



# Annual Report

# 23

**NRE**

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# 105 YEARS

# 365 Stories

Letter From the Chair



As a lifelong sportsman, nature lover, sailor and a National Recreation Foundation (NRF) trustee since 1997, my deep appreciation for the important work of NRF spans many years. I can attest that NRF remains committed to increasing opportunities for kids to engage in meaningful outdoor recreation experiences. NRF's foundational belief is that young people realize improved mental health, physical health and connectedness with nature through these experiences. They often discover a new interest that becomes a lifetime pursuit. A few 2023 highlights that make me especially proud to serve as Chair of NRF's Board of Trustees include:

**Partnerships:** Through collaborations with like-minded funders like Tom's of Maine and Turner Foundation, NRF increased grantmaking capacity and deepened our focus on supporting grassroots outdoor recreation programs in historically underfunded communities. Particularly moving was seeing many culturally relevant projects on Lakota lands (South Dakota). I joined our team of staff and trustees, driving approximately 1,000 miles over a handful of days, to observe grant-funded programs focused on supporting: food sovereignty through community gardens, youth camps reconnecting Lakota youth to nature and bison on the Wolakota Buffalo Range, camping and intergenerational teaching at sacred sites, re-foresting tribal

lands and career exploration for young adults. Partnerships provide NRF with a powerful means of increasing our reach and growing the pot of grant dollars available to award.

**Strategic Plan:** NRF staff and trustees spent the year deeply engaged in shaping the future of NRF. Unchanged, we believe that every kid deserves time outdoors and that we should continue to seek out and invest in innovative, entrepreneurial programs, particularly in areas where need is greatest. We also know that to meaningfully advance our mission, there must be more leadership of color for outdoor programs. For this reason, NRF seeks to identify programs developed by leaders of color in response to community needs. And, NRF investment goes beyond grant dollars. We offer robust capacity-building trainings and leadership development programs to all NRF grantees.

It is an exciting time to serve as NRF's Chair. We are digging deep to refine our strategic vision for the future, to focus our talents and to deepen partnerships. Altogether, this work will position NRF to better support the organizations providing young people across our vast nation with quality, life-changing outdoor experiences.

**Chip Davison**

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# BOARD of Trustees

Throughout its long history, NRF's board consistently has delivered high levels of passion and engagement to the work of the Foundation. Several years ago, long-serving board members partnered with our CEO to recruit the next generation of board leadership. After a comprehensive national search, additional board members joined NRF bringing a range of lived and professional experiences and representing diverse geographies. NRF's bench was strengthened with expanded board expertise in youth development, public health, finance, recreation, environmental literacy and equitable engagement in the outdoors. The long-term and new board, together with staff, faced the post-Covid world, with its more universal acknowledgement of still-standing systemic inequities and the impact of trauma on our most marginalized communities. Strategic reflection and planning were our logical next steps. NRF set forth to find our place as a multi-generational board in a changing world where young people are in more desperate need than ever for the benefits of purposeful outdoor experiences.

Over the last year, Arabella Advisors has partnered with NRF to reflect on our history and further articulate our aspirations for maximizing our impact. As part of

this work, Arabella conducted both an organizational assessment of NRF's operations and a strategic landscape analysis — talking with our peers, current and former grantees, and thought leaders. NRF was proud to receive positive feedback from our grantees on our support as funders, and also as capacity builders and conveners. Additionally, insights on current needs and opportunities in the field emerged from this process. Equipped with new information, board members and staff spent this year exploring the shifts and choices that will best position us toward maximum impact in a future of which we can all be proud.

While we have much work ahead of us as we build a strategic road map for implementation in the coming years, we have a refreshed vision, mission, strategy, and values to share with you now. Our work will not change dramatically, but rather incrementally, as we double down on serving those most historically denied access to outdoor recreation, finding increased opportunities to support leaders of color, taking a chance on new and innovative ideas as well as those that might offer scale. We look forward to sharing how this will impact not only our grant-making but also our role as a convener and influencer in the space where youth

outdoor education and recreation currently are represented and those where it could be meaningfully included.

NRF's strategic planning process has provided an illustration of how an organization with deep roots, history and leadership can face a changing world with openness to learning and a willingness to meet the moment by creatively supporting our grantee partners so they, in turn, can provide life-changing experiences for young people across the country.



## ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

### VISION

The National Recreation Foundation (NRF) envisions a future in which all young people are thriving and connected to the natural world. We believe that engaging in meaningful outdoor experiences during one's formative years is critical to realizing this future and that access to safe outdoor spaces is a human right.

### MISSION

The National Recreation Foundation increases access for young people to play, explore, learn, and grow in the outdoors.

### STRATEGY

We do this by supporting local and regional organizations that serve youth from marginalized communities through funding, collaboration and leadership development.

### VALUES

- ▶ Community
- ▶ Equity
- ▶ Entrepreneurial Spirit
- ▶ Integrity
- ▶ Respect



# 2023 Focused

## President's Letter

The year 2023 was a challenging year for me on a personal level. While NRF was accomplishing great things, my personal life suffered a series of difficult blows, the heaviest of which included the loss of my mother and a cancer diagnosis within my nuclear family.

Even though it overwhelmed my world, we all know death is a natural and inevitable part of life. It was a great privilege for me to be by my mother's side during her final journey. The emotional toll is high, however, and the grief is profound. At the same time, the anxiety about the physical and mental health of my husband and three children added another layer of complexity.

The silver lining of challenging times is how they remind you of what is important. Two things crystallized for me.

— **Access to safe and healthy green space is critically important.** I know that when times get tough and I feel close to breaking, I need to get outside. Strength and resilience are afforded to me by my connection to the outdoors. While it was hard to carve out the time, I remained dedicated to my daily walk outside. I was more aware than ever that this opportunity to move my body and spend time outdoors was the one time my mind could quiet. The anxiety and ruminating took a back seat. The reliable cycles of nature were soothing and observing the rhythm of nature allowed me to focus on something outside myself.

— **The brilliance of the NRF family.** I have been employed at NRF for nine years. My fellow staff members and NRF's trustees are not only colleagues but dear friends. The outpouring of support from this chosen family was profoundly meaningful to me. I am grateful every day to work beside this team of people dedicated to improving the lives of young people across our vast nation.

NRF supports programs that provide young people, who today are experiencing unprecedented levels of anxiety and depression, a connection to the outdoors and to a community of support. It's one thing to have a job that you know is important. But I believe in NRF's mission to my core. While NRF focuses its grant dollars on programs serving young people between the ages of 6-24, we all benefit from access to safe greenspace, connection to nature and a supportive community.

2023 was a tough year. As the dust settles, I'm more committed than ever to NRF's mission to provide equitable access to meaningful experiences in nature to all young people.

**Sophie Twichell**

Capturing images of wildflowers brings me joy; the larger image here is my favorite spring ephemeral, the small and easily overlooked Hepatica.



# The **ROBERT W. CRAWFORD** Prize

## Robert W. Crawford (1906-1995)

Robert W. Crawford, a graduate of Des Moines University, New York University, and the National Recreation School, served the park and recreation field for over forty years. He was recognized on both the national and international levels as one of the top authorities in the field of recreation and parks. He was renowned for his innovative and creative leadership. His hallmark in the park and recreation field arose from his dedication to community involvement and from his creative innovations in planning and operating recreation facilities and programs. He was the first professional elected to serve as President of the National Recreation and Park Association. His honors include an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Public Service from Temple University and an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Law from Grinnell College. Mr. Crawford's career began in 1934 when he served as Director of Recreation for Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. He later became Superintendent of Recreation in Montclair, New Jersey. From 1946 to 1952, he served as Superintendent of Recreation in Oakland, California. He accepted the recreation administrator's position in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1952, where he remained until his retirement in 1981. During the last part of his tenure, he served as both Commissioner of Recreation and as President of Fairmont Park Commission.

When Robert Crawford went to Philadelphia in 1952 to direct the city's newly organized Department of Recreation, he took over a program consisting of less than a dozen facilities. During his 29 year tenure in Philadelphia, he developed a recreation program that now has a total of 853 facilities including 47 recreation centers, 145 playgrounds, 24 park playgrounds, 84 swimming pools, 192 neighborhood parks, 10 play lots, four ice rinks, seven youth camps, and 15 specialty sites including Veterans Stadium and Kennedy Stadium. Under his leadership, the city developed one of the finest recreation systems in the country. Philadelphia's Department of Recreation encompassed not only neighborhood parks and playgrounds of the most imaginative and creative design, but included one of the most extensive sport and cultural programs in the nation.



**Robert W. Crawford served others through his role as Commissioner of Recreation in Philadelphia and as Executive Director of the National Recreation Foundation.**

**The purpose of the Prize is to recognize a living person who is dedicated to enhancing recreation opportunities for youth,**

**Crawford personified those qualities of leadership and commitment that the Foundation seeks to foster, which is why this achievement prize is named in his honor.**

Commissioner Crawford's commitment to community involvement motivated him to establish the Recreation Advisory Council, which grew from seven original members to 3,000 citizen advisors participating in 127 local advisory councils, 12 district councils, and one citywide group. The Philadelphia Department of Recreation became the foremost proponent in the country for citizen participation in the planning, organizing, and developing of community recreation programs.

Crawford felt a deep responsibility in preparing leaders for the future. While in Philadelphia, he developed in cooperation with the National Recreation and Park Association a nationally recognized post-master's internship program that trained 42 graduates selected from colleges and universities throughout the country. He assisted graduates from this program to assume leadership positions in the recreation and park field.

Robert W. Crawford played a key role in the formation of both the National Recreation and Park Association and the National Recreation Foundation. While serving as Executive Director of the National Recreation Foundation, he advanced many new programs around the country, and he created many new entities, including the Recreation and Park Hall of Fame. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2001. Beyond the Hall of Fame two other programs are named in his honor: The Crawford Lecture and the Robert W. Crawford Young Professional Award.

**making it possible for more young Americans to live healthy, participatory lives, thus reinforcing the work of the Foundation. Each year the prize is awarded to that person, whether professional or volunteer, who has made an extraordinary contribution in advancing recreation programs for youth from disadvantaged circumstances.**

**The prize consists of a \$50,000 cash award to support the recreation-related project of the recipient's choice and is presented at the Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees.**



Recipient  
**MANNY**  
**ALMONTE**  
Crawford Prize



**“Mentoring these young men is our way to give back and work with younger versions of ourselves. There was so much we needed to learn, relearn, unlearn...”**

Manny Almonte, 2023 Crawford Prize Recipient 

Growing up in the bustling city of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, Almonte treasured the peace and freedom he felt during weekend, holiday, and summer visits to his father’s home in Bona, an inland town at the foothills of the Pico Duarte mountains. “I was able to experience nature beyond the beach. Usually, you think of the Caribbean Sea and how beautiful the beaches are, but when you go into the land, you find beautiful mountains, streams, and wildlife—and that is something that I always looked forward to,” said Almonte. “I didn’t experience nature intentionally; it was simply life.”

Today, Almonte shares that way of life with young men of color from New York City and Denver. Through the nonprofit he co-founded, Young Masterminds Initiative, and its Camping to Connect outdoor mentorship program, Almonte uses outdoor recreation as a vehicle to help young men create connections with nature, their passions, their inner selves and their communities.

Almonte often reminds his Camping to Connect team and its participants that “the goal of Camping to Connect is not to go camping; it’s the connection.” The program uses outdoor recreation to instill self-reliance, healthy lifestyle choices, leadership, introspection, and brotherhood.

“The young men we work with are typically from urban-dense environments. They’re used to chaos, noise, pollution. The kids go from school to their apartments to play video games—everyday, simply because of the fear that exists their neighborhoods. There is a basketball court but the kids can’t go because of gang activity or people peddling drugs. It’s not safe,” said Almonte. “Being able to take these kids out to nature and disconnect, unplug, remove technology and allow them to be kids is something that we offer these young men.”

“In the quiet of the forest, we hold conversations on topics like race, masculinity, and mental health that tackle the meaningful issues these youth face in America’s cities,” said Almonte. “These trips also show our young participants and their families that America’s outdoor spaces are safe and theirs to benefit from, too.”

Camping to Connect’s volunteer mentors are from Mastermind Connect, a nationwide collective (founded by Almonte) of progressive men of color who support one another to become the best versions of themselves.

“Mentoring these young men is our way to give back and work with younger versions of ourselves. There was so

much we needed to learn, relearn, unlearn [like generational trauma and boundaries we had set for ourselves based on fear] and overcome. This is the catalyst for our work with the young men,” said Almonte. “We understand that someone has to share these experiences with them—to go out into nature with them and help them see and feel the healing power of nature, to connect with nature and to connect with each other and, more importantly, to connect with themselves.”

The power of connection to nature is highlighted in the award-winning short film, *Wood Hood*, which follows a group of young men on a wilderness journey with Camping to Connect. Produced by Almonte and Young Masterminds Initiative co-founder Andy Isaacson, *Wood Hood* champions justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the outdoors and urges viewers to recognize the power and potential of a world where nature is accessible and inclusive for all. In 2022, *Wood Hood* won Best Short Film at the Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival and the Act Now! Award at the Crested Butte Film Festival.

“One of the things that I love about Manny’s program is that it provides an opportunity for kids to experience all kinds of ‘firsts,” said Sophie Twichell, National Recreation

Foundation President and CEO. “Being outdoors allows kids to see a broader world. They can be successful at experiencing new things. And that’s incredibly powerful.”

In recognition of his creativity, dedication, and steadfast commitment to changing the lives of young men of color and for his powerful work to increase access and inclusion for BIPOC youth in the outdoors, the National Recreation Foundation awarded Manny Almonte the 2023 Robert W. Crawford Achievement Prize during its Annual Board of Trustees Meeting in Durham, North Carolina, in October 2023.

“It is an honor to receive this award and to be respected by those who understand the value of investing in a community beyond its immediate neighbors,” said Almonte. “Young Masterminds Initiative has been asked to collaborate and expand our Camping to Connect program all over the country, from the Bay Area to Portland, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, and Texas. The prize money is going to allow us to build capacity, hire staff, and expand so we can do more of this good work.”

National Recreation Foundation

# CRAWFORD PRIZE

## Prior Recipients

2022: Arshay Cooper, Fort Lee, NJ  
2021: Tyrhee Moore, Washington, DC  
2020: Derwin Hannah, Baltimore, MD  
2019: Richard Louv, Julian, CA  
2018: Peter Westbrook, New York, NY  
2017: Susan Teegen, Philadelphia, PA  
2016: Spike Lobdell, Stonington, CT  
2015: Khary Lazzarre-White, New York, NY  
2014: Jackie Joyner-Kersey, East St. Louis, MO  
2013: Harrison Steans, Chicago, IL  
2012: John Conaway, Bethany Beach, DE  
2011: Eleanor M. Josaitis, Detroit, MI  
2010: Melissa T. Harper, Boston, MA  
2009: Robert J. Kohel, Westfield, WI  
2008: Sidney Epstein, Chicago, IL  
2007: Kent Hutcheson, Denver, CO  
2006: Margaret C. Daley, Chicago, IL  
2005: Ronnie Lott, Redwood City, CA  
2004: Peter A. Witt, College Station, TX  
2003: Jane G. Pepper, Philadelphia, PA  
2002: David McLone, Chicago, IL

The Flint River Watershed Coalition believes that all people should have access to the river for recreation, swimming, and fishing as well. NRF funding supported its kayak and paddleboard program to reduce barriers for youth to engage in river-based outdoor recreation.

Trauma-Informed Practices are

# ESSENTIAL in Youth Programming



NRF grantees are doing the daily work of making communities into better places for kids to live and offering opportunities for young people to grow and learn. Unfortunately, part of the reality of doing this work is being prepared to engage with trauma among youth. There are several common misconceptions that are important to unpack in order to understand trauma. The first is what constitutes trauma. Triggers for trauma can include a single precipitating event, like an accident, a natural disaster, or an assault. Chronic adversity, systemic lack of opportunity, disruptions to positive relationships, neglect, and toxic stress, however, can all lead to trauma as well. While these are less dramatic causes, their long-term effects can be just as destabilizing to physical and mental health as a single intense experience of violence or danger. The second misconception is that all people respond to traumatic events the same way. Trauma is the experience we have as we internally process an event, rather than the event itself. Everyone deals with difficulties differently, so trauma looks different depending on the person. The same event may lead to trauma in some people but not in others.

With trauma at epidemic levels among young people in the U.S., it's essential that youth-focused organizations incorporate trauma-informed practices in their work. Two of the best ways to do this are to focus on creating safe relationships and safe spaces for kids. This can look like promoting positive communication and boundary setting around healthy touch and emotional intimacy. This can be accomplished, at least in part, by incorporating choices for youth throughout their experiences. Trauma is often linked to a loss of autonomy so building in age- and environment-appropriate choices can foster respect and buy-in from youth.

Youth-focused programs should be prepared to recognize signs of trauma and connect youth with appropriate forms of support. This requires ongoing staff training and check-ins with program participants. Organizations should have systems in place to recognize when youth are exhibiting signs of trauma responses. While not every person will respond in the same way, looking for changes in behavior, risk tolerance, or social groups can signal staff or program leaders to ask appropriate follow-up questions. Regular check-in points built into youth programs can create opportunities for kids to speak up about ongoing issues and make sure they're getting the help they need. Staff or volunteers should receive training and regular updates on legal obligations, such as mandated reporting, program policies, and community-specific, culturally appropriate

resources for engaging with topics related to youth experiences with trauma.

Although programs have a responsibility to look for trauma responses in the youth they serve, not every staff member or program volunteer can take on the task managing a young person's healing or meeting all of their needs. It's important that programs seek external help when dealing with issues outside the scope of their expertise. Mental health care providers, social workers, and other professionals should be brought in to help youth who are experiencing trauma in their lives. This ensures that young people receive appropriate, professional-level support and helps to avoid staff burnout and protect reasonable boundaries in programs that aren't designed to provide ongoing trauma-informed counseling. Seeking external support can also avoid retraumatizing staff who may have similar childhood experiences to the young people with whom they work.

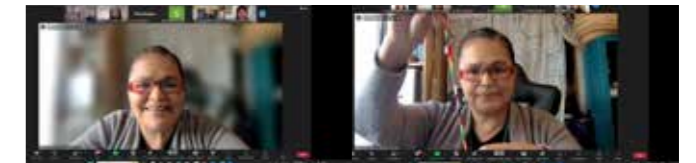
It's also important for youth-focused programs to recognize the unjust systems that lead youth from marginalized communities to be disproportionately exposed to violence and trauma. Youth of color, girls and gender minorities, LGBTQ+ youth, young people with disabilities, and those from families experiencing poverty or homelessness are more likely to experience triggers for trauma and less likely to receive the care they need. Programs should be prepared to support youth with a range of identities and experiences.

The ability to experience adversity without a trauma response is tied to our resilience. Resilience is fostered among youth through positive relationships with adults, opportunities for constructive community engagement, and overarching stability and consistency throughout development. Organizations that work with youth in the outdoors are especially well-positioned to engage meaningfully with this issue because time in greenspace is tied to positive mental health outcomes including increased resilience. Nature can also be an important space for those who have experienced trauma to heal. One person or one organization cannot eliminate trauma for young people in our communities. Working towards resilient and trauma-free kids is a long-term, imperfect process that requires collaboration across sectors and generations. Learning more about how trauma works and being prepared to recognize and address it with young people is a good first step for being part of that solution. At NRF, we hope to continue supporting organizations doing good work in this area and open the door for others to start the process of including trauma-informed practices in their programs.

## Trauma Trainings

**NRF grantees are reporting unprecedented levels of youth impacted by trauma in their programs. In response to grantee requests for more trauma-informed education and training, NRF offered a series of trainings in collaboration with The Trauma Foundation to share the science of how trauma impacts brains and bodies, new research in the field, and best practices in working with young people. Further, we've offered special sessions for youth development staff and volunteers to work directly with trauma clinicians to get all their questions answered, including a training specifically for staff and volunteers working with Indigenous youth. Because NRF funds numerous organizations led by and serving Indigenous youth, in 2023 we offered a workshop specifically focused on understanding and healing multi-generational trauma in the Indigenous community, led by Anita Charleston-Touchie (Hiinuqćuk<sup>w</sup>a), a practicing trauma clinician with extensive knowledge and understanding of Indigenous mental health and wellness needs at the individual, family and community levels.**

Anita leading the workshop on Zoom.





## Collaboration

# ACCESS Outdoors



### Collaboration with Tom's of Maine Boosts Equitable Access to the Outdoors

Across all our work, a top priority at NRF is equitable access to nature. Our three-year collaboration with Tom's of Maine has fueled this mission. A certified B Corp, Tom's of Maine donates 10% of its profits to advance work in the areas of climate change and the environment. As part of its Giving for Goodness program, Tom's of Maine launched a Get Into Nature initiative with NRF to connect more young people with nature. The financial support provided by Tom's of Maine to NRF allowed us to grow our Outdoor Grants program, which focuses primarily on funding smaller, community-based organizations providing youth from marginalized communities with meaningful experiences in the outdoors.

Since 2021, we've allocated \$1,842,000 in funding to 60 organizations in 37 states. Grantee organizations offer a range of services and opportunities for the youth and families they serve, including gear libraries, overnight camping, climate education, water safety instruction, farming and gardening programs, work experience, and hands-on science learning. A throughline across all grantees

is that they serve youth with marginalized identities. In particular, they serve youth with disabilities, youth from low-income backgrounds, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth of color.

Two areas of emphasis for this grant program include reaching youth of color and providing support to organizations with leadership of color. This commitment is rooted in data. We know that 74% of communities of color are situated in nature-deprived areas as compared to 23% of white communities. We also know that this discrimination doesn't stop there. In 2021, only 26% of nonprofits led by people of color received at least half their fiscal support as unrestricted funding as compared with 41% of white-led nonprofits. In addition, 82% of white-led organizations received foundation funding in 2021, but only 75% of Black-led organizations did. Therefore, we have actively sought out grantees that are rooted in the communities they serve and are working to reverse historic and ongoing disparities in access to nature. Thus far into the Get Into Nature initiative, almost 80% of grantees specifically serve youth of color and almost 70% of grantee organizations are led by people of color. We believe in the importance of locally based efforts to address real community needs as well as

**“In addition to financial support, we also provide workshops and trainings to enhance the capacity of the organizations NRF funds, as well as fostering connections between grantee partners.”**

**Sophie Twichell, President and CEO — NRF**

the immeasurable impact of supporting leadership that reflects the identities and experiences of the youth they serve.

In addition to financial support, we also seek to build capacity within the organizations we fund and leverage connections with other grantee partners. NRF grantees have access to professional development workshops and training opportunities, evaluation support from leading researchers in the field, and facilitated peer leadership circles. Grantees tell us that they appreciate these wraparound services, and our peer leadership circles stand out as particularly effective. Limited to 10 or less participants per circle, the circles operate via monthly Zoom meetings over the course of nine months. Circle participants offer overwhelmingly positive feedback about the opportunity to take a step back, look at their organizational needs and challenges from new perspectives, and connect with their peers. One participant summed this up in her evaluation, saying, “these opportunities to share, learn, and connect are immensely valuable for me as a leader and for our organization.”

Another capacity-building win as part of this program is evaluation training hosted by researchers at North Carolina State University. In these monthly cohort-based workshops, grantees not only learn from one another, but also receive training on best practices for setting projected outcomes and evaluating youth experiences in their programs. Following these conversations, representatives from most grantee organizations reported a deeper understanding of the evaluation methods and processes and expressed confidence in developing evaluation strategies that align with their specific needs and contexts. Evaluation is often a difficult and expensive process for small organizations to manage, but a critical component for obtaining external funding and improving internal processes. The expertise of recreation and education researchers is a valuable benefit we are thrilled to extend to grantees in addition to financial resources.

At NRF, we're working to build equitable access to nature for young people across the United States. Access to nature can help boost advocacy, heal trauma, create poignant educational moments, foster family connection, enhance a sense of belonging, solidify cultural identity, and mitigate

climate change. Not to mention, nature is a great place for kids to have fun. Nationally, getting kids into nature is still underfunded as a philanthropic initiative. We're committed to being part of the effort to change that trend. We still have more work to do as we challenge ourselves and our partners when it comes to issues of equity, but we're proud of the work we've accomplished so far. NRF grantees are driving remarkable impact, welcoming thousands of kids into the outdoors and crafting new opportunities for connecting with nature.





**“Our child really loved camp. Every day he came home dirty and happy. He told us stories about fun adventures, surprising himself with how far he could hike.”**

Parent of Camper in Rockies Rock Adventure Camp, Get Outdoors Leadville!

# GRANTS

## Overview

### 2023 TRUSTEE GRANTS – \$650,000

- Adaptive Climbing Group
- Aspen Institute
- Bike Works Seattle
- Catalina Island Conservancy
- Cheyenne River Youth Project
- Chicago Training Center
- Chicago Voyagers
- City Kids Wilderness Project
- Compass Rose Education
- Courage Ranch
- Detroit Hives
- Detroit Horse Power
- Eastern Sierra Conservation Corps
- Excite All Stars
- Friends of Momentum Bike Clubs
- Gardeners
- Get Outdoors Leadville!, a fiscally sponsored project of Lake County Community Foundation
- Girls on the Run Triangle
- Glacier Peak Institute

- Grand Canyon Youth
- Ironwood Tree Experience
- Kids in Focus
- Learning Outside
- Living Classrooms Foundation
- Lucky to Ride
- Miles4Mentors
- Nature for All
- Openlands
- Radical Monarchs, a fiscally sponsored project of Community Initiatives
- SHAPE Community Center
- Solar Youth
- Stepping Stones
- Urban Word NYC
- Walter Anderson Museum of Art
- We’ve Got Friends
- Wilderness Youth Project
- YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit

### 2023 IMPACT GRANT – \$77,000

- YMCA of Greater Seattle



### 2023 SPECIAL GRANTS – \$302,553

- Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles
  - Harlem Grown
  - Muddy Sneakers
  - SailMaine
- ### 2023 OUTDOOR GRANTS – \$982,000
- Black Kids Adventures
  - Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods
  - Bus for Outdoor Access & Teaching
  - Center for Recreation Education Arts Technology & Enterprise (CREATE)
  - Center for Southwest Culture
  - Conservation Legacy

- Diné WE CAN
- Field Institute of Taos
- Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida
- Flint River Watershed Coalition
- Friends of Anacostia Park
- Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks
- Gateway to the Great Outdoors
- Generations Indigenous Ways, an affiliate of Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples Inc.
- Greening Youth Foundation
- Hands and Hearts for Horses
- Heritage Trails Partnership of the Mississippi Gulf Coast
- The Humble Hustle
- Jefferson County Youth Council

Khmer Community of Seattle King County  
La Semilla Food Center  
Latinos Progresando  
LOOP NOLA  
Movement Education Outdoors, a fiscally sponsored project of New Urban Arts  
New Sun Rising  
New Treks  
Oyate Teca Project  
Red Cloud Renewable  
Saved by Nature  
SheJumps  
Siçangu Co  
Sierra Nevada Journeys  
Soul Trak Outdoors  
Tokata Youth Center  
Urban Adventure Squad  
VIVE Wellness  
Wasatch Mountain Institute  
West Atlanta Watershed Alliance  
Wildseed Gear Library, a fiscally sponsored project of The Flygirl Network  
Yellow Bird Life Ways  
YMCA of Greater Seattle  
Zuni Youth Enrichment Project

**2023 OTHER GRANTS – \$100,650**

Blackpackers  
Environmental Grantmakers Association/Blue Sky Funders Forum  
Forefront  
Los Padres Forest Watch  
Muddy Sneakers  
Native Americans in Philanthropy  
Partners for Environmental Justice  
Sitka Trail Works  
Young Masterminds Initiative



Detroit Horse Power harnesses the power of horses to expand opportunities for Detroit's youth.



Adaptive Climbing Group creates affordable and accessible climbing experiences for youth with disabilities.



Connecting

# CULTURE and Recreation

## Indigenous Youth Programs

Due to historical and present day forms of racism, including the legacy of colonialism, many Indigenous communities do not have access to the same services and resources as predominantly white communities. Indigenous youth, like all kids, benefit from recreation programs that support their growth and development while affirming their identities. While programs for Indigenous youth don't always receive the funding, acknowledgement, and research support they deserve, there are many excellent programs led by and designed for Indigenous people.

Historical policies that caused the forcible removal of Native youth from intergenerational communities and families to place them in boarding schools still resonate in some modern adoption practices. This pattern of taking Indigenous youth out of Indigenous communities makes Indigenous mentors, culturally-centered programs, and intergenerational approaches all the more critical. Opportunities for adults and children to learn and play together build connections that can have positive outcomes for community dynamics, mental health, and intergenerational communication. For Indigenous communities that face pressures of assimilation, passing knowledge and culture between generations is especially important for preserving identity.

NRF has increased focus on supporting Indigenous programming in recent years. In 2023 those programs included:

- Center of Southwest Culture
- Cheyenne River Youth Project
- Diné WE CAN
- Generations Indigenous Ways
- Oyate Teca Project
- Sićanġu Co.

Tokata Youth Center

Yellow Bird Life Ways Center

Zuni Youth Enrichment Project

The Sićanġu Co. and the Zuni Youth Enrichment Project (ZYEP) are two excellent examples of Indigenous-led youth programs. NRF specifically funded the Sićanġu Health Initiative, which organized youth day camps at the Wolakota Buffalo Range on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. This bison-based camp program is run by and serves the Sićanġu Lakota Nation. ZYEP is run by Zuni community members for youth living in the Zuni Pueblo in northern New Mexico. Sićanġu Health Initiative and ZYEP are working to reconnect youth with cultural practices that allow young people to invest in their personal health and wellbeing, embed themselves in community networks, and make intentional choices about their environmental impact.

More specifically, the Sićanġu Health Initiative includes day camps, afterschool education, family-based health coaching, a home garden project, and an internship program. All of these offerings are based in creating a legacy of cultural connection and community wellbeing. For example, programming like youth bison harvests allow young people to learn about healthy and sustainable food, connect with their culture, and build community ties. ZYEP provides summer camps, an after-school program, and built infrastructure like a community youth center designed to increase access to safe spaces to practice wellness and build cultural connections. The kids at ZYEP get to have fun painting, playing sports, making pottery, gardening, and hiking, but there's something deeper at work as well. All of ZYEP's programs are centered on an assets-based approach to youth development that fosters a new generation of Zuni leaders who feel valued, respected, and grounded in their identities.

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# PROGRAM

## *Snapshots*

Detroit Hives believes a healthy future for bees reflects a healthy future for humanity. Funding from NRF allowed Detroit Hives to expand its 'Bee the Change' education program for urban youth.





Learning Outside connects North Carolina children with the natural world through programs held entirely outdoors, year-round. Its programs provide the experiences research confirms all children need: unhurried time spent outdoors playing, learning, exploring, and connecting with nature and with one another.




Coombs Outdoors believes that all local youth deserve to experience the outdoors and feel like they belong in the community. Coombs Outdoors seeks to break down these cultural, financial, and knowledge barriers by providing year-round outdoor programming for Teton County, Wyoming youth from kindergarten to high school.



Wild Diversity offers a variety of programs to help youth of color find their love language in the outdoors and build their knowledge, skills, and confidence in exploring and experiencing the healing nature can provide.



A group of four children, three boys and one girl, are participating in a water sampling activity. They are standing on a dirt bank next to a pond. The children are wearing light blue school shirts and dark shorts or pants. They are using blue-handled nets to scoop water from the pond. The background shows a lush green field and trees under a clear sky. The water in the pond is dark and still, with some ripples from the nets. The children are focused on their task, looking down at the water or their nets. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment with dense foliage on the right side of the frame.

LOOP NOLA provides positive, life-changing outdoor experiences for children and youth in Greater New Orleans. By addressing the lack of opportunity urban children may have to experience the outdoors, LOOP NOLA nurtures students' connections to nature by developing a sense of wonder at the natural world along with social, technical and academic skills through repeated exposure to outdoor adventures over multiple years.



Ríos to Rivers envisions a world in which youth who are intimately connected to their local waters and tribal communities are equipped to become the next generation of passionate leaders for healthy rivers and communities.



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## MISSION

The National Recreation Foundation increases access for young people to play, explore, learn, and grow in the outdoors.

## HOW OUR MISSION TRANSLATES INTO ACTION

Over the past decade, National Recreation Foundation has distributed over \$19 Million to more than 270 grantees across the country. Today, NRF grants more than twice as much as it did 15 years ago. Programs supported by grants from NRF reach up to 50,000 youth annually.

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