MOMENTUM CONSERVATION

Three Rivers Land Trust

How to "Be Prepared to Meet People Where They Are"

Organization:
Three Rivers Land Trust

Challenge:
Creating connection to nature for school aged children and adults with intellectual disabilities

Solution:
Flexible Programming



Case Study 2025, Larissa Crockett; all photos courtesy of Three Rivers Land Trust

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Organization at a glance

Established 2000

2 staff, 11 board

York County, ME









Their Story:

The Three Rivers Land Trust was excited by their vision of the Sanford Community Forest as a place for both education and recreation. The ~ 550 acre parcel is close to a school and has a parking lot large enough to accommodate busses. They soon realized, however, that the reality of school budgets and schedules meant that programing at the schools was a far better way to "educate the next generation of land stewards and conservationists" according to Executive Director Ruth Gutman.

The property did provide an opportunity to partner with another community group, Great Bay Services. After 3RLT's success in creating an accessible trail at Goat Hill in Acton, they were committed to meeting their equity goals in more ways. They decided to look at their volunteers and saw their native plants project, funded by a Project Canopy grant, as a way to be more inclusive in volunteer opportunities. Ms. Gutman shared that, "When you start looking at access and equity it becomes easier to see all the ways it is absent." The partnership with Great Bay means that more people are able to spend time in nature with their hands in the dirt.

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"We can go to them"

The first Sanford Schools event was a great day of 5th grade students at the Sanford Community Forest. When the teacher champion for the program transferred to a new school, the partnership seemed lost and the hope of connecting Sanford students to conservation felt uncertain. 3RLT regrouped and found a new way to support student programing that wouldn't drain resources from the school with field trip expenses and time. They found a new teacher champion and support nature based science classes at the school.

Equity = More Diverse Volunteer List

3RLT recognized that equity work means diverse voices and when they looked across the community they found a partner for volunteers in Great Bay Services, a nonprofit that serves adults with intellectual disabilities. Volunteer days with GBS always include other community and board member volunteers on site and can also require a pre-event team of volunteers to prep the areas the full group will work on. The results have been rewarding for all the volunteers and for the property that now hosts fruiting trees and diverse native plants.

Challenges

Finding Champions -
Finding a strong ally in the schools creates an opportunity for successful partnership. It is equally important to identify board members and volunteers who are willing to advocate for the program and dedicate the hours needed to become well trained and school ready.

A Deep Bench of Volunteers -
It can be challenging to find enough volunteers to do all the work that needs to be done on land trust properties. By broadening their minds about who can be a great volunteer, 3RLT expanded their volunteer list and created connection between their work and members of their community who may not have felt part of the land trust before.

Learnings for Other Land Trusts

Programs Don't Have to be on Land Trust Properties:

Field trips are time consuming and costly. Programming at your local school is more likely to happen and to reach a broader group of kids.

Make Connections with Teachers:

Teachers are busy and have tight daily schedules. Be respectful of these challenges and seek out teachers who are enthusiastic about nature-based learning.

Create a Deep Bench of Volunteers:

Be broad in your mindset about who is a good fit for volunteering on a project. By working with Great Bay Services, 3RLT not only met the volunteer labor match they needed for a grant, they connected with a new population of people in their community that are eager to support their work.

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