Racism in the time of a pandemic: Living with twin public health crises

A message from our Executive Director

For the past 8 months, the world has been living in varying states of a global pandemic and public health emergency. The stress test brought about by COVID19 has illustrated in heartbreaking scale, the inadequacy of our public health infrastructure, our economy’s vulnerabilities, and the jarring injustice of our constructed social order. Along with the ever-present threat to individuals and communities that the coronavirus has unleashed, eyes are being opened to the centuries-long violence against the lives of Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) individuals and communities in the US. Particularly regarding the violent and unrelenting assault on Black lives, people and organizations across the country seem to finally be acknowledging the cruel reality. Dozens of cities and states have joined their voices in declaring the toxic system of racism a public health crisis.

Continue reading ...

2020 Grantmaking

Since the start of 2020, the Sewall Foundation has made over $9M in grant payments to 244 organizations. Of that total, we were able to provide $980K in response to the pandemic this spring through our Rapid Response Fund grants along with foundation initiated grants to organizations addressing immediate needs as they emerged throughout our State.

Our board of directors approved additional funding be made available for grants this fall in response to the pandemic and racial disparities.

Rapid Response Fund grants: This week, we are launching another round of Rapid Response Fund grants. These grants support emergency and/or time-sensitive needs of organizations and communities whose work aligns with Sewall’s mission: to support work in Maine to improve the well-being of people, animals and the environment while fostering relationships that strive for social equity and community resilience. $190,000 in additional funding is available and grants will be made on a rolling basis until all funds are spent.

Healthy People Healthy Places (HPHP) Twin Pandemics grants: Responding to COVID-19 and systemic racism not only as crises but also opportunities, groups throughout the state have been exploring new approaches, considering new possibilities, and forming new partnerships to carry out their work in new ways. The purpose of the Twin Pandemics Grants is to support further development of those efforts, building on lessons learned to position Maine communities, systems, and sectors to adapt in ways that foster equity, well-being, and resilience. These grants will support this transitional (medium-term) or transformational (longer-term) work. $2.6M in funding will be available and grants will be made on a
Lewiston–Auburn Co-Design Taking Shape!

Sewall staff are working with nonprofits and community partners across Healthy People Healthy Places focus areas to refine and redesign our work. This summer 11 members of the Lewiston-Auburn community worked with Sewall staff and consultants in a process to co-design Sewall's Healthy People Healthy Places program in L-A. Through five working sessions, the co-design team began giving shape to a vision for HPHP-LA, to be implemented beginning in January 2021.

Tamarack Institute, a community engagement consulting group based in Canada, developed and facilitated the co-design process. The team began by sharing their many divergent perspectives, and then identified a common aspiration. That aspiration was the focus of a fruitful brainstorming session of ideas about a path forward for HPHP-LA. Throughout the co-design process, team members were encouraged to share the conversations with their networks in the community and the feedback they shared has been folded into the co-design. A continuous feedback loop will be a key ingredient in the work of HPHP-LA.

In addition to grants and capacity building for non-profit partners, HPHP-LA will offer opportunities for impact investments and other resources to deepen equity, strengthen collaboration, and support ongoing efforts to achieve sustainable growth for L-A's civic systems and business sectors. HPHP-LA will be designed to center community voice, with special attention to youth leaders building the future together.

Sewall welcomes Jonah Fertig-Burd to the staff

We are pleased to welcome Jonah Fertig-Burd to the staff team, who started in his new role at Sewall this week. As a Community Partner, Jonah will provide leadership for EBSF’s evolving work in food systems and nature-based education. Over the past 18 years, Jonah has built deep, collaborative relationships; developed new nonprofits, cooperative businesses, and collaboratives; worked in restaurants, food pantries, and farms; advocated for food and farm policies; and helped to grow racial equity in our food system. He has been a critical thought partner, facilitator, collaborator, consultant, and mentor to people in Lewiston-Auburn, Portland, Washington and Oxford counties, and across the state.

We are delighted to have Jonah on board and look forward to working together to build a just, humane, and sustainable food system and expand equitable access to outdoor learning.
As COVID was changing the way we all work and live, the Sewall Foundation was in the midst of launching a new nonprofit capacity building program in partnership with Catchafire. Catchafire strengthens the social good sector by matching professionals who want to donate their time with nonprofits who need their skills via an online platform – rather like a social networking platform for nonprofit capacity building. Catchafire can be used for over 160 different projects on topics including fundraising, marketing, technology, finance & management, program management, and professional development – all at no cost to our nonprofit partners. For ease of use, Catchafire has created project bundles including their newest for COVID-19

In this pilot phase Catchafire was made available to 200 grantees, who – in six months - benefitted from over 2,000 volunteer hours for services valued at over $425,000.

As a testament to the value nonprofits are finding in the platform, many organizations have completed numerous projects in this short period of time. (see below for highlights) Sewall Foundation and Catchafire are gathering information on program use to guide the next phase of the program. If you have any questions about this program please contact Megan Shore.

---

**Catchafire in Action**

There are so many different ways that Catchafire's skilled volunteers can support nonprofits, we thought we'd share a few highlights.

- The Institute for Humane Education has used Catchafire for 9 projects valued at $44,000. Projects include translation, email marketing system set up, a website audit, and support for video-conferencing (Part of Catchafire’s COVID-19 Project bundle).
- Seed Money used Catchafire to create a short animated video.
- To see how Catchafire has been used by more Sewall grantees visit our Catchafire page.

---

**Resources**

- **Ideas to Action Field Guide.** This field guide presents seven pathways designed to help teams on their journeys of learning and transformation. Each pathway is goal-oriented, packed with tools to help you and your team.

- **Dismantling Racism Works Web Work Book.** This online workbook provides in-depth information on racism, anti-racism and resources and tools to help individuals and organizations move towards dismantling racism.

- **Collection of videos by Race Forward.** Race Forward has put together a
Applications for Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Culture of Health Prize. RWJF is looking for “communities that have placed a priority on health and are creating powerful partnerships and deep commitments to provide everyone, especially those facing the greatest challenges, with the opportunity to live the healthiest life possible.” Application deadline is October 15, 2020.

Partners for Places Mini Grants. Partners for Places is offering its second round of Mini Grants to help local governments, local foundations, and frontline community-led group(s) build relationships, align around project ideas, and ideally develop a proposal that centers on racial equity in water, sustainability, and/or climate action work. Mini grant applicants can receive up to $10,000 and are designed to strengthen the relationship between the three partners in order to aid in the development of a full and jointly developed P4P proposal. Applications Due Sept. Sept 30

Staff Picks

Ideas Arrangements Effects: Systems Design and Social Justice, Design Studio for Social Intervention (Lori Lobenstine, Kenneth Bailey, and Ayako Maruyama) July 13, 2020 (Article in Nonprofit Quarterly). This article covers the idea that design in our spaces (physical and social) have a big impact on how we behave, interact and the outcomes of our interaction. It is an excerpt from a book that addresses the “often unacknowledged and unspoken design principles behind some of the practices and structures that pervade our work.”

Just Mercy: A story of justice and redemption, by Bryan Stevenson. The true story of a young lawyer,
Elinor Oliphant is Completely Fine, by Gail Honeyman. A smart, warm, and uplifting story of an out-of-the-ordinary heroine whose deadpan weirdness and unconscious wit make for an irresistible journey.