

Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund - Frequently Asked Questions

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What is the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund?

- The “Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund” is the provisional name for a long-term, sustainable funding structure that the [Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship](#) is currently creating. This name is meant to emphasize that the ultimate purposes and structure of the fund are for Wabanaki communities to decide. The final name of the fund will emerge from the Wabanaki-led fund creation process.
- The fund will be *run* entirely by and for Wabanaki people. It will be held and distributed in ways that are determined by Wabanaki communities via a visioning and organizing process established by the Wabanaki Commission.
- The fund will be *funded* primarily by sustained commitments from non-Wabanaki people and organizations who work and dwell in Wabanaki homelands. This funding begins with the [Solidarity Deposit](#) in 2023.

What do you mean by self-determination?

- Wabanaki leadership will drive the decisions around how this fund is used. In provisionally calling this the “Self-Determination Fund,” we recognize Wabanaki expertise and knowledge in identifying the best ways to use funds and we affirm our support for total Wabanaki leadership in this decision. In terms familiar to philanthropy, this can be viewed as “unrestricted” funding in support of Wabanaki self-determination.

What is the Solidarity Deposit?

- The Solidarity Deposit is a demonstration of our steadfast support for Wabanaki communities and represents our tangible commitment to this work. As Wabanaki organizers move forward on the creation of this fund, we hope that the Solidarity Deposit can build confidence and trust that non-Wabanaki communities and organizations are committed to its ongoing support. This concrete action of organizing ourselves and demonstrating our commitment is particularly important given the long history of broken promises by settlers and settler-led organizations.
- For the Solidarity Deposit, we will raise one million dollars by the Fall of 2023. This deposit will be held temporarily by First Light’s fiscal sponsor, [New Learning Journey](#), and will be transferred in full to the Wabanaki-led fund when requested by the [Wabanaki Commission](#). This Solidarity Deposit is a starting point for a much larger, long-term effort to build widespread, committed financial support for Wabanaki self-determination and land reconnection.

Where did the idea for the Self-Determination Fund come from? What is the motivation for this fund?

- First Light organizers heard from Wabanaki communities during listening sessions in early 2022 that there is a clear need for significant funding to support, among other priorities, the work of rebuilding and deepening connection with tribal lands and sustaining care for these lands over the long-term. We have also heard strong enthusiasm from many organizations in the conservation and philanthropy communities toward deepening their work toward decolonization and growing their support for Wabanaki sovereignty. The creation of the Fund is a response to both calls, offering a path for financial redistribution that is ultimately to the service of Wabanaki and non-native communities alike.
- The process of building the [Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund working group](#), and of launching this call for solidarity deposits has been done in close conversation with the [Wabanaki Commission](#) and its staff. The Commission has expressed its full support for this approach, and we continue forward in an ongoing, accountable relationship with the Commission.

Who is making this call for funding? What (and who) is the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund Working Group?

- The Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund (WSDF) Working Group came together at the invitation of First Light catalyst Peter Forbes in the Spring of 2022 as a response to [Wabanaki requests](#) for increased financial support for land recovery and reconnection. This group has been working together, in ongoing consultation with the Wabanaki Commission and its staff, to collaboratively design a fundraising process for non-native organizations to contribute to the emerging Wabanaki Fund.
- Current members of the WSDF working group are: **Gabriela Alcalde**, Elmina B. Sewall Foundation; **Jess Burton**, Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative & Conservation Community Delegation; **Kate Dempsey**, The Nature Conservancy of Maine; **Peter Forbes**, First Light Learning Journey; **Ethan Miller**, Land in Common & Conservation Community Delegation; and **Ellie Oldach**, First Light Learning Journey. **Darren Ranco** serves as our liaison with the [Wabanaki Commission](#).

What is the Wabanaki Commission? Which Tribes are represented by the Commission? How are members selected? Does the Commission have the authority to make decisions for Wabanaki Tribes and communities?

- The Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship Nil yut ktahkomiq nik (the whole earth is our home) is an international body made up of two representatives from each of the five federally-recognized Wabanaki communities in Maine. Each representative is selected by the elected leadership of the Tribal community. The Commission plays a central role in guiding all the work of First Light, and offers essential advice and input into projects to expand Wabanaki land access.

- Here is the Wabanaki Commission's mission:

The mission of the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship Nil yut ktahkomiq nik (the whole earth is our home) is to improve the health and well-being of Wabanaki people through a sustained effort to expand our access, management, and ownership of lands to practice our land-based cultures across Wabanaki homeland in what is now the State of Maine.

We, representatives of the Penobscot Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe - Indian Township, Passamaquoddy Tribe - Pleasant Point, The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and the Mi'kmaq Nation, support this mission by acquiring lands and by sharing and co-managing, in the spirit of reciprocity, land that is currently owned by land trust and conservation organizations. To support this collaborative work, we seek to create, through partnership and education, a stronger conservation movement that includes and reflects Wabanaki expertise and perspective. As Wabanaki representatives, we offer our insights and wisdom to the conservation community to identify and protect lands of great importance across the state of Maine.

What are the logistics around how the Solidarity Deposit is collected, held, and distributed?

- Solidarity Deposit payments are made to New Learning Journey, which is the 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that houses First Light. New Learning Journey also serves as fiscal sponsor to the Wabanaki Commission.
- New Learning Journey holds all funds collected for the WSDF in a separate, restricted bank account until such time as the fund structure has been created. At that time, and at the request of the Wabanaki Commission or the new governance structure of the fund, New Learning Journey will transfer 100% of the funds (no fees taken) to the Wabanaki fund structure.
- When a contribution is made to the Solidarity Deposit via New Learning Journey, an acknowledgement letter will be sent to the donor organization. New Learning Journey's financial manager can work with organizations to customize these acknowledgements as needed for specific situations. The donor organizations and foundations will be listed without the donation amount to encourage broader participation.

What is the timeframe for the Self-Determination Fund?

- Our goal is for the Solidarity Deposit to reach \$1 million by the Fall of 2023. This is just the beginning, however. We ask organizations to consider ways their organizations can make long-term commitments to the Fund. Over the next year, the [WSDF Working Group](#) will be working with the First Light community to set the goals for the larger, long term fund and for how our organizations might think about ongoing participation.

Why is the Solidarity Deposit coming first, before the Commission finalizes plans for how to run the fund?

- The Solidarity Deposit is a demonstration of our sincere commitment to this work. This is the work we can do now. Wabanaki community leaders are in the process of important conversations about how this fund will be directed and used, and those conversations will take time and care. Our up-front demonstration of commitment supports their work and allows the Commission to take the time needed while knowing we are not going to break a promise.

Can organizations that did not participate in a First Light Learning Journey cohort contribute to the Fund?

- Yes, any organization can contribute to the Fund, even if they did not take part in a First Light cohort. However, we encourage organizations that did not take part in a cohort to pursue [other avenues for First Light trainings](#) (e.g. the [self-guided curriculum](#)), as they offer essential context around *why* we are doing this work and how we can talk about it with peers and in the conservation community.

Can individuals contribute to the Fund?

- One of the driving beliefs of First Light is that we are *stronger together*: by working collectively, we can accomplish much more than any of us can alone. For that reason, we focus on organizational contributions to the Fund. While individual contributions will be accepted, we strongly encourage individuals to make a contribution to the Fund *through* a land-holding organization that they know, work with, or appreciate. This can help encourage and strengthen the organization's commitment to ongoing participation in the Fund.
- If you are an individual interested in making a contribution, and you are considering working with an organization you care about to make this contribution, please get in touch with the Working Group, as we'd love to provide support and to hear how this process goes.

What if our membership or board feels that the Fund falls outside of our organization's mission? How might this Fund be connected to and aligned with our organization's purposes?

- There are a number of moral and strategic reasons why an organization should feel compelled to contribute to the Fund. These reasons may align with your organizational missions in several ways.

- Moral reasons include:
 - All of the land that has flowed into public and private conservation stewardship in the last 100+ years was directly cared for and belonged to Wabanaki people prior to colonization.
 - 400 years of colonization reduced Wabanaki land holding to less than 1% of the land that once sustained their vital cultures. Non-native conservation organizations have come to control, own and manage 23% of the state of Maine.
 - Because of the history of colonization and racism in Maine, the financial wealth and land resources that have flowed into environmentalism and conservation came directly and indirectly at the expense of Wabanaki communities.
 - The Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act has failed to uphold basic human rights including hunting, water and self-determination. This aura of injustice permeates the land and all human relationships in Maine.
 - As non-native people seeking a deeper connection to the landscape of Maine that we call home, our own relationship to place is greatly diminished and stunted by this history of colonization. *No one can move forward without making amends on this history.*

- Strategic reasons include:
 - Non-native scientists, conservationists, environmentalists are increasingly understanding that our work requires deep learning from multiple ways of knowing. Despite 100 years of western conservation, we are still facing multiple converging crises of climate, biodiversity, health, and justice. Working closely with Wabanaki communities in Maine is the most direct way to bring into land management a perspective and knowledge that is more time-tested (thousands of years old) and more durable than non-native's western science.
 - All of Maine will have access to knowledge that will help us to better address fire management, climate adaptation, and biodiversity conservation. Our conservation movement will grow stronger and wiser if it can embrace and center Indigenous traditional knowledge.
 - Non-native organizations and communities will be able to better understand the cultural and natural history of the land we call home and we can share that learning with the public who relies on the conservation community for so much place-based education.
 - As settler-descended people continue to learn more about the painful realities of colonization and land theft, they will expect proactive, reparative responses from the organizations they support. Participation in this Fund is one small way to demonstrate a commitment toward organizational and systemic change.

- Ultimately, this contribution of your organization's resources to the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund should not be driven by charity, but by a longing for solidarity. All people, Native and non-native, will deepen their relationships to this place now called Maine as Wabanaki communities flourish and as their connections with land and waters are restored. The land will grow healthier, and all people in Maine will benefit.

How will our organization's involvement in the Fund be communicated publicly? Can we talk about this with our members or through our public newsletters/tweets/blog posts?

- The Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund Working Group will share the names of organizations that have contributed to the fund with the First Light community periodically over the course of 2023. We will not list each organization's contribution dollar amount. Our aim in communicating with the First Light community is to support each other in making this collective contribution and to grow the community of committed organizations.
- For any external or public communication around the Fund, the Working Group is committed to emphasizing that this is a collective effort from many organizations across the state. If approached by the media, we will redirect journalists to Wabanaki partners for their perspective on the Fund.
- When it comes to your own communication about this fund with your membership, please remember that this is a moment for collective action, rather than individual congratulations. We recognize the importance of communicating about our organizations' work with our constituencies. It is crucial that this communication:
 - Emphasizes that a contribution toward the Fund is just one small step in an ongoing process of deepening commitment and action toward Wabanaki flourishing;
 - Centers the collective effort rather than the individual organization; and
 - Invites others to participate and offers whatever support your organization feels it can give to the wider process of organizing community contributions.

Here is an example of a statement your organization might consider using or adapting:

We are excited to join other organizations in the Maine conservation community in making a contribution to the emerging Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund. This Fund is currently being created by the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship. It will be held and distributed by and for Wabanaki communities in support of Wabanaki flourishing and land reconnection, with funding coming primarily from non-native organizations. By making early contributions,

non-native organizations are demonstrating commitment to the success of this Fund.

[Describe one or two ways that this action is in line with the values and vision of your organization].

We see our organization's participation in supporting this Fund as just one small step in a larger, long-term commitment to supporting Wabanaki flourishing. We encourage other organizations in the conservation community to join us in contributing to the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund, and we're happy to offer support to others in taking such action.

Please get in touch with a member of the Working Group if you'd like support customizing this language or would like feedback about a draft communication.

What other ways can organizations participate beyond making payments to the Fund?

- At the moment, we are maintaining a focus on direct financial contributions. The most important actions you can take beyond making a contribution are to encourage and support other organizations to do the same. We encourage you to build on your partnerships, collaborations, and other organization-to-organization relationships, as well as on our personal connections with others in our community, to grow the circle of participation. "Each one, reach one" is a crucial strategy for achieving our goal of 100% First Light organizational participation in the Solidarity Deposit.
- We also encourage all organizations to seek out ways to further their own relearning and preparing their organization to work in response to other and future calls from Wabanaki communities, and think creatively about other opportunities their organization may have to offer staff time, a communication platform, technical services, or other resources as requested by Wabanaki communities. If your organization is interested in land return, we encourage you to reach out to Brett Ciccotelli, Tribal Lands Recovery Manager: brett@firsightmaine.org.

What is the minimum amount that an organization should contribute?

- Thanks to those who have already made payments to the solidarity deposit, we are more than half way to our \$1 million goal— this is amazing!— and your organization can be part of making this commitment and change, too. While there is no minimum contribution required, we encourage organizations to consider their relative wealth and consider ways to give a contribution which is meaningful to the size of your organization.

What are some creative ways to think about raising the annual contribution?

- We have heard a few ideas around creatively raising the annual contribution from different organizations. This will depend on the resources your organization has access to, but you might consider: using camp leases or campsite fees; writing this into grant proposals; drawing from the same source you use for payments in lieu of taxes; or developing specific membership fundraisers.

Our organization is not accustomed to making unrestricted contributions. How do we convey that these are unrestricted funds and explain why that is necessary?

- We recognize that many land trusts may not have any prior experience making grants, and making this contribution may be a big transition for your organization to contemplate. At the same time, many land conservation organizations do already make payments in lieu of taxes to municipalities in their service areas, and payment to the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund could be understood in similar terms. Each organization will have to consider what framing works best for your systems of fundraising and accounting.
- We are committed to making space for peer organizations to connect on this question and to share technical support around our contributions to the Fund. This includes organizing virtual and in-person gatherings (we will communicate about this via the First Light Connections listserv!). Many organizations in the First Light community have already made contributions to the fund, and have offered to share their experience with peers. Please reach out.

Are there any other projects like this in the US?

- Projects across the continent such as the [Shuumi Land Tax](#), [Real Rent Duwamish](#), [Wiyot Honor Tax](#), and [Mana-hatta Fund](#) have shown us that organizing this energy into focused commitment can generate significant resources to support Indigenous flourishing.

Who can I talk with to learn more?

- All of the following members of the WSDF Working Group are willing to talk with you or others in your organization about the Fund and the Solidarity Deposit.

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