MOMENTUM CONSERVATION

How to Stop Learning in a Vacuum and "Transition to Doing Stuff"

MAINE Appalachian Trail LAND TRUST

Organization: Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust

Challenge: Helping New Mainers feel welcome in the outdoor recreation of Maine

Solution: #WeOutside Partnership



Case Study 2025, Larissa Crockett; all photos courtesy of Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust

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Organization at a glance

Established 2002

1 staff, 15 board

Portland, ME













Their Story:

In 2021 Simon Rucker, executive director of the Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust, and board secretary Louise Jensen were in a Zoom meeting learning about the history of racism in US National Parks. The workshop was one of a number of learning opportunities Simon and Louise had attended and they looked at each other and asked, "Are we going to do this [learning about inequity] forever? When does it transition to doing stuff"? They decided to find some way to take what they were learning and to put it in action. An upcoming wilderness first aid class seemed like a great chance to address inequities in the outdoor recreation and conservation space. They reached out to the leaders of Outdoor Afro and offered 5 free spots for Outdoor Afro members. This led to a hiking partnership and ultimately to Moon Machar joining a hike and the conversation about how to help deepen connections between historically marginalized communities of color and the outdoor recreational spaces of Maine. The result was supporting the #WEOUTSIDE program led by the Maine Association for New Americans, MANA.

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Targeted Action, Strong Program:

Partnering successfully with MANA didn't happen by accident. The members of the MATLT board had been learning about the history of racism on public land, were committed to supporting equity, and understood that their role was to be support for the team at MANA. MATLT sees their support as empowering MANA to do the work MANA is expert in - "promot[ing] social & personal empowerment of immigrants and address[ing] racial equity and health disparities in Maine".

The #WEOUTSIDE program started because MANA had purposefully put itself in the position to take advantage of things like the Outdoor Equity Fund and, with a grant secured by Moon Machar, could begin offering programming to kids living at the Portland Expo in 2023.

Challenges

Gear for the Outdoors - MATLT has hosted community hikes for 10 years and learned through these that the lack of outdoor gear was often a barrier to participation. One of the ways MATLT supports #WEOUTSIDE is by helping to source the gear kids need to be outside throughout the Maine seasons. Much of the gear stays with participants so there is a constant need of replenished supplies. Grants from Patagonia and individual donors help but this can lead to too much of one type of gear, like hats, and too little of others, like snow shoes or boots.

Learnings for Other Land Trusts

Actions Tied to Vision:

Program decisions need to tie to the organization's vision and be well planned. This starts at the board level and requires purposeful board cultivation to build a mindset of service through action.

Find Value Added:

For hesitant board members show how partnerships can open new opportunities for publicity, grants, and further partnerships. Sustaining a successful program requires continuous commitment and should be treated as just as important as a major land acquisition.

Be a truly good partner:

MANA is the expert in meeting the needs of the participants in the #WEOUTSIDE program. MATLT recognizes their role as support not leadership. It is important to listen to what the people you are supporting tell you they want and need.

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