



April 2014

NEWS & NOTES

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The Gray Family Foundation seeks to fulfill John and Betty Gray's faith in the human spirit. The Gray family acknowledges their responsibility to give back to the systems that nurture all of us: our culture, our natural environment and our communities.

Director's Notes

Spring Break in Oregon is almost like a state holiday. It felt like everyone was on vacation. In Portland, we had a few days of glorious weather to get us started, followed by some rains that seemed intent upon making up for our very dry January.

The Gray Family Foundation did an experiment in early March where we asked a cohort of our grant applicants do a peer review of their grant category. We had several hoped-for outcomes from this gathering:

- 1) To provide our environmental education organization leaders with a chance to spend time with each other, learning about each other's programs
- 2) To provide some professional development opportunities around evaluation models
- 3) To increase the grant writing capacity of our grantees by having them see their grants in comparison to other competing grants
- 4) To have grant writers experience a sample grant review process as a way to understand how grants are seen by reviewers
- 5) To provide feedback to the Gray Family Foundation staff about creative ways to distribute money into the environmental education community



We were exceptionally pleased with the results of this experiment and were very impressed by the quality of discussion and debate the cohort demonstrated during the grant allocation discussions. Many of same conversations our board has (around socio-economic distributions, rural vs. urban, whether to shave and spread or cut grants entirely, or how

to rank a new but promising organization with a weaker proposal compared to an established organization) also came up during the cohort review process. From our post-event evaluation we also uncovered some flaws in our model, primarily with the issue of asking non-profits with already scarce resources to spend a good chunk of time reading 38 grants and then spending even more time traveling to a central location to rank those grants.

I think our staff took away some interesting observations. The process of grant making isn't ideal for grantees or grantors. For grantees it feels like a lottery, with luck playing a significant roll in the outcome (who reads the grant, the strength of competing grants, the cutoff limits for dollars available). For grantors, the demand for money always exceeds the supply and its difficult to know if the projects selected represent the best interests of society as whole.

And yet, when we brainstormed with the organizational representatives about ways to more effectively distribute grant dollars, we found it surprisingly difficult to come up with other equitable ways to get the money out into the world, doing good. Grantees are very good at making objective decisions with their peers about how grants should be distributed. But fundamentally, competitive grant-making puts a burden on non-profits no matter how you do it.



The Gray Family Foundation also did a second experiment this year. In our second experiment, we didn't offer a competitive grant making process at all. For our camp maintenance grants, we researched the universe of outdoor camps in Oregon, narrowed down the list to camps that serve outdoor school, and then quietly visited those camps or surveyed the users of those camps to determine facility conditions. We looked at the geographic distribution of the camps, their policies on equity and diversity, and then we ranked them. Finally, we notified each camp that they would be awarded the grant in six months (the same amount for each camp) if they could secure a 50% match within a one year time frame. This still puts a

burden on the camp; they have to identify the project, raise money from their donor base, and then actually complete the project, but I think it reduces the burden on the camp and it reduces the uncertainty. They know that if they meet the conditions, they'll get the grant in six months. The downside, obviously, is for those camps that didn't get offered a grant, they want to know how to apply! And that is the beauty and the curse of this design. There is no application. We know the camps that are out there, we know that each of them has need far beyond our ability to fund it, and we know they have limited time to write grant applications to fix the roof of the main lodge building. We hope we can begin to make a dent in the deferred maintenance needs of camps all over the state and hopefully do it in a fair and efficient way that benefits the people of Oregon.

If you have ideas for more effective, efficient philanthropy, please tell us. We may not fund your idea, but we will listen, think about it, and try to find ways to make the process better for all of us.



--Eric
Executive Director, Gray Family Foundation

Notable News

Rimrock Expeditionary Alternative Learning Middle School Shares Student Work Online

Rimrock Expeditionary Alternative Learning Middle School is a public charter school for 6th through 8th grade students who are seeking a small, active, and challenging educational environment.

Their purpose is to foster scholarship, strengthen community, and inspire stewardship through active learning.

Their recent Tumalo Creek Project (8th Grade) can be found on their website! Check it out to learn more about this great program at: <http://realmschool.org/student-work-gallery/>.

More about the program: through a collaboration between Science, Math and Art classes, students are immersed in the study and stewardship of Tumalo Creek over the course of the Fall semester. Grounded in the ideals of Place-Based Education, this curriculum guides students to develop an understanding of issues surrounding our watersheds; build a relationship with the creek; and take action on their knowledge to create change. Students monitor riparian

vegetation, assess water quality parameters, work with local professionals, draw, paint and engage deeply with their study site. This fieldwork helps drive deep learning in the classroom throughout the semester. Below are samples of high quality work produced in conjunction with this semester long learning expedition.

Update on Conservation Education Coalition Advocacy Day!

Advocacy Day at the Capitol was a Big Hit!

Thanks to Rep. Alyssa Keny-Guyer and her staff Jillian and Roberto for helping facilitate the Conservation Education Coalition's Advocacy Day at the Capitol on 2/17!

Volunteers met with over 35 Legislators from all over Oregon who were excited about the possibility of a funding bill in 2015.

To learn more about the Oregon Conservation Education Coalition feel free to email: coalition@friendsofoutdoorschool.org.

Also, there is also still plenty of time to send a letter to your Legislators to share your thoughts about conservation education! Here is a sample letter you may use. To find out who your Legislators are, go to: <http://www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html>

Thank you,
Oregon Conservation Education Coalition
coalition@friendsofoutdoorschool.org

Grant Cycle Updates

We just closed our February grant deadlines for two funding categories. In our Teacher Professional Development funding category, we received 25 applications. Our grants committee will meet to review this grants in April, and grant award checks will be mailed out in May.

In our Outdoor Exploration and Community Field Trips for 5th–8th grades funding category, we received 38 applications. This grant cycle was unique in that applicants were trained and participated in grant review, and made recommendations for awards. The learning convening took place in early March, final decisions will be made in April, and grant award checks mailed out in May.

Next Cycle?

The RFP for our Overnight Residential Outdoor School Programs for

5th and 6th Grade has been released on our website. The application will open by March 1st. The deadline for proposals is May 5th, 2014.

GFF makes grants to schools, government agencies, and nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations. Please refer to our [website](#) for examples of recent successful projects and amounts granted.

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