory as a part of annual performance reviews and regular check-ins.
- Systematically identified and provided opportunities for staff to learn new skills and gain new experiences within their current position.
- Created opportunities for staff to practice and demonstrate leadership skills, by enabling them to lead projects and teams. At least one group used the Management Center’s [“MOCHA” model](#) for assigning project responsibilities.

- A few senior staff members felt overwhelmed by the abundance of leadership trainings, and absent a frank assessment of each one, were unsure how to proceed.
- Altogether interviewees mentioned thirty-five training programs and conferences as ones that they've found useful or believed produce exceptional leaders for the movement; most named less than two they would like to attend or would recommend to others.

Opportunities for Advancement

Another question we investigated was whether there are opportunities for talented young people to advance beyond entry-level positions at conservation nonprofits. We wondered whether there were sufficient mid-level jobs to keep young people employed in the nonprofit environmental sector and we were surprised by our findings.

Finding 2.9. Career advancement in the Northwest conservation community is possible.

- One-third of all employees at surveyed environmental groups previously held another paid position at the same organization.
- Sixty percent of staff members at surveyed conservation organizations were previously employed in the environmental movement.
- Many of the employees who left the surveyed organizations in the previous two years moved onto new jobs in the conservation community.

Finding 2.10. More than 60% of all jobs at surveyed conservation groups were mid-level positions.

- There were an average of four mid-level positions for every entry-level position at the organizations surveyed, which could indicate good opportunities for internal candidates to be promoted from entry-level to mid-level positions over time.
- However, 75% of the organizations surveyed had more mid-level positions than senior-level positions, with 11 groups having at least twice as many mid-level positions as senior-level positions. This may limit opportunities for emerging leaders to be promoted within their organization. In the absence of opportunities for increased

What Millennials Want in a Good Job & Workplace

Today the Millennial Generation* is the largest generation in the U.S. labor force and much has been written about how they differ from previous generations. Research on Millennials tends to draw the following conclusions.

An ideal job for a Millennial would feature:

- Purpose-driven work
- A significant role where they can make a difference
- Opportunities to solve new and tough problems, creatively

Millennials prefer to accomplish their work by:

- Collaborating as a team
- Fully integrating technology
- Being innovative and taking appropriate risks
- Continuously learning

In a workplace, Millennials want:

- A boss that serves more as a coach or mentor
- Specific, timely, and frequent feedback and recognition
- Opportunities for career progression
- Fairness and transparency in decision-making
- Flexible work schedules and locations
- Work-life balance
- Strong diversity policies

Unlike previous generations, Millennials:

- Prioritize making a difference over having a high-paying job
- Expect to stay in a job for less than three years

*Also known as Gen Y, this generation is generally considered to include individuals born between the early 1980s and late 1990s. <http://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/the-millennials-a-new-generation-of-employees-a-new-set-of-engagement-policies>. <https://wheniwork.com/managing-millennials-ebook>. <http://pewrsr.ch/1Ewsn9N>.

responsibility, autonomy, and leadership in mid-level positions, talented staff may seek out opportunities at other organizations where they can develop new skills and advance their careers.

Finding 2.11. Conservation groups are adding jobs more quickly than other nonprofits.¹⁰

- From 2013–2015, the organizations surveyed added a combined total of 119 new positions, which accounted for about 1 in 7 jobs across these organizations in 2015.
- Excluding the national environmental groups surveyed, 35 new jobs were added to the remaining 17 local and regional conservation groups from 2013–2015 (or approximately one new position per organization per year).

Finding 2.12. Staff turnover at most of organizations surveyed was lower than average for nonprofits in general.¹¹

- Combined staff turnover at the organizations surveyed was about 1 out of 5 for a two-year period (or about 11% annually), however turnover varies considerably between organizations.

The Career Path for Conservation Leaders

When thinking about the next generation of leadership for the conservation movement, we examined whether career paths in the environmental nonprofit sector were obvious or at least navigable. We found that the path to leadership is unclear and may be problematic when attracting and retaining talent for the conservation movement.

Finding 2.13. Young people struggle to see potential career paths in conservation, even once they work for an environmental nonprofit.

- Almost every younger or newer staff person interviewed felt that career paths in conservation were unclear and difficult to navigate. Many identified personal initiative, determination, and the willingness to "do anything" as necessary precursors to getting a job in conservation.

Finding 2.14. Few young people have mentors to help guide them in a conservation career path and to help identify next steps for advancement.

- Only a few of the junior staff interviewed had clarity around career paths in conservation, and most of these individuals were personally responsible for developing internships for young people or otherwise engaging younger people in conservation.
- Several interviewees noted that mentors play a critical role in helping young people understand and navigate the career paths in conservation.

“Mentorship is really important. Having someone in the community who can introduce you around, show you the ropes and increase your

¹⁰ According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [national nonprofit employment data](#), jobs in the nonprofit sector increased by 1.6% annually from 2007 to 2012, and overall employment in the U.S. declined an average of 0.6% annually.

¹¹ According to the [2015 Nonprofit Employment Practices Survey](#), turnover in 2014 was 19%, up from 16% in 2013. The increase in turnover was explained thusly, “This aligns with the economic recovery seen in recent years and is reflected in employees being more willing and able to leave their positions to retire or pursue new employment.”

understanding of where different environmental groups fall on the spectrum makes this work easier.” (Kyle Smith, Trout Unlimited)

- Few senior staff identified mentorship as one of their staff development strategies—senior staff at the legal groups being the notable exception.

3. Welcoming People from Diverse Backgrounds

As we think about strengthening emerging conservation leaders, the Brainerd Foundation is attentive to the diversity of places where our grantees work. Our research included organizations in Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, as well as groups working nationwide in the United States and Canada. We believe it is important for conservation groups to reflect the diversity of the communities where they work and the populations impacted by the conservation issues they seek to address. We have also observed that place-based definitions of diversity are changing with population and generational shifts.

To help ground our emerging leaders initiative in local knowledge, we asked individuals at organizations throughout our funding region to share their insights on diversity:

- *In Alaska*, interviewees defined diversity in terms of geography, political affiliation, and age, as well as the inclusion of Native Alaskans, while noting that demographic or generational shifts thus far have been subtle.
- *In British Columbia*, interviewees observed the rapid growth of ethnically diverse immigrant communities (predominately Asian and Pacific Islanders) in the lower mainland region, a growing presence of First Nations’ people in its cities, an aging population of retirees migrating from other provinces in Canada, and an increase in the number of young families moving to Southeast BC.
- *In Idaho*, diversity was described as a mix of urban and rural, Republican and Democrat, with expanding Mormon, Hispanic, and millennial populations.
- *In Montana*, interviewees defined diversity in terms of native populations, age, economic situation, and rural/urban geography. Increasingly people are living in Montana’s urban areas, ranchers and farmers are aging, and many ranches and farms have been consolidated.
- *In Oregon*, racial and ethnic diversity are key descriptors of the millennial generation and school-age children, especially in Portland. In Central Oregon, the numbers of people formerly from California and young people are increasing.
- *In Washington*, when asked to describe diversity, interviewees referenced the growing influence of communities of color, immigrants, and Latinos. In the rural northeastern part of the state, one interviewee noted the rising influence of Tea Party conservatives. Others observed the increasing influence of millennials, including a generational shift in staff at partner organizations.

Staff Diversity

When welcoming the next generation of conservation leaders, we recognize that embracing its diversity is a key component of maximizing engagement. In this research, we sought to understand how representative the staffs of surveyed organizations were relative to the communities where they work. We found that, in general, groups are not diverse enough, although many organizations are working to increase the diversity of their staffs.

Finding 3.1 *There are too few people of diverse backgrounds employed by nonprofit conservation groups.*

- Interviews with senior-level staff routinely identified this as an issue. Many organizations said that they were working on this challenge, often at the urging of younger staff.
- Low staff turnover means that efforts to increase staff diversity take time.

*“The hardest thing to do is to change the diversity of your staff because so few positions open each year. The math is hard to solve.”
(Gregg Small, Climate Solutions)*

- Interviewees also noted that there were very few people of color in leadership positions at environmental groups. What diversity did exist within organizations was primarily among employees in entry-level positions.

Finding 3.2. *Surveyed groups struggle to recruit people with diverse backgrounds into their hiring pools.*

- This was especially true for legal groups who noted that the majority of their applicants were white people with at least somewhat affluent backgrounds. Interviewees explained that this was a reflection of the (lack of) diversity of law school graduates who focus on the environment.
- One in three conservation groups offered unpaid internships and fellowships, which may limit the diversity of candidates for entry-level, first-job experiences. Sightline’s Anna Fahey noted that they converted their internships from unpaid to paid and the “result has been a more diverse pool of intern candidates, which has proved our theory.”

Strategies for Increasing Staff Diversity

Many groups look at the diversity of their hiring pools and recruit more diverse candidates when needed. The **Bus Fed** sets recruitment targets and, if the hiring pool isn’t diverse enough, they recruit more applicants before interviewing anyone. **Fuse** also considers revising the job description or qualifications.

ACE diligently reaches out to young Native Alaskans to participate in its youth organizing programs.

Crag Law makes an effort to bring in summer associates representing minority groups, who then receive mentoring and maintain long-term relationships with Crag’s attorneys.

Strategies for Culture Change

LCV has a diversity, equity, and inclusion steering committee intended to change its culture, so it can attract and retain more women and people of color. In September 2015, **Earthjustice** hired a VP of Diversity & Inclusion.

Sightline created a diversity action plan with a philosophy for the organization, long-term goals, and short-term objectives to achieve each year. **Ecojustice** has a similar plan; **WEC** and **Climate Solutions** are developing plans as well.

Fuse staff have been reading and discussing the book “Dismantling Racism” by Western States Center at their staff meetings. Similarly, the **WA Bus** uses Western States Center’s Racial Justice checklist.

Several interviewees praised the **Center for Diversity & Environment’s** trainings to help staff gain awareness, identify their unintentional-but-problematic behaviors, and acquire tools to make changes in themselves and their organizations.

Finding 3.3. Many organizations have identified staff diversity as a priority and are working on it.

- A few groups surveyed are making a concerted effort to ensure people with diverse backgrounds are in their hiring pools.
- A few conservation groups strive to provide paid internships and/or fellowships to people with diverse backgrounds.
- Some organizations are expanding the types of issues they work on to appeal to a more diverse set of individuals and to build partnerships with new communities.
- Others are working on changing the culture of their organizations to be more welcoming to people of color. As one senior staff shared,

“While many environmental groups are interested in having a more diverse workforce, many people don’t want to work for us until our culture changes. We need to do self-work to become more attractive.”

Board Diversity

We also wondered about the diversity of those charged with overseeing environmental nonprofits in the Northwest. We asked senior staff at organizations to reflect on how representative their boards were relative to the communities where they work. We found that significant opportunities exist to increase board diversity in the conservation movement.

Finding 3.4. The boards of conservation groups do not adequately represent the communities in which they work.

- Interviews with senior-level staff routinely identified board diversity as an issue, although the types of diversity needed varied by geographic region.
- Nearly all the organizations surveyed said that they were working on this challenge, but noted that they have a long way to go. A few organizations shared strategies they were using to increase their board diversity.

Finding 3.5. Several interviewees shared that their organization struggles to recruit board members with diverse backgrounds.

- Some interviewees lamented that there was “fierce competition” for board members, especially those with diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
- One organization noted that while 100% of white people invited to join their board accepted the position, only 60% of people of color said yes. This resonates with often-reported complaints from

Strategies for Increasing Board Diversity

OEC established its Emerging Leaders Board (ELB) to increase the age and racial diversity of its advisors and membership. OEC has explicitly worked to make the ELB diverse, and as it has become more diverse the individuals the ELB engages have diversified, as well.

FUSE noted that as they have increased their partnerships with communities of color, it has become easier to identify potential board members from those communities and successfully recruit them to its board.

ONDA has worked to bring more community leaders onto its board, including a large-animal veterinarian with local roots.

The **Bus Fed**’s board recruitment process includes analyzing racial, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic backgrounds, in addition to looking at skills and experiences of its board members.

LCV is working to create a board culture that supports people of color and has recruited new board members to champion this shift.

leaders of color who are over-tapped for unpaid advisory roles.¹²

- Since board openings are often announced by word of mouth and filled with individuals recommended by staff and board members, the lack of diversity is easily preserved without specific attention to this issue.

Finding 3.6. Conservation groups may have a harder time retaining board members from diverse backgrounds.

- One interviewee admitted that board members of color resign from their board more frequently “because of partisan issues or job changes.” Retention of diverse board members may be a challenge faced by other organizations as well.



Recommendations

Brainerd staff believes that the following recommendations will:

- Make the most effective use of our limited dollars, and
- Best cultivate the next generation of environmental leaders, while
- Simultaneously building broad support for conservation in the Northwest.

These recommendations focus on what to do, rather than how to do it. The inclusion of recommendations in this section does not imply that the Brainerd Foundation will necessarily fund programs or projects that implement these recommendations, nor are we able to fully fund all of these ideas. We do, however, hope to partner with interested funder colleagues to strengthen the next generation of conservation leadership and our investments will be informed by the findings and recommendations outlined in this report.

Welcoming Young Leaders

- ✓ *Enhance existing internship and fellowship programs.* This might include incorporating mentoring and professional development; providing competitive pay to increase the diversity of candidates; and developing cohort-style programs.
- ✓ *Strengthen post-internship connections* between nonprofit staff and interns (and fellows) to enable young people to stay engaged and find employment in the conservation field.

¹² Vu Le, executive director of Rainier Valley Corps and author of the blog Nonprofit with Balls, elaborates on this issue and provides recommendations for addressing the supply-side challenge of this diversity gap. <http://nonprofitwithballs.com/2015/03/the-supply-and-demand-of-diversity-and-inclusion/>

Providing Leadership & Growth Opportunities

- ✓ *Encourage professional development opportunities for younger staff that go beyond their current job functions. Focus on providing skills to prepare emerging leaders to step into leadership roles, including leadership training and coaching, fundraising, communications, personnel management, and strategy.*¹³
- ✓ *Support mentorship of emerging leaders to cultivate and sustain professional satisfaction, and help young people understand potential career pathways.*
- ✓ *Increase networking opportunities for young people so they can support each other and build relationships with environmental leaders.*
- ✓ *Increase the number of young people on nonprofit boards. Consider board membership as an opportunity for emerging nonprofit leaders to develop new skills and as an avenue for engaging young professionals outside the conservation or nonprofit sector.*

Welcoming People from Diverse Backgrounds¹⁴

- ✓ *Support nonprofits that are systematically working to increase the diversity of their staff and boards. Recognize grantees for their achievements and encourage them to continue this work.*
- ✓ *Prioritize leadership development trainings and networking opportunities for entry- and mid-level employees from diverse backgrounds.*
- ✓ *Encourage organizations to share their strategies to diversify their staffs, boards, internships, and memberships. This will enable grantees to learn from each other.*
- ✓ *Encourage grantees to partner with organizations that represent the Rising American Electorate¹⁵ and to reach out to such groups as grantees recruit new staff and board members.*

Next Steps

This research allowed us to test some of our initial assumptions about what is needed to strengthen the next generation of conservation leaders. As we move forward with our Emerging Leaders Initiative, we intend to evaluate grantmaking opportunities and needs within our regional focus areas. We will also examine how these recommendations relate to the distinct needs of emerging leaders in the advocacy, legal, and communications fields. Our Emerging Leaders grantmaking program will seek to partner with colleague funders and balance the cost implications of various recommendations.

¹³ A 2015 study found that a lack of learning and growth opportunities was the number one reason why nonprofit leaders left their organizations, and the lack of mentorship and support was the second reason for leadership turnover.

http://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_nonprofit_leadership_development_deficit

¹⁴ The Brainerd Foundation encourages its grantees to reflect the diversity of the communities where they work and the populations impacted by the conservation issues they seek to address. As we think about the future, Brainerd staff and grantees are cognizant that the demographics of the Rising American Electorate differ from those of previous generations.

¹⁵ The “Rising American Electorate” refers to groups including unmarried women, African Americans, Latinos, other people of color, and millennials who constitute the new majority in the United States.

<http://www.voterparticipation.org/the-rising-american-electorate>

Appendix A – Participating Organizations & Abbreviations

Alaska Center for the Environment (ACE)
Bus Federation (Bus Fed)
Climate Solutions
Conservation Northwest (CNW)
Conservation Voters for Idaho (CVI)
Crag Law Center (Crag)
Dogwood Initiative (Dogwood)
Earthjustice
Ecojustice
Fuse Washington (Fuse)
Idaho Conservation League (ICL)
League of Conservation Voters (LCV)
Montana Environmental Information Center (MEIC)
Oregon Environmental Council (OEC)
Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV)
Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA)
Renewable Northwest (RNW)
Sightline Institute
Trout Unlimited (TU)
Trustees for Alaska (Trustees)
Washington Bus (WA Bus)
Washington Conservation Voters (WCV)
Washington Environmental Council (WEC)
*Washington Toxics Coalition (WA Toxics)**
Wildsight

Italicized organizations were included upon request from the Bullitt and Harder foundations, and are not current grantees of the Brainerd Foundation. The Wilburforce Foundation provided input on this research, but did not request the inclusion of any additional grantees.

*Washington Toxics Coalition participated in interviews, but did not provide survey data.

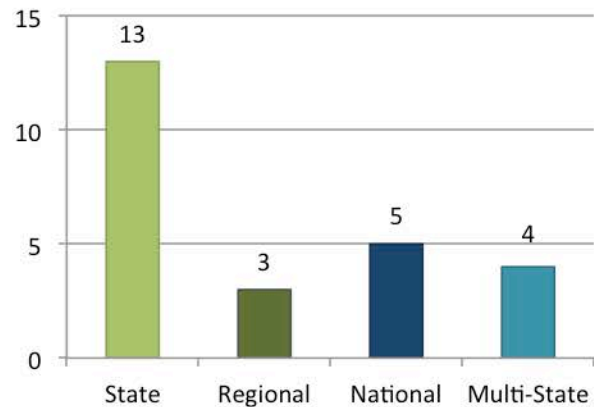
Appendix B – Surveyed Organizations & Interviewees

Below are a few characteristics of the 25 participating organizations and 50 individuals interviewed for this research.

Number of Interviewees by Location

Location	Number of Interviewees
Alaska	5
British Columbia	5
Idaho	4
Montana	3
Oregon	11
Washington	20
Other	2

Geographic Scale of Focus for Surveyed Organizations



Size of Surveyed Organizations by Number of Paid Staff

Number of Employees*	Number of Organizations
Less than 5	0
5–10	8
11–20	11
21–50	3
51–100	1
101–200	0
More than 200	2

*Full-time and part-time staff members were each counted as one employee.

Surveyed Organizations that Receive Grants from Selected Foundations

