

Summary of Grants for 2019

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY programs contribute to the development of awareness, knowledge, and attitudes about nature and environmental issues that lead to positive personal and collective decisions and actions.

AUDIENCE

- Early Childhood (ages 0–5)
- School Age (grades K–12)
- University
- Adult

IMPACT AREAS



Conservation

Conservation outcomes include those that increase environmental knowledge, improve environmental awareness and attitudes, and inspire positive environmental actions that lead to improvements in environmental quality.



Education

Education outcomes encompass improved academic performance, broadly defined. Specific outcomes can include greater STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) literacy, higher standardized test scores, and increased school engagement for students. Education outcomes may be achieved through programs that support teacher professional development and improve school grounds and other outdoor learning spaces.



Health & Wellness

Health outcomes are improvements in physical, mental, emotional, and social health and wellness. Specific outcomes can include improved nutrition and physical fitness, reduced stress and anxiety, recovery from physical or psychological trauma, and greater awareness and understanding of personal and environmental health.



Social Justice

Social justice outcomes expand access and opportunity for underserved communities and underrepresented populations. These outcomes can include more equitable access to outdoor experiences, greater cultural relevancy of outdoor programs, improved parks and public spaces, and leadership development opportunities for individuals from underrepresented populations.



Youth Development

Youth development outcomes support young people as they grow into responsible, engaged community members who care for the environment and future generations. These outcomes may be achieved through professional or character development, outdoor experiences, and/or community service.

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2014 as a working group of the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA), the Blue Sky Funders Forum (Blue Sky) exists to expand the amount of philanthropic investment and the community of funders supporting equitable access to meaningful outdoor experiences and connections to nature. A historically underfunded field in environmental philanthropy, the intersection of people and nature is a critical area where grantmakers have the opportunity to strengthen communities and to measurable improvements in conservation and stewardship, education and academic achievement, health and wellness, social justice and civic engagement, and youth development.

Since 2016, Blue Sky has partnered with EGA to monitor and better understand grantmaking for environmental literacy. Through the *Tracking the Field* program, researchers collect and tag Blue Sky and EGA members' environmental literacy grants

according to a number of categories, including grantmaking strategy, geographic region, and issue area.

Adding to EGA's existing *Tracking the Field* taxonomy, Blue Sky worked with members and advisers to develop a taxonomy specific to environmental literacy. Each environmental literacy grant is tagged with one or more of four target audiences and one of five impact areas. This report reflects findings from 2019 environmental literacy grantmaking. It seeks to provide a more complete picture of funding for environmental literacy to support funders as they identify trends, gaps, and opportunities in the landscape of funding that connects people and nature.

Blue Sky and EGA hope that the findings in this report will inform funders' individual grantmaking, and allow Blue Sky members and partners to align their efforts to ensure that everyone has positive experiences outdoors and shares the joy, health, growth, and sense of community that come with them.

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY FUNDING 2019 SNAPSHOT

THE GRANT POOL		AUDIENCE	
\$115.8 MILLION	In 2019, \$115.8 million was given to environmental literacy: an increase from \$97.8 million in 2018 after a small dip from \$104.8 million in 2017.		In 2019, the School Age audience group continued to receive the largest share (42%) of environmental literacy funding.
44%	33 Blue Sky members (out of the 163 total funders) gave 44% of the total environmental literacy funding tracked in this report.		Over the years, funding to the Adults audience group has been consistently increasing, now accounting for 26% of the total funding.
2,251	In 2019, a total of 2,251 environmental literacy grants were given across 1,744 grantees.		Funding to the All Ages group declined the most since 2017.
IMPACT AREA		ISSUE AREA	
	For the first time since 2015, "Conservation" funding surpassed "Education," becoming the most-funded impact area. The two impact areas received 35% and 33% of the total funding, respectively.		In 2019, "Freshwater & Inland Water Ecosystems" received a record high of \$25 million in funding, continuing to be the most-funded primary issue area since 2017.
	From 2017 to 2019, "Social Justice" experienced the highest rate of increase among all impact areas, replacing "Youth Development" to be the third most-funded impact area.	GEOGRAPHIC REGION	
			Southwest received a record high percentage (12%) of the total funding, with the number of grants increasing by more than 50% compared to 2017.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

KEY FINDINGS

- In 2019, \$115.8 million was given to environmental literacy, an increase from \$97.8 million in 2018 after a small dip from \$104.8 million in 2017.
- A total of 163 funders gave 2,251 grants to 1,744 individual grantees in 2019.
- While 44% of grants sized under \$10,000 continued to receive a fraction (4%) of the total funding, mega-sized grants of more than \$1 million received a smaller share of the total funding in 2019 (16%, compared to 9% in 2017).



Environmental literacy grants made by Blue Sky and EGA members totaled \$115.8 million in 2019, an increase from \$97.8 million in 2018 after a small dip from \$104.8 million in 2017. Out of the total environmental funding tracked by *Tracking the Field*, the share of environmental literacy funding increased slightly, from 5.7% to 6%, compared to 2017. In 2019, we tracked 2,251 environmental literacy grants given to 1,744 grantees, marking an increase of more than 30% in both the number of grants and the number of grantees from 2017 to 2019. Thirty-three Blue Sky members out of the 163 total funders gave 44% of the environmental literacy funding tracked in 2019.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of 2019 environmental literacy funding by grant size and the number of grants across each size category. There is still a great disparity in the size of the grants. Consistent with previous years, a large portion (44%) of the grants were small grants sized under \$10,000, but together they only received 4% of the total funding. Medium to large grants sized between \$100,001 and \$500,000 accounted for 9% of the total number of grants, and received the greatest share (42%) of the total funding. It is worth noting that the mega-sized grants over \$1,000,000 accounted for a smaller share of the total funding in 2019, decreasing from 16% in 2017 to 9%.

FIGURE 1. Environmental Literacy Giving vs. Total Environmental Giving, 2015–2019

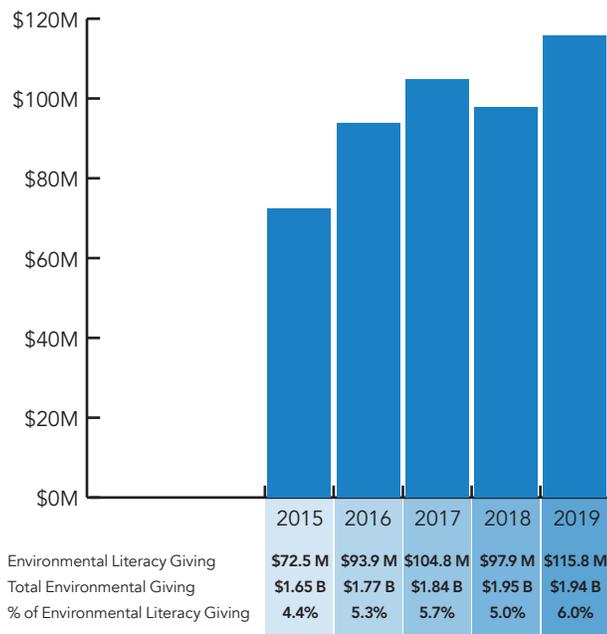
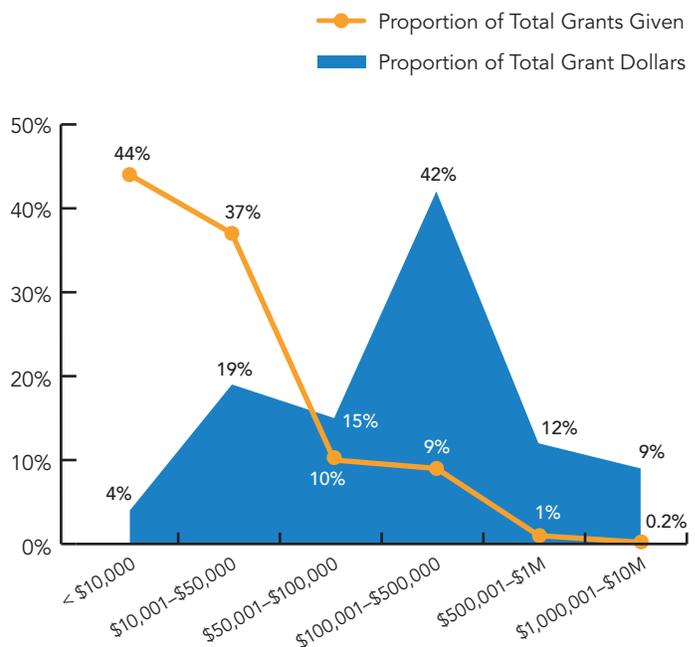


FIGURE 2. Environmental Literacy Grantmaking by Grant Size, 2019



SECTION 2: ISSUE AREAS

KEY FINDINGS

- In 2019, “Freshwater & Inland Water Ecosystems” received a record high of \$25 million in funding, continuing to be the most-funded primary issue area since 2017.
- The top primary and secondary issue pairings in 2019 were “Freshwater & Inland Water Ecosystems” + “Terrestrial Ecosystems / Land Use,” and “Terrestrial Ecosystems / Land Use” + “Sustainable Communities,” receiving \$16 million and \$11 million, respectively.
- Funding to Biodiversity education related to the three ecosystems—terrestrial, freshwater, and marine—continued to be significant, totaling \$11 million.

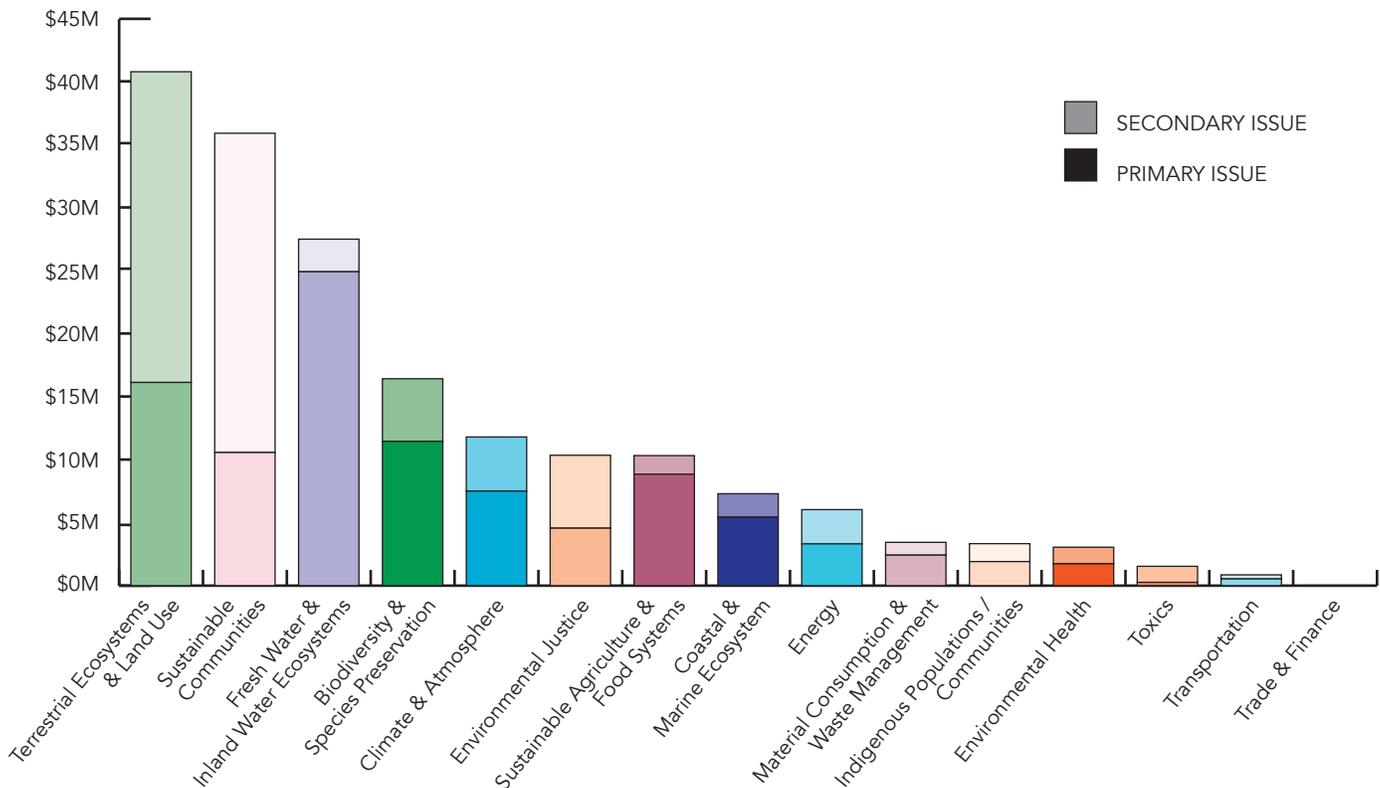
EGA and Blue Sky defined 15 issue areas that attempt to capture the range of environmental grantmaking. To cover the cross-cutting nature of most grantmaking, researchers designate a primary and a secondary issue area for each grant. The primary issue represents the most important or relevant issue supported by the grant and the secondary issue denotes any additional issue the grant seeks to address.

Over the years, the top-three most-funded primary issue areas remained relatively consistent. In 2019, “Freshwater & Inland

Water Ecosystems” continued to be the most-funded primary issue, receiving a record high of \$25 million in funding, an \$8 million increase from 2017. There was also a surge in grants (totaling \$16 million) tagged with “Freshwater” as the primary issue and “Terrestrial Ecosystems” as the secondary issue. This change was partially attributable to a number of large watershed education grants given to the upper and lower Colorado River basin.

Despite this surge, “Sustainable Communities” remained the top most-funded secondary issue in 2019. It is most commonly paired with “Terrestrial Ecosystems” as the secondary and primary issue, receiving \$11 million in funding in 2019. These grants often supported programs to benefit national or state parks and public lands. Another issue that’s often paired with “Sustainable Communities” is “Sustainable Agriculture / Food Systems.” This pair received \$5 million in 2019, with grants supporting farmer education, community gardens, school gardens, etc. Funding to “Biodiversity & Species Preservation” paired with any of the three ecosystem issue areas—“Terrestrial Ecosystems & Land Use,” “Fresh Water & Inland Water Ecosystems,” and “Coastal & Marine Ecosystems”—remained significant in 2019, totaling \$11 million. These grants typically supported education programs that target specific habitats and ecosystems, as well as zoos and aquariums.

FIGURE 3. Environmental Literacy Grantmaking by Primary and Secondary Issue, 2019



SECTION 3: IMPACT AREAS

KEY FINDINGS

- For the first time since 2015, “Conservation” funding surpassed “Education” to be the most-funded impact area. The two impact areas continued to lead the other impact areas, receiving 35% and 33% of the total funding, respectively.
- From 2017 to 2019, “Social Justice” experienced the highest rate of increase among all impact areas, replacing “Youth Development” to be the third most-funded impact area.
- Keywords related to food systems, farming, and gardening appeared as top keywords for four out of the five impact areas.



Since 2015, EGA and Blue Sky have conducted analyses of the most frequently mentioned keywords in the grant descriptions. There are a few new keywords that appear on this list in 2019. “Energy” and specifically “Energy EcoSTEM” are new top keywords for “Education” grants. For the first time, “Farmer” appeared as a top keyword for “Conservation” grants—these grants typically focus on sustainable farming education for farmers. Indeed, keywords related to food systems, farming, and gardening appeared as top keywords for four out of the five impact areas. Traditionally, “Health & Wellness” grants have a strong focus on food systems, but in 2019, the keywords “water pollution” and “air pollution” moved up the list as top keywords for this impact area. For “Social Justice” grants, an increasing number of grants targeted more specific issues such as food justice and climate justice, with grants continuing to specify underserved communities.

Aside from the issue areas, EGA and Blue Sky defined five impact areas that apply specifically to grants focusing on environmental literacy. In 2019, “Conservation” became the most-funded impact area, surpassing “Education” funding for the first time since 2015. Funding to these two impact areas continued to lead the other impact areas, receiving 35% and 33% of the total funding, respectively. Also for the first time, “Social Justice” surpassed “Youth Development” to be the third-most-funded impact area, experiencing the highest percentage increase (30%) in funding since 2017.

FIGURE 4. Environmental Literacy Grantmaking by Impact Area, 2015–2019

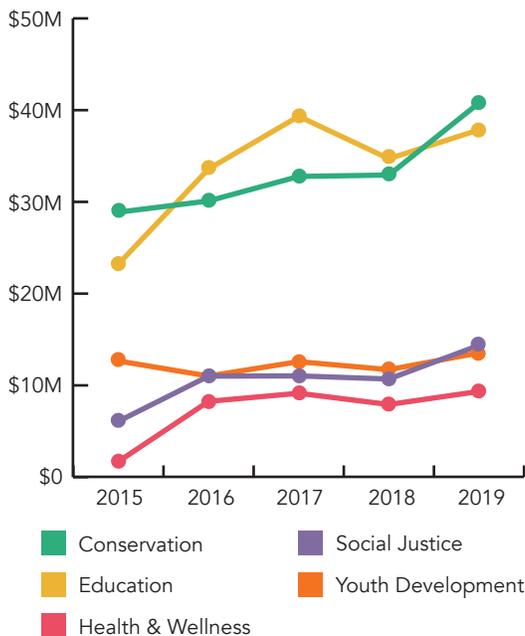


FIGURE 5. Environmental Literacy Impact Area Keywords, 2019

CONSERVATION	EDUCATION	HEALTH & WELLNESS	SOCIAL JUSTICE	YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
Water/River/Watershed	Ecstem/STEM/Science	Food/Food System	Youth/Students	Youth/Young
Community/Public/Local	Students/Youth	Community/Local	Food/Food Justice	Leader/Leadership
Youth/Students	Outdoor/Outdoor School	Health/Healthy	Climate/Climate Justice	Outdoor
Farmer	Garden/Learning Garden	Farm/Garden	Outdoor	Community/Local
Climate	Energy/Energy Ecstem	Pollution/Water/Air	Low-income/Underserved	Skills/Training

SECTION 4: GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS

KEY FINDINGS:

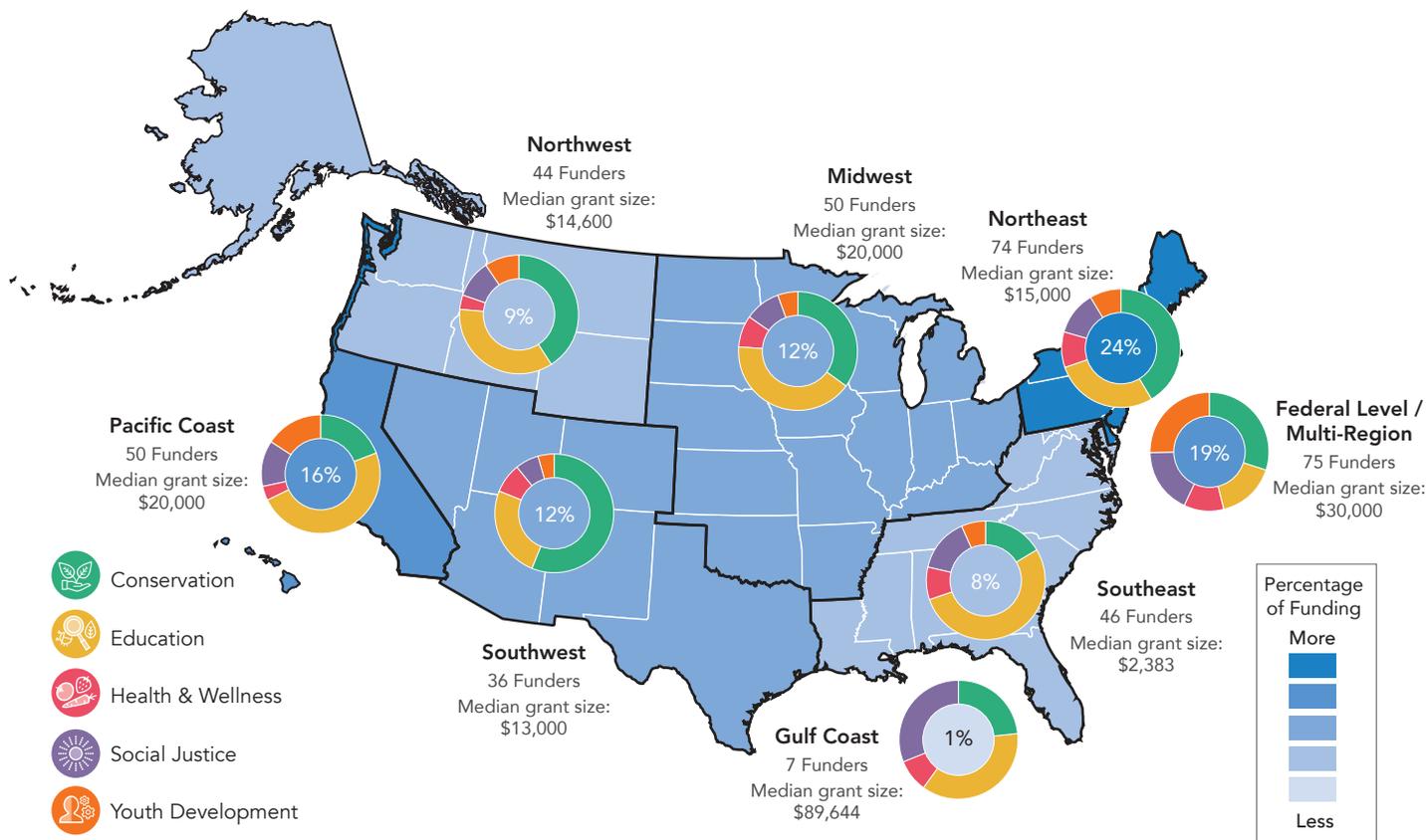
- Northeast and Federal Level / Multi-region received the highest share of funding in 2019, receiving 24% and 19% of the total funding, respectively.
- The Pacific Coast received 16% of the total funding, the first time that its share of funding fell below 20%.
- Southwest received a record high percentage (12%) of the total funding, with the number of grants increasing by more than 50% compared to 2017.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of grantmaking by domestic region and impact area. Northeast continued to be the most-funded region since 2016, receiving 24% of the funding in 2019. Federal Level / Multi-region replaced Pacific Coast to be the second most-funded region, receiving 19% of the funding. The Pacific Coast received 16% of the funding, the first time that this figure fell below 20%. The Gulf Coast once again

received the smallest share of environmental literacy funding, at 1%. As a traditionally less-funded region, the Southwest received a record high percentage (12%) of the funding. This was partially attributable to a number of large watershed education grants pertaining to the Upper and Lower Colorado River basin. But overall, there was an increase in the number and size of grants given to the region, with the number of grants increasing by more than 50% and median grant size increasing from \$10,000 to \$13,000 compared to 2017.

The distribution of funding by impact area continued to look different across the regions. “Conservation” was the most-funded impact area for Federal Level / Multi-Region, Northeast, Northwest, and Southwest, while “Education” was the highest-funded impact area for the Pacific Coast, Midwest, Southeast, and Gulf Coast. “Youth Development” was the least-funded impact area for five out of the eight regions; it also saw a significant dip (from 33% in 2017 to 25% in 2019) at the Federal Level, which traditionally received the most funding for this impact area. “Health & Wellness” accounted for the smallest share of funding (4%) in the Pacific Coast and the Northwest.

FIGURE 6. Environmental Literacy Grantmaking by Domestic Region and Impact Area, 2019



SECTION 5: AUDIENCE

KEY FINDINGS

- In 2019, the School Age audience group received the largest share (42%) of environmental literacy funding, totaling \$48.7 million. This represents a bounce back to its 2016 peak level after a decrease over the past few years.
- Over the years, funding to the Adults audience group has been consistently increasing and now accounts for 26% of the total funding, surpassing the All Ages group since 2018.
- Early Childhood funding experienced a small decline after continuous growth in the past few years, while the All Ages group saw the highest decline since 2017¹.

DESCRIPTIONS OF AUDIENCE GROUPS

Early Childhood (ages 0–5): 2%

Funding targeting children under five years old typically includes grants for preschool environmental literacy programs, museums, and science centers. There are also grants for backbone organizations and program providers dedicated to early-childhood environmental education, such as the Natural Start Alliance.

School Age (grades K–12): 42%

Funding reaching school-age students commonly includes grants to K–12 environmental science and STEM education



programs. These programs include in-school environmental literacy programs, outdoor youth development programs, place-based learning programs, and school garden programs.

University: 14%

Funding reaching university students and young adults commonly includes grants for undergraduate- or graduate-level environmental study and research programs (especially marine science, freshwater science, and sustainability studies) and leadership development and fellowship programs.

Adults: 26%

Funding reaching adults typically supports general public education campaigns on issues such as climate, energy, land, and water. It also includes education to policymakers, voters, industry practitioners (including farmers), and local community members.

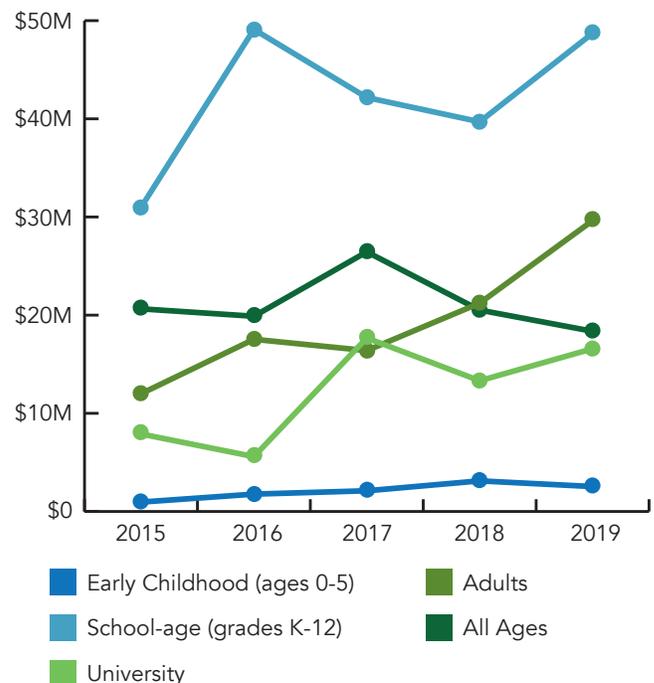
All Audiences: 16%

Funding reaching audiences of all ages typically supports zoos, aquariums, museums, and nature centers. It also includes grants supporting public outdoor spaces such as national and state parks, urban parks, waterfronts, and trails.

Footnote

1. The All Ages group funding decline was largely due to the spending down of a major funder, who gave substantial funds to state parks and later closed doors in 2020.

FIGURE 7. Environmental Literacy Grantmaking by Audience, 2015–2019



SECTION 6: GOVERNMENT FUNDING

KEY FINDINGS

- In 2019, NOAA and EPA gave a total of \$10.4 million in environmental literacy funding, accounting for 9% of all funding tracked in this report.
- Government agencies remain the major funders in the Gulf Coast, with NOAA and EPA giving 83% and 9% of the total environmental literacy funding, respectively.
- More than half of the funding from the two agencies supported school-age children, with “Education” remaining the highest-funded impact area.

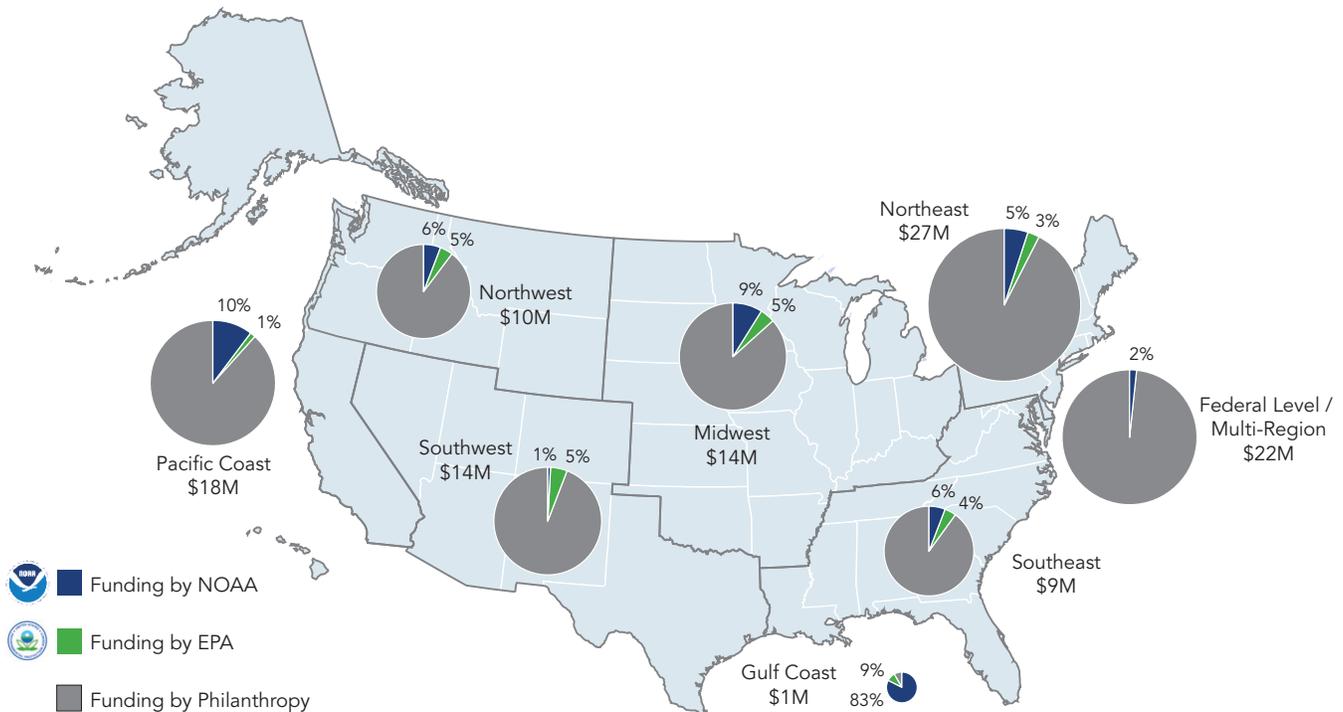
Federal grant programs make up a considerable share of funding for environmental literacy in the United States. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) make significant investments in environmental literacy throughout the country. In order to better understand the larger landscape of funding for the field, Blue Sky partners with EPA and NOAA to track funding from their largest, federally administered environmental literacy grantmaking programs, which include NOAA’s Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) awards, which provide funds for experiential watershed education for K–12 students and educators; NOAA’s Environmental Literacy Program; and EPA’s environmental literacy grants, which are awarded annually through the agency’s Environmental Education Grants Program. In 2019,

NOAA and EPA gave a total of \$10.4 million in environmental literacy funding; this number fluctuated between \$10 million and \$12 million from 2014 to 2019 (except for a record high of \$14.4 million in 2015). However, compared to the overall increase in philanthropy’s environmental literacy funding, government funding has remained rather static, especially for years after 2016.

In 2019, environmental literacy funding given by NOAA and EPA totaled \$7.1 million and \$3.3 million, respectively. This funding in total accounted for 9% of all environmental literacy funding tracked in this report. As shown in Figure 8, NOAA and EPA funding took the highest share in the Gulf Coast, with NOAA funding accounting for 83% and EPA funding accounting for 9% of the total funding to this region. In terms of regional versus federal-level funding, NOAA had a decrease in the percentage of its funding to Federal Level / Multi-Region programs (dropping from 11% in 2017 to just 2% in 2019), while EPA continued to direct grants to specific regions, with no funding going to federal-level programs.

In terms of impact areas, more than 50% of NOAA’s funding had “Education” as the impact area. It is worth noting that “Social Justice” funding accounted for a significant share of the funding by these two agencies, at 19% for NOAA and 25% for the EPA. This is a higher percentage than the average funding tracked in this report, and also marks an increase in 2019. The EPA also has a high percentage (29%) of funding going to “Health & Justice” grants. “School Age” remained the highest-funded audience group, with more than half of the total funding for both federal agencies focusing on this demographic.

FIGURE 8. Environmental Literacy Government Funding by Domestic Region, 2019



SECTION 7: METHODOLOGY

In partnership with the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA), the data for this report were collected and coded by a small and cohesive research team rather than by each foundation or agency individually. Considerable effort has been applied to ensure consistency when tagging grants, by reviewing each grant after it has been collected and coded.

The data-collection team referred to funders' websites and 990 forms to obtain a list of grants for the 2019 calendar year. For most Blue Sky Funders Forum members, the foundation was contacted directly to obtain a list of grants from 2019. The 163 funders reflected in this report include Blue Sky members, EGA members, and other foundations included in EGA's *Tracking the Field* partner reports.

Before inputting a grant, a profile for the grantor and grantee was created (if not already existing) in the CiviCRM database, with information such as the organization's website, address, and mission statement recorded under each profile. Upon entering each grant, information including the grant year, grant amount,

grantee's name, and grant's description was inputted. Based on the grant description and the grantee's mission, each grant was then tagged with a primary and secondary issue area, the grant strategy, and the geographic region where the grant initiatives were to take place. If a grant was identified as being relevant to environmental literacy, the grant was also tagged with additional fields, including the impact area and target audience. Only grants given domestically and identified as environmental literacy grants are included in this report.

In cases when the grant description did not contain enough information to identify the appropriate tags, the researcher determined the information necessary to categorize the grant based on the grantee's and grantor's mission statement and program areas as described on their websites. The researcher also looked up the specific program names mentioned in the grant to help identify tags that require more details, such as the target audience and geographic focus of the grant.

SEARCH THE BLUE SKY TRACKING THE FIELD DATABASE:

Blue Sky members can log on to <https://blueskyfundersforum.org/connect/ttf> to search and view the grants included in this report. For assistance logging on to the Blue Sky website, contact Berkeley Bryant at berkeley@blueskyfundersforum.org.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AUTHORS

Ashley Li, *Tracking the Field* Research Specialist, EGA
Lily Niska, *Tracking the Field* Research Consultant
Caitlin Brogan, *Tracking the Field* Research Consultant
Savannah Blide, *Tracking the Field* Research Consultant

RESEARCH TEAM

Debbie Pierce, Senior *Tracking the Field* Research Consultant
Austin Miles, *Tracking the Field* Research Consultant
John Nguyen, *Tracking the Field* Research Consultant
Julian Rauter, *Tracking the Field* Research Consultant

EGA STAFF

Tamara Toles O'Laughlin, President & CEO
Franny Chiles Canfield, Chief Operating Officer
Malavika Sahai, Director, Justice & Equity
Maud Henderson, Director, Engagement & Knowledge
Ashoka Alvarez, Program Coordinator
Shivant Shrestha, Program Associate
Randi Roberts, Assistant to CEO
Corrine Sigismund, Controller

BLUE SKY FUNDERS FORUM STAFF

Anupama Joshi, Executive Director
Berkeley Bryant, Program Coordinator

BLUE SKY FUNDERS FORUM BOARD

Jason Morris, Pisces Foundation (Chair)
Lois Morrison, Harold M. and Adeline S. Morrison Family Foundation (Vice Chair)
Kim Moore Bailey, Justice Outside
Nancy Bales, Gray Family Foundation
Kathleen Doffermyre, George B. Storer Foundation
Tom Boutureira, Elmina B. Sewall Foundation
Fabiola Greenawalt, The Russell Family Foundation (EGA Board Liaison)
Stephanie Maez, Outdoor Foundation
Hannah Shulman, 11th Hour Project / Schmidt Family Foundation

Designer: Ivy Climacosa, Design Action Collective
Copy editor: Amy Brosey-Láncošová

Photos courtesy of: National Park Service, Big City Mountaineers, Education Outside, National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), Wallow Resources

ABOUT BLUE SKY FUNDERS FORUM

The Blue Sky Funders Forum is a funders collaborative that exists to inspire and increase philanthropic investments and the community of funders supporting equitable access to meaningful outdoor experiences and connections to nature. Our vibrant membership welcomes all types of funders and supporters of this vision. We aspire to spark meaningful connections and collaborations and to provide strategic vision for a stronger, more unified movement.

We are a community united in the belief that when people have meaningful experiences outdoors their quality of life, health, and social well-being improve and, in turn, their communities become stronger and more sustainable.

Blue Sky **engages** and convenes funders to expand philanthropy that supports the many benefits of a stronger connection to nature. Blue Sky **activates** funder collaboration to advance shared goals. And Blue Sky **showcases** successful programs, strategies, and innovative partnerships to enrich and inform members' grantmaking.

Blue Sky coordinates Rethink Outside™—a shared narrative campaign co-generated through a multiyear, inclusive process to move the vital work of connecting people with the outdoors from a “nice to have” to an absolute necessity.

“Blue Sky has played a part in shining a light on leaders, innovations, and victories in the field, and has facilitated a collaborative learning community of funders and practitioners.”

—Randi Fisher
Trustee, Pisces Foundation

“[Blue Sky] has expanded our network. It provides us opportunities for learning beyond what we do in our small region and within our small foundation . . . We’ve been able to learn and contribute to the greater community.”

—Nancy Bales
Executive Director, Gray Family Foundation

Membership in Blue Sky Funders Forum offers funders opportunities to connect, align, and collaborate with peers. Membership is open to all staff, board, and trustees of grant-making organizations.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS:

- Networking, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration with peer funders in the Blue Sky community
- Access to *Tracking the Field*—a searchable grants database for environmental literacy and connection to nature
- Access to members-only resources on the Blue Sky website
- Members-only calls and Listserv
- Ability to help shape the Blue Sky strategy, programs, and events
- Discounted registration fees for Blue Sky events and invitation to nominate a grantee partner
- Access to and engagement opportunities with practitioner leaders
- Ability to contribute to Rethink Outside™ services, stories, and events; and access to research and resources informing the shared narrative campaign
- Access to Blue Sky staff for ideation, connections, and resources to support your grantmaking
- Eligibility to serve on the Blue Sky board

Interested in joining Blue Sky? Contact Anupama Joshi at anupama@blueskyfundersforum.org for information.



MOUNTAIN VIEW GLASS
Wallova Resources

Blue Sky FUNDERS FORUM



ENVIRONMENTAL
GRANTMAKERS
ASSOCIATION

www.ega.org

TRACKING THE FIELD

ENVIRONMENTAL GRANTMAKERS ASSOCIATION