

Oak's people-centred approach to grant-making

The Environment and Global Climate Initiatives programmes place people and communities at the heart of their grant-making strategies. Through the power of people and communities, our grantees have the tools to drive broad scale change and can help transform and restore our connection to nature and change how we feed and fuel the world.

What is our collective challenge

We are living through an era of deep societal unrest, growing levels of inequality, restrictive environments for civil society to operate, and power imbalances between the global north and the global south. In addition, the urgency of the climate and biodiversity crises has often led to solutions that sometimes fail because they do not adequately consider the people most impacted by decisions that affect their daily lives and livelihoods. Many of these failed solutions have not considered the tremendous knowledge that Indigenous Peoples and other communities (such as long-standing networks and coalitions in the Global South) possess – thousands of years of experience in protecting 80 per cent of the biodiversity in the world.

Why a people-centred approach

We adopted a people-centred approach through a process of deep listening and learning from our grantee grantees. Since we began grant-making in 1998, we have learned that long-term positive environmental change is only possible by working with and supporting those closest to the issues. We aspire to ally ourselves with them and support them to achieve the change that they need to thrive in today's world.

Example of what we have learned

“Many years ago, we supported organisations to help establish marine protected areas. Over time, we learned that marine protected areas are only effective in conserving marine biodiversity and restoring fish stocks in the long term, if designed with a strong commitment from the community, science-based methods, and adequate funding. If these are not considered, marine protected areas can restrict access to traditional fishing grounds and limit the livelihood opportunities of people engaged in small-scale fisheries and undermine the long-term viability of protect areas.

Given this, we widened our approach to support people who engage in small-scale fisheries, as they represent more than 108 million people worldwide. Their collective power presents an enormous opportunity to transform and promote an economy where marine life is allowed to recover and be harvested sustainably in the long term. All of this can be done while ensuring the food security of coastal and Indigenous communities. This example demonstrates how we have evolved over time to ensure that people are at the heart of our systems-change approach, recognising that this is what it takes to be effective for both biodiversity and people.”

– Oak Trustee

What we fund

Our people-centred approach has direct implications for how we fund. We support **regional networks and coalitions (from constituency-led to more scientific / academic organisations)** and:

- prioritise the needs, perspectives, and experiences of people and communities who are most impacted by decisions that affect their lives, such as food insecurity, biodiversity loss, or climate change;
- amplify the voices of and are led by people with first-hand experience and knowledge of the challenges we are trying to solve;
- address the power imbalances between global and national organisations by funding, growing, and supporting networks and groups led by people living in the global south to better engage, collaborate, and succeed together with allied northern-led organisations in a global network;
- resource efforts led by people and organisations that have been historically marginalised and under resourced by philanthropy;
- unlock the inherent power of communities networked across countries and regions in determining their own development course (e.g., through movement building and community organising); and
- aim for biodiversity and climate mitigation outcomes that benefit people and nature.

We also work with our grantee grantees to ensure that their organisations:

- are inclusive, flexible, and open to learning from different points of view;
- are mindful of power imbalances in how projects are implemented and in the relationships we hold with our grantees;
- develop shared goals with the people and communities involved; and
- include a range of perspectives on their boards and consider where decisions are made, who makes them, and whether the people affected help design and carry out the work.

Approach to learning

We are on a learning journey with our grantees and strive to build honest relationships in which both success and failure offer opportunities for learning. In practice, this means that we have embedded learning practices into our daily work to improve our grant-making in real time.

Example of our people-centred approach in practice

Green New Deal Rising is a constituency-led organisation, with the vision of a world in which climate justice is achieved when inequality is reduced, and the wellbeing of citizens and ecosystems is prioritised. Green New Deal Rising is a young, female-led, and diverse not-for-profit organisation, with staff from across the UK, including from post-industrial areas like former mining communities. Its approach aims to seed movements to develop green jobs and transform the economy.