

FIELD GUIDE

TO DEVELOPING

PARTNERSHIPS



CONTENTS

Contributors	4
Executive Summary	5
Looking Beyond Birds to Find Partners	5
Reaching Out and Communicating	6
Developing Relationships	6
Overview of Partnership Opportunities	7
Introduction	8
Background	10
Looking Beyond Birds to Find Partners	11
Explore Complementary Outcomes	13
Water Quality and Availability	13
Human Health/Community Well-Being	14
Resilient Landscapes	16
Supporting Productive Working Lands	16
Tourism Industry	18
Carbon Sequestration	19
Sustainability	20
Regulations	21
Identifying Potential Partners	22
Additional Resources	23
Worksheet: Looking Beyond Birds to Find Partners	23
Reaching Out and Communicating	23
Elements of New Partner Outreach	24
Understand Your Audience	24
Look for Existing Connections	25
Find an Initial Contact	25
The Messenger is Part of the Message	25
Listen, and Seek to Understand	26
Speak Your Partner’s Language	26
Lead with Messaging that Resonates with the Partner	26
Acknowledge Misunderstandings or Disagreements	27
Consider International or Multicultural Factors	27
Additional Resources	28
Worksheet: Reaching Out and Communicating	28

CONTENTS (Continued)

Developing Relationships	28
General Considerations	29
Be Flexible and Expect Discomfort	29
Build Personal Relationships	30
Demonstrate Reliability and Competence	30
Understand the Importance of a Good Leader and a Good Facilitator	31
Establish a Foundation of Mutual Value, Desired Outcomes, and Ground Rules	31
Challenges and Missteps to Building Trust	32
Cross-Cultural Collaboration	33
Dealing with Conflict	34
Conclusions	35
Additional Resources	35
Worksheet: Developing Relationships	36
Overview of Partnership Opportunities	37
Individuals	37
Private Associations, Organizations, and Initiatives	41
Corporations	46
Foundations	51
In-Kind Match	53
Additional Resources	54
Final Thoughts	55

CONTRIBUTORS

Editor: Judith Scarl (NABCI/Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies)

“Looking Beyond Birds to Find Partners” Writing Team

Steve Albert (Institute for Bird Populations)
Laurel Anders (Intermountain West Joint Venture)
Jessica Barnes (Virginia Tech/NABCI)
Scott Johnston (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
Henning Stabins (Weyerhaeuser)
Catherine Wightman (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks)

“Reaching Out and Communicating” Writing Team

Laurel Anders (Intermountain West Joint Venture)
Chris Deets (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
Mitch Hartley (Atlantic Coast Joint Venture/
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
Paige Johnson (American Wind Wildlife Institute)
Deb Reynolds (Atlantic Coast Joint Venture/
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
Chris Sebastien (Ducks Unlimited)

“Developing Relationships” Writing Team

Jennie Duberstein (Sonoran Joint Venture)
Geoff Geupel (Point Blue Conservation Science)
Melinda Pruettt-Jones (American Ornithological Society)
Scott Johnston (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
Deb Reynolds (Atlantic Coast Joint Venture/
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

“Overview of Partnership Opportunities” Writing Team

David Brakhage (Ducks Unlimited)
Scott Johnston (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/
Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative)
Holly Robertson (American Bird Conservancy)
Lynn Sagramoso (National Audubon Society)
Brian Smith (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
EJ Williams (American Bird Conservancy)

Additional Contributors—Lessons Learned

Jessica Barnes (Virginia Tech/NABCI)
Joe Buchanan (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife)
Mike Carter (Playa Lakes Joint Venture)

Full Document Review Team

Brad Andres (U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership/
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
Wilhelmina Bratton (U.S. Forest Service)
Ian Davidson (BirdLife International)
Jennie Duberstein (Sonoran Joint Venture)
River Gates (Pacific Shorebird Conservation Initiative/
National Audubon Society)
John Hannan (BirdLife International)
Paige Johnson (American Wind Wildlife Institute)
Sherry Liguori (Rocky Mountain Power/PacifiCorp)
Darren A. Miller (National Council for Air and Stream
Improvement, Inc.)
Margaret O’Gorman (Wildlife Habitat Council)
Robert Penner (U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership/
The Nature Conservancy)
Catherine Rideout (East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture)
Aimee Roberson (Rio Grande Joint Venture)
Sandra Scoggin (San Francisco Bay Joint Venture)
Henning Stabins (Weyerhaeuser)
Barry Wilson (Gulf Coast Joint Venture)

Document Finalization Team

Steve Albert (Institute for Bird Populations)
John Alexander (Avian Knowledge Network/
Klamath Bird Observatory)
Scott Gillihan, editor
Keith Norris (The Wildlife Society)
Brian Smith (U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership/
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
Mark Wimer (U.S. Geological Survey)

Graphic Designer: Diane Tessaglia-Hymes, dianeth.com

Recommended Citation: North American Bird Conservation Initiative, U.S. Committee. 2021. Field Guide to Developing Partnerships. Washington, DC. 55 pages.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the recently documented loss of 2.9 billion birds over 50 years in North America, unprecedented and creative partnerships are needed more than ever to advance bird conservation goals. Many bird conservation outcomes align with broader societal goals, such as water quality and human health, creating opportunities for meaningful and productive partnerships that advance goals to benefit birds and people, in coalitions that are

stronger than one community working alone. Developing mutually beneficial partnerships based on common or complementary goals requires commitment, flexibility, and a desire and capacity to listen and understand the needs, values, and challenges of potential partners. This document provides guidance on how to find common goals, effectively reach out to potential partners, and develop lasting relationships that benefit all players.

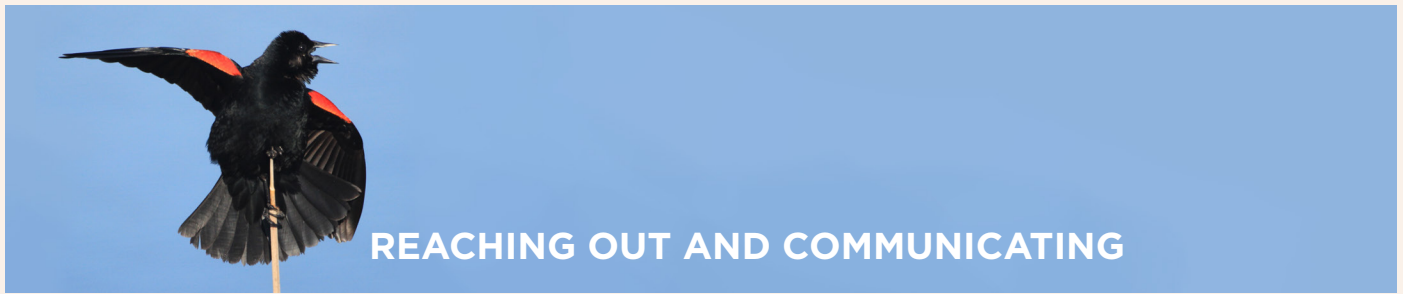


While opportunities always exist to strengthen partnerships among organizations focused primarily on birds or bird conservation, many untapped opportunities abound to develop partnerships with entities whose primary focus is not bird conservation, or that are less frequently involved in bird conservation.

Successfully achieving bird conservation goals can also result in, or be compatible with:

- improved water quality and/or increased water availability
- improved human health and community well-being through access to nature, a clean environment, or opportunities for outdoor recreation
- resilient landscapes that provide protection from extreme weather events
- productive working lands
- a strong tourism industry, both domestically and internationally
- corporate sustainability

Exploring opportunities based on these goals can open the door to productive partnerships with a diverse group of constituents that can bolster the resources, credibility, and public influence of bird conservation. By exploring local effects and conducting a stakeholder analysis, engaging in opportunities for networking with and learning about organizations whose focus is broader than bird conservation, and researching potential partners, bird conservation organizations can identify entities that might collaborate towards common goals.



When reaching out to a potential partner, it is important to understand their goals, motivations, and values, and to communicate with the partner in ways that resonate with their interests.

When reaching out to potential partners:

- Understand your audience and identify common ground.
- Identify what you bring to the table to benefit the potential partner, and what they can bring that benefits your own goals. Inviting organizations to the table because you need something from them, without clearly identifying the benefits to them, is a common pitfall of partnership development.
- Look for existing connections to provide insight and introductions.
- Consider who will make the most effective liaison with a new partner—the messenger is part of the message.
- Listen, and seek to understand; approaching a potential partner with an open mind can dispel assumptions and identify areas of common ground.
- Speak your partner’s language—both their actual language, and the manner of speaking and words you use to communicate.
- Lead with messaging that resonates with the partner, which may not focus on birds.
- Acknowledge opportunities for misunderstanding or disagreement.



Once you have identified an organization or individual with common goals and made initial contact, **building on these common goals, identifying value to all partners, and developing trust** are key actions to forming and maintaining the new relationship.

When developing positive relationships:

- Be flexible and expect discomfort; approach a partnership with an open mind and a willingness to listen and understand.

- Build personal relationships and provide opportunities for individuals to connect; partnerships between organizations often start as connections between individuals.
- Clearly and honestly state your goals and demonstrate reliability and competence by doing what you say, respecting partners' time, and being organized and efficient.
- Understand the importance of a good leader and a good facilitator; a good leader can set the tone of a partnership, and a strong facilitator ensures everyone is heard.
- Establish a foundation of mutual value, desired outcomes, and ground rules; framing the group's destination and process can help avoid later pitfalls or confusion.

Building relationships across cultures, whether they be across racial, ethnic, religious, or organizational cultures, requires additional open-mindedness and flexibility:

- Work to understand the culture of the organization with which you wish to partner.
- Be careful not to assume that your way is the “right” way.
- Conduct up-front planning to engage people across cultures; this may take longer but can ultimately pay off with a stronger partnership with greater collaboration and buy-in.



The benefits of partnering with private organizations or individuals extend far beyond funding or match requirements; broadening a partnership to include new and different perspectives can yield new ideas, new approaches, increased capacity, and new opportunities. Partnering outside of the bird conservation community can positively benefit public perception of a cause and lend political clout to an issue. Building on broad, common goals with private organizations can help engage a more diverse network and give stronger relevance to an initiative. Different types of private entities bring different opportunities for partnership contributions and may require different approaches.

- **Individuals** can contribute to conservation through on-the-ground action, political influence, land access, data collection, and financial donations. Citizen-science opportunities, training workshops, and existing landowner connections all provide opportunities to connect with individuals.
- **Private associations, organizations, and initiatives**, such as birding groups, zoos, organizations connected to land and land use, forestry associations, cattlemen's and ranching associations, and energy industry associations may share common or complementary goals with bird conservation. Engaging with organizations that focus on historically underrepresented constituencies in the outdoors can provide

valuable perspectives. Management boards or other governing bodies and business-oriented conferences can help connect with organizations that share common overarching goals.

- **The corporate sector** provides many opportunities for effective partnerships, including implementing conservation on corporate-owned lands, engaging employees in conservation action, and securing financial support from corporate contributions. Corporations work to maintain or enhance their reputation with customers and within their communities, so they may appreciate opportunities to promote positive brand recognition. Industry-led roundtables and industry-focused associations can help provide connections to corporations with interest in sustainability or other common goals.
- **Foundations** can serve as important sources of private funding. They often have very specific areas of interest, so ensure that your organization's mission and goals align with those interests when seeking foundation funding.

INTRODUCTION

Bird conservation is most effectively achieved through partnerships. The work of many organizations touches bird conservation, from federal and state agencies to a diverse array of nonprofit organizations and other stakeholders, and coordination and collaboration among these groups yields more effective strategies, actions, and results. In addition, more than half of the birds that breed in North America are migratory, and partnerships across the geographic range of a species' full life cycle are critical for conservation success.

With the [recently documented loss of 2.9 billion birds over 50 years in North America](#), unprecedented and creative partnerships are needed more than ever to advance bird conservation goals. Many bird conservation outcomes align with broader societal goals, such as water quality and human health, creating opportunities for meaningful and productive partnerships with a diverse array of individuals and organizations whose primary focus is not bird conservation.

Developing relationships with new **partners** is a multifaceted, long-term investment. Identifying diverse stakeholders in an initiative, researching potential partners to understand their interests and values, developing communication materials, finding the right person with whom to talk, and building relationships requires time and focus. However, building these relationships can offer long-term gains that often extend beyond a single project or grant. This guide provides advice and tips on how to navigate partnership development, from identifying new partners through fostering continued relationships. This document is both theoretical and practical. It is designed to help any user build connections between organizations that have traditionally had a bird conservation focus and organizations and individuals whose primary objective is not bird conservation—for broadly supported and lasting conservation outcomes.

- The “[Looking Beyond Birds to Find Partners](#)” section provides an overview of how to identify organizations whose goals and desired outcomes may align with your work. This section provides an overview of some common outcomes that may be shared between bird conservation and other organizations and offers suggestions on how to identify organizations with common goals, including ways to evaluate potential partner organizations, expand opportunities for networking, and explore different certification programs.
- The “[Reaching Out and Communicating](#)” section provides strategies for communicating with potential partners, including the importance of understanding

In the North American conservation community, the term “**partner**” is used as both a verb and a noun in many different contexts, and the bird conservation community consists of layers upon layers of what we call “partnerships.” For the purpose of this document, we use “partner” and “partnership” to represent mutually beneficial relationships that are developed over time and serve to advance common or complementary goals of participants. Partnerships can occur over multiple scales of geography, time, and investment. Within a successful partnership, all parties both provide and receive benefits.

a partner's values and communication styles, the value of listening, and how to communicate with messaging that resonates with your new partner.

- The “**Developing Relationships**” section focuses on continued relationship development and highlights key elements of sustaining successful, mutually beneficial relationships, with a focus on practices that will build trust throughout a partnership.
- Finally, we provide an “**Overview of Partnership Opportunities**,” which provides specific guidance on identifying and advancing partnerships with individuals, private organizations, corporations, and foundations.

While the guidance this document provides applies to developing relationships with any new organization or individual, we hope it will be particularly useful when developing partnerships with organizations whose primary focus is not bird conservation, or who may not have historically participated in bird conservation. As the global human population increases and societies increasingly deal with addressing the needs of larger populations, conservation actions have the potential to affect greater numbers of people and therefore become increasingly complex ecologically, politically, and socially. More and more, measures to conserve birds cannot be undertaken in isolation; conservation actions must be considered within the broader context of human needs and goals to have the greatest likelihood of success. With this increasing interconnectedness comes increased opportunity to engage broader sectors in working together toward common goals. This guide is meant not just to help bird conservation professionals expand participation in our existing partnerships, but to create or join new partnerships and engage new organizations and individuals with open minds and open ears for the benefit of all.

Bird conservation cannot be undertaken in isolation—it must be considered within the broader context of human needs.

BACKGROUND

In 2018, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) released the [National Bird Conservation Priorities document](#) to provide a common framework to organize and communicate about bird conservation. This document highlighted a list of Top 10 Priority Actions that the bird conservation community agrees urgently need to happen. One of these Priority Actions reads:

Leverage government dollars with private dollars to multiply conservation impacts through partnerships including Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and new programs.

Based on a survey of NABCI Committee members in December 2018 and a follow-up discussion at the August 2019 NABCI meeting, NABCI partners identified **five main barriers to progress** on this Priority Action:

- a lack of relationships or partnerships,
- a lack of capacity or expertise to build relationships or partnerships,
- competition for limited funding,
- communication limitations,
- and political restrictions.

NABCI formed a “Private Dollars Priority Action Team” that developed a [proposal](#) identifying NABCI’s role in reducing barriers to this Priority Action. This team recommended that NABCI develop a guidance document to provide tools and best practices for identifying potential partners with overlapping interests, initiating conversations, and developing successful partnerships to leverage resources for everyone’s benefit. This document is the result of that recommendation. Although the Priority Action specifically mentions dollar leveraging, this document will have broad utility beyond financial leveraging; we provide guidance on how to engage organizations and individuals for mutually beneficial relationships, to work toward common or complementary goals. We envision members of the bird conservation community using this guide as

- a primer for new bird conservation professionals to understand the basics of partnership building;
- a source of ideas for how to broaden our stakeholder base and develop meaningful professional relationships that benefit people and birds;
- practical guidance and empowerment for moving past easy and comfortable relationships with like-minded groups to diverse partnerships with the capacity for bigger and more powerful impacts.

The bird conservation community has a great deal of expertise in developing partnerships, from local through international scales. This document is compiled from knowledge gained by dozens of professionals throughout the United States and supplemented with published resources on aspects of partnership development.





LOOKING BEYOND BIRDS TO FIND PARTNERS

Birds and bird conservation are relevant to a variety of interest groups. Birdwatchers, hunters, landowners, and backyard naturalists all enjoy and appreciate birds on the landscape. Organizations serving these interests, including groups engaging birdwatchers, game-bird-focused conservation entities, nonprofits focused on bird habitat conservation, and bird-oriented science organizations, all share the common value of maintaining healthy populations of birds. Public agencies that own or manage land have direct or indirect interest in sustaining habitats for birds, as do private entities such as land trusts and hunting and angling groups. Opportunities abound for meaningful, productive partnerships within this broad community of organizations and individuals that have an existing interest or mission linked to birds or bird habitat.

Multiple models exist of successful bird conservation partnerships among organizations with similar yet distinct missions. For example, NABCI, Partners in Flight, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Partnership, and the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures bring federal, state, and nonprofit organizations together to work toward common goals on regional, national, or international scales. While there are always opportunities to more effectively partner with organizations focused on bird conservation, the professional bird conservation community already supports many strong examples of organizations coming together to advance some element of bird or bird habitat conservation.

Beyond benefits to birds, bird conservation activities and outcomes often have far-reaching benefits for people, organizations, and communities, and bird conservation priorities often align with broader human goals such as economic security, human well-being, clean water, and environmental justice. For example, the waterfowl community has had tremendous success over the last three decades in linking human water needs and priorities with waterfowl conservation. The human health benefits of nature are increasingly relevant, and communities, media, and conservation groups now regularly emphasize the value of outdoor recreation and the linkages between human and ecological health. There are a vast array of tactics to align bird conservation with positive economic outcomes, and for industry partners, supporting their bottom line, community, and sustainability goals can be messages that resonate strongly.

For a partnership to be successful, all partners must contribute to and benefit from the partnership. Identifying and communicating goals that go beyond birds will help engage organizations that have not historically worked to advance bird conservation. This section lays out broad categories of cross-cutting beneficial outcomes

For a partnership to be successful, all partners must contribute to—and benefit from—the partnership.

of bird conservation, to provide an understanding of how it might align with the goals of organizations whose primary focus is not bird conservation. We also provide guidance on how to find organizations that might share these broad goals, or otherwise benefit from bird conservation activities, to help bird conservation organizations identify new potential stakeholders and guide partnership outreach efforts.

EXPLORE COMPLEMENTARY OUTCOMES

There can be tremendous benefits to building partnerships that include both bird-focused organizations and organizations or individuals whose primary focus is not birds or bird habitat and/or who are not consistently engaged in bird conservation efforts. Building inclusive coalitions based on common or complementary goals and broad benefits can leverage resources that different organizations and communities bring to the table. Partnerships with a diverse participant base often have more political sway than a more narrowly focused community acting alone. Engaging diverse communities to work toward common or complementary goals can ensure broad perspectives that support outcomes with comprehensive, far-reaching, and lasting benefits.

Water Quality and Availability

The availability of clean, safe drinking water is an important issue that resonates with many communities. Habitat protection or restoration can improve water quality for

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: Playa Lakes Joint Venture

Conserving Water in New Mexico



MIRUH HAMIND

Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) formed a [partnership with the City of Clovis, New Mexico](#), based on a shared interest in the water supply in the western Great Plains. The partners have worked together to conserve and restore playas, shallow basins that are key sources of groundwater recharge; playas also provide critical habitat for migratory birds. Focusing on the regional need for abundant, clean drinking water has allowed PLJV to protect important bird habitat and make new allies for conservation. This approach is now being used to build partnerships with communities in other states; for example, in Kansas, PLJV partners including county conservation districts, groundwater management districts, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service [collaborated on a ~\\$3m project to support groundwater recharge and sustainability](#). Ultimately, PLJV has provided a safe venue to have difficult conversations and repurposed some of its tools, such as spatial targeting and conservation delivery, to help communities address their biggest challenges. See Mike Carter's PowerPoint presentation, [Seeking Relevance in All the Right Places](#), for an overview of PLJV partnerships based on groundwater recharge and tips on how to know a partnership is succeeding.

urban areas and improve upstream environmental conditions, and be a [cost-effective way to ensure clean drinking water for downstream](#) municipalities. Bird conservation work that supports the availability of drinking water provides opportunities for partnerships with municipalities, watershed restoration groups, environmental justice organizations, and foundations that focus either directly on water or broader societal issues.

This message can be particularly important in the American West, much of which is arid or semi-arid and where water issues often dominate local and regional political and social discourse. In addition to the community importance of groundwater for drinking, agricultural producers benefit from enhanced water availability and quality for crop or livestock production. Opportunities to collaborate with landowners can include projects involving cover crops, grass reseeded, and maintaining areas in forest cover, and wetland restoration projects that help keep water on the landscape, filling aquifers and maintaining the water table. These activities also directly enhance bird habitat. In addition, clean, available water has positive impacts on fisheries, and projects that restore floodplain function or riparian areas can align with efforts to enhance water management or improve infrastructure for better water quality or quantity for native fish and other aquatic animals, in addition to birds and other wildlife.

Human Health/Community Well-Being

Birds and bird habitat affect human physical and mental well-being in many ways. A growing suite of evidence shows that human health is linked to air and water quality. Some studies have demonstrated that [loss of biodiversity and wildlife habitat directly leads to an increase in infectious diseases](#). Several recent studies have shown that listening to bird songs and calls can help improve a person's mood and attention. (Find these references and other examples in [NABCI's Relevancy Toolkit](#).) As documented by Richard Louv in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, research increasingly shows the value of nature and spending time outdoors to human health. These linkages offer a diverse set of partnership

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: Audubon California

Improving Human Health by Saving the Salton Sea

The Salton Sea, a globally significant Important Bird Area in California, is shrinking, partly due to diverted water sources, making it inhospitable to nesting birds and fish. In addition to negative impacts on birds, including colonial nesting seabirds, [human health experts are concerned](#) that more dust and pollution will be kicked up by the region's strong winds, which will exacerbate asthma and bronchitis of area residents, particularly children. [Audubon California](#) and researchers at Loma Linda University are [including community partners in data collection](#) to address both bird conservation and environmental justice issues.



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

opportunities with government and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and regional and local groups focused on human health, including foundations interested in physical or mental health and the health benefits of outdoor recreation or outdoor access. Local governments and community groups, such as civic associations, may serve as partners to improve community well-being while creating or maintaining habitat for birds.

As noted in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s [Urban Bird Treaty Guide](#), “Improving availability of green spaces in ethnically diverse, underserved, and underrepresented communities can help promote environmental justice and health equality in urban populations and address deep-rooted inequities in access to parks and other natural areas.” Promoting access to green space offers unique opportunities to collaborate with urban communities and associated organizations that are often underrepresented in traditional bird conservation efforts. Environmental justice groups strive to reduce environmental harms, which disproportionately affect Black communities, Indigenous communities, and other communities of color. Working with these organizations may provide valuable opportunities for partnership around conservation issues. The organization [WeAct for Environmental Justice](#) offers [guidance on ways environmental organizations can also support environmental justice](#). City offices of sustainability, parks and recreation organizations, and local community schools can be valuable bird conservation partners. Master gardener clubs, along with river and watershed groups, may engage in habitat conservation or restoration activities with broad benefits.

Bird conservation activities that support positive, healthy communities can also align with industry goals. Corporations value communities that provide good places to live,

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: San Francisco Bay Joint Venture

Protecting Marshes with SediMatch

Partners need not share a primary goal if their goals are complementary. In the San Francisco Bay, [sediment has been recognized as a valuable resource](#) that can be used to help sustain marshes, which in turn can provide valuable flood protection to a wide range of communities. The San Francisco Bay Joint Venture (SFBJV), in collaboration with the San Francisco Estuary Institute, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, the San Francisco Estuary Partnership, and many other participating partners, facilitates [SediMatch](#), a program that matches wetland restoration organizations with industries and agencies that engage in dredging and other sediment supply activities, to foster beneficial use of sediment for marsh restoration. To advance this program, the SFBJV helped create [Flood Control 2.0](#), an ambitious regional effort that leverages local resources from several flood control agencies to reassess how ecological functions can be integrated into flood control design and management. The partnership created through these efforts advances healthy and sustainable wetland habitat for birds, provides flood protection for communities, and helps industries dispose of unneeded sediment in ways that benefit the ecological health and resilience of the region.



SANDRA SCOGGIN

work, and raise a family, including the amenities that residents value in their communities, such as public programs and services, and parks and recreation areas. Communities that retain residents help businesses retain their employees, and some corporations have corporate giving programs that center around community well-being.

Resilient Landscapes

Protecting coastlines and wetlands can benefit coastal communities and support healthy bird populations. As many coastal communities plan and prepare for climate impacts that include rising seas and increased storm activity, the challenges posed by these accelerating impacts also bring opportunities for new and innovative partnerships with municipal planners, flood control districts, and communities that increasingly recognize the value of marshes and other natural areas as buffers for these impacts.

Coastal estuaries, which provide important habitat for birds and other wildlife, also provide protection for humans against hurricane storm surges and flooding. Hurricane Sandy in 2012 caused \$70 billion in property damage, but it led to [resilience-based solutions and investments in habitat](#) that support wildlife and will mitigate against future disasters. The loss of 1 hectare of coastal wetlands corresponds to an [average increase in storm damage of \\$13,000, and coastal wetlands provide up to \\$23.2 billion per year in storm protection services in the U.S.](#) Conserving bird habitat along coasts can also protect private roads and other private property, including homes and businesses.

Bird habitat protection or restoration projects may appeal to foundations interested in coastal communities, municipalities, private individuals or businesses located in coastal areas, and public and private community groups. Some foundations have a specific focus on resilience; for example, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's [Emergency Coastal Resilience Fund](#) "supports conservation projects that strengthen natural systems at a scale that will protect coastal communities from the future impacts of storms, floods and other natural hazards." This type of fund offers opportunities for partnerships and projects that benefit people, communities, and wildlife.

Supporting Productive Working Lands

Sustainable land management practices provide important habitat for birds, while offering long-term viability and potential for increasing profitability for ranchers,

"Roughly 60% of the land area in the United States (1.43 billion acres) is privately owned by millions of individuals, families, organizations, and corporations, including 2 million ranchers and farmers and about 10 million woodland owners. More than 100 species have 50% or more of their U.S. breeding distributions on private land... Many privately owned working lands that produce food, timber, and other resources for society also provide valuable habitat for birds. Sustainable grazing systems yield better food resources for livestock over the long term, as well as healthier habitats for grassland and aridland birds. Ricelands can provide important wintering habitat for waterbirds. Sustainable working lands can meet the economic bottom line while providing habitat for birds and cleaner water, cleaner air, and improved human health for communities."

—[The State of the Birds 2013: Report on Private Lands \(NABCI\)](#)

farmers, and industry. Voluntary stewardship by private landowners can support bird habitat conservation goals at a scale relevant to bird populations. For example, more than half of rangelands in the western United States are in private ownership, and these landowners have a critical role to play in bird conservation. Federal and state policy, such as the federal [Farm Bill and state-based incentive programs](#), can be leveraged to support sustainable [land management practices](#) that help producers and industry and align with bird conservation objectives of maintaining and enhancing native plant communities that support bird populations.



BLM Idaho/Flicker

More than half of rangelands in the western United States are in private ownership, and these landowners have a critical role to play in bird conservation.

Programs that improve the profitability of ranching and sustainable land management ensure that “ranchers keep ranching,” preventing conversion of grasslands to development or other uses that are less suitable to grassland bird habitat. Profitable ranches lead to vibrant and sustainable rural communities. In addition to the economic benefits, maintaining working lands also has cultural implications. In the West, the cultural importance of rural communities acting as stewards of the land through agriculture and ranching provides additional incentive to keep working lands working, which can sustain bird habitats on working agricultural lands over the long term. Finding solutions to producer challenges, such as helping to support local finishing plants and local markets, can lead to stronger relationships with producers and more investment in bird conservation goals. As an example, [Audubon’s Conservation Ranching Initiative](#) increases the likelihood that ranchers who manage grasslands sustainably receive a premium price for their products. In addition, sustainable certification programs for ranch lands and forest lands may provide benefits to owners of those lands; understanding these programs may lead to opportunities for partnerships.

Non-industrial private landowners, such as family ranchers or timberland owners, are often highly interested in the wildlife values of their lands, but may be difficult to bring into partnerships. Associations and organizations focused on landowners (e.g., [American Tree Farm System](#), [Family Farm Alliance](#), [Partners for Conservation](#), and cattlemen’s associations) may help to identify and connect with interested private landowners, as can efforts by NGOs and governments to collaborate and provide educational resources. One example of a successful partnership between non-industrial woodlot owners and bird conservation organizations is the [Foresters for the Birds](#) program, which originated in Vermont and now engages foresters in [additional states](#) throughout the Atlantic Flyway. This partnership works with woodlot owners to integrate positive timber practices with bird habitat management. Another partnership, [Conservation](#)

[Without Conflict](#), brings together landowners, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and industry to collaborate on nonregulatory approaches to conservation, demonstrating a commitment to conservation and maintaining working lands.

There are many partnership opportunities and models between bird conservation organizations and working landowners that focus on farming, grazing, forestry, and even salt production. For example, in southern Oregon and northeastern California, certain flood irrigation practices support wetlands and wet meadows that create critical stopover habitat for migratory waterbirds in the Pacific Flyway, providing opportunities to develop relationships with ranchers to encourage irrigation practices that are mutually beneficial. Preliminary research in Montana suggests that transitioning Conservation Reserve Program lands to managed grazed pasture increases abundance of some declining grassland bird species, offering key opportunities to collaborate with ranchers even in the absence of federal subsidies. The Cargill Corporation, working in the Caribbean, [owns salt ponds that can also be profitably managed as good habitat for shorebirds](#), creating international corporate partnership opportunities that can be critical for conserving neotropical migratory bird populations.



PHOTO COURTESY BIRDS CARIBBEAN

Salt ponds in the Caribbean owned by the Cargill Corporation can also be profitably managed for shorebirds.

Tourism Industry

Birdwatching and birding-related tourism [generate billions of dollars in economic activity](#). About 46 million people in the U.S.—nearly one in five adults—watch birds. In 2016, 16.3 million people took trips away from home to observe birds. Overall, birders spend about \$40 billion annually on this activity, supporting more than 860,000 jobs. With side benefits and associated economic impacts, birdwatching is a \$107 billion per year industry, positively impacting 47 million people per year. Events such as bird festivals can have a [huge positive impact on small, rural communities](#), providing



JIM BARNEY / USEWS

Bird-centric tourism, such as this field trip associated with the Great Salt Lake Bird Festival, can have significant positive economic impacts for local communities.

opportunities for economically motivated partnerships. Chambers of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureaus are heavily involved in bird-related tourism in some communities. For example, during the Sandhill Crane festivals in Nebraska, Colorado, and New Mexico, local businesses and the hospitality industry developed partnerships focused on bird-related tourism. Similarly, the [Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival](#) in Texas is co-led by the local Chamber of Commerce and yields local economic benefits, as does the [Great Salt Lake Bird Festival](#) in Utah, which is managed by Davis County.

Beyond birds, people often enjoy traveling to places where they can see wildlife generally. Even where tourism is focused more broadly on landscapes, supporting these landscapes can have positive benefits for birds and tourism. These links provide opportunities to leverage tourism dollars and goals for conservation that benefit natural areas and wildlife through partnerships with outdoor tourism, recreation-linked industries such as outdoor/sporting goods stores, or outdoor recreation organizations that promote hiking, boating, hunting, fishing, mountain biking, etc.

Bird-focused tourism also presents numerous international partnership opportunities and can facilitate partnerships that benefit full lifecycle conservation of birds. For example, Audubon, Patrimonio Natural, and the Asociación Calidris developed [The Northern Colombia Birding Trail](#), which engages local bird guides, national parks, private reserves, and small businesses in support of birding and bird conservation. An Audubon partner [offers birdwatching tours](#) to Colombia as a mechanism to support conservation and sustainable development.

Carbon Sequestration

Restoring or maintaining vegetation on a landscape can benefit birds while storing and sequestering carbon that otherwise would be released into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. Landowners can obtain carbon credits for maintaining vegetation such as trees or perennial grasses, and these credits can be traded for payment, which can provide incentive for practices that provide bird habitat. Bird conservation partners are drawing connections between carbon sequestration, ecosystem services, and private land management in the context of sagebrush conservation, as well as in establishing forest habitats for birds through



Restoring or maintaining vegetation on a landscape can benefit birds.. Landowners can obtain carbon credits for maintaining vegetation.

the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) of the Farm Bill.

Depending on your audience, the link between carbon sequestration and climate change may provide an intersection between bird conservation goals and the broader goals of private organizations or individuals. An [April 2020 report](#) from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication indicates that two out of three Americans are at least somewhat worried about climate change, and a majority of Americans are worried about extreme events in their area, such as extreme heat and water shortages. These effects will impact birds, as well; a [recent Audubon report](#) shows that two-thirds of North American bird species are at increased risk of extinction from global temperature rise, so opportunities exist for partnerships with organizations working directly or indirectly on climate change. However, messaging about climate change could also be a turnoff for other potential partners, so it is particularly important to understand your audience's goals and values before approaching this topic.

Sustainability

Many private groups include economic, community, or conservation-related sustainability in their organizational vision. Companies are often interested in sustainable communities to promote employee retention. Likewise, some companies have sustainability goals to demonstrate their stewardship efforts to customers and serve as responsible corporate citizens. For example, electric utilities may [track a variety of environmental and community stewardship metrics](#), such as air and water quality, waste reduction or recycling, and biodiversity. Some industries, such as forest products, can require extended periods to recoup their initial financial investments, and may benefit from long-term landscape and conservation planning. Similarly, regulatory certainty and environmental sustainability will also help to promote these longer-term investments. Finally, consumer choice influences corporate actions and can be a strong driver to implement environmental sustainability efforts.

With the “Environmental, Social, and Governance” (ESG) movement in the investment world, investors and analysts are tracking sustainability metrics among publicly traded companies, many of which are responding by promoting sustainability and reaching out to create new partnerships. Many companies are paying attention to

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

Sustainable, Bird-friendly Coffee

Organic, shade-grown coffee farms provide high-quality habitat for migratory birds and the coffee can yield higher prices for farmers. The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center partners with over 4,900 coffee farmers and a network of coffee importers and roasters to certify [Bird Friendly coffee](#); this certification provides an opportunity to sell coffee outside of the volatile commodity market for higher prices. Sales of Bird Friendly coffee have grown steadily for 20 years, and this approach is now being used to conserve birds in rangelands and tropical lowland forest with certified beef and cocoa programs.



climate change, which provides another opportunity for bird conservation and private organizational goals to overlap.

For many industries, such as forestry, coffee, and aquaculture, certification systems exist through which companies can demonstrate sustainability. Some of these certification systems have objectives focused on biodiversity. In addition, some corporate-focused partnerships have certification programs. Members of these partnerships adhere to certain standards and their employees can earn points for undertaking different conservation actions. For example, if company employees participate in a citizen science project, the organization receives points toward certification.

Regulations

Rules and regulations that serve to protect migratory birds, such as regulations on air or water quality or habitat use, can have strong impacts on industry. Many industries value clear, consistent guidelines and mitigation requirements. Some industries and sectors are affected by endangered species listings. Oil and gas, wind, and forestry companies, as well as private landowners, may be interested in partnering on proactive habitat con-

servation actions to help secure bird populations and avoid listing, which could prevent them from doing their own work. Many industries adopt voluntary practices in their operations that minimize their impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat. When combined, these voluntary, proactive, and coordinated conservation efforts can support healthy wildlife populations and reduce the need for future Endangered Species Act listings and other regulatory actions. This work benefits industry and wildlife, while giving states, businesses, and communities the certainty they need to plan for sustainable economic development. Over time and with company leadership support, these efforts may be embedded into industry practices, resulting in a “new normal” of doing business. Differences in political ideology and administrative policies can affect interest in partnerships related to regulatory frameworks, so it is important to be aware of the current political administration and status of federal and state regulations.



PRESTON KERRIS / USDA

Many industries adopt voluntary practices in their operations that minimize their impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL PARTNERS

One of the best ways to get started with developing partnerships is to identify organizations outside of your normal working relationships that may have goals that are compatible with bird conservation outcomes. Here are a few suggestions on how to begin:

Look for Local Impacts and Conduct a Stakeholder Analysis. To evaluate which organizations might have common goals, conduct a formal or informal stakeholder analysis to evaluate who might be affected locally by the conservation issue in question. Even with large-scale projects and big industries, there are local questions and local impacts; these can be assessed for the opportunity to build partnerships. A systematic internet search can identify entities in a certain geographic area with a specific interest, such as clean water or sustainability. These potential stakeholders can then be prioritized based on factors such as their level of potential interest and the potential impact they are positioned to make. For example, organizations that have available funding may be prioritized differently than organizations that do not, if funding is a primary need of an emerging partnership.

**LOOK FOR
LOCAL
IMPACT**

Consider Opportunities for Networking and Learning. Professional conferences outside of traditional bird conservation networks can provide excellent opportunities for making new connections and understanding the needs, goals, and projects of a broad array of potential partners. In addition, being visible within a community can help to encourage and foster new relationships. The [Society for Range Management](#), forestry and agricultural producer conferences such as the [Society of American Foresters](#) or the [Family Farm Alliance](#), meetings of watershed or water management groups, the [World Ocean Council](#), [Green Marine](#), [The Wildlife Society](#), and others, all convene professionals whose goals may overlap with bird conservation goals. Trade associations or other collaboratives, like the [National Council for Air and Stream Improvement](#), the [National Alliance of Forest Owners](#), the [American Wind and Wildlife Institute](#), or the [National Association of Environmental Professionals](#), can provide opportunities for understanding and connecting with new partners. Municipal or county public meetings on issues related to water, outdoor recreation, or other conservation-related topics can help identify local issues and connect with organizations involved in addressing them. Ideally, a contact who is already established in a new network can help to make introductions and facilitate interactions.

**CONSIDER
WAYS TO
NETWORK**

Do your Homework on Potential Partners. An organization's website should have information on their mission and vision. Many corporations have a sustainability page and some, including many oil and gas companies, have philanthropy programs that are looking for conservation partners or programs to encourage employees to volunteer in their communities. Bird conservation professionals can use their existing networks to gather information on particular organizations and evaluate whether they are a good fit. Signing up for organizational newsletters or other mailings can be another good way to learn about their priorities. Even a simple email or phone call to a company to speak to their environmental/sustainability representative is often well received and can provide insight into their efforts that may not be detailed on their website.

**DO YOUR
HOMEWORK**

Once you have identified organizations or individuals whose goals may align with or complement bird conservation outcomes, the next step is to reach out to develop an initial connection and gauge interest in working together. The next section provides strategies for reaching out to new partners.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [NABCI's Relevancy Toolkit](#) summarizes and links to dozens of published studies linking birds and bird conservation with other human benefits. This toolkit is meant to help bird conservation professionals draw links between bird conservation and clean air, clean water, human health, and a diverse set of economic interests. These examples can spark ideas on the types of organizations that might benefit from bird conservation activities and provide opportunities for engaging potential partners outside traditional bird conservation spheres.
- The Conservation Measures Partnership's [Incorporating Social Aspects and Human Wellbeing in Biodiversity Conservation Projects](#) document provides guidance on links between human well-being and conservation and is designed to help conservation professionals identify areas of overlap as well as trade-offs with human well-being.
- The Project Management Institute [offers an explanation of stakeholders and provides one method for approaching a stakeholder analysis](#).
- [Up in Smoke: Fire and Invasives on Western Rangelands](#), a short film by the Inter-mountain West Joint Venture and a product of their partnership with the Bureau of Land Management highlights a successful partnership built around goals broader than bird conservation.



WORKSHEET: Looking Beyond Birds to Find Partners

- (1) What outcomes will your project have that are not specifically linked to birds? (E.g., clean or available water, expanded or improved natural areas, increased coastal resilience)
- (2) How might these outcomes add value to organizations whose primary focus is not birds? (E.g., improved human health/community well-being, homeowner security in coastal areas, water security for ranchers or communities, regulatory certainty)
- (3) As a result of a stakeholder analysis, what organizations did you identify that may value these broad outcomes?
- (4) What information have you gathered about these potential partners' mission, values, priorities, interests, communication styles, cultural norms, and political interests?
- (5) How will you use this information to prioritize which organizations or individuals you will focus on, and to develop a communication strategy that will resonate with the potential partner?



REACHING OUT AND COMMUNICATING

This section provides communication and strategy tips for reaching out to new partners, focusing on how to reach out to potential partners in ways that resonate with their interests, and also explores how to identify new contacts within a target organization. If your organization has a dedicated communications and outreach or development person, engage them in this process as early as possible.

ELEMENTS OF NEW PARTNER OUTREACH

Understand Your Audience

Before deciding that an organization or individual could make a suitable and mutually beneficial partner it is important to understand their goals, motivations, and values (see “[Looking Beyond Birds to Find Partners](#).”) Some additional research will also help you to effectively reach out to a potential partner—knowing your audience and how they communicate will help to develop successful outreach strategies. For example, if an organization or individual has a website, that website can provide important information not just about their priorities and interests, but about the way they communicate. Internet searches can provide insights into an organization’s engagement, public face, and challenges; news articles can provide insights into both their public engagement and public perception of the organization. However, also recognize that some partners, such as private landowners, may not have an online presence, and may require different methods to evaluate their priorities. Gaining this perspective on a potential partner can help identify common ground that can serve as a starting point of discussion during initial contacts. Conducting initial research can also help to prioritize organizations or individuals to approach. Resources are limited, so it is important to figure out the most relevant potential

Partnerships built on honesty, trust, and mutual benefits have the highest likelihood of success.



POTENTIAL PITFALL

Inviting organizations to the table because you need something from them, without clearly identifying the benefits to that entity.

Lessons Learned

- Clearly identify what you bring to the table that will benefit other partners.
- Be up front about your expectations of partners.
- Be sincere about your willingness and ability to help partners work toward their goals.
- Be flexible about what you are willing to give, especially with partners whose primary goal is not bird conservation.
- Have honest conversations and be clear about your own motivations.
- Engage in one-on-one conversations with new partners to build trust and better understand their needs, values, and motivations.

partners—ideally that will maximize return on investment for both your organization and theirs. Partnerships built on honesty, trust, and mutual benefits have the highest likelihood of success.

Look for Existing Connections

Consider how to use existing connections and resources to explore new relationships. Research into a potential partner may turn up existing connections between your organization and the potential partner. Membership-based nongovernmental organizations may have members that are part of an organization that could be a potential partner. Individuals on your organization’s board may have connections with other entities. These connections may be able to help you decide how to approach a potential partner, including identifying a contact person and providing an introduction. Having an existing personal connection helps to build trust between two organizations, especially if they have not worked together previously, or if there is actual or perceived controversy between these organizations. Based on initial one-on-one relationships, new partners can work together to look for opportunities to scale up these conversations.

Find an Initial Contact

Existing connections provide the strongest opportunities to make initial contact with a new organization. In the absence of existing connections, explore the organization’s structure to evaluate who holds a relevant position. For NGOs, outreach coordinators in bird-focused organizations may have counterparts in other NGOs. Corporations often have a community relations specialist or an environmental scientist who is an appropriate initial contact. Many foundations have program officers or other individuals who answer questions about specific programs. While your initial connection may not be the person with whom you ultimately end up working, they can help introduce you to others. For example, an organization’s outreach coordinator can help you identify a connection within their organization that addresses wildlife or sustainability issues. Often, a conversation can be more impactful than an email: be bold and pick up the phone.

The Messenger is Part of the Message

Consider who will make the most effective liaison with a new partner, and who will be a good ambassador for your organization. An individual who has interests or values in common with the potential partner may be more effective at making connections and can potentially dispel myths about potential areas of controversy between the organizations. Also, consider who the potential partner



SARA SCHMIDT

Consider who will make the most effective liaison with a new partner, and who will be a good ambassador for your organization.

might initially trust. For example, having a prominent landowner initially approach a potential industry partner may be more effective than an agency representative making a first contact. The liaison should be able to listen to a partner without criticizing or arguing against that partner's value system.

Listen, and Seek to Understand

Approaching an individual or organization for a partnership opportunity requires careful, open-minded, and empathetic listening. Initial conversations can be similar to informational interviews; this is an opportunity to learn about a potential partner. Listening to how they talk about their interests can inform your understanding of how they communicate, including their focus and word choices, which can inform the development of messaging that resonates with that partner. Approaching a potential partner with an open mind can dispel assumptions and help to identify areas of common ground.

Speak Your Partner's Language

Make sure you are speaking your partner's language as you build a relationship. This refers not just to the actual language—for example, ensuring that your materials are published in Spanish when approaching a Spanish-speaking partner—but ensuring you are aware of your manner of speaking and the words you use to communicate. For example, the way a rancher, a corporate executive, or a foundation officer communicates may be very different from how a bird biologist communicates. Every field has its own jargon, but jargon can exclude individuals who are not already well-versed in that field. Using jargon, or communicating using complex or technical language, can reinforce silos and serve to exclude people rather than build bridges and encourage broader participation. When crafting messages, consider who you are trying to reach, who they trust, and where they get their information, and approach them accordingly. Using language that has currency for your partner is more effective than using messaging that resonates with already like-minded people. Communicate clearly, not condescendingly.

Listen to a partner without criticizing or arguing against that partner's value system.

Lead with Messaging that Resonates with the Partner

As bird conservation professionals, we often focus our messaging on birds and bird conservation. Leading with messages that resonate within bird conservation circles is not always the most effective way to connect with a new partner. It is important to develop messages that will resonate with that partner, based on an evaluation of their interests. Subsequent conversations may include birds, where appropriate, but connecting with a new partner's existing priorities can serve as a starting point for further engagement; if we lead with our own values and messages, we risk losing that opportunity for future conversation. You may never talk about birds with some partners, but if the ultimate goal of habitat conservation is the same, and if you are working together toward that goal, the fact that birds are not a direct part of the conversation may not

matter. The previous section of this document provides an overview of ways that birds and bird conservation align with broader human interests. This broad context, plus specific research into a partner's interests, values, and word usage, can help guide both initial contacts and future relationships.

For some potential partners, bird-focused messaging may resonate, but this approach still requires careful consideration of a partner's interest. Bird conservation professionals have a passion for birds and we often get excited about our work, but not everyone has the same level of interest. Sometimes, even if a partner is not interested in bird species, the connection people have with birds may resonate. Organizations may care about the public's perception of birds; for example, organizations that wish to make a positive impression on a community may be interested to know that their stakeholders care about birds.

There is no one formula for messaging that works for all partners, or even for all partners within a specific category or interest group. Finding the common value or common thread with a specific partner—and sometimes a specific individual—is critical, which requires listening and creative thinking.

Acknowledge Misunderstandings or Disagreements

Individuals may come to a new partnership opportunity with existing preconceptions or mistrust of the different groups around the table. When organizations have beliefs or value systems that differ from our own, it is easy to make assumptions about them that may not be accurate or valid. Before engaging with a new partner, it can be helpful to recognize and acknowledge these assumptions and consider how to approach the partner with openness to their beliefs, values, or traditions. This can open the door to a more successful, honest partnership. Acknowledging areas of disagreement, but choosing to focus on areas of agreement, can highlight a partnership's value, too. For example, if several groups that notoriously do not agree come together to support a shared priority, having these organizations come together in partnership provides strong communication leverage in itself.

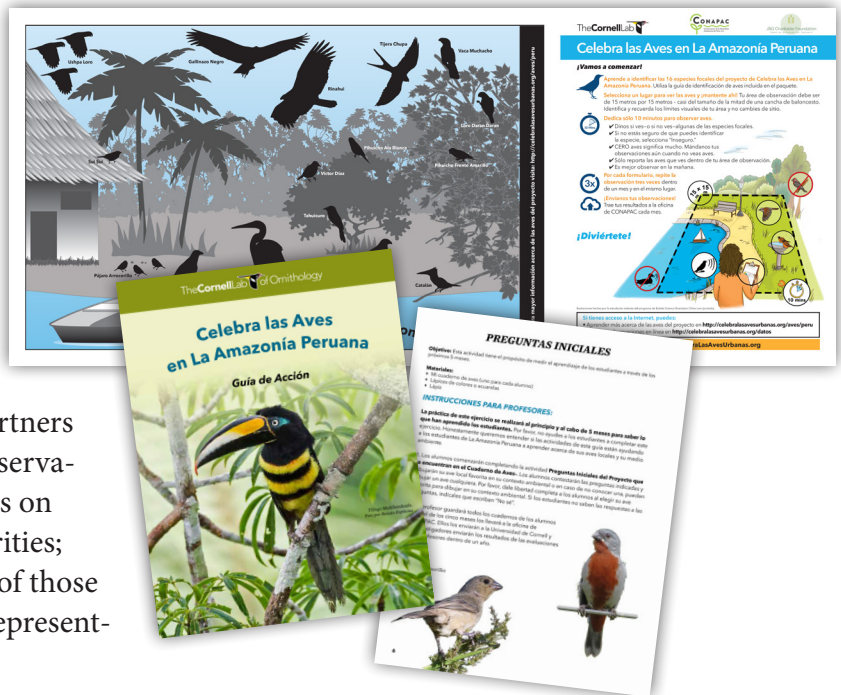
Consider International or Multicultural Factors

An added layer of understanding should be considered when reaching out to partners in other countries or whose first language is not your own. Sensitivity to cultural and political issues that may not align between you and a potential partner is critical. For international or multicultural partnerships, part of doing your research should include



Begin by connecting with a new partner's existing priorities. You may never talk about birds, but if the partnership achieves your objectives, it may not matter.

gaining a basic understanding of cultural norms and expectations for the culture to which you are doing outreach, to obtain an understanding of what is considered polite and appropriate, for example. At a minimum, in addition to providing outreach materials in the primary language of your main audience, make a sincere offer of translators at meetings, and incorporate these expenses into your operating budget. For international partners already engaged in or interested in bird conservation, consider how to focus communications on shared priorities, not simply your own priorities; for example, determine the priority species of those partners and ensure that those species are represented in communications.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The Convention on Biodiversity offers [guidance on developing a communications strategy](#) and selecting partners, starting on page 253 of the linked document.
- Compass offers a [Message Box](#) to help communicate your message in a way that resonates with your intended audience.

An added layer of understanding should be considered when reaching out to partners in other countries or whose first language is not your own. At a minimum, outreach materials should be provided in the primary language of your main audience. Above, kits for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's [Celebrate Urban Birds in the Peruvian Amazon curriculum](#) were culturally and linguistically created especially for the local community.

WORKSHEET: Reaching Out and Communicating

- (1) How will you connect with this new organization or individual initially?
 - (a) What existing connections can you engage?
 - (b) What characteristics will make an initial liaison effective in connecting with this potential partner, and who in your network fits those criteria?
- (2) How have you framed your messaging to connect with the potential partner's interests, priorities, and values?
- (3) What assumptions or biases might you hold about this partner (and vice versa) and how might these be acknowledged and overcome?



DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

Building on common goals, clearly identifying value to all partners, and developing trust are key to forming and maintaining relationships. Developing relationships requires an investment of time and energy, and to create successful partnerships, it is important to sincerely commit to the process of getting to know a potential partner, listening to their ideas and concerns, and maintaining the relationship over time.

Developing relationships requires sincerity, flexibility, and reliability. As mentioned in the “Reaching Out and Communicating” section, it is important to approach a new organization through the lens of their needs. Learning about a potential partner—what they do, what they value, what problems they may face—can help to find areas of overlap and ways that a partnership can be mutually beneficial. Ensuring that all partners see value in collaborating and then following through on commitments helps to build credibility. When initiating a partnership, clearly identify the purpose and initial value for each participant. Throughout the partnership development, create and encourage a culture of collaboration, where all voices are heard and all stakeholders’ perspectives are important. The sections below highlight components of relationship development that support building trust and creating a strong, mutually beneficial, functional partnership.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Be Flexible and Expect Discomfort

Building new partnerships, especially partnerships outside of your organization’s traditional niche, requires flexibility and a willingness to explore ways to do things differently. People and organizations may be hesitant to try new methods and new approaches, but following the established method of doing business may feel exclusionary to new partners and can limit the potential of a partnership. While it is important to learn from historical efforts concerning your issue and potential processes, there are usually multiple ways to address an issue. Maintaining an open mind allows a partnership to consider alternative and potentially equally valuable approaches.

Being flexible should be reflected in both our actions and our thinking; it is beneficial to let go of assumptions you may hold about a potential partner. Instead, approach a partnership with an open mind and a sincere desire to listen and learn. Partnerships that push

“If you’re in a coalition and you’re comfortable, you know it’s not a broad enough coalition.”

—Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, song leader, musician, composer, scholar, and activist

comfort boundaries are often the most effective, as they reflect a broad array of positions and experiences. Having courageous conversations that challenge assumptions and invite constructive disagreement may not always be comfortable, but if approached with respect, sincerity, and open-mindedness, this can be extremely productive. Sometimes it may be beneficial to have challenging conversations one on one; it is important to be aware of context and approach disagreements or have difficult conversations in appropriate and productive ways. Remind yourself that there are many ways to approach an issue, and that there is almost certainly more than one “right” answer.

Build Personal Relationships

Partnerships among organizations often start with connections between individuals. As mentioned in the “[Reaching Out and Communicating](#)” section, finding an existing connection with a new organization or individual is often the best way to build an initial bridge. Continuing to build strong, personal relationships helps to bolster an emerging partnership, and developing a champion within an organization can support broader connections within an organization or community. Making time for social engagement outside of a formal meeting can be an important opportunity for this type of relationship building. For example, building enough break times into structured meetings is important to provide partners the opportunity to connect more casually. Some organizations use food—from coffee breaks to picnics—to build these connections. Others may use field trips as more casual opportunities to connect both around work and personally. These shared experiences that arise from unstructured or semi-structured time can help strengthen partnerships, too. Provide opportunities for partners to “show off” their work, if they are interested and as appropriate; for example, a rancher may provide a tour of their property and operations.



MARILÚ LOPEZ-FRETTES

Partnerships among organizations often start with connections between individuals. Making time for social engagement outside of a formal meeting can be an important opportunity for this type of relationship building. Above, participants in the [Noise Project](#)’s workshop socialize after the day’s meeting.

Demonstrate Reliability and Competence

Clearly stating your goals, being reliable, and demonstrating competence are three important components of building trust, which is a key factor in successful partnerships. Demonstrate reliability through your actions; show that you will do what you say. This involves engaging in active conversations, listening sincerely to partners to best understand their needs, and being on time and prepared

“It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently.”

—Warren Buffett, investor, businessman, and philanthropist

and following up on promised actions. Demonstrate competence around organization and show respect for partners' time; for example, when convening for a meeting, ensure that the meeting is well organized and well run, the agenda is sent out ahead of time, and the meeting space is adequate. Ensure that your team has the skills and abilities to undertake the proposed partnership work. Especially in larger partnerships, make sure that both leadership and the people at the table are representative of the diversity of the partnership; representative membership also serves to demonstrate competence in bringing together the full range of perspectives and stakeholders on an issue.

Understand the Importance of a Good Leader and a Good Facilitator

A good leader can set the tone of a partnership, ensuring that all voices are welcomed and heard, helping to establish strong ground rules that encourage collaboration, and ending meetings on a positive note. A strong leader can set a positive tone early in the process. Good leadership and facilitation help to navigate difficult situations; for example, ensuring that a particularly vocal or negative partner feels heard but is not allowed to shut down or dominate a discussion.

While some leaders are also good facilitators, sometimes partnerships can benefit from a separate skilled facilitator. It can be difficult to both participate in a discussion and facilitate it, and not all subject matter experts make good facilitators. A strong facilitator should acknowledge that they are not a participant in the discussion, since an unskilled facilitator who is a subject matter expert can dominate the stage and interject their own ideas from a position of power. This can be disruptive and demoralizing for the rest of the group. Instead, a skilled facilitator reflects back what they are hearing, sums up key points in a discussion, and helps move the conversation along. This ensures everyone is heard and has the opportunity to participate.

Establish a Foundation of Mutual Value, Desired Outcomes, and Ground Rules

When establishing a partnership, make sure the group lays out clear goals and priorities and identifies shared values and ground rules for how you will work together toward these



POTENTIAL PITFALL

Failing to lay out a clear process for how the partnership works, including scope of work, roles and responsibilities, expectations, payment, etc.

Lessons Learned

- Work hard to get a plan in place up front, and schedule plan updates as needed.
- Identify not just the right organizations to have at the table, but also the right individuals and expertise from those organizations.
- Balance developing a broad partnership with the importance of identifying a unifying theme that is specific enough to provide focus. Clearly identify the achievement that will be accomplished by the partnership.

Check out Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy at the University of Montana's [Designing an Effective Process](#) resource, as well as Partners in Flight's [Guidelines for Engagement](#), for more tips on establishing objectives and protocols.

common goals. Framing both the group's destination and process from the start helps avoid pitfalls and confusion later in the process. Identifying the role of each partner will ensure that there is clear value and purpose for everyone.

A formal charter, official Terms of Reference, or partnership bylaws can help to clarify the scope of the project or task, identify final products or tangible results, and establish expectations for the conduct and process of interactions by team members. This can be especially valuable if the working partnership involves potentially controversial issues and can help clarify the partnership's purpose and end goal. These guidance documents can also specify how information can and will be shared and identify a spokesperson for press releases or announcements. However, occasionally partnerships are exhausted by an early and intensive charter- or bylaws-development step, so carefully consider the best tool for developing a clear process for your partnership.

If the partnership involves collecting data or evaluating complex information, consider adopting a clear protocol for analysis, data ownership, and/or data sharing. Investing in a process only to become ensnared in technical debates about analysis or evaluation can damage trust and derail progress.

When a partnership involves multiple NGOs, including membership-based NGOs, establishing ground rules early on can help prevent or manage competition in fundraising or volunteer engagement. Direct, honest communication with board members and partner organizations can lay out expectations for financial niches and responsibilities and help to avoid hard feelings over competition for limited resources.

Challenges and Missteps to Building Trust

Establishing trust is essential in building successful partnerships; a lack of trust may prevent partners from being open about issues or ideas that could move the partnership forward, or even from engaging in the partnership in the first place. However, trust is earned, rather than automatic, and when trust is lost, it is harder to regain. Also, trust is not given simply because of a position or authority.

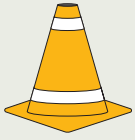


FRIENDS OF SKAGIT BEACHES, ANACORTES, WA

For partnerships that include collecting data, adopt a clear protocol for data collection, analysis, ownership, and sharing. Above, the City of Anacortes partners with the Friends of Skagit Beaches to monitor pollution from stormwater flowing into Puget Sound.

Common missteps to building trust include:

- Over-promising what a group can deliver;
- Lacking sincerity or reliability;
- Communicating poorly or not enough;
- Poorly defining the group decision-making process;
- Not investing the time to get partners on the same page, where possible;
- Asking for opinions or feedback and then not using or acknowledging this input;
- Making a public statement on behalf of the partnership that does not represent the entire group;
- Not adequately sharing data among partners.



POTENTIAL PITFALL

Engaging partners late in the process: Partners may not feel that they have equal say in project evolution or vision, which may lead to tension and partners not feeling ownership of the project.

Lessons Learned

- Involve partners as early as possible; the timing will vary based on the issue and the partner and should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- Try to engage partners equally, when appropriate, to ensure newer or less integrated members don't feel like outsiders to a core group.
- Partners may feel more ownership of and engagement in projects they help to create from the start, compared to efforts they join later in the process.
- In some cases, it is appropriate to start with a small project that engages some partners early, and use that success to build up to a bigger project and larger partnership.

Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Cross-cultural collaboration can refer to partnerships built across countries or across racial, ethnic, or religious groups. It can also apply to partnerships across organizations with different internal cultures, such as small nonprofits compared to large government agencies. The same tenets described above apply to cross-cultural partnerships. Working across cultures requires an understanding of the organization you are trying to work with, whether that organization is a domestically based corporation or an international NGO. Even within cross-cultural partnerships, relationships are often initiated between individuals, so identifying and building a connection with an individual can facilitate partnerships both within and outside of the bird conservation community.

When approaching cross-cultural partnerships, open-mindedness and flexibility are especially important. Be careful not to assume that you, your organization, or your country are doing conservation the “right” way. Promoting the narrative that your organization (or country) has figured everything out and is approaching a problem correctly can exclude and offend potential partners.

Successful, inclusive partnerships often include some discomfort. In an effort to avoid or minimize this, we often look for the “low-hanging fruit” and engage initially with people who are most like us. In the United States, we often “try out” partnerships in our own region and then expand them, or focus initially on other English-speaking partners before engaging individuals whose primary language is



DAVID GARCÍA SOLÓRZANO

Working across cultures requires understanding the values and culture of the partner organization. The dance steps and the magnificent, vibrant colors of the costumes worn by students of the Toluca, Mexico, Fine Arts School Folklore Dance Group suggest the plumage and movement of Toluca's local birds, as the dancers use their art bring awareness of urban bird conservation to the Toluca youth.

not our own. While sometimes this is necessary as a result of available resources and capacity, this approach risks excluding partners that have different perspectives. Bringing in people from other countries or other cultures after a strong partnership has formed means they have to fit themselves into an existing group, which can lead to feelings of disengagement, disinterest, or resentment. Up-front planning to engage people across cultures may take longer, but it can ultimately pay off with a stronger, more sustainable and inclusive partnership.

Dealing with Conflict

Conflict can occur on many levels. Organizational conflict may occur when organizations have historically taken opposing sides on issues. Issue-based conflict can occur over controversial resource issues, where stakeholders have divergent needs. Individuals can exhibit different styles of engagement or communication that lead to conflict within a group. When approaching a new partnership, it is important to understand the history between organizations and individuals within the group.

Conflict does not have to be negative, but it is important to manage conflict constructively so a group can grow and move forward. Clear rules of engagement, including information about how partners will treat each other, can help, combined with good facilitation that guides people to follow the rules. The partnership can acknowledge conflict, and perhaps agree to disagree, allowing the group to move on. If repeated conflict arises that is tied to an individual, consider why that conflict may be occurring. Is that individual representing a minority voice within the partnership, and is the partnership not adequately reflecting or accommodating that perspective? One-on-one conversations with the individual may help to ensure their perspective is heard and allow for a less confrontational way to explore solutions. If the individual reflects a majority perspective and simply struggles to follow the rules of engagement, even after one-on-one conversations to empower them to

Conflict does not have to be negative, but it is important to manage conflict constructively



POTENTIAL PITFALL

Enabling partners to sit at the table without contributing, in order to avoid conflict.

Lessons Learned

- **Be bold:** have challenging yet strategic conversations to identify where overlap in interest can grow into true collaboration with mutual benefit.
- **Engage partners to clarify their role in the partnership.** If a partner is present but not contributing, sit down with them and ask what they need, or how to help them get more from the partnership. If there is no real benefit for them to participate, suggest that it is acceptable for them to step down, and leave the door open to future partnerships that may more clearly align with their priorities.
- **It is easier to invite someone to join a partnership than it is to ask them to leave.** Some long-standing landscape-scale partnerships, such as some of the Joint Ventures, expect new partner entities to participate on teams or subcommittees before considering that partner for management board membership. Such roles provide an opportunity for the new entity to learn about the partnership, gauge their own interest, and demonstrate their value and potential.

feel heard, consider other ways to engage them while minimizing conflict; for example, consider including them on a subcommittee or team rather than on a central board.

CONCLUSIONS

Building trust through consistency, transparency, reliability, and sincerity provides a foundation for creating and maintaining successful partnerships. The strategies outlined in each section above all factor into developing trust in a partnership. Trust is easier to lose than to build; maintaining trust throughout a partnership reflects a series of conscious and unconscious actions that nurture and promote positive relationships over time. Trust sets the stage for enabling honest and productive conversations about challenging or controversial issues. Relationship building takes time, but investing time in developing relationships can yield broad, beneficial outcomes that would be impossible to accomplish alone.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Tools of Engagement: A Toolkit for Engaging People in Conservation](#), developed by the National Audubon Society in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Education and Training Partnership, and Together-Green, walks users through the planning process of building partnerships and engaging individuals.
- The Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy at the University of Montana offers [several resources](#) on collaboration and partnership, including handbooks, best practices, and the role of facilitators. It also lists resources developed by federal agencies. It has a useful overview of [designing an effective collaboration process](#), which details how to develop ground rules and a work plan, addresses identifying and engaging stakeholders, and provides a checklist for designing an effective process.
- An article in *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, [Understanding Leadership in a World of Shared Problems: Advancing Network Governance in Large Landscape Conservation](#), discusses “specific practices for leaders of networks, including: shaping the network’s identity and vision, attracting members, instilling leadership skills in members, and advancing common interests.” The article offers case studies to demonstrate these concepts.
- [Six Common Mistakes in Conservation Priority Setting](#), published in *Conservation Biology*, explores mistakes in conservation priority setting that include “not acknowledging conservation plans are prioritizations; trying to solve an ill-defined problem; not prioritizing actions; arbitrariness; hidden value judgments; and not acknowledging the risk of failure” (text from article abstract).
- Partners in Flight’s [Guidelines for Engagement](#) offers additional guidance on building collaboration, laying out expectations, developing products, dealing with finances, creating formal agreements, and articulating responsibilities for leadership and decision making. It also highlights some potential challenges to collaboration.
- [Advancing Landbird Conservation on Western Federally Managed Lands With](#)

[Management- and Policy-Relevant Science](#) outlines a strategy for researchers and conservation practitioners to transform management challenges into conservation opportunities and action through collaborations between federal land agencies and science-based NGOs.

- [Decision Support Tools: Bridging the Gap Between Science and Management](#) outlines a collaborative process between scientists, decision makers, and educators to enhance development of effective decision support tools that support partner access to best available science for decision-making focused on implementing bird conservation priorities.
- Partners for Conservation offers some [lessons learned from the Greater Sage Grouse collaboration](#).
- [Conservation Planning on Grazing Lands: The Art of Communication](#), an article by NRCS, provides tips on how to communicate effectively with landowners in order to motivate conservation behaviors. NRCS also offers social science information to help with building community partnerships in the [People, Partnerships, and Communities](#) section of its National Planning Procedures document (starting on page 188); tips include how to identify power structures within communities and how to work with community leaders.

WORKSHEET: Developing Relationships

We often approach projects or partnerships with ideas about methodology and ideology, but it is important to be flexible when developing relationships with new partners.

- (1) What are some ways you can be flexible about:
 - (a) Establishing shared goals for the partnership?
 - (b) Meeting protocols?
 - (c) Communication styles and messages?
 - (d) Project implementation?
- (2) How will you build and maintain personal relationships between partners?
- (3) In what ways will you demonstrate reliability and competence?
- (4) What are the characteristics of a good leader for this partnership, and who in the partnership might fit those criteria?
- (5) What are the benefits to each partner of being in the partnership? What resources does each partner bring to the table?
- (6) How will your partnership identify and agree on goals, priorities, responsibilities, expectations, and ground rules?
- (7) What is your plan for dealing with conflict, if it arises, and how is this addressed in your ground rules?



OVERVIEW OF PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Many types of organizations and entities can provide valuable partnership opportunities for the bird conservation community, and the resources they bring to the table can include implementation capacity, knowledge, direct funds, in-kind support, equipment, and political influence. This section explores different types of private partnership opportunities and provides an overview of what types of resources different entities might provide and the benefits all partners may gain from these partnerships. Although the most effective communication strategies are based on the specific values, interests, and priorities of an individual organization, we also offer some general guidance to consider when communicating with these different types of partners.

INDIVIDUALS

Private individuals offer many different opportunities for conservation support, such as direct, on-the-ground conservation action, political connections, land access, and financial donations. Large landowners can provide property access for conservation projects or can implement conservation projects on their land, which in addition to providing direct conservation benefits can also be used as match for some types of grants. Private landowners can also be very effective advocates for the value of conservation and need for conservation funding, and they can provide an essential perspective as participants on boards and committees. High-profile individuals can help raise awareness of an issue on multiple scales; a notable example is the National Resources Defense Council's [partnership with actor Robert Redford](#) to raise awareness about climate change.

Avenues for Identifying Partners

Multiple networking opportunities exist to connect with individual partners. Providing citizen-science opportunities, such as engaging individuals to act as nest monitors or surveyors, can help to identify individuals who are interested in birds or nature and who may wish to participate in other initiatives. Workshops that inform participants about local conservation issues and opportunities or



Providing citizen-science opportunities can help identify individuals who are interested in birds or nature. Audubon Arizona, in partnership with the Wild at Heart Raptor Rehabilitation Center, has mobilized over 1,000 community members to build artificial burrows for Burrowing Owls at the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area.

meet landowner needs also are effective ways to meet and engage individuals. Training workshops on certain aspects of private lands management, including sustainable forestry, tree planting, thinning, and implementation of prescribed burning, are educational and can serve to identify people with an interest in your work and provide tangible project support. Workshops can also be a way to start to build relationships with individuals whose role may expand in time. Some conservation organizations hold events or field trips, during which they create a database of people who are broadly interested in some aspect of their work. For Joint Ventures or other partnerships with management or organizational boards, these networks can be leveraged for their connections. For example, landowners on a management board can leverage their network to develop connections with other individuals, Cattlemen's Association chapters, or a local Natural Resource District Manager. A membership-based organization on a management board may be able to connect interested members with Joint Venture projects. Membership organizations can also turn to their members for different resources, including participation in conservation projects, financial contributions, in-kind match, community outreach, or advocacy.

Many landowners take their role as land stewards very seriously and have a long-rooted concern for conservation. Landowner engagement may start through connections with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Bill participation, or state-level Forestry Associations; while the enrollment may initially be program-driven, this can build relationships that serve broader conservation purposes. Once you have successfully partnered with a few members of a community, neighbors who have already established relationships and a sense of trust are likely to be interested in hearing from their peers who can highlight positive interactions with a conservation organization.

Individuals can offer a wide range of benefits for conservation projects, and individuals may sometimes provide multiple types of contribution.

Potential Benefits

Individuals can offer a wide range of benefits for conservation projects, and individuals may sometimes provide multiple types of contributions; a landowner may engage in conservation practices on her land, provide guidance to a management board, and engage her neighbors and peers to support a conservation initiative. Working with landowners can provide sizable amounts of in-kind match that can sum very quickly, even with just a few landowners, multiplying the impacts of grants or other financial contributions. Prominent individuals within a community may also have a strong voice with elected officials and can advocate on behalf of a conservation partnership. From a financial contribution perspective, working with individuals can be administratively much more straightforward compared to working with large, formal foundations or agency granting programs, and individual donations often have fewer restrictions on how resources can be used. Individual financial donations usually have few reporting requirements or specified outcomes, and money is often provided almost immediately, once an agreement is reached.

Potential Challenges

While individuals can make valuable standalone contributions to conservation, quantifying and tracking these contributions to use as in-kind match can be challenging, and the rules of in-kind contributions can be complex and may vary by funding source. Tracking multiple small actions will take more time and effort than documenting a few large projects, even though the amounts generated may be equivalent. Landowners and other community members may require travel support to meet with legislators or attend board meetings, something to factor in to an initiative's budget.

Some private landowners may want to implement conservation projects on their land but may not want data to be collected or shared publicly. This can create challenges for conservation organizations that are trying to track progress toward goals and monitor effectiveness of methods and projects. These topics should be openly discussed with the landowner early in project or partnership development to ensure that a mutually beneficial agreement can be reached. A good trust relationship is essential for data-sharing requests. In relationships where there is mutual trust, helping the landowner understand the need to share data and the implications of doing so may increase their level of comfort with collecting and sharing data.

Individual donors tend to provide smaller direct financial contributions than an organization might receive from a larger funding source, such as a government agency, and it can require a substantial time investment to get to a point where an individual will contribute a substantial gift. Bequests do not necessarily come in when an organization most needs them. Also, consider what requirements come with a donation; how much influence does a private donor want over partnership priorities? Clarifying these expectations in advance via an organizational contribution acceptance policy can help determine whether a partnership with a particular donor will have strong benefits for all partners. Similarly, reaching out to high-profile individuals to secure a spokesperson for a cause can require large time investments for sometimes little or no reward, and some high-profile individuals may require accommodations or compromises that put too much strain on partner organizations.

Communication Tips

With individuals, as with all potential partners, it is important to make your messaging personal, which requires knowing your audience. Early meetings with individuals may be more about getting to know each other, rather than being focused on communications about projects or issues. Spending some low-key social time, talking about families and common interests, can help set the stage for discussions or make project-oriented communications more impactful. Peer-to-peer communications between landowners may be more impactful initially than communications from “outsiders.”

Some individuals may be interested in local birds and their contributions to local ecosystems. Some landowners are interested in managing for game species, and a conversational entry point can include how good bird management aligns with good

*Know your audience,
and make your
messaging personal.*

turkey, quail, or deer management. Partnering with organizations known for game conservation, such as the National Wild Turkey Federation or the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, may provide contacts for landowners interested in conservation. In several regions, including the West, many individuals feel a cultural connection to land and want to promote agriculture to support farms, ranches, and a rural lifestyle. For landowners, understanding issues in their communities can offer insight into what may be important to them. Additionally, understanding historical relationships between landowners and government or conservation groups can help inform communication and relationship-building strategies. For example, if there has historically been tension or conflict between a landowner and a conservation or management organization, additional steps may be needed to build trust.

Connecting with landowners that may not be initially conservation-minded usually begins by providing information about financial incentives for which they may be eligible. Building pride in their land through their stewardship efforts can be enhanced by one of the many programs that provides a recognition plaque and/or local community ceremony. Conservation-minded individuals may be integrated into these activities as they can help influence and encourage neighbors to take on habitat management plans on their properties. Trusted local leaders, such as clergy, may provide assistance by communicating the value of participation and helping to identify and reduce barriers to participation.

Listening to potential donors to understand their interests will help identify areas of alignment and tap into their passions. Individuals can also provide feedback on how much and what type of communications they are interested in; for example, some donors may want to join organizational mailing lists, some may want periodic formal or informal reports, and others may want minimal engagement.

As individuals become more engaged in an issue, the messaging that may resonate with them can change. For example, a landowner may initially be interested in the financial aspects of land management practices, but after learning about their positive impacts on native animals may gain a new interest for protecting birds and other wildlife.

Consider the ethics or values of individuals as you reach out to them. For example, for many farmers and ranchers, your word is your bond—communicate accordingly, and promise only what you can deliver.



SAGE GROUSE INITIATIVE

Consider the ethics or values of individuals as you reach out to them. For example, for many farmers and ranchers, your word is your bond—communicate accordingly, and promise only what you can deliver.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR DONOR PARTNERSHIPS

- **Set quantifiable objectives** to your overall individual donor plan to ensure you are spending your time, and the donor's time, effectively.
- **Identify the minimum gift level** for which you want to invest time, and work with donors within that capacity.
- **Establish a solicitation strategy.** Decide whether you will solicit only immediate gifts or whether you can invest time to cultivate bequests of land or cash.
- **Enlist help in finding partners.** Identify members of the community who can help you identify individuals with the capacity and interest to be strong partners; often friends in real estate, local attorneys, or CPAs have insights into local wealth, especially in smaller communities.
- **Invest in a donor database.** An organizational infrastructure to support individual donor strategies can be critical to success; donors may be frustrated with lack of follow-up or inaccurate record keeping, so ensuring your organization can accurately track donor correspondence and contributions is key.

PRIVATE ASSOCIATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND INITIATIVES

A wide range of private organizations and associations can develop strong partnerships with bird-conservation organizations and help leverage public and private funding. Even within the conservation community, there are many opportunities to strengthen partnerships between established conservation groups that work on similar landscapes.

Within bird conservation, the [North American Waterfowl Management Plan](#) has been a foundational international partnership for wetland and waterfowl conservation throughout the continent, recognizing and aligning species, habitat, and human needs for conservation, and providing a model for later bird conservation partnerships. Partnerships like [NABCI](#) and [Partners in Flight](#) work to bring together organizations with broad interests in bird conservation, such as governmental agencies at state and federal levels, nationally or internationally focused NGOs, and other bird-focused entities. The [Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative](#) and [Pacific Shorebird Conservation Initiative](#) bring together organization partners not focused primarily on bird conservation throughout the Americas to benefit shorebird conservation and other goals. [The Migratory Bird Joint Ventures](#) excel at engaging partners to collaborate on on-the-ground conservation work and related science, policy, and



ANNA SWERCZEK/PHEASANTS FOREVER

A broad-scale partnership between industry, federal and state agencies, regional entities such as watershed districts, private associates such as Pheasants Forever, NGOs, and Joint Ventures works to conserve habitat that benefits birds, pollinators, and other wildlife.

communications, and many Joint Ventures are already working with multiple partners whose primary focus is not conservation. However, there are still other opportunities to strengthen partnerships that engage both public and private organizations within the bird conservation community. For example, **game-bird or hunt-ing-oriented organizations** like the [National Wild Turkey Federation](#) and [Pheasants Forever](#) support important habitat restoration programs and may have access to different constituencies and resources than organizations focused primarily on birdwatchers, like the [American Birding Association](#). **Membership-based or vol-unteer-oriented organizations** can raise money by hosting events such as birdathons or can provide in-kind resources through citizen-science opportunities or help with field work.

Many organizations whose primary focus is not bird conservation also have strong conservation links, interests, opportunities to leverage resources, and connections to birds. For example, **birding groups** may not explicitly focus on conservation but have many overlapping interests with bird conservation professionals. As another example, not only do **zoos** offer an important link to the broad public, but zoos are increasingly working to connect exhibits with conservation education and efforts locally, nationally, and internationally. In addition, zoo employees are often encouraged to work with local conservation groups and can provide in-kind match opportunities.

Private organizations connected to land and land use can offer opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships. **Land trusts** offer tremendous opportunities for partnership and dollar-leveraging. As described in [NABCI's All-bird Bulletin](#) focused on Land Trusts, a land trust is a “nonprofit organization that actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land acquisition or the development of conservation easements. Land trusts work



STAN LUPO PHOTOGRAPHY/FLOCKER

The Urban Bird Foundation's [SAFE SHOREbirds Program](#) works with businesses and communities to protect resident and migratory birds. Shorebird habitat is safeguarded by using innovative science-based solutions and supporting policies that reduce coastal impacts.



ARHIE CHURCH, MISSISSIPPI VALLEY CONSERVANCY

Land trusts offer tremendous opportunities for partnership and dollar-leveraging. The Mississippi Valley Conservancy is partnering with their local Audubon chapter, which is providing skilled volunteers to conduct informal bird surveys.

with landowners and the community to conserve land by accepting donations of land; purchasing land; negotiating private, voluntary conservation agreements on land; and stewarding conserved land through generations.” Donations to land trusts provide opportunities for conservation through habitat delivery on the landscape. Some land trusts can provide private funds that can be used to leverage federal monies. While conservation partnerships with land trusts are becoming more prevalent, many smaller land trusts do not realize that they can provide match to leverage other funds, so there are opportunities to engage new, local land trusts in conservation.

Beyond land trusts, **forestry associations, cattlemen’s associations, ranching associations, and energy industry associations** may engage their memberships to encourage adjustments to operations that provide economic, social, and ecological benefits. [The National Recreation and Parks Association](#) offers opportunities to partner with parks and communities from the local to the national level. Other **outdoor recreation groups**, focused on activities such as canoeing, hiking, or mountain biking, can also provide opportunities for both organizational partnership and potential links to individual members on a local level. Non-bird hunting and angling groups such as the [Mule Deer Foundation](#), the [Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation](#), or [Trout Unlimited](#) have strong ties to habitat conservation and provide good opportunities for ecosystem-based conservation.

Engaging with **organizations that focus on constituencies that have been historically underrepresented** in bird conservation organizations and activities can help to unify and strengthen conservation, outdoor recreation, and environmental protection efforts. For example, [Green-Latinos](#) convenes Latino leaders dedicated to addressing conservation issues and focuses on priorities like public lands and waters, clean air and climate change, and clean transportation. [Outdoor Afro](#), a national organization that connects Black people to nature, also strives to change the face of conservation leadership, goals that conservation organizations are increasingly embracing. With goals that align with or complement bird conservation goals, organizations like these can provide valuable perspectives and offer opportunities for meaningful partnerships.



NEW YORK YMCA CAMP / FLICKR

Outdoor recreation groups that do not focus on birds can provide good opportunities for partnership and ecosystem-based conservation.

Further from the bird conservation realm, **organizations whose primary focus lies outside of conservation** may have broad goals that align with bird conservation outcomes. For example, health care nonprofit organizations may be interested in connections between healthy, accessible natural areas and physical and mental health. Environmental justice NGOs address issues like clean air and water and may be strong local or regional partners. Some faith-based organizations are driven to support ecosystems; for example, Jewish and Protestant organizations often have elements of faith-based giving dedicated to environmental stewardship.

Avenues for Identifying Partners

Management boards and other governing bodies can provide assistance with identifying and building connections with new partners. Federal and state agency partners can also provide advice, since they often hear from multiple constituents interested in an issue. For more local projects, colleges and universities, including community colleges, work with organizations on a particular topic and may know of groups with similar overarching goals. In addition, colleges and universities themselves may be interested in partnering to enrich a course curriculum, and they can provide training opportunities for natural resources students through work-study and internship projects. Local governments and funders, too, may have good networks of local organizations interested in specific initiatives or causes.

Business-oriented conferences can also be a source of connection to new partners, if you have identified overarching goals with relevance beyond conservation (see the “[Looking Beyond Birds to Find Partners](#)” section). For example, bird conservationists with an interest in seabirds, migratory shorebirds, or disease transmission could attend a [World Ocean Council](#) meeting to understand the resources and priorities of companies that work on ports and shipping. Meetings of the [Association of Zoos and Aquariums](#) can provide similar understanding of and connection with zoos. While this approach can be fruitful, it can also take a lot of time, effort, and energy to network at these types of events. It helps to find an existing connection, if possible, and ask for introductions within the new community.

If you are starting from scratch and conducting an initial stakeholder analysis of potential partners in a given region, an internet search can provide a starting point. For example, if you would like to partner with forestry, cattlemen’s, or other agricultural organizations, an online search for these categories, paired with a geographic location, can provide names of organizations to explore. Exploring stakeholder associations at the national level can also provide connections to more local entities.

Potential Benefits

Partnering with organizations that are not focused primarily on conservation can help engender a broader sense of community and place environmental work in a broader context, which can help mainstream conservation. Broad, multi-stakeholder partnerships can highlight the interconnectedness of environmental work and lend

Avenues for Identifying Partners

- Management boards
- Federal and state agencies
- Colleges and universities
- Business-oriented conferences
- Internet search

weight to a partnership when advocating for funding. These broad partnerships can amplify conservation partners' voices in the legislative sphere as well, if they include on-the-ground constituents whose voices and perspectives are of interest to legislators. Including these on-the-ground organizations and individuals can help to expand our understanding of the issues we work to address, and their impacts. In addition, diverse partnerships can open the door to underserved constituencies that have historically not been engaged in bird conservation. Broader partnerships can often open the door to other sources of intellectual or financial resources. Some private foundations require organizations to show that they are working with partnerships, or perhaps working with diverse and underserved communities; building broad partnerships can help to leverage these funding sources.

As economic and health situations change, private organizations and associations may be even more open to partnerships that identify long-term solutions for sustainable economic growth, local renewable energy, climate resiliency plans, and local outdoor opportunities for the public. For example, the COVID-19 global pandemic has provided opportunities to address potential sources of viral transmission such as illegal bird trade and unregulated animal markets.

Potential Challenges

As with any multi-stakeholder partnership, when partnering with private organizations or associations whose primary focus is not bird conservation, bird conservation professionals will need to work with these organizations on their own focus, which may not entirely overlap with yours. Some negotiation may be required to sort out priorities and meet in the middle. Sharing credit can be tricky to navigate; some organizations need to raise money and may be quicker to take organizational credit for a partnership project. It is important to understand each partner's ability to do the work and manage expectations; for example, in a partnership between a small organization and a large one, work may be divided unequally because of differences in capacity among partners. These issues can be discussed in advance to ensure there is agreement on division of work and how communications can be designed to serve all the partners.

Communication Tips

As noted earlier in this section, the suite of organizations and associations that might partner with bird conservation organizations is tremendously broad and diverse. As with any new partner, it is important to know your audience and understand a private organization's interests, values, and motivations. [Land Trusts and Bird Conservation: A Needs Assessment](#), a report by scientists from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, offers some guidance on partnering with land trusts, including types of information that might interest them.

CORPORATIONS

There are many ways to partner effectively with the corporate sector, such as implementing conservation on corporate-owned lands, engaging employees in conservation action, and securing financial support from corporate contributions. Understanding a corporation's needs, what drives them to engage in the partnership, and how the partnership will help further their goals are critical steps to successful partnerships with the corporate world. Compared to other partnerships for conservation, corporate partnerships can be the most transactional, but also can be one of the most transparent if objectives and needs are identified in advance.

The world of corporate giving is complex and can be difficult to navigate; finding an entry point can be challenging. However, relationships with corporations can provide valuable perspectives that may lead to greater success in conservation outcomes and important sources of grant funding, in-kind match, and land on which conservation projects can be implemented.

Corporations vary in their structure for grants or cash donations. Some large corporations have separate corporate foundations that handle their giving programs; these corporations may have their own interests and priorities and should be treated as foundations when approaching them for funding. Smaller corporations may have a single "community relations" individual who serves as the initial point of contact for corporate giving, which may include small grants or corporate sponsorships. With these smaller corporations, the giving process and focal interests may be less formal, and identifying and developing a relationship with the community relations person is key. Some companies may have both a separate foundation and an internal giving program through their community relations group. Still other corporations may have regional interests or giving through individual retail stores or facilities within communities. Because giving structure is not always clear on corporate websites, it may be necessary to make a phone call or two to obtain this information. It is especially helpful if you have a contact from the corporation to help you navigate, but sometimes you have to invest time in locating the appropriate giving person or program.

In addition to outright grants/gifts, corporations can offer different opportunities for in-kind match for conservation projects. Many companies are interested in their employees' quality of life, and conservation organizations may have success through providing opportunities for corporate employees to engage in conservation projects, which can serve as in-kind match. In some cases, companies may allow employees



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY HENNER

Urban Bird Treaty partners worked with the local chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council to incorporate promotion of bird safe design practices into their outreach, and with glass manufacturers to design bird-safe glass that is transparent to humans but not to birds.

to volunteer during their work hours, or companies may provide financial matches to nonprofit organizations for hours that employees volunteer on their own time. Companies may lend or donate equipment as well. For example, companies may donate used vehicles for field work, or companies with skilled employees and heavy equipment may assist with activities such as tree planting or clearing, or installation of nest platforms.

Corporations work to maintain or enhance their reputation with customers and within their communities, so opportunities to promote the company's conservation contributions, partnerships, and other stewardship efforts may resonate, particularly in communities that share these values. Event sponsorships, recognition by community partners, and external communication articles can all be attractive methods for companies to highlight their conservation efforts. Similarly, corporations benefit from protecting or promoting their brand and managing reputational risk, and conducting activities within the community and/or supporting conservation projects can help corporations attain that goal. Many customers want service providers that demonstrate environmental responsibility and stewardship, and this can be a strong driver to influence corporate practices and giving. Local recognition within communities can provide positive publicity for a company, recognize employees engaged in these conservation efforts, raise awareness, and generate a sense of pride within the community.

Another way to obtain positive brand recognition is by obtaining certifications, and there are opportunities for conservation organizations to partner with companies through certification initiatives, such as the [Sustainable Forestry Initiative](#), the [Aquaculture Stewardship Council](#), or the [Wildlife Habitat Council Conservation Certification](#), which provides recognition for conservation actions with a scoring system incentivized to advance action aligned with existing conservation goals. Similarly, many big companies participate in the [Global Reporting Initiative](#) (GRI) and prepare sustainability reports on how they are doing on different facets of corporate responsibility. Partnering with bird conservation organizations may be a mechanism to help organizations improve their GRI scores. In addition, companies that seek or maintain [ISO 14001 compliance](#), which recommends standards for environmental performance, must have environmental management systems with components for conservation action, and this can provide an opportunity to engage with conservation organizations.

Corporations have a strong interest in managing risk, including risk to their direct resource supply and their supply chain, and risk to their ability to build new capacity and operate and maintain existing facilities. Some corporations rely on land and water to develop their product and therefore they have a vested interest in ensuring the availability of those resources. Corporations may engage in conservation projects or programs to mitigate for impacts on natural resources or to manage property where their corporate campuses, factories, extractive plants, or rights-of-way are located. Some companies may voluntarily elect to implement practices to minimize their environmental impacts while conducting business. For example, some electric utility companies develop and implement voluntary Avian Protection Plans to minimize direct avian mortality and other impacts to nesting birds and their habitat. Some entities may

have a vested interest in helping to ensure that species are not added to the Endangered Species list and so may invest in proactive conservation. Companies may invest internally to document and understand effects of their practices from a sustainability standpoint, but they may also partner with external organizations to build those messages.

Finding corporate connections within a community can require creativity in how we think about common goals (see the [“Looking Beyond Birds to Find Partners”](#) section for a deeper evaluation of opportunities). For example, outdoor clothing or outdoor outfitters and renewable energy companies are likely to be environmentally conscious and interested in partnering with conservation organizations. Many large retailers and manufacturers are facing increasing public pressure to address impacts related to climate change and biodiversity. While not all conservation groups are comfortable working with extractive industries, these industries must adhere to environmental regulations and standards and may be open to participating in mitigation activities or other forms of conservation support. Utility companies often own land and want to mitigate their environmental impacts, and some have active conservation programs and priorities. Keeping an open mind about the types of potential corporate partners can broaden the playing field and yield surprising results.

Finding corporate connections within a community can require creativity in how we think about common goals.

Avenues for Identifying Partners

Many corporations want to have an enduring and positive impact in the communities where they work, so conservation organizations can start by identifying corporations that have local connections to their projects and shared interests in conservation results. For example, banks are congressionally mandated to invest in the communities in which they do business, so regional banks can make good partners for local investments. Also, since corporations can be challenging to approach initially, joining or leveraging existing partnerships and relationships can help to build connections. The [Just Means](#) website highlights corporations that are doing good things in the sustainability realm, which can help to identify companies that are conservation-oriented. Industry-led roundtables, such as the [U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef](#) or the [Roundtable on Responsible Soy](#) can provide links to partners with an interest in sustainability within a specific field. The [Wildlife Habitat Council \(WHC\)](#) is a corporate-focused nonprofit organization that “promotes and certifies habitat conservation and management on corporate lands through partnerships and education,” and may be able to help facilitate partnerships between the bird conservation community and corporations. The [Outdoor Industry Association](#) is a trade association for outdoor recreation that can provide links to organizations engaged in outdoor recreation research, sustainability, participation, and advocacy. [The Avian Power Line Interaction Committee](#) is a coalition of electric utility industry and agency representatives that addresses bird conservation topics related to electric facilities.

If your needs are modest, sponsoring a local work day, where corporate employees can engage, can allow local businesses to quickly assess a short-term opportunity to

partner; these one-off interactions can then lead to deeper, more meaningful partnerships in the future. For local connections, the facilities manager or Environmental, Health, and Safety manager can make good initial contacts.

If you have identified a specific corporation, their website can be a source of information about their conservation ethic and values. Some corporations have a sustainability page; for those that do not, a search for “community relations” on their website may uncover the point of contact.

Potential Benefits

Several corporations have made significant strides in aligning corporate goals with conservation goals. In addition, corporations can provide multiple types of resources, such as grants and in-kind match, and they may have some flexibility in their funding interests. Corporations often invest substantially in marketing and communications with the potential to include messaging about conservation. In addition, conservation organizations may have an opportunity to help corporations mitigate their environmental footprint, a win-win for all. Some corporations have internal expertise or experience in addressing conservation issues; individuals within a corporation who both understand the corporate environment and have knowledge about and passion for conservation can be indispensable in successful, diverse partnerships.

Potential Challenges

For conservation partners without previous corporate experience, corporate culture may be intimidating. It can be more difficult to determine their giving interests compared to other private organizations, and it can require a lot of work both to find a point person within a corporation and to build a relationship with them. Corporate grants may be small, especially at the beginning of a relationship. Conservation partners may have reservations about partnering with corporations that seem antithetical to conservation (e.g., extractive industries) and may not want to feel that they are contributing to “green-washing” by potential corporate sponsors. On the flip side, corporations may fear being labeled as engaging in “green-washing” when they promote conservation practices or ethics; conservation organizations can help provide legitimate



PHOTO: PARK PRIDE

If your needs are modest, sponsoring a local work day where corporate employees can engage, can allow local businesses to quickly assess a short-term opportunity to partner; these one-off interactions can then lead to deeper, more meaningful partnerships in the future. Above: As part of EarthShare of Georgia’s Corporate Greenday Challenge, Atlanta nonprofit Park Pride worked with Kaiser Permanente to install a garden to benefit birds and pollinators at Chapel Hill Park in DeKalb County, Georgia.

recognition of positive conservation efforts made by corporations. Corporations may be more focused on employee experiences than conservation goals. While opportunities exist to help corporations meet their sustainable development goals and improve their GRI scores, these often must occur on a very large scale and at a very high level, and it can be challenging for smaller conservation organizations to engage at this level. Also, when seeking donations from corporate foundations, significant competition with other nonprofit organizations can make securing contributions difficult; for corporations that are engaged in sustainability efforts the likelihood of yielding results from unsolicited outreach is very low.

Corporate disruption, which can be driven by economic downturns, mergers and acquisitions, or internal changes, will make a relationship with a corporation risky over a long-term period. A partnership that provides strategic business value to a corporation will make the relationship more sustainable over the long term.

Communication Tips

As with any partnership, partnerships with corporations will have an increased likelihood of success if conservation organizations let go of assumptions they may hold about corporations. Also, as with any partner, it is critical to identify both what you can do for the corporation and what you can do together.

Corporations have a bottom line, and creating messages to show how a corporation's business will benefit from working together can resonate, such as maintaining their social license to operate, facilitating access to markets, engaging employees, and satisfying pressure from customers to operate sustainably. Positive publicity can be important for corporations and can be leveraged in different ways. For example, some corporations want to be recognized as sustainability- or community-focused leaders within their industries, so providing them with an opportunity to be a social or environmental champion can benefit bird conservation and industry. If an industry has previously had negative publicity as a result of the impacts of its actions on birds, partnering with the bird conservation community can be an avenue to identifying best practices to help minimize impacts to birds in the future and creating projects to invest in mitigation to support restoration efforts, both of which can have a positive impact not only on birds, but on the corporation's public image. When you approach a corporation, be prepared to provide information to the marketing or community relations officer on how many members your organization has, how many people will see your press releases and social media posts, whether your members might buy the corporation's products, and whether their staff might support your cause.

Many corporations have specific fields or causes to which they donate, and it is helpful to identify a corporation's giving strategy.

Many corporations have specific fields or causes to which they donate, and it is helpful to identify a corporation's giving strategy. Some companies may give to different causes at different times of the year. Some companies may have a set budget for the year, so reaching out earlier in the year when funds are available may yield more success than

seeking funding in later months. Explore conservation initiatives to see what corporate logos are included; if a corporation has donated to an environmental cause in the past, it is more likely to continue these contributions. However, competition for limited funds already challenges conservation partners. Consider reaching out first to the conservation-focused organizations on those initiatives to explore whether there are opportunities to join the existing partnership in ways that would be value-added for all collaborators.

Information about dollar leveraging may resonate with a corporation's business sense. For some corporations, understanding how their funds can be extended through broader partnerships to help money go further will provide enticement to contribute to a cause that aligns with their interests. Leveraging funds may provide a positive impact to a corporation's image and to an environmental cause.

FOUNDATIONS

Foundations can serve as important sources of private funding through grants or sponsorship, rather than in-kind match. Many foundations are very specific about their areas of interest, so it is important that conservation organizations seeking private funding align well with those interests.

In addition to individual sources of private resources, combining different sources of private funding can be very effective, and this may be particularly relevant for foundation funding. For example, corporate or individual funding can provide match for foundation funds. Providing a conservation link between a foundation and corporation may be appealing in terms of image or demonstration of commitment to sustainability.

Types of Foundations

Large Foundations: Large foundations often have a significant infrastructure, supporting program officers with varied interests. They tend to be fairly specific about funding priorities and have sophisticated giving strategies. Some have specific funds that may be generated from wealthy corporate contributors or a collection of individuals, and some have endowments. Large foundations provide grants and are often required to give a specific amount per year. While many foundations have very specific giving interests and programs, some larger foundations may also have some discretionary money. Developing a relationship with program officers in large foundations can be valuable to understanding the foundation's giving targets and flexibility; also, many foundations have deep connections and may be able to suggest other groups that may be interested in contributing to a specific project.

LARGE

Community Foundations: Community foundations are administrative, "umbrella" bodies that support individual, public community, and donor-advised funds; these funds may come from individuals or small family foundations. Community foundations help small foundations minimize the burden of administering grants; applicants may still apply to individual foundations but through a community foundation infrastructure. Community foundations have program officers that administer these donor-advised funds, and some have websites that clarify what their funds support. Some community foundations also have discretionary funding that is less tied to a specific donor interest. Community foundations may sponsor statewide or regional "giving days" and raise funds to match contributions.

COMMUNITY

FAMILY

Family Foundations: Family foundations are generally managed by a single family; there is often a family dynamic to consider and understand. Family foundations vary greatly in size, geographic scope, processes, and philanthropic priorities. An understanding of the origins of the family foundation and the foundation's mission is essential. Although a family foundation may not specify conservation as a funding priority, look for ways that conservation activities and outcomes could support or contribute to stated priorities. It is often helpful to do research into family members' interests to help focus your ask or contact person. Some family foundations function more like an individual donor; others are patterned after larger foundations and even have non-family members as program officers or executive directors. Some family foundations have a cap on the size of an organization they will support, as their funding stream tends to be smaller.

INDUSTRY

Industry Foundations: Some large corporations have their own foundations; these foundations are set up to do philanthropic work, often in support of the company's brand so that giving is also tied to marketing priorities. Often, this funding is used to support efforts in local communities where the companies operate.

Avenues for Identifying Partners

Several online resources provide free or inexpensive tools to explore foundations based on foundation priorities and geographic interests. [Philanthropy News Digest](#) compiles philanthropy-related news, publishes requests for proposals from grantmaking bodies, documents large trends in giving strategies, and provides tutorials and webinars. The [Association of Fundraising Professionals](#) helps to promote ethical fundraising and provides tools and resources for fundraising. [The Foundation Directory Online](#) provides a comprehensive, searchable database that allows users to search the focused priorities of foundations; conservation organizations can filter results by environmental, conservation-focused, land protection, or geographic interests, among other things. Exploring a [foundation's 990 forms](#) and annual reports can also provide information on grant recipients and amounts, which allows conservation partners to gauge whether the foundation has funded similar organizations or projects in the past.

Potential Benefits

Foundations can be excellent sources of funding, if matched appropriately to conservation projects. Foundations have missions and goals that, if aligned with conservation projects, conservation organizations can help fulfill, leading to a clear and mutually beneficial partnership. Some foundations will work with conservation organizations on long-range conservation planning, which can lead to long-term funding.

Potential Challenges

Foundations can be very specific in their missions and will not necessarily be flexible to meet conservation organizations' goals. It can be tempting to try to mold your project to fit the priorities of a potential funder to take advantage of a funding opportunity. While that can work to a certain extent, it is important not to allow your proposed work to shift so much that it turns into an entirely new project that no longer fits with

your organizational priorities. Like many big, new partners, it can require a lot of work to develop a partnership with a foundation, especially the bigger and longer-term partnerships. Additionally, some foundations may require detailed grant administration and reporting from grantees, potentially requiring a substantial investment of staff time.

Communication Tips

Foundations are often narrowly tied to a specific focus; working with these partners may require additional background research and diligence, including reaching out to a foundation to explore whether it is the right fit for a project or initiative. Many foundations may prefer proposals that demonstrate how their resources will leverage other funds, so showing how the foundation's contribution will lead to a broader reach or impact can be an important element of a communication strategy. Since similar NGOs may compete for foundation contributions, building a consortium of partners to approach foundations collaboratively can serve to both decrease competition and appeal to a foundation's desire to make its dollars go further.

The effectiveness of communication with foundations can depend not just on content but also on timing; be aware of a foundation's capacity and how that directs its focus. For example, during times of economic hardship, some foundations focus their giving only on existing grantees. Be sensitive to the fiscal climate and a foundation's financial situation.

IN-KIND MATCH

As mentioned above, many private organizations and individuals can provide not just direct project funding, but different sources of in-kind match that can be leveraged with other funding sources. Granting agencies, foundations, and government agencies may have different definitions of in-kind and how in-kind is considered. It is important to understand these definitions and the processes required to assign value to and document in-kind match. Start a dialogue with the funder to understand how in-kind match can extend your leverage for funds. These questions may be helpful:

- Is in-kind match allowed?
- Is there a limit to how much of the match requirement can be met through in-kind match?
- What types of in-kind match are allowable (e.g., salary, equipment, materials)?
- Do you have guidelines for assigning value to in-kind match, or can we use our own calculations?
- What are your requirements for documenting in-kind match?
- What is the timeline for in-kind match? Must the contribution occur within the timeframe of the grant, or can it occur prior to the start of the grant?

Here are some examples of in-kind match definitions and requirements for federal grants:

[Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Handbook](#), pages 91–107

[Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act](#), pages 7–8

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *The Artful Journey: Cultivating and Soliciting the Major Gift* by William Sturtevant provides a step-by-step guide to private fundraising.
- [Fundraising for Social Change](#) by Kim Klein, is described as “the preeminent guide to securing funding, with a specific focus on progressive nonprofit organizations with budgets under \$5 million. Used by nonprofits nationally and internationally, this book provides a soup-to-nuts prescription for building, maintaining, and expanding an individual donor program.”
- [How to Write Successful Fundraising Appeals](#) by Mal Warwick
- [Strategic Corporate Conservation Planning](#), by Wildlife Habitat Council President Margaret O’Gorman, provides an overview of how to identify mutually beneficial priorities between corporations and environmental groups, and lays out strategies for developing environmental projects that also meet business needs.

Bird conservation is more relevant than ever. The [Science article highlighting the loss of almost 3 billion birds since 1970](#) caught the attention of scientists, journalists, and the public. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, watching birds became more of a household hobby, with interest in backyard birdwatching swelling. For many people, the outdoors became safer than indoors for activities such as socializing, recreating, and exercising, offering an opportunity to promote natural spaces that benefit humans and birds in many different ways.

Developing partnerships, too, is more important than ever. The global human population has more than doubled in the last 50 years, jumping from 3.7 billion in 1970 to 7.8 billion in 2020. Growing human populations and decreasing bird populations are relying on increasingly limited and human-modified natural resources. Changes in social, economic, and political dynamics locally and globally can encourage—and, indeed, require—us to seek new and innovative ways to stay connected to existing partners, and to build more inclusive partnerships. The benefits of conserving natural resources across our planet are tremendous for people and birds. The more we can demonstrate that bird conservation’s goals align with human needs, and the more we can engage a broad diversity of partners to work toward mutually beneficial outcomes, the greater our chance of success. Experiences with global disruptions—such as the COVID-19 pandemic—demonstrate that we are adaptable and can advance key priorities even under dramatically changed circumstances. These lessons carry over to building partnerships. There are many ways to look at an issue, and there are many ways to reach a similar goal.

“Partnership” is a broad category of relationships, but in successful partnerships, all entities both give and receive benefit. Identifying, reaching out to, cultivating, and maintaining new partnerships requires a multifaceted approach. Key strategies to apply include the following:

- **Evaluate shared or complementary goals** to identify entities that might benefit from, and provide benefit to, a partnership.
- **Target outreach and relationship-building strategies** based on specific organizations’ interests and common goals.
- **Maintain clear channels of communication**, including around mutual expectations.
- **Build and maintain trust** through consistency, reliability, sincerity, openness, and inclusiveness.

This is a time of great challenge and great opportunity. The future of bird conservation relies on partnerships, and now is the time to seek unprecedented collaborations that advance common goals and benefit birds and people.