



New England
Grassroots
Environment Fund

GRASSROOTS TREND REPORT: Living Economies *Working Draft*

July 2018

“Our common future depends on a New Economy in which the power and responsibilities of ownership of the means of living are distributed equitably among the people who depend on them.”

David Korten

INTRODUCTION

Living economies ensure that economic power resides locally to the greatest extent possible, sustaining vibrant, livable communities and healthy ecosystems in the process.¹ Living economies value their unique character and culture, while promoting cultural exchange and cooperation¹.

A living economy is guided by the following principles:

- Locally produced and exchanged products
- Support of decentralized ownership of business and farms
- Fair wages and taxes
- Budget allocations and trade policies that benefit local economies
- Stewardship of the natural environment¹.

The building blocks of a Living Economy include:

- Sustainable agriculture and natural resources
- Renewable energy
- Zero-waste manufacturing
- Independent retail and services
- Community capital

¹ Local First Ithaca. <http://localfirstithaca.org/what-is-a-local-living-economy/>

- Green building
- Health and wellness
- Independent media
- Arts and culture education
- Reuse and waste management
- Sustainable transportation¹.

The living economy must be built on the following tenants: justice, sustainability, and democracy.

- **Justice:** A living economy must work for all people, starting with those who have historically been marginalized and oppressed.
- **Sustainability:** A living economy supports regeneration of both human and natural systems and recognizes that we live on a finite planet.
- **Democracy:** A living economy must incorporate democratic principles into the management of economic and civic life.²

Ultimately, the aim of the living economy is to build communities that are healthy, equitable and regenerative.³

WHY A LIVING ECONOMY?

“The old economy fails to fulfill its essential function and threatens species viability.”
David Korten

When ownership of the means of living is held by the few solely to maximize personal financial gain, the certain outcome is what we now get: destruction of the social and environmental foundations on which the health and well being of all depend.⁴ The concentration of wealth by a few privileged people has spelled economic, health, and environmental disaster for our communities and those that reside in them. This inequitable system is allowed to persist and flourish due to structural racism, imperialism, and un-regulated consumption.

² New Economy Coalition: <https://neweconomy.net/about/what-is-the-new-economy>

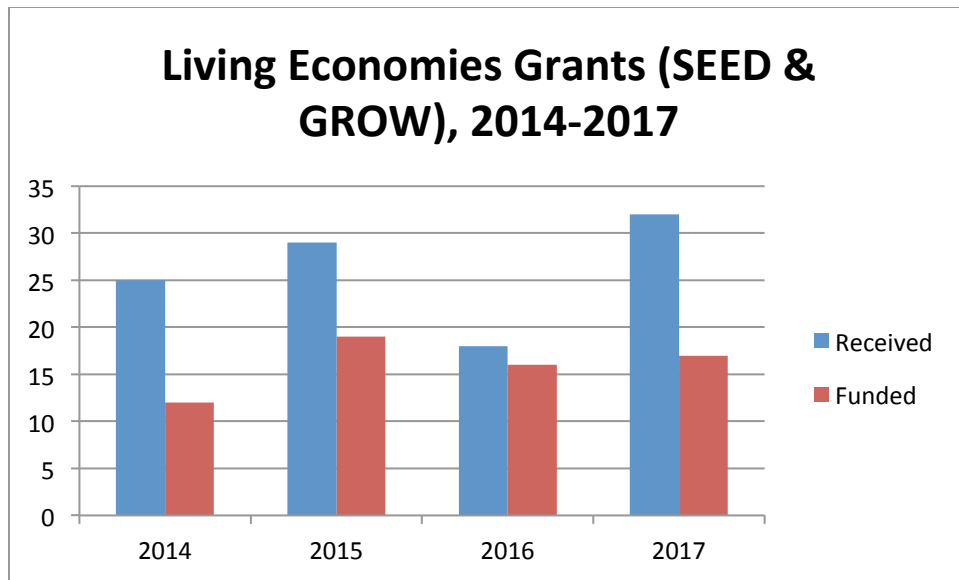
³ BALLE. <https://bealocalist.org/what-is-localism/>

⁴ Korten, David, “A New Economy: The System”, October 7, 2017. <http://davidkorten.org/the-new-economy/>

Is this truly the type of economy and the type of world that we want? What are we willing to accept?

Numerous studies on local economies have shown that every dollar spent at the local store contributes three times the jobs to the local community, three times the boost to income, and three times the tax benefits. Additionally, 90% of the new jobs created in the United States are created by locally-owned businesses. The New England Grassroots Environment Fund (Grassroots Fund) and its partner organizations are committed to furthering this progress.

Since 2014, there has been an overall steady increase in the number of grant applications that have been received within the living economies realm, with the exception of 2016. The Grassroots Fund seeks to support groups that are inspiring behavior change towards conscious and ecological living and recognizes there is more work that needs to be done.



THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an analysis and evaluation of the current needs, challenges, barriers and opportunities present within grassroots organizing around Living Economy issues. To accomplish this, a survey was developed in partnership with The New Economy Coalition (NEC) with the overall aim of highlighting key issues within grassroots organizing, so that collectively we can drive more dollars, resources, and support to grassroots organizing efforts.

The survey was sent out to the networks of both the Grassroots Fund and NEC. Work within all six (6) New England states was represented. There were eight (8) survey responses.

The Grassroots Fund considers this a living document and intends to conduct an annual survey and trend report to provide the Grassroots Fund Grant Making Committee with context around the current state of living economies issues and to inform their decision making. We recognize this is a modest survey pool and seek to build in future years on the breadth of respondents.

Key Highlights

- Majority of responding organizations reported that they provide education and networking services
- In the upcoming year, majority of responding organizations plan to work on buy localⁱ and community loan fundsⁱⁱ
- Majority of responding organizations report implementing projects that seek to address co-benefitsⁱⁱⁱ between living economies and one of the following, environmental health, land and water or social and community issues.
- Increased funding support would be used to support to staff and recruit additional volunteers/organizers
- Environmental justice issues are important to a majority of responding organizations
- Representing community demographics is an important factor to majority of responding organizations, however many noted that there is need for improvement
- Majority of responding groups noted that they most often collaborate with local groups that are working on similar issues

Challenges/Barriers/Needs

- Funding was listed as a barrier to addressing many of the issues that were presented. Increased funding would allow organizations to:
 - Implement projects with co-benefits
 - Increase volunteer recruitment efforts
 - Increase diversity and representation among staff
 - Increase investments in media and communication
 - Aide in improving capacity building
 - Expand education efforts
 - Expand efforts to garner increased participation from traditionally under-represented groups
 - Expand collaborative efforts
- Time, lack of resources, volunteer burnout and difficulty reaching out beyond the present audience were also among the top challenges/barriers that responding groups listed
- Although the majority of responding groups are concerned about environmental justice issues, they listed a “lack of diverse voices and perspectives” as a barrier in addressing it. However, not of the responding groups selected DEI^{iv} training as a type of assistance groups would like more of.
- Responding groups noted a need for technical assistance, legal assistance, help with community organizing, communications, and policy support

RECOMMENDED ACTION AND NEXT STEPS

The Grassroots Fund is committed to furthering partnerships and strengthening collaborations with both grassroots and grasstop^v organizations as well as to driving more dollars, resources, and support to grassroots organizing efforts. We ultimately want to build a strong collective that can achieve just and sustainable change at the community level.

Based on the results of the survey, below is a list of recommended action. This list is by no means exhaustive.

- Funds and resources should be focused on community based programs and initiatives
- DEI trainings should be encouraged for all grant applicants and recipients

- Organizations should work to build a collaborative network of shared information and resources

ABOUT THE GRASSROOTS FUND

Grassroots Fund is dedicated to co-creating healthy and sustainable communities throughout New England. With a focus on those who have often been marginalized, Grassroots Fund empowers individuals, groups and organizations working across a broad range of environmental and social justice issues. By helping them identify, select and access the specific tools, resources and connections they need to challenge existing systems, they are able to develop lasting solutions to the complex problems affecting the places they live and the health of the people who live there. To learn more visit grassrootsfund.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ⁱ Buy local: valuing, encouraging & supporting locally owned & community-based enterprise

ⁱⁱ Community Loan Funds: establishing alternative financing models and local investment opportunities

ⁱⁱⁱ Co-benefits: implementing a project that addresses multiple issues simultaneously

^{iv} DEI: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

^v Grasstop: Nonprofit working at the state or regional level