



**CARE FOR  
OURSELVES,  
CARE FOR THE  
EARTH:**

**UNDERSTANDING WELL-BEING AS  
CAPACITY INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE  
U.S. CONSERVATION COMMUNITY**



Jasmine Sudarkasa  
Consulting



conservation  
Capacity Project

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## **AUTHOR**

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**The Conservation Capacity Project** provides free capacity building advisory services and access to expert guidance to U.S. nonprofits and Tribes working with communities to conserve our land, wildlife, and waters for people and nature.

# INTRODUCTION

In the Center for Effective Philanthropy's [2025 report on the State of Nonprofits](#), leaders across the sector report compounding obstacles, financial uncertainty, and overwhelming burnout.

**86% of executive leaders surveyed reported some concern about employee burnout, essentially unchanged from 2024.**

Many respondents also reported concern about the safety and well-being of the communities they serve, alongside the polarization of a volatile political climate and challenging relationships with governmental funders. Over 50% of respondents report burnout as moderately or significantly affecting their staff, and most reported considering staff-related adjustments to account for stalls in revenue.

For conservation professionals, the coinciding threats of federal and state grant cuts and layoffs, climate disaster, biodiversity crisis, overt attacks on efforts at equity and inclusion, and a contracted economy mean that leaders are struggling to navigate complex challenges when their work to conserve nature for wildlife and communities is needed most.

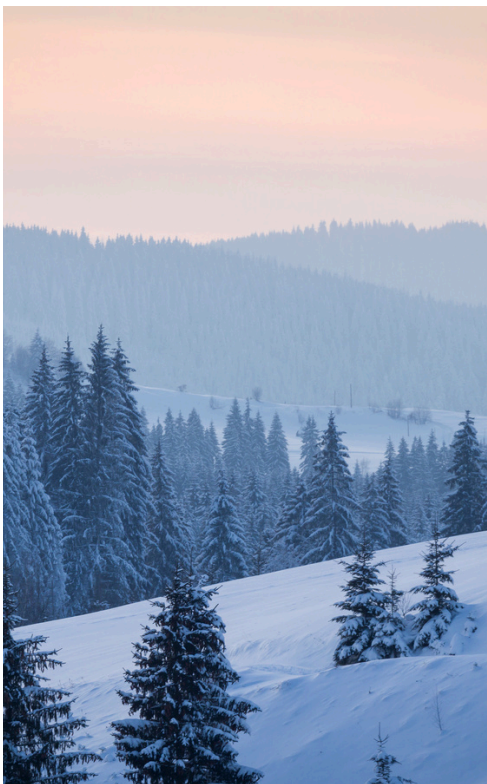
Inside conservation organizations, funding shortfalls and subsequent layoffs/downsizing are impacting programming. Simultaneously, the existential fear of loss of charitable status and federal or congressional investigation have created a sense of danger and uncertainty that severely risks the viability of conservation outcomes across the country.

To quote a nonprofit leader surveyed in the Center for Effective Philanthropy report, **“maintaining clarity of mission and financial sustainability over the next few years, in the current political climate, will be an existential challenge.”**

In the face of these compounding pressures, philanthropy and nonprofit leaders may be looking to well-being and wellness activities as a way to address these immediate challenges and the long-term effects of nonprofit burnout.

This publication, developed on the heels of a comprehensive review of philanthropic investments in individual well-being and leadership capacity, is a summary of lessons learned from well-being practitioners, funders, and movement leaders from the environment and conservation sector, and is offered as an invitation to funders and nonprofit leaders alike to reflect on what it means to be well while doing well.

For the **Conservation Capacity Project**, the intention has been to provide responsive and adaptive solutions that support conservation leaders and their organizations in this uncertain time. Well-being has repeatedly been raised as a critical need across the sector; the guidance of the many people who generously informed this publication will inform future Project activities to help strengthen the field.



***If we don't model regenerative practices ourselves, we are being just as extractive as any other corporation. We're being just as extractive as the oil industry, if all we're doing is extracting labor from ourselves instead of doing regenerative work.***

***If we look at the earth, the earth takes time in the winter for the fields to lie fallow.***

***If we actually paid attention to the earth, and learned from the earth in trying to help her, we would do this, right? That's the irony of it.***

- Jayeesha Dutta, The Windcall Institute

# METHODOLOGY

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## PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This methodology outlines the approaches used to inform the findings, analysis and recommendations in this report. Its methods were designed to:

### 01 — Synthesize early, published learnings

We focused on learnings across the nonprofit and for-profit sectors about employee well-being and organization health.

### 02 — Gather field-based insights

We conducted interviews with key funders, well-being practitioners, and conservation leaders.

### 03 — Generate actionable, useful insights for the Conservation Capacity Project (CCP)

Our aim was to support the Conservation Capacity Project's ability to better fund and/or support the capacity and well-being of conservation professionals.

## DATA SOURCES

For the literature review, **23 relevant sources were identified and reviewed**. These sources are listed in Appendix A, and include sector publications, professional journal articles, podcast episodes/transcripts, and op-eds.

Following the literature review, **10 experts were identified and informed this report**. All interviews followed a common interview guide, and the list of interviewees can be found in Acknowledgements.

Transcripts from **interviews were then used for qualitative and thematic analysis**, and several quotes from these conversations are included throughout the report. Participants were informed about recording and use of interview materials, providing consent in advance.

## APPROACH

To prepare this report, **we used a mixed-methods approach:** to begin, we conducted a literature review and light quantitative analysis in order to understand current best practices, field norms, and key stakeholders at the intersection of conservation funding and capacity building. Our goal was to develop clear, consistent language for our work - aligned with field standards - and to identify 2-3 promising methods for funding well-being work.

Following the review of these findings, we facilitated key informant interviews and a thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Our goals were to develop a more targeted understanding of promising practices relevant to conservation leaders and funders, and to level-set expectations from the literature review based on insights from practitioners and funders that have already invested time and resources in this work.

### **This approach was selected for three reasons:**

- 01** — As a field-building effort, we wanted to gather and catalogue as many of the relevant resources and data sources available through a literature review.
- 02** — We wanted any language that we used to describe the program, and its methods, to be in conversation with existing learnings about individual and organizational well-being.
- 03** — We hoped to ground any insights found through desk review with the lived experience of our interviewees, and to check our assumptions about the usefulness of these findings with those that might actually apply them in practice.

## LIMITATIONS

While we anticipate that this report will shed new light on well-being support for the conservation community, we do not intend for this to be a comprehensive review of all well-being supports available to this community, and/or all of the philanthropic resources supporting this work. Instead, we envision this as a snapshot of ideas and opportunities for the field to further build upon.

Similarly, because this report was authored to inform the Conservation Capacity Project, we do not anticipate that its findings will be useful in all scenarios for all conservation organizations and professionals. This report was commissioned to inform the direction of well-being programming at the Conservation Capacity Project, and its findings are most attuned to support that work.

# NAMING THE WORK

## WELLNESS, WELL-BEING, OR SOMETHING MORE?

This report began with a curiosity: **what to call work to “be well”** that will endear it to as many people as possible? How might we name this program to draw in those that need it most?

Our operating assumption was that “well-being” and “wellness” were the most used and most accessible terms to describe the work of rest and renewal, serving as interchangeable terminology implying “a positive state experienced by individuals and societies”. (World Health Organization, 2022)

Instead, we found that the term “wellness” is often used to refer to the act of pursuing health in the short term, whether mental, emotional, or social. “Well-being,” on the other hand, is positioned as a positive and aspirational end state, often the intended result of wellness activities and efforts.

As far as grantmaking and programming are concerned, the term “well-being” is commonly used across the nonprofit and public health sector, and seems to generally be agreed upon as an aspirational end state that:

- Does not have a singular definition
- Includes the experience of wholeness and/or interconnectedness
- Can be a personal or collaborative journey

***The distinction here is that wellness is almost temporary, perhaps like a band aid or a fix, and not necessarily permeating deep within the core of a circumstance that you're trying to change. Well-being is this state that you're constantly striving for, and a more permanent place to be. I definitely feel like I talk more about well-being [than] wellness.***

- Kathleen Badejo, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

## NAMING SUCCESS

Our early assumption about this work was that individual leaders were well positioned to take advantage of wellness supports as a way to improve the well-being of their organizations.

To better understand what that might look like, we reviewed several op-eds and blogs alongside the summary findings of the Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR) on integrating individual and organizational well-being. We also asked long-term practitioners of this work, at [Knoll Farm](#) and the [Windcall Institute](#), what success has looked like for them over time.

Generally, these sources confirmed our theory of change: **that investing in the well-being of individual leaders does indeed have positive ripple effects onto their organizations**; some commonly reported individual outcomes from well-being programming are as follows:

- Reduced burnout
- Enhanced resiliency
- More trust and open-mindedness
- Reframed thinking
- Healthy distance from work, ability to make informed and thoughtful decisions
- Peer learning and validation
- Prioritizing and applying lessons learned about rest and well-being in work and organizational culture
- Deeper connections
- Integrating and modeling well-being and healthier patterns

When leaders are able to integrate and apply these individual outcomes, organizations might expect to see some of the following outcomes:

- Better teamwork & sense of belonging, especially visible in decision making and communication
- More balanced workload, and staff know when and how to ask for help
- More creative approaches to problem solving and culture
- More openness to diverse perspectives
- Ability and desire to integrate mission and well-being toward long term goals and resiliency

## ANATOMY OF A WELL-BEING PROGRAM

From this research, and subsequent interviews, we were also able to narrow down a list of common features of funded opportunities to pursue well-being, namely:

**Opportunities to gather**  
with peers (often framed  
as retreats)

**Funds with which to  
make individual choices,**  
often intended to  
augment the  
breakthroughs and  
lessons learned through  
gathering

**Coaching options,**  
intended to support the  
integration of short term  
wellness activities into  
long term well-being

## ... AND A FEW CAVEATS

Interestingly, we learned along the way that investing in organizational leadership is not the only way to compel change or support infrastructure. The Windcall Institute, which has facilitated well-being work for 30 years, suggested that a core component of their program and its success is that it does not require positional leadership for participation:

*You don't have to be [at] an Executive Director or Director level. You can be an organizer. You can even be a finance person, or a back office person, as long as the organization you serve is organizing. I think that's also a unique element of creating space for all different types of folks, who are serving our movement, to get that rest; we think that culture change can't only happen if the Executive Directors are bought in, right?*

- Jayeesha Dutta, The Windcall Institute

This wrinkle in our understanding of success helped gesture us towards the idea that there are a few caveats to measuring or building success through well-being efforts. We share them here, in hopes that fellow funders can keep them in mind when developing outcomes for well-being work:

**Over and over, flexibility and choice in how to spend dollars is emphasized as an outcome in and of itself**

*I think for grantees, for a lot of them, this was the first time that they had restricted dollars to focus on well-being. For some of them, the thought was 'oh, we'll just do a retreat. That's kind of the easy, well-known thing. We can just do that, bring people together.'*

*But, I responded, "You all know yourselves. You know best, and I don't want to limit you on what's possible and how these dollars can be used". I really tried to drive that piece of self determination - grantees being able to identify for themselves what it looks like to care for people, and to care for themselves, as individuals in the organization.*

- Kathleen Badejo, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

**People arrive at rest/well-being with different perceptions of when it's okay to seek help, and what it takes to truly rest; sometimes, just their attendance is a win**

*For me, a success would be when someone, on their intake, says "I don't even know how I'm gonna get through this." There are people who are like that, up until the moment they get there. So even just going, making the time... Some folks are surprised at how many folks just don't go.*

- Jayeesha Dutta, The Windcall Institute

**The ability to integrate personal and organizational well-being, and the opportunity to pursue wholeness, were the most commonly reported benefits of investments in well-being**

*Often, that initial debrief is when we'll hear "I didn't realize how much I needed the rest. I am really thinking about how I can create this for my organization." And then, six months later, the true indicator of real success is "We created a new sabbatical policy!"*

*That's how you know that it percolated beyond them, to really influence the way they are leading their organizations. To me, that's the highest level of the arc of transformation.*

- Jayeesha Dutta, The Windcall Institute

# CASE STUDY

## Putting Principles into Practice at the WINDCALL INSTITUTE



Tea Ceremony during Healing Hike  
Point Reyes Sanctuary Residency



Cohort 2019 hiking  
Olympic Peninsula



Stoneroot cohort, 2025  
Opening Workshop - Mandala Sharing

The [Windcall Institute](#) is a 36-year-old nonprofit with a mission to support and sustain labor and movement organizers. Through its flagship programs, the **Residencies** and the shorter-term **Staying Power**, Windcall provides opportunities for “rejuvenation and renewal” for the people powering social change in the U.S.

### ABOUT THE RESIDENCIES

As one of the longest operating organizations of its kind, Windcall has awarded hundreds of residencies to community and labor organizers from around the country. The Residency, one of the institute’s two major programs, is a nine-month experience that includes the following curated components:

- Residential retreats immersed in nature, with stipends, that last for either one week (“mindful breathers” for people with caretaking responsibilities) or three weeks (“cohorts” of three to five organizers).
- After the retreats are completed, participants take part in reflective debriefs, webinars and coaching, designed to support the integration of lessons learned during the retreat into daily life.

### INTAKE AS INTENTIONAL START

The selection process for participation in the Residency program is unique, in that it is seen as the start of a person’s relationship with the organization. Program Director Jayeesha Dutta insists that “we don’t reject anyone, we just direct folks between the Residency and Staying Power programs” based on their application and the selection committee’s recommendation. To her, the initial intention-setting that it takes to apply for the Residency is the start of an applicant’s journey with Windcall.

Once someone is placed between the two programs, there is a more in-depth, personalized intake process for the selected residents. Windcall staff identify which site participants may be best suited to, based on the available offerings and articulated need.

The team also does some intentional matchmaking for the cohort experiences, aiming to ensure the final cohorts are diverse by movement, identity, geography, and generation.

Most important, says Jayeesha, is the desire to place folks with cohort peers that "*understand the grind, but can't talk shop*" about the specifics of the work. It's important that people feel like they are in good company, but also have the time to truly unplug. After placement & intake, there is a general orientation with the Windcall team, explaining the organization's ethos and values and what to expect, generally, from the program.

### **RETREAT, AS IN NOT WORKING**

Closer to the arrival date, participants attend a second orientation with the site host, intended to answer questions and discuss logistics. Upon arrival at a 3-week Residency, participants have access to several offerings - what Jayeesha calls a "choose-your-own-adventure" approach. While relatively hands-off, Windcall also makes sure that each independent stay is supported by a residency guide, COVID safety guide and protocols, and a stipend.

An important point raised, in discussing their approach to renewal, is that Windcall encourages participants to practice discernment around their rhythms and habits when deciding how to engage with programs. For them, it's important that organizers have the opportunity to distinguish rest and rejuvenation as focal points for their time:

*Sometimes, especially with organizers, they see a blank schedule and want to overfill it. And so we say, 'No, don't overfill it, but here are some options of ways you can be, and things you can do' to really encourage them... distinguishing what is restful, what is rejuvenating, as opposed to continuing that go, go, go mentality.*

*Only they are going to know that a horseback riding experience is going to be healing for them. But if they do horseback riding, kayaking and a hike on the same day, maybe there's something going on there.*

- Jayeesha Dutta, The Windcall Institute

Residencies are offered, annually, in several geographies and natural settings. Participants are grouped based on what they love and where they thrive.

After completing the retreat component of the Residency, participants have access to two opportunities for debrief, and a 6-session coaching or therapy award. In this, the balance between individual choice, group gathering, and intentional aftercare is emblematic of the Windcall Institute’s approach.

*I think the number one thing is just not working.*

*I think people have some serious revelations of how hard that is.*

*I often say my job is the deceptively complex task of getting very busy people to do nothing. We're so used to doing, doing, doing, going, going, going. And so for me, that's the number one, common denominator of what we want to see and what really is transformational.*

- Jayeesha Dutta, The Windcall Institute



West Coast Retreat, 2022  
Staying Power Election Decompression



East Coast Retreat, 2024  
Opening Circle, Healing Hike



East Coast Retreat, 2024  
Meditative Mandalas



West Coast Retreat, 2024  
Fireside Chat

# RESOURCING WELL-BEING

## FUNDING IN PRACTICE

Based on our literature review, the usual philanthropic routes for resourcing well-being activities in a nonprofit organization appear to be:

- **Make a project grant to an organization to spend on behalf of staff**, usually on convenings, gatherings or programming for the organization, **or**
- **Make a project grant to an organization to distribute to staff**, in equal increments, as an individual wellness stipend.

In both instances, project grants are often made in addition to an existing general operating support grant, and fall in the \$5,000-\$10,000 range.

Across sources, the autonomy to choose what wellness means was often emphasized, and the designation of wellness funds as a distinct project grant helped to ensure that monies were actually used for well-being. It seems that success in funding this work often lies in the balance between a designated purpose for grants, and the open-ended use of funds.

## CASE STUDY: WELLNESS TOPPERS AT THE HEWLETT FOUNDATION

*Investing in staff well-being is not just about preventing burnout—it's about ensuring that nonprofit teams are equipped to deliver sustained impact for the people and causes they serve.*

- Jen Wei, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

The Organizational Effectiveness (OE) program is a supplemental grant program under the Hewlett Foundation's Effective Philanthropy Group, providing project grants to grantees who are looking to prioritize an area of organizational strengthening. In 2023, and again in 2024, the program piloted a set of wellness grants that set the stage for our understanding of how to fund well-being at scale.

In 2023, the team conceptualized \$10,000 “topper” grants for wellness, offered to existing foundation grantees in addition to existing OE grants already in the pipeline. The goal of leveraging these grants as “toppers” was to reduce operational burden, as the program team didn’t require any additional paperwork or proposals to make these grants.

Instead, the OE team empowered program officers to initiate discussions about these funds during ongoing conversations about capacity. Often, the toppers were a complete surprise to grantees.

Grantees were then able to choose how and when to use funds within the one year project grant cycle. The program was so successful in 2023 that it was replicated in 2024, and its impact has been far-reaching: OE program staff reported seeing more programs allocate program funds to augment the supplemental pot available, with some going even further by carving out program funds for well-being.

Grantees have also expressed gratitude for receiving these funds as project grants, which required that they use the funds for wellness activities. For program staff, the conversations that they’re able to have with grantees about wellness helped to build trust and facilitated more honest and ongoing conversations about capacity.

*By having the wellness grant, with our program officers, we found [that] it's opened up conversations more candidly, and grantees feel that they can share and trust Hewlett more because we're able to offer resources and money behind it. I think our program officers have learned things about organizations that they otherwise may not have known, and vice versa.*

- Jen Wei, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

## FUNDING WELL-BEING FOR CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS

From a funding perspective, the intersection of well-being and conservation is a small, relatively new one. Few conservation funders report support for capacity-building, let alone well-being.

Yet, for those in the conservation community, the loss of individual species or protected habitats to climate or policy change (and other threats) can be a devastating burden. Conservation leaders and staff may be doxxed online, or feel physically unsafe when doing their jobs. Compounding the issue, the stress of managing a nonprofit in an uncertain funding environment can be untenable.

For those working on climate-related issues, the situation may be only marginally better: Michael Kavate reports for Inside Philanthropy that “anecdotal accounts and funding data show few dollars go toward addressing climate-related mental health concerns,” with the few funders in this space working at the intersection of climate fatigue and mental health, particularly amongst young people. Kavate reports that this is a ‘new field with few big players.’

According to a Candid search cited in the same article, the average award for climate-related mental health concerns is \$19,167 with just 8 grants in the six figures; 87% of grants have been made in the last six years.

With this in mind, there seems to be a lot of room for philanthropy to support the well-being of conservation leaders and make a meaningful difference. To get a better sense of how to do so, with an eye toward the unique challenges and opportunities faced by leaders in conservation, we interviewed several conservation leaders to discern the following key themes at the intersection of conservation, capacity, and well-being:

### **MULTI-FACETED LEADERSHIP**

On the whole, conservation leaders are generous, relational, and deeply concerned with organizational well-being. Success may be measured through industry-specific metrics (like policy outcomes, river-miles restored, and acres conserved) and more intangible ideas like staff morale and quality of relationships, both within their organizations and local communities.

*I love my people, I love them. I love everybody in my organization and value sharing appreciation and respect for all contributors on the team.*

- Rue Mapp, Outdoor Afro

*Often, the leaders I work with have this understanding and connection to the relational, the trust-building of the group, but it's always in tension with what people are expecting and what people value.*

- Marcelo Bonta, J.E.D.I Heart

In 2025, these leaders faced multi-directional pressures from government, funders, and staff, resulting in observable burnout and CEO turnover. One interviewee, a CEO of an environmental organization, highlighted the challenge of generational differences within the workplace as a significant source of operational and organizational pressure.

To address these compounding pressures, **philanthropic efforts to support conservation leaders can and should take into account the tangible and intangible measures of success that they strive for.**

Financial stability, alternate leadership structures, and a healthy culture are all considerations that leaders make before they feel prepared to step away (and stay away) from work.

Wellness activities that require leaders to step away from their organizations should take into account the resources and organizational readiness that is required for work to continue in their absence, and the self-work that leaders may need to do to ready themselves to separate from the relational needs of their teams.

*It's critical to have a financially stable organization with enough experienced executive leadership to steer the organization well and in harmony with the strategic vision of the founder. You have to cultivate a culture that supports distributed leadership, meaning: not an over-psychological dependence on a single person for the team to feel secure.*

*The support of the board and external stakeholders is also key. There's so many relationships that must be cultivated, and strengthened to support a CEO's time away.*

- Rue Mapp, Outdoor Afro

## **A CULTURE OF URGENCY**

Because of the nature of their work, conservation leaders can be the 'hardest nuts to crack' with regard to well-being. There is a mentality of urgency around the idea that the Earth can't wait; the work is too important to stop or pause for rest.

But, as one of our interviewees suggests, integrating the work of well-being can be some of the most important work that conservation professionals can do to serve their greater goals:

*What I try to push in the conversation is the understanding that a just recovery, a just transition, inherently needs to include elements of rest and healing and wellness, because otherwise we're just going to burn ourselves out. Which is extractive, in and of itself.*

- Jayeesha Dutta, The Windcall Institute

To address this, **funders can take steps to address the urgency that conservation leaders feel by providing for the more practical capacity needs that they have, alongside efforts to facilitate well-being and resilience.**

## CASE STUDY: THE RESILIENCE INITIATIVE

Launched in 2017 by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, [the Resilience Initiative](#) is a collaborative capacity-strengthening hub (now funded by several organizations) that does exactly this. As a self-described “capacity strengthening & wellness offering rooted in care for the people and organizations leading social change,” the organization is a great example of a funder-founded initiative that aims to address urgent needs while building long-term resilience.

Today, through workshops, coaching and peer-to-peer support, the Initiative is an independent entity offering the grounding and organizational support that many leaders need to be able to give themselves permission to pursue wellness.

*For leaders and organizations to feel resilient - and have what they need to do their work and achieve their goals - they may want access to well-being support, alongside support for the many other needs they have as social change leaders.*

*There is not one need, but needs that change over time amidst a changing context.*

*We've invested in resource hubs for that reason.*

*Resource hubs - like the Resilience Initiative - are a responsive platform that can serve as critical infrastructure for the social sector. They can listen to leaders and adjust programs and offerings accordingly.*

*- Jamaica Maxwell, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation*

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## EXHAUSTION IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Some of our interview participants named a deep sense of exhaustion experienced by people of color, especially women of color, within conservation and environmental justice organizations:

*Because conservation (with the big C) is so white dominant, I just think that there's exhaustion around the dog-whistling and not prioritizing the environmental landscape for communities of color, who always bear the brunt of both climate change and any kind of pollution. [There's] a question of, 'how do we create space for visibility for what's happening in these communities and simultaneously resource support for their resilience'?*

*- Maya Thornell-Sandifor, Kataly Foundation*

It can also be difficult for people of color to identify that they need to rest, and integrate efforts at rest into their work and lifestyle. For example, interviewees self-reported that they understood well-being from an intellectual standpoint, but have struggled in the past to make the changes needed to actually slow their lives down and pursue well-being.

For some, the challenge is generational. For others, who come from cultural lineages that center community, the focus on individual needs can feel selfish. In those instances, practitioners suggest that the reframe of community care can be very meaningful for folks pursuing well-being:

*If I'm struggling with self-care in the first place, it's because I'm relying on myself.*

*So now, when I become aware and want to do something about it, I'm relying on myself again to take care of myself and figure it out? That self-reliance is exactly the problem.*

*So, being in community (or community-care) becomes the solution - a more reliable path forward.*

*Being in solidarity with and walking alongside people you trust and love makes self-care actually work.*

*That was one of the big learnings: self-care is more successful in community.*

- Marcelo Bonta, J.E.D.I Heart

To support this, **fundors can create opportunities for grantees to pursue well-being within a cohort**, making the practice more accessible and creating spaces where checking in with each other about well-being becomes an act of individual and community care.

*Our grant partners describe these spaces as 'resilience hubs', which are places for folks to be able to go, and gather, and get mutual aid when there is a climate event that impacts their community.*

*How do we create more spaces like that for folks to physically go and get healing, feel safe in community, and cared for, while they're also simultaneously doing the work?*

- Maya Thornell-Sandifor, Kataly Foundation



# CASE STUDY

## Making Refuge at KNOLL FARM



*Knoll Farm is a working organic farm nestled in the Green Mountains of Vermont*



*Better Selves Fellows enjoying the sheep*



*Restoring Force Fellows gathered on a hike*

For over 25 years, the Refuge at [Knoll Farm](#) has been a place of gathering for conservation and social justice professionals from across the country. Located on a working organic farm in Vermont, the Refuge leverages green space, organic gardens, and ceremonial, hand-crafted facilities to encourage inspiration and renewal. The farm is run as a family enterprise by Helen Whybrow and Peter Forbes, alongside their hard-working staff, in order to emphasize the personal and the relational. Their nonprofit organization, New Learning Journey, takes the work beyond the boundaries of the farm to create large-scale, national change models like the land return effort, First Light, in Maine and the Oregon Land Justice Project.

The Refuge offers two signature programs, annually: the Better Selves Fellowship, founded in 2014, and the Restoring Force program, founded in 2025.

### **BUILDING BETTER SELVES**

The Better Selves Fellowship is a weeklong offering of self-directed respite, focused on leaders of color and their allies working for environmental and social change. The cohort-based experience is offered three times per year, during the summer months, and all costs associated with participation are covered. In addition to the gift of time and reflection, fellows are offered:

- Three organic meals per day
- Free lodging in eco-yurts on the property
- A travel stipend to support their easeful arrival
- Access to the entire farm & surrounding valley
- Facilitated time for reflection and/or witnessing.

## RESTORING AND FINDING FORCE

Restoring Force is a fellowship for people who are connected to marine conservation: researchers, fishermen, funders, resource managers, naturalists, culture bearers and anyone else who finds their work in the care and contemplation of water. With an eye towards the changing and deteriorating reality of bodies of water and ocean life, the retreat spends lot of time on the idea of grief and how to hold it:

*Its focus is really on holding grief, and what creates grief, and not healing it.*

*We don't have that capacity, but we do have the capacity to help people see that every time our nation has been in an era of destruction, we have also simultaneously been in an era of repair. So, [helping fellows to] be able to hold the grief alongside the rebirth.*

- Peter Forbes, New Learning Journey

During their four day stay at the farm, participants have access to several healing modalities:

- Grief practices
- Massage
- Meditation
- Silence
- Targeted conversation on the difference between solidarity and charity

## THE DIFFERENCE IN ADDRESSING DIFFERENCE

In both fellowships, what is particular to Knoll Farm's approach is that way that its Refuge programming holds difference and similarity in the convening of people towards change:

*You know, the very first gatherings we had were deeply contentious conversations between logging truck drivers and wilderness advocates, about what it means to have a life and to make a life worth living.*

*It's always been about difference, as opposed to commonalities, because the exploring of commonalities does not reduce stress. It merely puts a band aid on the problem, whereas the exploring of difference actually heals. And that's what making refuge is about: it's the healing of relationships, and the healing of relationships between people leads to the healing of relationships on the land.*

- Peter Forbes, New Learning Journey

For Peter, who founded the program and leads both fellowships, renewal is a practice rather than an outcome. It looks different to different people.

*For a white space in a white state, making refuge is the practice of learning how to be in service and care for others. And when I say others, I mean other classes, other races, other sexual identities, other political persuasions, all of that. How do we be in service to the other?*

*And, in a rural context, it's the making modern and making visible the rural story of helping one another, and how that has really been destroyed by consumerism and political division. To practice it today, it has to be made more explicit and more visible, defined by identity and also location.*

- Peter Forbes, New Learning Journey

Across identities, the team at Knoll Farm works to engage people towards difference in order to understand what they share, and how to be in community with one another.



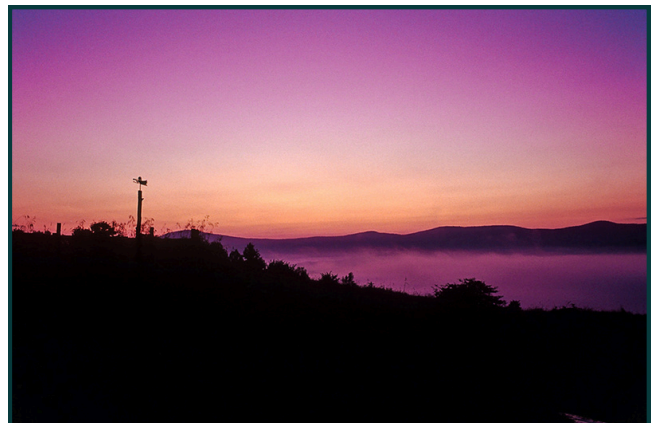
*Fellows gather many nights around the fire*



*"Working with one's hands is the core act of self-actualization, which is the foundation of all social change." Peter Forbes.*



*Planting a tree together creates belonging*



*The embrace of nature as the primary teacher*

# LOOKING AHEAD

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

Beyond our immediate work, this section elaborates on the implications of our findings for the philanthropic sector. In particular, it offers a long view of the opportunities and trends surfaced in this scan that might shape future approaches to funding well-being and capacity building.

### GROWING MOMENTUM FOR WELL-BEING WORK

On the funder side, the momentum behind these offerings is growing.

*There has been a groundswell of more foundations taking it on, and I think that has been influential to us being able to do it.*

- Jen Wei, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

*I haven't taken an academic or systematic approach, but it seems that attention to and investment in well-being is growing amongst funders and changemakers. A decade ago, well-being sometimes felt more like a niche thing, that people were thinking about here and there.*

*But now [especially within the Funders + Wellbeing Learning Group], funders are building, embedding, and mainstreaming well-being into their strategies, as are the changemakers we work alongside.*

- Laura Bacon, Funders + Wellbeing Learning Group

Similarly, the steps that grantmakers are taking to institutionalize well-being are making it easier for others to fund this work.

*We did add [well-being] to our list of OE project types that you can do, and as a code in our grants management system. In the future, if there are grants that come in for wellness or well-being, we can easily code it as such and make sure it happens. And we have seen more of those happen since then.*

- Jen Wei, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

## SHIFTING UNDERSTANDING OF WHERE CHANGE AND IMPACT HAPPEN

Alongside a shifting understanding of how capacity can be addressed by funders, there is an observable shift in the locus for change and investment. There has long been an understanding that the individual leader is critical to the success of an organization, but there seems to be a demonstrable shift in how funders are understanding the correlation between the everyday experience of a nonprofit leader, and their ability to meet outcomes.

*If you have a bad manager or a stressed out leader, that can affect and stress out the whole organization. And so perhaps supporting leaders' well-being responds, in part, to the question: 'Where are you going to get the most value?' Not in a transactional or monetary sense, but rather that leaders' well-being matters and their well-being influences many other people's well-being, as well.*

- Laura Bacon, Funders + Wellbeing Learning Group

In turn, leaders are finding new opportunities to relate to one another and trust in one another, and count these networks of peer support as critical to their ability to lead.

*Most cohorts and consortiums gather around a shared cause or thesis. But even then, you're not always invited to bring your full self - or your specific needs - to the moment.*

*What feels different here is that I have people I can truly turn to. And that matters.*

*You can't lead alone, and you can't stay in your echo chamber.*

- Rue Mapp, Outdoor Afro

There is also a sincere interest, on the part of funders, in supporting leaders from a place of humanity and care, rather than productivity. Support without conditions (rather than an assumption of new or extended outcomes) is an ethos reflected in the ideas of well-being funding, long-term general operating support, and trust-based philanthropy, which are all experiencing continued growth and uptake in the sector.

*And also, there's this question about "to what end?" I think there's this dangerous [assumption] that, 'we want to be well, so that we can be able to carry out our work and meet our mission.' Yes, people can hopefully then do their jobs in a more healthy state, but that isn't, for me, the end all be all.*

*It's truly that, as an individual, I want you to be well beyond just the work that you do, your labor. That's also really important. I hope folks can also recognize and name that in all of this work.*

- Kathleen Badejo, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

## **A NEED FOR INVESTMENT IN, AND LISTENING TO, LONG-TERM PRACTITIONERS OF WELL-BEING**

There is a need to meaningfully invest in infrastructure for and by well-being practitioners, especially those who have done deep work in this field long before philanthropy was invested.

*Cara Page and Erica Woodland are the advisors for that [infrastructure] work... I would consider them elders in the healing justice space. They're leading that work, which is about stewarding some collaboration around infrastructure for folks who are healing justice practitioners, [in order] to create some shared agreement around the practice.*

*Because, like everything, there's a concern that healing justice will become just another extractive and capitalized trend.*

*That healing justice will lose its DNA, which is black feminist, indigenous, and queer in its origin.*

*- Maya Thornell-Sandifor, Kataly Foundation*

These are the elders and keepers of best practice and lineages of care. They are also, often, small organizations that do enduring work and need investment.

*We're not trying to create an institution here. We're trying to show what a small group of people can do for a much bigger group of people. It just takes a toll; how do we help each other - who are doing that work - to do our own healing?*

*- Peter Forbes, New Learning Journey*



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE WELL?

As a closing reflection, here is a short selection of responses from interviewees to the prompt: **What do you think it means to be 'well'?** We hope that conservation leaders and funders will reflect on the question, its impetus, and how they might help others on the road to well-being.

**Kathleen Badejo, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation:**

*To be well is to feel and think you are whole, or at least that you are in pursuit of wholeness. Perhaps you've not completely reached wholeness, but that emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and physically, you are being cared for and tended to, and being nourished.*

**Marcelo Bonta, J.E.D.I Heart:**

*People feeling they can bring the wholeness of who they are, and they have the wherewithal and the health to do it in a way that's kind hearted. It's empathetic, it's loving, it's patient. Part of it is also that focus and intention, and the constant building of skills, awareness, and behaviors to continue moving yourself and others forward in a healthy way – to take care of ourselves, and each other, just like we're trying to take care of the planet and the earth.*

**Jayeasha Dutta, The Windcall Institute:**

*I remember my coach from my [time at] Windcall. I remember, once, she said to me "People talk about pouring from an empty cup. Yes, for sure. But I want you to think about not just an empty cup. What would it be like for you to pour from your saucer?"*

*And I was like, "There's a saucer? What are you talking about?"*

*So I feel like being well means you have a saucer. Maybe there's not always stuff in it, but you know that it exists. That you are fully filled up, so that what you provide and give to others isn't depleting from you.*

**Peter Forbes, New Learning Journey:**

*To be in relationship, and relationship with the other. However you stretch yourself to do that. That's the only answer.*

**Jamaica Maxwell, The David and Lucille Packard Foundation:**

*To have purpose, to have joy in your life, to have space for rest, to have space for creativity, to be safe, to be healthy. That's it.*

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- **Jayeesha Dutta**, Program Director at the The Windcall Institute
- **Peter Forbes**, Founder and Executive Director of New Learning Journey / Knoll Farm
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- **Danielle Levoit**, Program Officer at the MOSAIC Environmental Fund
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- **Emily Sidla**, Climate Program Manager at The Barr Foundation



# APPENDIX A: ARTICLES AND DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Center for Effective Philanthropy's [2025 State of Nonprofits Report](#)

## Naming Norms

### Wellness vs. wellbeing

1. Schaffner, B. F., Hershewe, T., Kava, Z., & Strell, J. (2025). [Do conservatives really have better mental well-being than liberals?](#) PLOS ONE, 20(4), e0321573
2. TakeCare. (n.d.). [Wellness vs. well-being: What's the difference?](#) TakeCare.
3. World Health Organization. (2022). [Geneva Charter for Well-being.](#)

### Common Measures

1. Allen, E. (2021). [How a pandemic and wellbeing practices honed my leadership skills.](#) Skoll Foundation
2. Bailey, K. M. (2024). [Why sabbaticals are key for healthy organizations: A personal reflection.](#) JusticeOutside
3. Bhojwani, S. (2024). [Women leaders of color are exhausted. Philanthropy needs to step up.](#) The Chronicle of Philanthropy
4. Cookman, A., & Whyte, G.K.Y. (2020). [Integrating individual and organizational well-being.](#) Stanford Social Innovation Review
5. National Council of Nonprofits. (2025). [Supporting nonprofit sector health through programming for staff wellbeing.](#) National Council of Nonprofits.
6. Stahl, R. (Host). (2024). [How Funders Can Support Nonprofit Workers in the Age of Burnout, Part 3 - with Desiree Flores, General Service Foundation.](#) In Fund the People: A Podcast with Rusty Stahl. Fund the People.

## Promising Practices

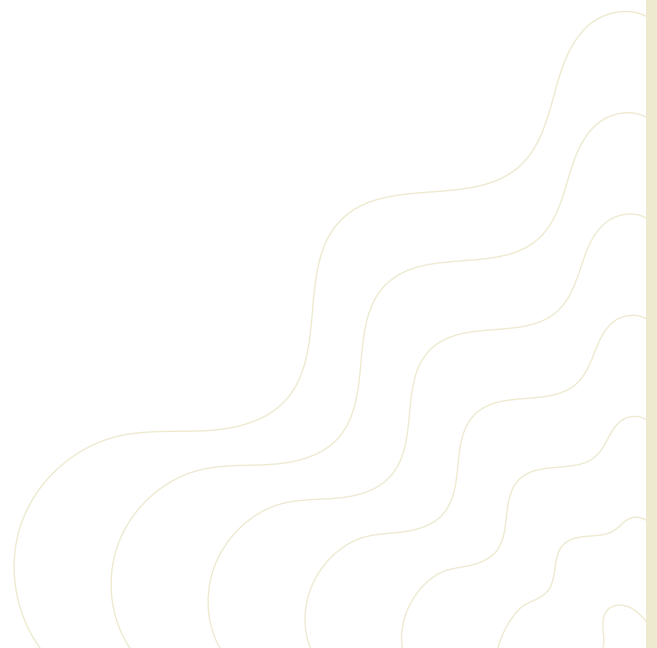
### New Directions & Popular Methods

1. Allison, J. (2025, September 10). [Nonprofits need rested leaders: Reframing rest as a leadership practice, not a luxury.](#) Walter & Elise Haas Fund
2. Badejo, K., & Wei, J. (2024). [Empowering nonprofits to thrive: Lessons learned from our wellness grants.](#) The Wellbeing Project
3. Durvasula, S. (2025). [Showing care in a time of crisis: Lessons from the frontlines.](#) Rachel's Network
4. Kelly, E. L., Berkman, L. F., Kubzansky, L. D., & Lovejoy, M. (2021). [7 strategies to improve your employees' health and well-being.](#) Harvard Business Review.
5. Lovejoy, M., Kelly, E. L., Kubzansky, L. D., & Berkman, L. F. (2021). [Work redesign for the 21st century: Promising strategies for enhancing worker well-being.](#) American Journal of Public Health, 111(10), 1787-1795

6. Severns Guntzel, J., & Murphy Johnson, N. F. (2020). [Wellbeing inspires welldoing: How changemakers' inner wellbeing influences their work](#) [Research report]. The Wellbeing Project.
7. Stahl, R. (Host). (2025). [Wellbeing as Strategy: Reimagining Philanthropic Practice - with Laura Bacon, Funders and Wellbeing Group](#). In Fund the People: A Podcast with Rusty Stahl. Fund the People.
8. Stahl, R. (Host). (2023). [Doubling-Down on Wellness in Capacity-Building - with Janet Nami McIntyre and Paula Morris, The Resilience Initiative](#). In Fund the People: A Podcast with Rusty Stahl. Fund the People.

### **Key Stakeholders**

1. Cama, T., & Brugger, K. (2024). [Who funds conservative green groups?](#) E&E News by Politico
2. Kavate, M. (2025). [Climate mental health issues are on the rise. But funding? Still limited.](#) Inside Philanthropy
3. Le, V. (2022). [We must prioritize nonprofit leaders' rest and healing — And here are some cool funders doing that.](#) Nonprofit AF
4. Mosaic Momentum (2025). [Mapping the moment: Challenges and opportunities for building movement power — Insights from Mosaic's 2025 open cycle](#) (Report). Mosaic Momentum
5. Skoll Foundation. (2021). [Nature, wellbeing, and social change: A conversation with Carlos Souza and Michael Jenkins.](#) Skoll Foundation



# APPENDIX B: WELLNESS RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Sabbatical Programs

- [Ile Kimoyo \(formerly the BIPOC ED Coalition\)](#)
- [Durfee Foundation](#)
- [O2 Sabbatical Award](#)
- [Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation](#)
- [The Cal Wellness “Be Well, Lead Well” Sabbatical Program](#)
- [The Colorado Health Foundation](#)
- [Fieldstone Leadership Network’s Clare Rose Sabbatical Program](#)
- [Rasmuson Foundation](#)

## Grants, Micro-grants and Stipends for Individual Well-being

- [The Loveland Foundation Therapy Fund](#)
- [Point of Pride's Thrive Fund](#)
- [Asian Mental Health Collective's Lotus Therapy Fund](#)
- [National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Mental Health Fund](#)
- [Return to the Heart Traditional Helpers & Healers Micro Grant Fund](#)
- [Real Farmer Care’s \\$100 Self-Care Award](#)

## Rest-oriented Fellowships

- [Better Selves Fellowship at Knoll Farm](#)
- [The Windcall Institute Residency](#)
- [Tandem Sanctuary Fellowship](#)
- [River of Nourishment Rafting Retreat](#)

## Resources and Learnings for Conservation Leaders

- [Unthinkable Resource Hub](#)
- [Green 2.0’s Integrating Wellness in the Environmental Sector](#)
- [The University of Washington’s 2025 Doug Walker Lecture: The global Movement for Mental and Physical health](#)

## Resources and Learnings for Capacity Builders

- [Longitudinal evaluation of the Ford Foundation’s BUILD Program](#)
- [Nonprofit GPS, a national collaborative](#)

Please note: These resources are shared for informational purposes only, and do not represent an endorsement or approval by the Conservation Capacity Project and/or the report’s author.