



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

NorthLight Foundation envisions a world where the Earth's natural environment is healthy, protected and sustained for future generations.

Looking back on 2020

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With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 proved an especially difficult year for many of our grantees and for advancing some of our objectives as a foundation. 2020 was the third full year of NorthLight's operations, and a critical year for us improving on our grantmaking practices. Given that NorthLight is in an unusual situation of being half-endowed, with legal restrictions on certain funds, the foundation had to make difficult temporary cuts to its grantmaking budget. NorthLight also delayed plans for some programs and activities involving the intersections of climate and health, climate and workforce development, and more. We were, however, able to minimize cuts through creative deployment of our endowment, at the same time ensuring that our most financially vulnerable grantees were prioritized. We also waived our reporting requirements. Beyond our own grantmaking, we shared funding opportunities with current and previous grantees to replace or supplement our funds.

Nonetheless, we recognize that philanthropy needs to do more before, during, and after crises to strengthen grantees and their ability to weather impending storms. This is particularly important for grantees with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) leadership, and for grantees that serve disproportionately affected BIPOC and low-income communities. To consider how to respond to the economic crisis of COVID-19, NorthLight considered the 2008 recession and its aftermath. The 2008 recession clearly demonstrated that in times of economic collapse, cash-strapped non-profit organizations suffer much more than grantmaking foundations. While foundations can usually count on emerging from crisis intact due to their endowments, many grant-seeking non-profits—particularly those that are grassroots, place-based, and BIPOC-led—cannot make the same assumption.

NorthLight is committed to a consistent drive to do better and hold itself accountable. NorthLight will incorporate lessons learned from 2020 (and from the 2008 recession) to plan for future crises that have major economic consequences for underserved, excluded, and under-resourced grantees, families, and communities.

The health and economic crisis of COVID-19 forced many to seriously examine structural inequalities, including the inequalities that gave rise to philanthropy itself. We and the rest of the sector have a long way to go in addressing these inequalities, but hope that the practices we implemented in 2020 will contribute to meaningful change going forward.

The summer of 2020 also saw massive protests and outrage sparked by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many other Black people at the hands of police and vigilantes. Worldwide outrage and condemnation in response to these horrific yet all-too-common events was more than justified—and long, long overdue. While NorthLight had already been emphasizing racial justice in its grantmaking and institutional processes, these historic events shone a spotlight on how important it is for those with resources to prioritize funding BIPOC-led efforts to achieve racial justice.

In 2019, we had begun to search for a financial advisor that could ensure that NorthLight’s endowment was mission-aligned and free of investments that perpetuated the climate crisis. After careful consideration of multiple candidates, we chose an advisor in early 2020, just before COVID-19 sent us all to work at home.

Throughout 2020, we worked with the advisor to identify opportunities to leverage our investments in ways that not only avoided environmentally destructive industries, but also considered racial injustice. We worked to develop investment policies that accounted for this concern, seeking to avoid investments in sectors that disproportionately harm BIPOC communities. We looked for ways to ensure that our investments generated wealth that would remain in communities that have suffered from racial injustice. This is distinct from typical practices in which financial institutions extract wealth and leave communities no better than before. While we had been discussing this work prior to the summer of 2020, the global movement in support of Black Lives Matter brought increased urgency to the task. We tried to be thoughtful and considerate in this process and acknowledged that mistakes would be made, that we had shortcomings, and that we would have to adapt. Our work resulted in multiple iterations of an [investment policy statement](#), which has allowed us to achieve our goal of having a 100% mission-aligned endowment in 2020.

We recognize that these steps we took in 2020 were by no means comprehensive solutions, and the work to achieve racial and climate justice is ongoing. NorthLight does not wish for society to “return to normal” after the pandemic, because “normal” was clearly unjust. COVID-19 widened long-standing “normal” inequities, in addition to causing unnecessary death and suffering. 2020 was a call for us and for our peers in philanthropy to do better. Moreover, 2020 affirmed our mission for us, highlighting the urgency of strengthening movements for justice and a just transition to a better, healthier, more equitable future.



Grants

From January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020, NorthLight Foundation awarded 35 grants totaling \$6,438,606. The Foundation's three principal themes and the program areas within those themes are described in the following pages.

Strengthening the Environmental Movement

In 2020, the Foundation continued to focus its grantmaking on strengthening the environmental movement, with the aim of achieving and protecting victories in climate and conservation. While NorthLight continues to fund through our three key programmatic areas of Just Transition, New Leaders, and Cross-Issue Collaboration, the Foundation aims to support equity-centered and BIPOC-led initiatives within each category. This commitment is not only consistent with our overarching theory of change, but it also contributes to filling an ongoing critical gap, as BIPOC-led, environmental justice and climate justice groups remain tremendously underfunded compared to their “mainstream” counterparts. Beyond its grantmaking, a key focus of NorthLight’s work - in partnership with aligned funders and organizations - is pressing the case to rectify this extreme and unjust imbalance. As such, NorthLight strives to increase its grantmaking to BIPOC-led and power-building climate organizations to at least 30% of our grantmaking dollars over the next two years, in line with the Donors of Color Network’s [Climate Justice Funders Pledge](#). In 2020, 33% of our grantees were BIPOC-led and power-building organizations, with 17% of our grantmaking dollars going towards these organizations.

In 2020, our formerly stand-alone programmatic areas of Communications and Innovative Strategies were integrated into our primary areas of focus.



Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign

Just Transition

NorthLight supports transitions from resource extractive economies to alternative, long-term, regenerative, and just economies. In 2020, the Foundation invested heavily in just transition efforts, making it our largest programmatic area with a grantmaking budget of \$1,250,000. We also investigated the possibility of creating a Bronx-based portfolio within our New York Just Transition program to support community-based environmental justice work led by Bronx residents.

As our largest programmatic area, our Just Transition portfolio is organized around three levels of geographic reach: local/rural; statewide; and national. It is our belief that critical progress and learning around effective just transition strategies happens at all three levels, and that each has important influences on the others. Every community that experiences displacement brought about by the transition to a clean energy economy is unique. By investing in and then collecting the experiences across communities already successfully engaged in transition work, we can bring important lessons to bear in the design of state and federal policy.

New Leaders

NorthLight supports initiatives fostering new leadership in the environmental movement, with a focus on building power and connection across diverse communities for environmental justice. In 2020, New Leaders was our second-largest programmatic area, after Just Transition, with a total grantmaking budget of \$1,200,150.

Cross-Issue Collaboration

Movements stand a greater chance of achieving long-term, durable success by working together. In 2020, the Foundation explored opportunities for investing at the intersection of climate change and health justice, and intends to establish a climate and health portfolio in 2021. The Foundation is also considering expanding our support for movement building at the nexus of climate change and labor, in line with our Just Transition program.

Communications

NorthLight supports powerful storytelling to inspire, inform, and motivate people to take action. In 2020, NorthLight funded communications work within each of our programmatic areas of focus, with a total of \$475,000 going towards strategic communications within the environmental justice movement.

Innovative Strategies

NorthLight seeks to nimbly deploy capital in support of innovative solutions to climate change as well as creative tactics that invigorate the environmental movement. In 2020, Innovative Strategies was no longer a stand-alone focus area, but informed our funding in each of our programmatic areas.

Grants Summary: Strengthening the Environmental Movement

ORGANIZATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PRIMARY PROGRAM	SECONDARY PROGRAM	GEOGRAPHY
The New School***	\$585,150	New Leaders		National
Environmental Advocates of New York	\$110,000	Just Transition		New York (Statewide)
Waterfront Alliance†	\$160,000	Just Transition	Innovative Strategies	New York (Statewide)
Trust for Public Land: Will Rogers Fund**	\$300,000	New Leaders	Conservation	National
Climate Jobs New York	\$50,000	Just Transition	Cross-Issue Collaboration (Labor)	New York (Statewide)
WE ACT for Environmental Justice*	\$50,000	Just Transition		New York (Statewide)
Power Shift Network*	\$50,000	New Leaders		National
Center for Story-Based Strategy*	\$25,000	Just Transition	Communications	National
Grist*	\$200,000	Just Transition	Communications	National
Rebuild by Design*	\$20,000	Just Transition	Innovative Strategies	New York (Statewide)
Climate Justice Alliance**	\$35,000	Just Transition		National
New York Energy Democracy Alliance*	\$50,000	Just Transition		New York (Statewide)
Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund*	\$50,000	Just Transition		National
OurClimate Education Fund†	\$15,000	New Leaders		National
New York Renews Education Fund*	\$120,000	Just Transition	Innovative Strategies	New York (Statewide)
Island Institute+	\$300,000	Just Transition		Maine (Local/Rural)
Building Equity and Alignment for Impact Fund*	\$50,000	Just Transition		National
Telluride Foundation**	\$130,000	Just Transition	Innovative Strategies	Colorado (Local/Rural)

* BIPOC-led and power-building organization, as defined by the [Donors of Color Network](#)

+ Multi-year pledge

† John Tishman Fund Grant



Gwich'in Steering Committee

Conservation

NorthLight's conservation funding revolves around both national and Alaska-based efforts to protect public land from extraction, with an emphasis on supporting Indigenous-led conservation efforts.

Alaska

NorthLight Foundation supports groups working to advance sustainable economies and to protect Alaska from oil, gas, mining, and other forms of resource exploitation. Our efforts are focused on protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Bristol Bay against imminent threats by extractive industries, while also advancing statewide just transition conversations. In 2020, Alaska was our third-largest programmatic area after Just Transition and New Leaders, with a grantmaking budget of \$1,125,000.

Public Lands

NorthLight's trustees have an abiding commitment to the protection of public lands. In 2020, the Foundation continued to support innovative approaches to public land conservation that centers the public trust doctrine.

Grants Summary: Conservation

ORGANIZATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PRIMARY PROGRAM	SECONDARY PROGRAM	GEOGRAPHY
Natural Resources Defense Council ⁺	\$285,714	Public Lands	Innovative Strategies	National
Trustees for Alaska ⁺	\$50,000	Alaska	Public Lands	Alaska
Northern Alaska Environmental Center	\$50,000	Alaska	Public Lands	Alaska
Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition	\$50,000	Alaska	Just Transition	Alaska-Artic Refuge
Native Movement*	\$50,000	Alaska	Just Transition	Alaska-Artic Refuge
Gwich'in Steering Committee*	\$50,000	Alaska	Public Lands	Alaska-Artic Refuge
Alaska Wilderness League-Artic Refuge Defense Campaign*	\$750,000	Alaska	Public Lands	Alaska-Artic Refuge
Bristol Bay Defense Fund	\$125,000	Alaska	Public Lands	Alaska-Artic Refuge
Mountainfilm ⁺	\$250,000	New Leaders	Communications	National

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+ Multi-year pledge

† John Tishman Fund Grant

Environmental Advocates of New York



Education & Scholarship

A significant portion of NorthLight Foundation’s grants are made through the John L. Tishman Fund. John L. Tishman’s Legacy Trust directed that his estate support education and scholarship. In addition to providing legacy grants to organizations and institutions important to John L. Tishman, NorthLight Foundation funds education and scholarship that further our strategic priorities of conservation and environmental movement building. Over time, we are striving to ensure our support of long-term grantees, like the University of Michigan and Montefiore Medical Center, are mission-aligned.

ORGANIZATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PRIMARY PROGRAM	SECONDARY PROGRAM	GEOGRAPHY
University of Michigan**	\$1,000,000	Education & Scholarship	Innovative Strategies	Michigan
Montefiore Medical Center**	\$1,375,000	Education & Scholarship	Public Lands	New York
Planned Parenthood of New England**	\$50,000	Education & Scholarship	Cross-Issue Collaboration (Reproductive Health)	Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine
Mountainfilm**	\$10,000	Education & Scholarship	New Leaders	National

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+ Multi-year pledge

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While NorthLight has defined these primary funding areas to inform our grantmaking strategy, we also recognize that our funding overlaps and intersects among these programmatic areas. What unites and grounds our grantmaking is a commitment to centering environmental justice, and empowering frontline communities to lead the transition to a just and sustainable world.



Grants Summary: Other

ORGANIZATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PRIMARY PROGRAM	GEOGRAPHY
Environmental Grantmakers Association	\$23,392	Affinity Groups	National
Climate and Energy Funders Group	\$5,000	Affinity Groups	National
Philanthropy New York	\$14,350	Affinity Groups	New York

Total 2020 Grantmaking: \$6,438,606

Beyond Grantmaking

Volunteer Time

In addition to grantmaking, the trustees of NorthLight Foundation contributed a combined total of over 800 hours in 2020 as board members and supporters of organizations including Montefiore Medical Center, Mountainfilm, Natural Resources Defense Council, Open Space Institute, Riverkeeper, Telluride Foundation, Trust for Public Land, the Center for Earth, Energy, and Democracy, and more.



Many thanks to the **Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign** [pages 4 & 7], **Environmental Advocates of New York** [page 8], **Florian Schulz** [page 3], **Katie Rodriguez** [back cover], **Power Shift Network** [page 9], and **Vlad Tchompalov** [front cover] for providing the images used in this report.