

NEW ENGLAND GRASSROOTS  
ENVIRONMENT FUND

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*July, 2014*

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund (the Grassroots Fund) ***Inspires, Connects, and Supports*** the region's environmental grassroots community with ***Dollars, Stories, and Tools***. This memo captures the essence of what the Fund is today and opens the opportunity to think about what it will be in its next decade and beyond.

**Mission or Purpose:** To energize and nurture long-term civic engagement in local initiatives that create and maintain healthy, just, safe and environmentally sustainable communities.

**Tagline:** Practicing democracy and protecting the environment.

**Vision:** The New England Grassroots Environment Fund envisions a region where public involvement and civic leadership are part of every day life in the pursuit and achievement of environmentally, socially and economically healthy communities.

**Founder's mission as described in January 1996 'Environmental Futures', the Grassroots Fund's founding document:**

*Mission: The New England Grassroots Environment Fund is designed to foster and give voice to community-based environmental initiatives in New England. The furthering of an environmental ethic based on stewardship and citizen involvement is dependent upon the support and maintenance of a vibrant and diverse grassroots network. By investing in grassroots efforts, this fund will enhance community participation in local and regional environmental issues.*

**Founder's priorities were as follows:**

*The Purpose of the Fund: The Fund will support community environmental initiatives beginning in four of the six New England states (Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont) and may possibly expand to Connecticut and Rhode Island in the future. The Fund will concentrate on the priority objectives of building networks, increasing community involvement, and fostering environmental stewardship within the citizenry of the region.*

**By 2019 the Grassroots Fund's efforts will, alongside the work of its strategic partners, result in:**

- Increased levels of civic engagement, volunteerism, and emerging leaders engaged in initiatives that forward the Fund's mission and broader regional health;
- Conversion of single issue, backyard debates into initiatives that inform and forward lasting community solutions;
- Stronger connections between community-based advocacy and the work of statewide and national organizations; and
- Increased networks of grassroots activists across the region committed to building a just and equitable society, sharing their knowledge with each other and working toward collective action and community problem-solving.

### Strategic Programs:

- **Investing in the Grassroots** – Distribute dollars as seed (\$75,000), grow (\$150,000), and harvest (\$25,000) grants to support practical work of community people to solve local challenges.
- **Coaching, Networking and Skills-building Initiatives**- Provide opportunities for grantees to learn the art and skills of civic life so they can participate more effectively in their work.
- **Advocating for Community Grassroots Action** - Elevate the role of community-based work in larger state, national and global strategies and campaigns. Create a mechanism through which the grassroots activists can tell their stories and inspire each other to participate in work that strengthens the environmental, sustainable community and social change movements.
- **Convene and Lead Statewide Working Groups** – Leverage a rich network of partner organizations and a thorough understanding of collective impact. Through efforts like the New England Local Energy Network (NELEN) and the New Hampshire Local Energy Working Group, the Grassroots Fund builds trust among support organizations and develops backbone organizations.

### Programs and Services:

The Grassroots Fund's programming is designed to **Inspire, Connect, and Support** grassroots groups with **Dollars, Stories, and Tools**. Grants (dollars) give legitimacy to a local effort, often unincorporated, while the RootSkills program (tools) offers opportunities for volunteers to strengthen their civic skills and nurture long(er)-term engagement. The third component of the Fund's programming is its communication tools and strategies (stories). The Fund's programs are influenced by Bruce Tuckman's group development theory (*Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing*) and programs are staged to address challenges throughout the group development process.

**Dollars:** 2015 grant dollar distribution will be around \$300,000. Roughly 250 - 300 groups will apply for assistance in one of the grant categories - Seed grants, Grow grants, Harvest grants and Fiscal Sponsor grants. Requests will come through the Fund's five issue portals - local Energy, local Food, New Economy, local Land & Water, local Environmental Health (for more information, see: <http://grassrootsfund.org/dollars/issue-areas>).

In addition, the Grassroots Fund will serve as fiscal sponsor for ad hoc grantees that need to raise additional funds. Eight to ten groups will avail themselves of this service, attracting \$50,000 to \$100,000 additional dollars to the grantmaking pool. A 5% administration fee is charged to all fiscal sponsor contributions.

**Stories:** the Grassroots Fund believes that activists, organizers and community volunteers have as much knowledge to share as they need to get, and the Fund has structured its communication strategy to facilitate an easy to use and content rich website that facilitates grassroots peer-to-peer exchange through a Groups Map, Feature Stories, PEP Talks and a regular e-bulletin.

**Tools:** RootSkills, the Grassroots Fund's training program, is both live and virtual. It has three parts: 1) Online: civic skills resources and training modules, supplemented with webinar sessions discussing common challenges; 2) Networking & Training Events: 1 or 2-day events offering ample networking opportunities and daylong workshop tracks focused on key 'process' skills; 3) One-to-One Coaching: staff regularly provides individual group coaching over the phone or on occasion through site visits.

**Operating Systems:**

Technology & the Website: the Grassroots Fund's website and content management system host and manage a wide range of organizational programs. It functions as the:

- Online grant application, grant review and final reporting system;
- Data management system that tracks relevant statistics and outcomes;
- News & communication platform that includes annual reports, calendar and e-bulletins;
- Contact list development & management for distribution out to a wide range of readers – activists, colleagues and funding partners.
- Governance tool with secure sections for board activities, documents and exchanges, as well as a grant review section where staff, grantmaking committee members and board can review and vet applicants.
- Fundraising tool to support community crowdfunding for unincorporated grantee groups.

**Governance:** The Grassroots Fund has a board of up to 15 members who represent the grassroots community, colleagues, and funder partners. Members represent all six New England states and cover the Fund's major issue area interests. The Board meets in-person twice a year in a New England central location. Board members assist with fundraising and there is an assumption that all board members make a personal contribution to the organization. The Board currently has an Executive Committee and a Nominating Committee, both meet electronically on a quarterly schedule or as needed. The Executive Director works closely with the Board President and the executive committee throughout the year. The Grantmaking Committee is tasked by the board with vetting staff recommendations for all incoming Grow requests. The grantmaking committee consists of 9-13 members who represent the on-the-ground organizers, colleague organizations, and foundation interests.

**Administration:** The Grassroots Fund has in-place effective policies, procedures, and strong operation management systems that guide its governance and administration. It has written financial, grantmaking, and personnel management manuals. Annual work plans are aligned with the organizational budget, which is broken into program components and geographic activity budgets (by state). An external bookkeeper manages QuickBooks entries and a 12-month cash flow projection is updated monthly to reflect actual expenses.

**Fund Raising:** The Grassroots Fund raises most of its annual budget each year from approximately 25 foundations and a handful of individuals. Annual fundraising goals are set up to cover approximately 1/3 of the budget into the following fiscal year. The strategic plan calls for an increase in major donor fundraising and the addition of \$200,000 for the reserve fund.

**Strategic Partnerships:** the Grassroots Fund is fully engaged in four major strategic partnerships. The Fund plays a coordinating role in the first two of the partnerships, in the latter two, the staff is engaged as active participants:

- New Hampshire Local Energy Working Group – a partnership with the NH Charitable Foundation, the Putnam Foundation and several other smaller individual donors allows Julia Dunderf, the Fund's Energy & Climate Action program director, to perform 'backbone functions' for a group of partners that support local energy committees.

- New England Local Energy Network - a collaborative organizing and learning community of 35+ public and non-profit sector organizations that support local energy committees which shepherd residential and municipal weatherization and renewable energy projects.
- Food Solutions New England - in addition to local state food networks, staff represents community-based local food system work In regional conversations about food system development.
- New Economy Coalition – as a member of this national network of organizations evolving the current economic system to better serve people and the planet, the Grassroots Fund is working to strengthen community level elements of the New Economy work.

**Communication Components:**

- Annual Report: released (paperless) each April;
- Periodic e-bulletins: weave the work of the grassroots together, discusses trends and issues, as well as features group stories and useful links;
- Feature Stories: highlight community-level projects and how they work towards healthy, just, safe and environmentally sustainable communities;
- PEP (People Energizing People) Talk videos: highlighting synergistic projects that are making an impact in a variety of (sub) issue areas.
- Calendar of Meetings, conferences and gatherings;
- Social media (Facebook and Twitter) and regular media outreach.