As we approach the end of 2020, I think back to the plans we were making last December for a year yet-to-be-known. Few years in recent history have shaken all of humanity as much as 2020. The global viral pandemic continues to take lives, weaken economies and test every system in place. As communities in the U.S. and across the world rise-up for racial justice, existing systems continue to disproportionately burden black, indigenous and other communities of color. Closer to home, Maine’s communities suffer from the highest racial disparities in COVID-19 rates.

The end of the calendar year has always been a particularly poignant time for me: the ability to look back on what is still our present while raising our eyes, minds and hearts to what is yet to be. 2020 has been a very eventful year, and we have much to learn from it. In 2021, we will be spending time reflecting on and absorbing lessons learned during this tough year. We also look forward to continuing our evolution in 2021, including:

- Launching our first Year in Review report, to be shared electronically with all of you
- Deepening our work in our Focus Areas – Food Systems; Katahdin Region; Lewiston-Auburn; Nature-Based Education; Wabanaki Communities and Tribal Governments; Washington County; statewide policy, advocacy, and communications work – and continuing our work in Animal Welfare
Putting into practice Sewall’s new way of working—our emergent approach, rooted in a trust-based philanthropy framework, which entails:

◦ Deploying multiple support strategies that are flexible and responsive, strategic and long-term (grantmaking, capacity-building, convening and community engagement, impact investment)

◦ Further streamlining our grantmaking processes

◦ Continuing to explore and develop internal organizational structures to better align with our values and mission
  • Growing our communications tools and vehicles for greater transparency
  • Continuing to build our learning framework to be flexible and participatory
  • Continuing to grow our foundation voice, sharing our values and leveraging our influence for mission-aligned systems change

We will be ending 2020 with a staff team 50% bigger and with new skillsets, experiences and perspectives and we could not be happier about our expanded team. Hiring during a pandemic is a new and challenging experience, and we are privileged to have the resources to grow our team and to bring three additional individuals with deep values-alignment into our organization. Together with our Board, our team is committed to building a healthier and more equitable Maine where people, animals and the environment thrive.

As we transition from 2020 to 2021 and enter a new phase for Sewall amidst the uncertainty and loss being felt at a local and global level, we commit to continuing to strive to be a good partner in our work with organizations and communities and to do so by

• creating connections
• elevating voices
• fostering innovation
• leading humanely
• embracing learning
• transforming systems

As 2020 draws to a close, we wish all of you and yours health, safety and peace and we affirm our belief that the health and well-being of people, animals and the environment are inextricably linked. With an equity-first approach to everything we do, we commit to building mutual, trust-based partnerships spanning socioeconomic, cultural and geographic boundaries. We will connect organizations to each other and the resources they need, amplify their voices, and make sure they have a say in decision-making. Together with our partners, we’ll work to expand access to power, right historical wrongs and strengthen communities for a just, healthy and sustainable future.

In Solidarity,

Gabriela Alcalde
Sewall Foundation Executive Director
Please note our offices will be closed from December 21 to January 1.

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