

HARNESSING THE POWER OF THE SUN

Finding Common Ground
Working with Corporations



LAND TRUSTS AND CORPORATIONS PARTNER FOR Conservation and Community

By Kelly Saxton

"As a new executive director, I've set a goal for myself to increase corporate giving to our mission," says Jennifer Chandler, executive director of Dumbarton Oaks Park Conservancy in Washington, D.C., in her article "Attracting Corporate Support for Your Nonprofit" on the National Council of Nonprofits' blog.

"Fundraising gurus tell us that whether you are approaching a large corporation or a small business for support it is just like approaching any other donor," Chandler says. "You have to build a relationship and discover what they are excited about."

Land trusts, with their unique assets of place and perpetuity, can be very persuasive about the exciting opportunities they can offer corporations.

Starting on a Local Level

"Corporations are just people who live and work in your communities and care about the same things you do," Kieran Fleming, executive director of Little Traverse Conservancy (LTC), says. "In Upper Michigan, it's land conservation that unites us. While they may be large corporations, they have a significant local presence."

Fleming explains that LTC's corporate relationship with TransCanada is grounded in shaping the decisionmakers of the future through its environmental education program

24 Fall 2019 SAVINGland www.landtrustalliance.org

In a program supported by TransCanada, students from the Mackinaw City schools visited the Hathaway Family's Regina Coeli Nature Preserve to put up a kestrel nesting box, go on compass adventures, learn about plants and build shelters (pictured).

LITTLE TRVERSE CONSERVANCY

in coordination with the Mackinaw City School District.

"We were gifted a property a few years ago in Mackinaw City that had an easement where the TransCanada pipeline crosses, so we talked to people at the company and gradually built a relationship," Fleming says. "When they heard about our new immersive program in the Mackinaw City schools at a nature preserve within walking distance from the schools, they were very interested. TransCanada chose to give \$100,000 to the environmental education portion of our endowment fund, a gift that will support the immersive programming and help us expand it to other schools."

LTC is able to draw from the investment and take children out to learn on the property. Fleming says, "The primary underlying thought with our education program is that even up here in beautiful North Michigan it's not as intuitive for kids to get outside and spend hours there as it was when I was a kid. Our belief is that our children have to develop an appreciation for what is so wonderful about northern Michigan if we are going to expect them to be good decision-makers on conservation in the future."

Building Relationships

Cheryl Fowler, membership director of the accredited Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) in Asheville, North Carolina, agrees on the importance of local engagement, and adds that identifying a common element, such as water protection, can be key to building relationships.

SAHC enjoys a strong relationship with local Wicked Weed Brewing. "Wicked Weed is one of our new partners. They brew a beer called Appalachia Session IPA, and they are donating 10% of proceeds from all the sales of that beer to us. This year they hope to make it available in more western states and eventually go national," Fowler says. "Our name and logo are on the packaging of this beer."

She says Wicked Weed "sees our corporate partnership growing. They want to invest in the preservation of our local mountains for clean water."



Staff of Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy and Wicked Weed Brewing celebrate the release of Appalachia Session IPA, sales of which benefit the land trust.

COURTESY OF SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY

"Being a local from Western North Carolina and having the ability to grow up hiking the mountains, rafting the rivers and enjoying all the wonders nature brings us, I am thrilled to be partnering with SAHC," says Wicked Weed founder Ryan Guthy. "As Asheville continues to grow, it is crucial to help preserve what makes this area so special. We need to focus on protecting it now for the generations to come."

Fowler also talks about a long-term relationship that became something more. Oscar Wong, former owner of Highland Brewing, has been a SAHC member since the '70s, "so he was already invested in our mission, but the business had not yet committed."

"Just building that initial relationship was crucial," Fowler says. "Oscar would come to events and then a SAHC staff member's husband started to volunteer his time at Highland and we started to talk about the different ways that we could partner." Now Highland, owned by Oscar's daughter Leah Wong Ashburn, has become a local

corporate partner that names its seasonal beers after properties that have been protected by SAHC, "and then we receive a part of the proceeds at the release party. Highland is very proud to support SAHC and that makes us feel good."

SAHC keeps building relationships with these partners, Fowler says, spending time with them throughout the year, sending them pictures of how their donation has been invested in SAHC and "just making them feel really good by showing them that because of their support, this is what we were able to make happen."

Also local to North Carolina, SAHC's partner Mast General Store donates 20% of sales from its Asheville and Waynesville locations every year in support of Land Trust Day, the first Saturday in June.

Unique to this relationship is the fact that it also supports other land trusts, and in 2019 Land Trust Day raised money for the accredited Blue Ridge Conservancy (BRC), among others. Communications and outreach associate for the conservancy, Nikki



Robinson, says, "This partnership with Mast Store fits particularly well. The owners are avid conservationists and through their business model they promote values such as cultural heritage, outdoor recreation and community. They are open to creative ways to collaborate and help BRC get our name out into the communities we serve."

She adds, "They not only support us financially, but the owners donated a 21-acre farm to BRC that sits behind the Original Mast General Store in historic Valle Crucis, North Carolina. We hope to use the land as a showpiece of sustainable agriculture and environmental stewardship. This idea of community conservation will generate new opportunities connecting people to the land and engaging new audiences to support conservation."

Thinking of Customers

"The program has really grown and evolved over time," says Jena Thompson Meredith, vice president of business partnerships for the accredited Conservation Fund (TCF), whose relationship with U-Haul has generated over 2 million customer donations—"and you know that's a pretty phenomenal number."

"What we found together was that U-Haul's customers overwhelmingly wanted to find a way to give back, and over time we began to expand the partnership, from planting trees to protecting forests to ways to support the green economy."

The partnership may also produce benefits far beyond the region. "The Conservation Fund has planted more than 750,000 trees, which will trap an estimated 450,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide over the next 100 years," Meredith says.

"To offset our vehicle emissions, U-Haul partners with proven environmental organizations like The Conservation Fund and Tree Canada, offering point-of-sale contribution opportunities to our customers so that carbon-consuming trees may be planted," says Michelle Sullivan, manager of Corporate Sustainability at U-Haul.

"U-Haul serves customers across North America, so TCF's national presence was appealing," she says. "More so, U-Haul appreciates being treated in the same way that we strive to treat our customers—with respect, understanding and caring attention to our goals and challenges. TCF thoroughly vets and facilitates worthy

projects supported by U-Haul and our customers' hard-earned contributions."

One of TCF's strengths is truly getting to know its corporate partners, explains Sullivan. "Its staff members do this through diligent communication to ensure the corporation's goals are being met and suggestions are being offered to evolve the partnership." She says TCF does not push its agenda "without understanding first if that agenda fits ours. It excels at finding projects that meet a corporation's vision within its own mission statement."

Meredith observes that, in general, "We have found that companies are getting involved in conservation when it affects their supply chain. If we say help us protect 100 acres, they don't know if that's big or small, but if we say help us protect the place where your customers get their drinking water, that's when they can start to have some level of understanding of our being relevant to their company."

Sullivan says U-Haul is "grateful to all of our customers, Team Members and The Conservation Fund for making a real, positive impact with lasting results for communities, economies and conservation."



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shared it through community letters and with our employees," Notarangelo says. "We are currently planning a video to showcase the partnership. It is nice to be able to highlight something that is important to us."

Notarangelo has some good advice for land trusts seeking corporate partners: "Sit down and talk! Many of the best programs we are involved in are the result of talking through what the organizations want and seeing how that fits with our refinery's priorities. It's even easier to get to 'yes' when organizations like Save Mount Diablo come with clear guidance on how the money will be spent, what the benefits of the program will be and how many people will be reached or impacted. More and more companies are asking for metrics. Save Mount Diablo makes it easy to give and to understand how the social investment we make on behalf of our employees is reaching its objectives."

Sharing a Feeling of Responsibility
When the accredited Save Mount Diablo in Walnut Creek, California, was establishing relationships with sponsors, Shell Martinez Refinery was interested because of its social investment program, according to Caleb Castle, Save Mount Diablo communications manager. "Our Discover Diablo program—an educational series of guided hikes held on local preserved lands in the East Bay—was simply a great fit. It incorporates everything they are trying to do with outreach and stewarding the environment and giving back to their community."

The program, now in its third year sponsored by Shell Martinez Refinery, boasts about a thousand participants each year, with about a quarter of the attendance made up of families. "We were impressed with the public outreach for these hikes, the opportunity for environmental education and a chance to offer an outdoor program that would be attractive to families and individuals with a wide range of abilities," says Ann Notarangelo, external relations manager with the refinery.

"We enjoy being able to promote Save Mount Diablo and the program, and have

Meeting the Bottom Line

Several recent studies¹ have measured how consumer purchase decisions are increasingly influenced by brands' social purpose and impact, and corporations stand to gain on many levels by showing their involvement in things that are good for everyone. For instance, 66% of consumers—and 73% of millennials—are willing to pay more for sustainable goods. Overall, 75% of Americans are particularly concerned about helping the environment as they go about their daily lives.

Another study found that 88% of consumers would buy a product from a purpose-driven company and 78% would tell others to buy products from purpose-driven companies, with the environment ranking as the number one cause consumers want companies to support.

This research makes the case that land trusts and corporations have a lot of reasons to get together. Other benefits to corporations include nonpartisan relationships, strong ties to local leaders, ways to support quality of life and resources needed for work in communities where employees and customers live.

"The stories we've shared here are such good examples where everyone wins," says Land Trust Alliance Corporate Relations Manager Marissa Max. "We hope the word spreads that land trusts and corporations make great partners for achieving common goals." 🌱

KELLY SAXTON IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND EDITOR.

ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/thought-leadership/attracting-corporate-support-for-nonprofit>
- 2 2015 NIELSEN GLOBAL SURVEY OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY 2016 FOR RESEARCH CENTER SURVEY 2018 PORTER NOVOTNICK PUREGE PREMIUM INDEX "HOW COMPANIES CAN INFLUENCE REPUTATIONAL GAINS BY LEADING WITH PURPOSE"

A Menu of Partnerships

There are a variety of ways for nonprofits to connect with corporations, including some of the following:

Corporate Philanthropy: Corporate underwriting or investment in a nonprofit's strategic initiatives or general operating support without expectations of direct corporate gain.

Marketing Partnership (also called "cause-related marketing"): A marketing partnership between a business and a nonprofit entity that links a corporate brand to a charity's cause to advance both business interests and provide benefits to society (may be regulated in your state).

Corporate Practices: Working with corporations to transform the impact of key industries (such as decreasing waste or water use).

Corporate Sponsorship: Support for a nonprofit's strategic initiatives or operating costs that is recognized by the nonprofit with a public acknowledgment of the company's support.



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- ▶ Playing a leading role in securing federal funding and policies for conservation.
- ▶ Establishing standards and practices for the land trust community and providing training and funding to land trust leaders, staff and volunteers.
- ▶ Hosting our signature event, Rally: The National Land Conservation Conference, which brings together conservation professionals from across the nation to share lessons learned, explore emerging trends and connect with each other.

With you on our team, we can create more opportunities to shape and advance the future of land conservation.

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