EFN’s mission and values

The Environmental Funders Network’s mission is to grow and nurture ambitious and effective environmental philanthropy that unlocks and increases the levels of financial and non-financial giving to environmental causes.

EFN aspires to uphold its values in all that it does: inclusiveness, efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, accountability, and social and environmental responsibility.

Our vision for 2040

Our planet and all who share it are thriving and in balance. As individuals, communities and nations, we have worked together not only to survive and cope with the environmental damage and losses we wrought in previous generations, but to use that challenge to transform our ways of being for the benefit of all. A commitment to justice, equity, health, (bio)diversity, creativity and life underpin our economic, social and governance systems. Funders have evolved to help usher in this era as quickly and justly as possible through their strategic, catalytic, equitable and collaborative grantmaking, convening, investing and advocacy.

Background

EFN was established in 2003 to better connect UK-based environmental funders, on the principle that a more informed, connected funding sector with a better sense of the context of its work would be more effective in its giving and ultimately in accomplishing environmental goals.

At the first EFN lunch, the founders gathered 12 people around the table, representing six trusts – roughly the extent of their contacts in the sector at the time. Last year, staff and trustees from 155 different trusts and foundations participated in the network’s events, along with over 50 high-level individual donors to environmental causes. The network continues to grow apace, with several new funders joining EFN a month.

EFN is known as the go-to place and first port-of-call for environmental philanthropists in the UK. Ours is a supportive network where funders with a variety of ideas and approaches to tackling the challenges of our time can connect and find strength.
Members have provided feedback on the network that we think highlights our success in manifesting our values of inclusiveness, efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, accountability, and social and environmental responsibility – such as:

‘EFN remains an essential resource to our giving process.’

‘I – we – have benefitted so much from EFN’s amazing work, and it’s great to see all your plans going forwards. You play such a critical role in bringing everyone together, both personally and organisationally. I have appreciated it so much.’

‘The EFN retreat was the best event I have ever attended. You guys create miracles.’

‘The best place to start on the journey funding environmentally motivated causes is a cup of tea with EFN staff. Inspiring, knowledgeable, challenging and an absolute font of information!’

‘I have been busy speaking & meeting with most of the people you suggested, which has been incredibly helpful, thank you. We are now working quite closely with [the foundation you suggested we connect with] and are planning to align our giving where our strategies overlap – so this is a really significant step forwards for our strategy, thank you again for connecting us.’

‘Without a doubt EFN has been the vital conduit for us branching out into sectors we would not have funded otherwise … I am sure that EFN has directly been the catalyst for an uplift in charitable giving to environmental causes, and better environmental philanthropy.’

**Context for 2021**

The events of 2020 have significantly affected the operating context for EFN’s work, and the way our work can be conducted. Our 2021 strategy has been developed with the following significant changes in mind:

**COVID-19 and related economic changes**

- A large and growing funding gap for environmental organisations
- Looming recession and joblessness and the need for a huge number of new green jobs
- Impact of the economic upheaval on foundations’ and individual donors’ investments
- Rising numbers of billionaires who profited from the lockdown
- The urgent need for economic recovery that is both fair and green
- A reawakening of the value of nature/green and blue space as a result of lockdown, and, to a degree, of the connections between environmental and human health
- The deflation of the global fossil fuel industry: by market capitalisation, the biggest players in energy are not hydrocarbon but renewable energy companies
UK and international policy developments

- The jeopardy and opportunities posed for environmental protections by all the new trade deals being developed between the UK and other countries
- Changing regulatory frameworks associated with our departure from the EU
- Postponement from 2020 to 2021 of several key UN conferences relating to the environment (COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, COP26 of the UNFCCC, UN Ocean Conference)

Social change and movements

- The growth of the Black Lives Matter movement and an increased societal focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and justice
- Increasing recognition of the need to fund at the intersections of social and environmental issues
- Increasing numbers of foundations and individuals wanting to support environmental causes
- Increasing public concern about environmental issues, stemming at least in part from disasters like the fires in the Amazon, Australia and the US West Coast, as well as flooding in the UK; recent research shows that the vast majority of Brits believe that climate change is real and humans are causing it
- High profile interventions like Sir David Attenborough’s film A Life on Our Planet, the Earthshot Prize, etc.

In addition, we are, of course, taking account of the effects of the pandemic on EFN’s operations – our continuing inability to convene funders in person, and our dependence on online meeting technology. This has upsides (the barriers to attending our events are lower, and we are seeing high levels of engagement) as well as downsides that we need to adapt to, such as the increased challenge of fostering relationships between funders.

Finally, 2021 will now be the ‘policy superyear’ we were all expecting in 2020, and our work priorities will take account of that.

EFN’s strategic priorities, objectives and activities

EFN occupies a unique niche within the environment sector; we are the only UK organisation convening and networking environmental funders, and consequently we have a bird’s-eye view of the sector overall. As one fundraiser put it:

‘EFN are uniquely placed to deliver this kind of support. You are representative of funders and insightful about their thinking, but you are not funders. This enables us fundraisers to feel confident in speaking honestly and openly, and without feeling in competition with each other.’

Given this perspective we hold, and our ambitious vision and mission going forward, our three areas of focus are:

GOAL ONE: More effective environmental philanthropy

GOAL TWO: Increased environmental philanthropy

GOAL THREE: A more effective environment sector
GOAL ONE

More effective environmental philanthropy

Our research indicates remarkably low levels of funding for environmental causes from UK-based charitable trusts and foundations, with total amounts hovering between £105-115 million per year for the ten years for which we have been collecting data (up to 2016). Given such low levels of funding, we feel that every pound must be spent as effectively as possible.

We will foster more effective environmental philanthropy by:

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<th>Informed funders - exposing them to issues, approaches and grantees to increase their effectiveness.</th>
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<td>This means:</td>
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<td>• Organising convening opportunities in person, where possible, and digitally for funders to learn about issues and approaches on a periodic and ad hoc basis that can inform their strategies and grantmaking.</td>
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<td>• Introducing funders to potential organisations and initiatives they could fund and support, both through convencings and facilitating bilateral introductions.</td>
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<td>• Sharing research conducted by ourselves (see below) and others on key issues, trends and best practice in the sector through blogs, publications and guides.</td>
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<td>• Sharing intelligence with funders regarding the impact of COVID-19 and the recession on the sector.</td>
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<td>• Organising dedicated convenings to illustrate the connections between racial and other injustices and environmental issues, and to foster open dialogue around the direction environmental philanthropy needs to take to dismantle injustice, including sharing best practice.</td>
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<th>Supporting and fostering collaboration where it can improve effectiveness.</th>
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<td>This means:</td>
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<td>• Fostering stronger relationships between funders through regular convening of in-person events, where possible, and online gatherings, and through online forums such as Teams.</td>
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<td>• Maintaining an active enough network, through the above approaches, that philanthropists, trusts and foundations feel empowered to step forward and take on leadership responsibilities - for example, around convening or collaborating on particular issues.</td>
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<td>• Providing examples of the value of collaboration and best practice for effective collaboration.</td>
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<td>• Engaging and promoting collaboration with different parts of the philanthropic community to encourage intersectoral approaches to key environmental challenges.</td>
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<th>Increasing collective understanding, through our research, of the environmental grantmaking landscape and the sector as a whole.</th>
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<td>This means:</td>
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<td>• Undertaking research that contributes to a stronger understanding of how the environmental grants market functions, and sharing this in a transparent and accessible way, focusing in particular on 1) revealing trends and patterns in environmental giving and highlighting gaps (e.g. through the next edition of <em>Where the Green Grants Went</em>), and 2) revealing resource acquisition and allocation within the environmental sector and highlighting gaps, including those related to the pandemic (e.g. through the next edition of <em>What the Green Groups Said</em>).</td>
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<td>• Through the research described above and our convenings, fostering a stronger understanding of how the environmental movement functions, in terms of its priorities, strategies, values and skills.</td>
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GOAL TWO

Increased environmental philanthropy

Given the low levels of funding for environmental causes, we work hard to attract and cultivate new donors, aiming to increase total giving levels to environmental causes from £105 million per year (in 2016, the latest year for which we have data) to £1 billion per year by 2025. (We set this target according to the scale of need; we think it is a necessary level of ambition and will strive hard to get the sector there in partnership with a range of organisations.) We focus our work on ‘growing the pie’ on trusts, foundations and wealthy individuals that do not currently support environmental causes at high levels but, we think, could, because of their overall means and/or because of the overlap between environmental issues and their mission.

We will increase environmental philanthropy by:

- Promoting the bold public target for our Expanding Environmental Philanthropy programme across different forms of media, to give a clear signal about the need for a step-change in environmental philanthropy, given the critical and urgent situation we are in, and the imperatives revealed by the pandemic (links between human health and environment; value of green and blue space; opportunity to build back better).
- Focusing our efforts much more carefully on the following key audiences: major trusts and foundations, Rich List families, ‘Next Generation’ wealth holders, family offices, philanthropy advisers.
- Being much more rigorous in following up with our prospects to move them along the continuum of giving, including developing a mentoring/buddying system to help new donors develop their strategies.
- Developing a programme of nature-based trips and visits for prospects (when such in-person events are possible), and signposting to other organisations offering these experiences where appropriate.
- Continuing our salon series of events for prospects, in person when possible but otherwise online, for which we will partner with other organisations and connect with non-environmental networks (e.g. arts, health).
- Continuing to work with environmental charities to identify and provide the support they need to grow major gifts and grants.
- Producing publications, events and podcasts about environmental giving and key issue areas, as resources for new donors and philanthropy and wealth advisors.
- Continuing to support place-based philanthropy where appropriate, particularly focusing on growing environmental funding in Scotland and for the UK Overseas Territories.
- Continuing to partner with and support intermediaries, such as philanthropy and wealth advisers; other philanthropy networks; and other organisations working to increase levels of funding for environmental causes.
GOAL THREE

A more effective environment sector

This, our third and most recent strand of work, began with two research studies surveying the chief executives of UK environmental organisations. Those studies – *Passionate Collaboration?* and *What the Green Groups Said* – took the pulse of the UK’s environment sector while painting a picture of its resources. The findings produced new insights into the environment sector, such as its needs around collaboration and communications.

**We will champion the work of the environment sector, supporting it to meet the challenges and opportunities it faces more effectively, by:**

- Providing digital and, where possible and beneficial, face-to-face programming for both funders and environmental organisations based on the sector’s needs, especially in light of disruptions such as COVID-19 and the associated recession.
- Continuing to provide programming on improving framing and communicating environmental issues, or to partner with initiatives that do, such as through the Reset Narratives Community.
- Continuing to manage the Green Fundraisers Forum to foster collaboration and mutual support among environmental organisations.
- Continuing to coordinate the Rapid Response Fund, to facilitate access to funds that can be quickly mobilised and thereby enable the sector to respond to unexpected crises and opportunities.
- Highlighting organisations leading the way on diversity, equity and inclusion in the sector and promoting best practice.
Organisational foundations for impact

In order to deliver this strategy successfully, EFN must ensure that it manages its own internal operational processes effectively. Therefore, in the coming year we will prioritise:

- Ensuring the financial health of the organisation and our ability to respond flexibly to changing needs (including raising at least one-third of our income from membership contributions, and maintaining our funding relationships with the following organisations: Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, John Ellerman Foundation, Arcadia, Mark Leonard Trust, William Grant Foundation, Waterloo Foundation, Schroder Foundation and Impatience).

- Working to ensure that EFN’s governance, staff, organisational and network culture is as inclusive as possible to a broad diversity of people.

- Working to ensure EFN’s staff have the skills and support necessary to accomplish our goals.

- Ensuring we have an effective governance structure, and a dynamic and representative Trustee board with the necessary skills and experience to achieve this.

- Ensuring full statutory compliance, with the Charity Commission and OSCR, tax authorities and others, including through the preparation and timely submission of an annual report.

Monitoring our impact

Ultimately, our goal is to be completely transparent and accountable in the delivery of this strategy. As an organisation we are committed to tracking quantitative data relating to our membership numbers and the number of events, publications, etc. that we deliver and how many people connect with these, as well as tracking the level of funding for environmental causes through our Where the Green Grants Went series. However, alongside the numbers, we are keen to share the difference we are making through written feedback from our members and case studies that outline in more detail the work that we are doing.

Growing the environmental funding pot from £105 million in 2016 to £1 billion by 2025 is necessarily ambitious given the extent of the environmental challenges that exist right now. We look forward to working with our partners towards our vision of a sustainable and thriving planet in 2040, where, through networks like EFN, individuals, communities and nations can come together to find the solutions we so urgently need.

1 January 2021