

## Climate Solutions New England: Promoting Integrated Solutions to Climate Change Across the Region

This is an excerpt of a proposal, which was successfully funded in late 2015, which illustrates the scope and continued impact of the UNHSI Sustainability Fellowships.

### The Project

#### Promoting Integrated Solutions to Climate Change Across New England

As a complex problem spanning multiple natural and social systems, climate change demands problem-solving approaches that are integrated. In our 2014 proposal, we defined “integrated solutions” as “sustainable solutions that solve more than one problem/challenge (e.g., they reduce greenhouse gas emissions, raise community resilience and create economic opportunity) by incorporating relationships and interactions across multiple sectors (e.g., agriculture, forests, water, infrastructure, economy, etc.) and scales (local, state, regional).” With the support of Janes Trust Foundation over the past ten months, CSNE has had an opportunity to identify and dive into in-depth exploration of some of these more integrated approaches being created and honed across New England, and this exploration seems to have borne out our working assumption: that approaches that are more systems-oriented, participatory, responsive, anticipatory, place-based and in which planning and implementation are not divided have outcomes that offer greater promise than more traditional approaches to addressing climate change as individuals, communities and as a society.

Building off of this preliminary work looking at diverse solutions, the CSNE backbone team sees an opportunity, in partnership with our advisory team and the network we have begun to form, to take these solutions deeper and broader. For example, in looking at Green Bonds, we discovered that there is a likelihood that municipal governments, schools and even businesses throughout the region might be in an ideal position to utilize Green Bonds as a funding mechanism for their climate change projects—but they aren’t aware of this as an option or they don’t know how to go about using this new financial vehicle. Working with partners like the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund and CERES, to help local governments from Portland to Boston to Providence to Bridgeport, and public or private colleges from across the region, to navigate this process and get significant capital investment underway (which will simultaneously offer opportunities for local investors to reduce the climate risk in their portfolios and thereby strengthen local and regional economies) is just one possibility for follow-up that has emerged from the 2015 case study research, begging to be explored.

Likewise, with all of the other in-depth case studies and shorter “vignettes” that our research team has worked on over the past six months, a plethora of actionable opportunities that might be leveraged with some dedicated focus, collaboration and “manpower” are evident. One theme that has emerged in our preliminary research is that very often, the key to systems transformation is as simple as convening specific stakeholders and *helping* them identify and flesh out mutually beneficial new ways of operating. For example, from the Solarize and Green Bank case studies, we saw that scaling became possible when traditional banks and lenders were helped to become aware of new opportunities presented by evolving technology, economics and policy. Getting financiers and solar installers together in a room, and helping them to ask the right questions of each other, helped make magic happen in the Upper Valley (NH and VT); ditto getting traditional lenders and architects of PACE policy together, in Connecticut. Very often it is assumed that those sorts of conversations, if they are warranted, will naturally happen—but CSNE’s 2015 integrated solutions case studies suggest

that this is patently NOT the case. By investing in the development of collective impact networks and facilitative leadership, philanthropists and social change agents like the Jane's Trust Foundation can ensure that more of these connections are made, and fewer opportunities are wasted.

CSNE has two key assets that could be leveraged to significantly further some of these opportunities:

- Our Sustainability Fellows program, developed at Clean Air-Cool Planet in 2006 and run through UNHSI since 2014, which pairs exceptional students from across the U.S. with municipal, educational, corporate and NGO partners in New England to work on innovative climate change initiatives. While the 2015 CSNE Climate Fellows focused primarily on research, there is ample precedent for having future CSNE Fellows also focus on program piloting, outreach, assessment or refinement, with relevant partners.
- The intellectual capital and relevant experience of our backbone faculty and staff, that of our informal networks, and that of the formal network we have begun to develop with the work this past year (as outlined in our program reports to Jane's Trust Foundation.)

CSNE would like to leverage these assets to 1) benefit local communities and institutions across New England who lack capacity or expertise to do all of the things they want to do on climate; 2) further specific climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts; 3) provide unparalleled educational and professional development opportunities for the next generation of social and environmental leaders; and 4) convene and enhance collaboration between key regional stakeholders in diverse disciplines.

### Our Approach

We propose to utilize the case study research that our 2015 CSNE Fellows have already done, and the expertise of associated staff, faculty and partners, to identify key opportunities to refine, disseminate or promote more integrated solutions across New England, and to continue to identify new examples of such. Once we've identified the best opportunities for projects that meet these goals, we'll place 10-15 Fellows, grouped in cohorts of two or three, to work with key partners to the following:

1. Further the solutions already identified and profiled in the 2015 case studies. For example, this might mean placing a cohort of three Fellows in three different partner communities, to help them explore possibilities for utilizing Green Bonds to finance key climate mitigation or adaptation investments; or a cohort of three Fellows with one community-based non-profit to lay the groundwork for a local Solarize campaigns; or a cohort of Fellows with local Green Banks or Community Development Finance Agencies to further their work to support access to clean energy and energy efficiency upgrades for low-income communities.

OR

2. Research and profile integrated solutions suggested by our advisory team and/or initial research that we have not yet had a chance to explore in-depth, to continue to identify key leverage points for success in addressing climate change. For example, to dig deeper on examples of community solar farms; on successful multi-sector collaborative efforts like Vermont Energy Action Network or Boston Green Ribbon Commission; or on efforts to promote enhanced psychosocial resilience, racial and social justice, and social capital in communities as a tool for climate adaptation.

The critical elements of this program will be three-fold:

- Significant support, mentorship, orientation and professional development for Fellows. This will entail everything from consistent and strategically chosen skills trainings and information sessions, one-on-one mentoring, and grouping into cohorts (which we've found facilitates

- heightened engagement and learning.) This has long been one of the defining features of the Sustainability Fellows program, and we see opportunities to further enhance it in 2016.
- Regular convening and facilitation of dialogue between the host partners, Fellows’ supervisors, and advisors. In this way we will help further trust, understanding, dialogue and collaboration across disparate sectors and continue to build an effective collective impact network around integrated climate solutions.
  - Ensuring that each Fellow creates a case study on her/his project, to highlight key aspects of the Integrated Solution they are working to further. These will be resources that can be utilized in the future not only by network members, but by those in other regions.

### **Specific Activities: Piloting, Promoting and Continuing to Identify and Illuminate Integrated Solutions to Climate Change in New England** **Project Identification, Development & Design; Fellows Recruitment**

During this phase, we will focus on identifying the best opportunities for collaboration/Fellow placement, developing those opportunities fully and laying the groundwork for their successful implementation, and recruiting the optimum cohort of 2016 Fellows. Deliverables will include:

- Projects and partners identified/selected
- Partners convened to share and “workshop” projects w/others
- Workplans developed for each Fellow/project
- Fellows with project-relevant expertise competitively recruited and hired
- Advisory teams of professional and faculty experts formed for each project or cohort

### **Project Implementation**

During this phase, Fellows work “on the ground” on their projects, with support from the network. Key deliverables and activities of this phase include:

- Multi-day orientation for Fellows—To include networking and professional development, as well as training on facilitative leadership for Fellows and their host partner supervisors.
- Day-to-day supervision w/ host sites; weekly check-ins with mentors and advisory teams
- Mid-term presentations and convening
- Weekly webinars, networking events, social media posts, and other p.d.
- Development of project deliverables, including (for each Fellow) a case study
- Final convening of host partners, advisors, Fellows and funders

### **Lessons Learned, Product Development and Next Steps for the Network**

Activities will include:

- Compile all of the case studies (and any other project deliverables) and disseminate them widely to key stakeholders across New England.
- Convene a one-day facilitated gathering with the network members to identify opportunities to further utilize the summer’s work, and to take it further.

### **Outcomes, and Evaluation:**

There are a number of tangible benefits for host partners, which accomplish or lay the groundwork for progress toward GHG reductions or enhanced climate resilience. Assessment of this outcome will be based on feedback gathered from formal exit interviews and written evaluations by host partners.

- 1) Exceptional educational and professional development experience for Fellows that truly equip them

to be leaders on climate change solutions as they move across fields. This will be assessed using written evaluations from, exit interviews with the Fellows, and supervisors' performance reviews.

- 2) Continued development and strengthening of a multi-disciplinary, collective impact network that results from the convening and collaboration that is woven throughout the process outlined above. This network will include host partners, advisors, Fellows, Fellow program alumni, and funders (Foundation and Individual) from across New England working to implement these integrated solutions and this enhance sustainability in local communities and/or the region as a whole.

**Project Sustainability:**

UNHSI has integrated the Fellows program created at CA-CP into its ongoing program of work. CSNE and the Sustainability Fellows program are long-term undertakings and commitments.