



OPEN PATHWAYS PROJECT

Washington State Convening Report



ABOUT THE OPEN PATHWAYS PROJECT

The Open Pathways Project believes strongly in the transformative power of the outdoors and its role in helping people heal, become empowered, and thrive through achieving wellbeing—especially communities of color and Native communities. Yet, creating opportunities for people to experience that power—through access, time and meaningful connection to the land—is far from simple. That is why the Open Pathways Project (OPP), was created by the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions and Fresh Tracks, Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP), YMCA Bold & Gold, the National Caucus for Environmental Legislators (NCEL), and others. This partnership of aligned organizations is working to ensure that the powerful results of time spent outdoors are accessible to everyone and embedded in our policies, funding strategies, and programs. With a focus on state and local impact, OPP is building a future where institutional support for outdoor experiences is sustainable, resilient, and based on best practices—laying the crucial groundwork for long-term systems change.

Since 2021, Open Pathways Project has laid the foundations for large-scale systems change rooted in the healing and unifying power of the outdoors. Fresh Tracks—a community-focused program of the Aspen Institute offering leadership development and engagement opportunities—served as an early model and catalyst for channeling and demonstrating the power of the outdoors to bring people together for healing and transformative change through wellbeing. The Aspen Institute has helped convene community leaders and funders at the Opportunity Youth Forum and other key gatherings, while Native Americans in Philanthropy is a critical bridge between philanthropy and Native priorities, helping to bring vital resources to Native communities. YMCA Bold & Gold brings decades of experience running impactful outdoor programs that help achieve Social Emotional Learning outcomes through powerful outdoor experiences for young people. The National Caucus of Environmental Legislators has leveraged its position as a trusted convener and thought leader to bring policymakers together and craft policy solutions that elevate the role of the outdoors in community wellbeing.

Together, these partners are shaping a clear, actionable blueprint for driving systems change from the ground up by drawing on the ideas and insights of state and local leaders. This means serving as a convener to bring together local stakeholders and help catalyze cross-sector impact through convening policymakers, program experts, and philanthropists in order to:

- **Lean Into the Power of State and Local Impact:** We know that much of the power and potential of outdoor opportunities unfolds at the state and community level. That is why the Open Pathways Project is focused on piloting state-focused convenings to discuss what has worked to date and how states can ensure integrated, cross-sector strategies promote the power of the outdoors across agencies, legislative bodies, the executive branch, and other state programs, all in alignment with grassroots leaders. Meeting states ‘where they’re at’ by convening funders, state leadership, and program experts can ensure holistic, large-scale problem solving, while bringing national perspectives and solutions to address evolving priorities and fiscal realities.
- **Highlight Innovative Ideas and Practices for Centering the Outdoors:** We know the baseline policies that have helped build momentum around the outdoors and mainstream quality outdoor opportunities around the country. From State Outdoor Equity Funds in New Mexico and Colorado to outdoor experience bills in Washington, Oregon, and Minnesota, these policies have been foundational to helping people understand the power of the outdoors to address issues far beyond just getting outside. But building a sustainable strategy for mainstreaming more extensive outdoor programming requires bringing policymakers and thought leaders together to develop system-changing policies that build on successes and failures across the country, including the critical viewpoint of program leaders. All of this is in service of the critical goal of integrating the benefits of time outdoors into policies that impact a diverse range of social issues, from health to education.

- **Forge New Models for Public-Private Partnership:** We know that systems change around accessing the benefits of the outdoors doesn't just require increased funding; it requires creative thinking around how the public and private sectors can come together to innovate. OPP is working to help develop public-private partnerships that create space for philanthropy to come to the table not just as funders of critical work, but as thought leaders and critical innovation partners in multiplying the impact of public-sector funding and ensuring sustainable support.

This work—and bringing together the various sectors, causes, and organizations that have a shared interest in the outdoors—necessitates collaboration and coalition. That is why the Open Pathways Project works to promote 'Outdoor Wellbeing'—a term that aims to encompass the vast and diverse goals, constituencies, and intricacies of programs ranging from environmental education to outdoor experience trips, and from outdoor preschool to nature-based youth, young adult, and family programming.

'Outdoor Wellbeing' means not just providing access, but acknowledging that community and individual health, social cohesion, and wealth come through making the outdoors a part of our lives.

We refer to anyone working to achieve Outdoor Wellbeing as part of the 'Outdoor Sector.' This includes not only traditional outdoor program leaders, but anyone who is leveraging the power of the outdoors for recreation, education, learning, programming, and beyond.

A FIRST STEP IN WASHINGTON

The Open Pathways Project (OPP) is focused on catalyzing state and local systems change by embedding the proven benefits of outdoor experiences—improved mental health, stronger social-emotional development, academic achievement, and workforce readiness—into durable policies and sustainable funding structures. Washington State has long stood out as a national leader in this work, offering a compelling example of how the outdoors can serve as a unifying force across communities and systems, as well as showing how vital it is to shape long-term, resilient solutions for safeguarding and funding outdoor experiences.

For close to two decades, Washington has prioritized equitable access to nature through policy and programming, established long before similar efforts in other states, including:

No Child Left Inside

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission's No Child Left Inside (NCLI) grant program provides quality opportunities for underserved, underrepresented, and historically excluded youth to learn, play, and experience the outdoors. The Washington State Legislature established the program in 2007 with two primary goals: to improve the overall academic performance, self-esteem, health, community involvement, and connection to nature for youth; and to empower local communities to engage youth in outdoor education and recreation experiences. NCLI provides grants for a wide range of outdoor education and recreation activities including environmental education, leadership development, outdoor recreation and adventure, stewardship activities, and camp programs. The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) administers NCLI for the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

Outdoor Nature-Based Child Care Programs

Washington state was an early adopter and leader in Outdoor Nature-Based (ONB) child care licensing and programming. ONB child care gives young children the chance to learn and grow through outdoor, hands-on experiences. These programs provide safe, supportive spaces where children can explore, move, and connect with nature every day. There are currently more than 20 licensed ONB programs licensed by the Department of Children, Youth and Families. (DCYF)

Outdoor Learning Grants Program (OLG)

The Washington State Legislature funded the Outdoor Learning Grants Program from 2023 – 2025 to develop and support outdoor educational experiences for students traditionally underserved in science and outdoor experiences across the state. This program provided funding for allocation grants to schools as well as Tribes and organizations partnered with schools, in addition to allocating funds to Outdoor Schools Washington with the ambitious goal of providing an overnight outdoor experience to every 5th or 6th grade student in the state. The grant programs were administered by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), RCO, and the Washington School Principals’ Education Foundation and served over 130,000 students.

Youth Engaged in Sustainable Systems (YESS)

Pacific Education Institute coordinated this summer natural resources workforce development program for high school students. The program provided hands-on experience for students as they work with employers and earn a participation stipend. (OSPI)

FieldSTEM

Through a statewide partnership program between OSPI and the Pacific Education Institute, for ten years FieldSTEM has built a systemic approach to integrated, meaningful, place-based learning designed not just to improve student engagement and achievement but also to provide high quality professional learning, STEM and Equity clock hours for teachers. (OSPI)

Salmon In The Schools

An environmental education program that allows elementary students to witness firsthand the salmon lifecycle as well as get outdoors to explore salmon habitat. The program is coordinated by 16 partner organizations who install aquariums in classrooms where students raise salmon from eggs to release in local watersheds. Along the way, students learn about the salmon lifecycle, local ecosystem, the significance of salmon to local Tribes, and more. (OSPI)

Climate and Science Education Initiative (ClimeTime)

Since its inception in 2018, ClimeTime has been a national model, pioneering state investment in climate education and empowering educators with high-quality, locally relevant professional learning opportunities. ClimeTime has built a powerful network of school districts, community-based organizations, educational service agencies, and Tribal education organizations, all working collaboratively to bring meaningful climate science instruction into classrooms across Washington. (OSPI)

Taken together, these efforts have helped connect diverse communities across the state—from rural towns and Tribal nations to urban neighborhoods—through the shared value of outdoor access and stewardship.

Yet Washington has found itself at a crossroads. In the previous legislative budget, the outdoor sector saw cuts totaling more than \$40 million for youth outdoor education and recreation programs, including:

- No Child Left Inside: reduced from \$7 million to \$1.2 million
- Outdoor Nature-Based Child Care Programs: maintained
- Outdoor Learning Grants: reduced \$31.7 million to \$0
- FieldSTEM: reduced from \$1.5 million to \$0
- Salmon in the Schools: reduced from \$500,000 to \$0
- Clime Time: reduced from \$6 million to \$0
- YESS: new program requesting \$4.6 million, not funded
- OSPI Environmental Education Coordinator position: eliminated

How can the state keep its culture of the outdoors alive in the face of constrained public resources? And how, in forging a new model, can key stakeholders embrace a more collaborative, unified approach to advocate for and fund resources more holistically while learning from other states and putting in place the policies, structures, and sustainable funding to ensure a resilient future in Washington?

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

The aforementioned questions have been at play over the past few years in Washington— and surfaced through a thorough assessment process undertaken statewide to better understand the ‘state of the outdoors.’

In 2022, local leadership from Philanthropy Northwest and LBC Action, key partners in the Open Pathways Project in Washington, and grassroots leaders, collaborated on an in-depth survey and report process entitled “Building Stronger Roots: Cultivating Collaboration in the Youth and Outdoors Space in Washington State.” Through ongoing engagement with funders, nonprofit leaders, advocates and other stakeholders, the report surfaced that the potential for Washington was great, but that there were significant issues around collaboration and forging a common agenda for this work to serve as a unifying vision for the field. Notably, 92% of respondents collectively gave Washington a failing grade of 47 out of 100 when it came to collaboration in this space. Additionally, the report highlighted a distinct need for increased leadership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in the outdoors space across Washington moving forward— a space that had previously been dominated by white-led coalitions and organizations.

This report highlighted Washington’s need for action in the space and an opportunity for a partnership to be a catalyst for that change. Meanwhile, recent state budget cuts have deepened the need for more significant collaboration and innovative thinking around funding, and the arrival of a new governor and numerous Freshmen senators offer an opportunity to forge new ways of working with State partners. The potential impact of this opportunity was also emphasized in the 2025 update of the “Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State” report, which noted that outdoor recreation in the state supports \$33.1 billion in economic activity.

To build on the potential for advancement highlighted in the “Building Strong Roots” report, harness the economic impact, help address the statewide context, and act on a stated interest in having national partners help facilitate local conversation, Open Pathways

Project selected Washington State as an ideal location for a pilot convening, with a goal of bringing together partners from across the state in mid-to-late 2025 for a convening of cross-sector partners. The goal was to help catalyze engagement, collaboration, and a culture shift that had been difficult to achieve to date without an outside stimulus.

CONVENING STRUCTURE

The convening was designed to not only bring leaders together for dialogue across sectors and program areas, but to provide a space for stakeholders to hear and garner insights into others' thinking through a series of panels, speakers, and facilitated discussion.

The Open Pathways Project Washington Convening aimed to bring a diverse range of representatives from the program, policy, and philanthropy sectors to be in conversation with one another, facilitate cross-sector dialogue, and help people learn about how others view their work. In addition to this, the convening sought to highlight the Indigenous knowledge and worldviews that have been core to Fresh Tracks and are vital in Washington in particular.



The day featured the following speakers and panels:

- Tony Monroe, Facilities Director for United Indians of All Tribes Foundation
- Casey Sixkiller, 14th Director of the Washington State Department of Ecology
- CJ Goulding, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Boyz in the Wood
- Shawn Bills, State Director for United States Senator Patty Murray

Philanthropy Panel: Funding an Outdoor Movement

- Lyn Hunter, Director of Community Partnerships for Thriving Communities Program at Philanthropy Northwest
- Fabiola Greenawalt, Senior Program Lead at The Russell Family Foundation
- Erik Stegman, Chief Executive Officer of Native Americans in Philanthropy

Program Panel: Delivering the Benefits of the Outdoors

- Courtney Aber, National Director of Outdoor Initiatives at the YMCA of Greater Seattle
- Kathryn Kurtz, Executive Director of the Pacific Education Institute (PEI)
- Serene Williams, Lead Teacher at Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe Outdoor Education
- Chase Buffington, Director of the Cispus Learning Center under the Washington School Principals' Education Foundation
- Shawn Bills, State Director for United States Senator Patty Murray

Advancing Policy that Leverages the Outdoors for Youth Wellbeing

- Dylan McDowell, Chief Executive Officer for the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators
- Megan Duffy, Director of the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO)
- Jacqueline Reyes, Urban to Wild Program Manager with The Wilderness Society
- Marc Berejka, Strategy, Partnership, and Policy Advisor at Nature and Health Alliance

INSIGHTS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Open Pathways Project Washington State Convening was not the culmination of a process, but rather the start of one— an impetus for collaboration and lasting impact. That required not just naming contextual challenges and prioritizing cross-sector discussion, but forging a clear path forward for Washington to reinvigorate and channel appropriate resources to outdoor wellbeing with the necessary commitment and investment from key stakeholders in program, policy, and philanthropy.

Based on panel conversations, participant group discussions and analysis of convening notes, Open Pathways Project has chosen to highlight the following insights and key takeaways:

1. **There is a clear need for an integrated understanding of outdoor wellbeing in Washington— and without that, it's difficult to build a coalition and shared goals.**

Convening participants noted that because of the history of fragmentation, there is no integrated understanding of who is working on what. While OPP partnered with key stakeholders to build a diverse, representative list of invitees from across the state, we know that there is a wider range of advocates, program leaders, and others working towards similar goals who were not present and may not work with the funders and state agencies that have supported this work to date.

Undertaking a wider scan of who is doing what—and their stories of success and challenges— can help to ensure that any new vision and narrative for the sector are fully representative of outdoor wellbeing efforts across Washington, especially in underrepresented areas of the state outside of the Seattle Metro Area.

Perhaps more importantly, this will help establish a fuller sense of the scale and scope of the need for public and private investment to support this work in the longer term, and can help guide the identification of common strategies and goals, as outlined below.

2. **Overcoming the fragmented field of the Outdoor Sector in Washington and rallying around a shared vision can help build something bigger and attract more resources for Washington.**

Throughout the convening, and in particular during the philanthropy and policy panels, participants noted the fragmentation of the Washington outdoors sector and the resulting focus on advocating and fundraising for highly-specific causes and programs related to the outdoors, which has led to a notable absence of a shared vision for how the outdoors can be leveraged to benefit state residents at a holistic level. This absence has, in turn, resulted in policymakers and funders receiving myriad narratives about the most effective ways to allocate resources and leverage the outdoors. Similarly, the absence of a shared vision has contributed to overlap and duplication within the sector.

Moving forward, by deepening trust, increasing coordination, and securing funding to support time for ideation and coalition-building, the sector can begin to shape a shared narrative and forge a jointly-held vision for the future— specifically one that tells the story of how disparate outdoor experiences, educational opportunities, and programs are building something bigger in Washington and what that should mean for the state's residents.

That vision can serve as an umbrella and guiding principle for everyone engaging in this work without supplanting or significantly altering existing missions, goals, and program models. In turn, that can help policy and philanthropy advocate for and resource the sector to deliver on the holistic vision and outcomes named together.



3. A backbone organization for the sector is crucial to moving beyond the current state.

It will be difficult to shape a shared vision without a leader driving forward the process and prioritizing collaboration. Because organizations working in the Washington outdoors sector have had to focus on securing resources and advocating for their own work and ideas around how best to leverage the power of the outdoors, the sector has been left disjointed and in need of a unifying force to move forward as a collective.

With a shared vision for the future of the sector will come the need for a central entity that can coordinate, catalyze conversation, and help attract resources.



Additionally, because of the history of organizations focusing on narrow areas of outdoor programming and competing for limited resources, convening participants agreed that there is currently no ideal candidate to serve as that entity among the various nonprofits and coalitions working in the space. In fact, selecting an existing coalition or nonprofit could seed distrust and exacerbate any existing divisions and senses of competition. By serving as a ‘backbone,’ a newly-identified or formed central coordinating entity can take on this responsibility by creating a ‘neutral space’ and serve as a bridge to help channel private investment into a streamlined set of strategies for outdoor wellbeing that is shaped and adopted by organizations and advocates across the sector.

4. With a clear vision, the sector will need to develop long-term goals and strategies for its work.

The convening– as well as prior conversations and the “Building Stronger Roots” report– made clear that many program leaders and advocates share the feeling that they’re ultimately working towards similar long-term or ‘mega’ goals, but there is little consensus on exactly what they are. Convening participants agreed that many existing long-term goals for their work are still tied to specific programs or activities. And, even where those long-term goals do align, their framing– around a broad range of areas ranging from youth development to education outcomes to outdoors as a health solution– is sometimes disjointed and often leaves policymakers and philanthropy unsure how best to advocate for or allocate limited support and resources.

While a shared narrative and vision is the first step, with that and a backbone organization in place, **common goals and strategies will not only help the Washington Outdoors sector to better align its work (especially around shared policy goals), but will also help legislators and funders understand how they can achieve their own outcomes through the work of myriad organizations contributing to outdoor wellbeing– and make the case for more prolific support for the sector.**

This is distinct from a shared vision, as it will help guide the work of various actors working towards outdoor wellbeing for Washington and ensure that funding for the sector is covering the various strategies for achieving that vision.



5. The funding model for the outdoor sector requires new, creative thinking.

Many of the organizations working on outdoor wellbeing have historically relied on state funding to deliver programs and reach their goals with some supplementing with private funding. Recent state budget challenges aside, this has meant that there is little flexible funding for visioning, scaling efforts, and taking on new, innovative forms of this work. At the convening, leaders spoke firsthand about the need, desire, and potential that private investment can make to support outdoor wellbeing in Washington. During group brainstorming, various ideas were raised– from a potential ‘Outdoor Wellbeing Revolving Fund’ to matching private dollars for state funding like No Child Left Inside grants to reviving Outdoor Education Grants in a new form.

No matter the form, it is clear that there isn’t simply a need for funding in the sector– there is a need for reliable, consistent, and flexible dollars that allow organizations working on outdoor wellbeing to be able to plan ahead without continued concern for meeting their minimum budget requirements.

Bringing private funding to bear in combination with public dollars can provide that flexibility and help Washington adopt a practice that has seen success in other states, as well as further Washington’s embrace of innovative public-private partnerships.

6. The Washington Outdoor sector needs to identify concrete actions to create leadership opportunities for Black and Indigenous Washingtonians and other People of Color as advocates, practitioners, and leaders in this work.

As noted earlier in this report and at the convening, the recommendations highlighted in the “Building Stronger Roots” report, especially those around creating space for more diverse leadership, were never fully brought to fruition. Despite widespread agreement and embrace of these recommendations, few documented actions have been taken to cede power and platform the voices of Black, Indigenous and Native, and other voices of color across the sector.

Moving forward, the outdoor wellbeing movement in Washington must take meaningful, collective steps to welcome and elevate the voices of those who have historically been marginalized in this work.

This will likely start with whatever backbone organization or entity forms to drive this work forward, but should happen at the individual organizational level as well. The visioning and strategy identification processes described earlier also offer tangible opportunities not just for representation but for active leadership.



7. Making a strong case for the outdoors is still a barrier, even in Washington:

While Washington has a long history of embracing the outdoors through supporting and growing policies and programs, the convening– coupled with recent budget cuts– highlighted that outdoor experiences are still considered a ‘nice to have’ in Washington and beyond. Rather than being viewed as a vital pillar that advances health and wellbeing and strengthens community, outdoor education, programming, adventure and experiences are, for the most part, not considered essential and can be some of the first up for budget cuts.

It is clear that in Washington and beyond, there must be a better way to communicate the value of these experiences and more deeply integrate them into core services.

Convening participants noted that this should be rooted in the first-hand experiences and stories from community members that have gone through, sent children to, or seen the impact of outdoor wellbeing close to home.

These takeaways point to a common theme– that while the desire and need for collaboration are clear in Washington, a plan of action and accountable leadership are critical if this work is to advance beyond the reflection and recognition stage. To that end, OPP is recommending a more manageable set of next steps that can advance this work in the near-term, as outlined below.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

OPP wants to offer recommendations that are ambitious while acknowledging the current constraints faced by leaders across sectors– program leaders working to address a dearth of funding, advocates and policymakers facing competing demands for public sector resources in the midst of budgetary challenges, and philanthropists working to strategically address gaps across Washington and beyond.

These suggested action items directly connect to the needs and considerations addressed in the takeaways section earlier, with a long-term goal of helping establish a phased approach that– with a moderate investment of time and resources– will allow the Washington outdoors sector to move beyond its current state towards a place of deeper collaboration and planning while developing tangible opportunities for increased leadership roles for Indigenous leaders and leaders of color.

None of these steps are requirements, but rather offer starting points for stakeholders to come together to shape and agree upon a direction for this movement going forward.

Convene key stakeholders to build trust and discuss what a shared vision and phased approach might look like.

Participants noted during the convening that the space, time, and capacity required to engage in this type of sector-building work are not easy to come by, and that any process must be incremental and not create an unfunded mandate. To that end, a critical next step is to hold a follow-up discussion focused on the “how” of this work– especially how it can be neutrally facilitated and eventually transitioned to an independent, neutral third party organization while making space for wide stakeholder engagement. This will also help to build deeper connections and relationships between organizations and individuals who, up until this point, have not had the opportunity to collaborate at a deeper level and truly build trust.

- **Considerations:** Bringing together a sampling of stakeholders to understand capacity, barriers, and ideal participation will ensure that any working group or team that is formed does not create an unfunded mandate or overly-complex process with a barrier to entry.
- **What it will take:** An entity that can serve as a preliminary convener for these conversations.



Work to establish a backbone organization or entity that can drive this work long-term and attract and administer private investment.

Time and again, participants noted the lack of a coordinating body or ‘middle layer’ during the convening. Establishing a backbone organization or entity that can lead this work across Washington and has the capacity to accept and administer private funding is critical to long-term success. This is vital for two reasons– firstly, a backbone organization that is focused on long-term goals and a vision for the sector can operate across a multitude of program areas. Secondly, convening participants and sector leaders noted time and again that Outdoor Wellbeing cannot rely primarily on state funds. While, as noted earlier, there is no organization operating in the sector that naturally straddles the various parts of the outdoor wellbeing sector in Washington, there are potential creative solutions. For example, given RCO’s current role as a grantmaker and its access to Washington State Parks’ Outdoor Education and Recreation Program Account, which provides the statutory authority to accept private funds, the office might be able to play that role in the interim.



This would require deep partnership and alignment with fellow officials in Washington’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Parks, the State Treasurer and other agencies, as well as across the sector to ensure a full range of perspectives are represented, but could provide an alternative to shaping, standing up, and launching an entirely new project to administer this work. To ensure capacity and focus, the office could hire a fellow dedicated to this work, allowing them to embed within RCO and lead from a more neutral position independent of nonprofits operating in this space. This would build on a tradition of privately-funded positions embedded in state and local government, as championed by funders such as Rockefeller Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies.

- **Considerations:** Any backbone organization will need to draw on a range of perspectives from across the Washington outdoors sector– including outdoor programming, education, experiences, and more. To start, early conversation will help name concerns around how the backbone organization should operate within the sector and who might take on this work.
- **What it will take:** This will require resources to fund staff dedicated to this work, which depending on the organization, could take the form of a multi-year fellowship. If this is taken on by a state agency or office such as RCO, this could mean establishing a privately-endowed, multi-year position that embeds within the agency to deliver on this work– ensuring that such a position is within government and accountable to RCO leadership, but insulated from state budget concerns and able to prioritize outdoor wellbeing long-term. Beyond that, such an approach would require developing a strategy for combining state dollars with private funds to augment and scale support for outdoor wellbeing– through existing grant programs, state-funded programs for education and recreation, and / or a new mechanism.

Undertake sector mapping to capture everyone’s work– including that which has historically been considered separate.

While OPP partnered with key stakeholders to build a diverse, representative list of attendees, we know that there is a wider range of entities connected to this work. A wider scan of who is doing what– and their stories of success and challenges– can inform messaging, goals, and long-term planning. This scan should ideally include the full range of outdoor wellbeing work– education, programming, and related health programming. Perhaps more importantly, this will help establish a fuller sense of the scale and scope of the need for public and private investment to support this work in the longer term.

- **Considerations:** After deeper trust has been established and common goals and shared strategies have been named, a trusted partner or consultant can undertake a scan of outdoor wellbeing work across Washington to (a) capture key stories and (b) understand the full extent of programs working towards the goals and the full scope the need for support.
- **What it will take:** This scan must be undertaken by a neutral party and build towards something bigger– a shared platform for advocacy and making the case for renewed investment in outdoor wellbeing in Washington. This will require careful administration by a trusted entity as well as dedicated resources to complete this scan, specific to Washington State, and ensure it surfaces impactful, applicable information to drive long-term change. This will also require resources to fund this work, ideally raised in partnership and with input from the funders who have supported the sector to date.

Beyond delivering the convening and this report, OPP will continue to support and facilitate conversation between leaders across sectors to ensure this work has the resources and commitment needed to move forward.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, the challenges and potential solutions to the Washington outdoor sector’s current dilemmas were apparent even before the convening. But knowing that something is not working and being clear on where to begin fixing it are not one in the same. It is clear from the passion, engagement, and dynamism of the convening’s participants that there is not a lack of will to take on the fragmentation and competing priorities of this work, but rather a shared sense that the challenge is too large, the funding gulf too wide, and the operational considerations too complex. But even after just a few hours of deep, considered dialogue, there was obvious consensus and alignment. People need an entity at the helm that they trust and that organizations feel will understand and consider their individual points of view. People need to find the shared vocabulary for what they’re working towards, and there must be a certain sense of security, namely that individual organizations and coalitions won’t lose precious funding if they choose to collaborate more deeply with programs and organizations they may have once considered competitors for valuable resources.

Identifying and sharing these feelings was a key part of the process– but it is just a first step. Now, moving forward, the Washington outdoor sector has an incredible opportunity to reimagine how it frames and communicates its work– and how that work can feed into a larger sense of pride and shared identity for all Washingtonians. OPP is committed to helping set up the sector for success, ensuring that the future of the outdoors in Washington is practical, resilient, and grounded in larger goals around outdoor wellbeing, as well as guided by the leadership of Indigenous people and people of color that has largely been missing to date. Now is the ideal time for the sector to set aside the hesitation of the past and use a challenging moment as an occasion to rethink what’s possible, set shared goals, and work towards a future where everyone in Washington can benefit from the power and wellbeing of time spent outdoors.

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