



Garfield Weston
FOUNDATION

Prioritising our Planet

Clear messages for maximum impact – the urgent need for great communication between environmental organisations, funders and the public

Introduction

Foreword – from Foundation Director, Philippa Charles



I am delighted to introduce this survey which the Garfield Weston Foundation commissioned to understand more about the issues faced by non-profits working across the environment sector. This report is being launched at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic is causing significant uncertainty across all areas of our society but, despite the fact that the Foundation has been at the forefront of philanthropic response to the crisis, our Trustees are very clear that issues relating to climate change, biodiversity, natural resources and conservation remain a key priority.

For several years, we have been grappling with the confusing paradox of seeing the need and the urgency but not receiving either the volume or the quality of applications from charities working for positive change in our environment sector. We networked and vigorously encouraged but, despite our enthusiasm, success was limited, so it was clear that we needed to better understand what was affecting this. We therefore commissioned this survey to explore those factors. This report provides the perfect platform to listen to those working at the forefront of this sector and we are very pleased to share this freely in the hope it is helpful.

We would like to thank all those who took the time and care to respond to the survey – your collective messages are clear and, while they don't make entirely comfortable reading, they highlight opportunities for change and improvement; both for funders and for those working directly on environmental issues. This report reflects back what the experts have told us about the challenges they are facing and concludes with a brief analysis of the key messages we have taken on board as a funder; messages we will use to inform our work and the actions we take next. I hope you find the report informative and thought-provoking.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Philippa Charles'.

Philippa

Executive summary

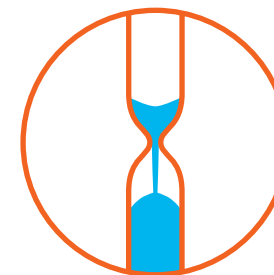
In response to fewer environmental grant applications than our Trustees would like, the Garfield Weston Foundation commissioned a UK-wide survey of the non-profit environmental sector in order to:

- 1 understand the need for funding in the environmental sector, and any barriers environmental organisations face in this context
- 2 inform grant making in a practical way to address the most critical issues
- 3 share learnings publicly with other funders and organisations, as part of the Foundation's commitment to being a transparent funder

Despite being launched at the height of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the survey received 68 responses from environmental organisations across the UK, of which 86% came from UK registered charities. The key findings include:

Environmental sector challenges:

- **The public is not fully grasping the immediate need to safeguard our environment.** Almost half of organisations (48.5%) believe the biggest challenge the sector faces is a lack of public understanding about the urgency to act on environmental issues.
- **Environmental organisations are struggling to communicate the sheer scale and complexity of the climate and environment crisis to the public and their main funders.** Over half (55%) reported that they struggle to persuade the public of the need to act rapidly.
- **Fundraising for environmental issues is difficult, despite organisations being well equipped to do so.** Three-quarters of organisations stated that they feel confident in the skillset necessary to raise funds, yet almost half of organisations (46%) consider income generation one of the biggest challenges for the sector.
- **There is a significant resource gap, putting a strain on organisational stability and staff capacity, and hindering environmental impact.** Three-quarters of organisations find financial sustainability challenging, almost 60% struggle with staff capacity, and almost 80% are unable to achieve their strategic impact goals because they cannot raise funds as quickly as they need to.

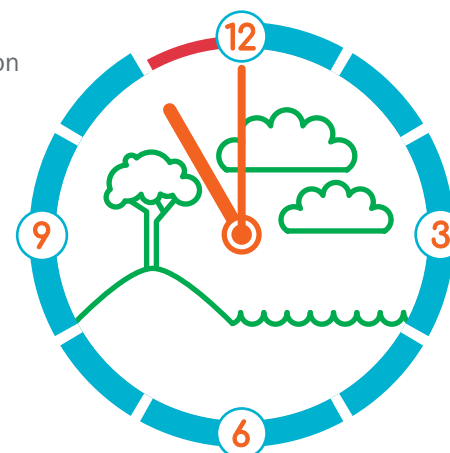
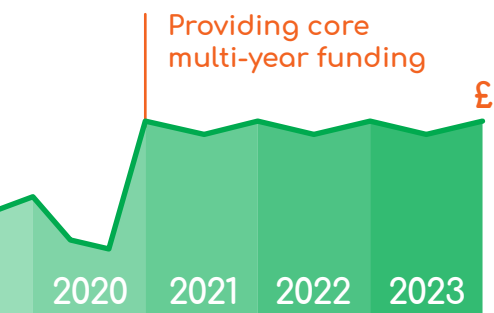


Actions for environmental organisations:

- **Compelling storytelling:** Organisations need to prioritise communications activity to share their stories and goals in ways that attract funders and inspire greater public action.
- **Cost recovery to support Impact:** Organisations to include the costs of communication work and other central costs as an integral part of their project and activity budgets.
- **Investment in preventative solutions:** Organisations to seek funding towards preventative efforts and work that addresses the root cause of a problem, educating funders and policy makers why these are important.
- **Stronger environmental policies:** Organisations to use their knowledge and experience to promote strong policies to protect the environment and encourage positive change

Actions for funders:

- encourage and fund organisations to prioritise communications as a critical part of their work
- invest in organisational infrastructure, by allowing full cost recovery budgets and providing core, multi-year funding
- invest in learning to understand the complexities of climate and environmental work and incorporate this into grant-making strategies
- be transparent and agile when funding, to meet the urgency for action



Methodology

This report is based on the findings from a survey undertaken by non-profit environmental organisations in the UK. The survey was sent to a sample of 150 non-profit organisations, and included organisations of all sizes, UK geographies and across different issue areas. A small pilot of the survey took place first, before officially launching between 20 April and 8 May 2020. Responses were received from 68 different organisations across the UK, 86% of which were UK registered charities. Surveys were completed primarily by executive leadership (59%) and senior fundraising staff (38%).

In this report, the survey findings are divided into four key sections. The first three sections address core thematic challenges the UK environmental sector faces:

- 1 persuading the public and funders of the urgency to act to protect our climate and environment
- 2 the challenging funding landscape
- 3 limited resources and capacity to carry out work and operate sustainably

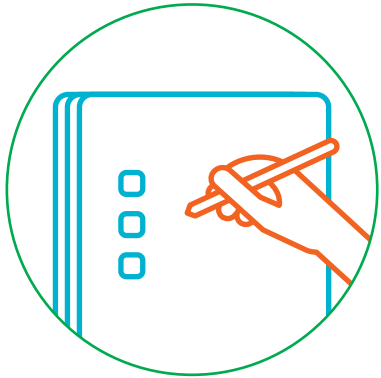
The fourth section details how to move forward: what can be done to create a thriving environmental sector. All quotes featured throughout this report are from the surveyed environmental organisations. As the survey collected responses anonymously, quotes have not been attributed.

Following the survey, we also reached out to a handful of organisations surveyed to delve further into our findings and put them into context. We spoke to Hubbub, Woodland Trust, RSPB and Buglife. Whilst survey findings remain anonymous, quotes from these four organisations are credited.

Comments on survey results

We have a high degree of confidence that our findings speak to the biggest challenges faced by the sector. Although the report was commissioned by the Garfield Weston Foundation, its name was purposefully not evident in the survey, so not to elicit funder-influenced responses. Our survey also received responses from those who implement the majority of the environmental work across the UK, including responses from most of the largest organisations within the sector. We did, however, receive a few responses from smaller organisations, particularly those with an income of less than £10k per year, and our survey results are therefore skewed towards larger organisations.¹ The survey was launched less than a month into the pandemic lockdown in the UK, so this likely had an impact on the ability of smaller, potentially less resilient organisations to respond.

¹ Whilst previous research has indicated 42% of UK environmental charities have an income of less than £10k, and only 6% have income of over £1m, the majority of our survey respondents (57%) have an annual turnover of over £1m - NCV0 (2019) 'UK Civil Society Almanac 2019'



Urgency for action

Environmental organisations struggle to convince the public and funders about the need and urgency to act.

Climate change and the rapid degradation of our natural world affects everyone, everywhere. However, many of the detrimental impacts to our economy and social lives have happened gradually, or affect us indirectly. One clear theme from the survey was that **people are not fully grasping the immediate need to safeguard our environment**. Almost half of organisations (48.5%) believe the biggest challenge the UK charity sector faces is a lack of public understanding about the urgency to act on environmental issues.

💧💧 *We need more public awareness of why this is urgent and why we need to act now. It cannot constantly be put on the back burner because other issues come up.*

Given the current circumstances, organisations widely compared the urgency with which environmental issues must be addressed with the public's attention and response to Covid-19.

💧💧 *The UK and the wider world need to act on a dramatic scale and bring about behaviour change in a similar scale to that prompted by Covid-19.*

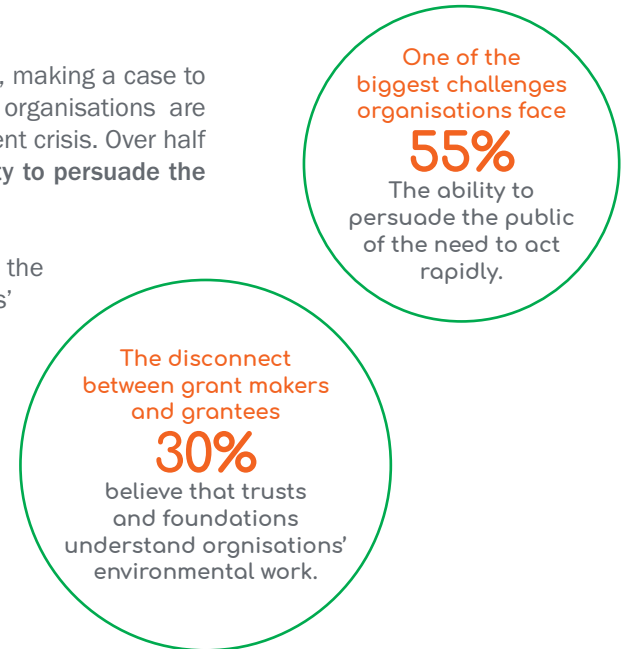
Communicating this urgency is an essential role played by environmental organisations, making a case to prioritise our environment, particularly in a post-Covid-19 recovery. Yet it appears organisations are struggling to communicate the sheer scale and complexity of the climate and environment crisis. Over half (55%) reported that one of the biggest challenges their organisation faces is the **ability to persuade the public of the need to act rapidly**.

It is not only the general public who lack this understanding, but also decision-makers in the sector, such as funders. Findings revealed that, whilst half of surveyed organisations' income primarily comes from trusts and foundations, only 30% of them believe trusts and foundations understand their environmental work. This indicates a big disconnect between grant makers and their grantees.

💧💧 *[We need] dialogue with funders about how we can achieve the system change towards an equitable and sustainable world.*



💧💧
Communication has come a long way. But there's still a way to go. It can't be all doom and gloom. We can, and must, give people hope. Helping them take the practical steps ... and ensure we are all part of the solution.
Woodland Trust CEO, Darren Moorcroft



Funding challenges

The environmental sector has a limited funding landscape.




Fundraising for environmental causes is not an easy task. In 2016/2017, work focused on the environment received less than 4% of the total income of the UK voluntary sector.² Now, Covid-19 has placed even greater economic pressure on the charity sector, with many organisations expecting a decrease in total income of 31% against total income in the previous year.³

It comes as no surprise that fundraising is one of the biggest challenges respondents identified. Almost half of organisations (46%) consider income generation one of the biggest challenges for the sector, and **almost one in four organisations (24%) told us that they struggle to identify sources of funding.**

A key aggravating factor is that the environmental sector appears to have an extremely limited number of large funders. Recent research found that approximately three-quarters of all giving to environmental causes was provided by just 20 foundations.⁴ Organisations understand that they need to diversify their funding in order to be resilient and sustainable and 87% are investing in diversification. However, many believe that most funders simply aren't prioritising our climate and environment.

 *The vast majority of charitable trusts and foundations have always struggled with prioritising funding for 'climate change' [...] But it is the biggest issue humanity faces [...]*

Despite this challenging context, respondents told us **they are well equipped with the skills needed to fundraise.** Three-quarters of organisations stated they feel somewhat or very confident in the skillset necessary to raise funds. However, fundraising skills could be rendered useless if grant sources are few and far between.



There are funders in the sector that have been around a long time and they understand the environmental issues. But other funders are at a low point on the learning curve. They go with what they know – it's a big leap for them to try something new.

RSPB CEO,
Beccy Speight

Confidence of organisations

Organisations that feel somewhat or very confident in the skillset necessary to raise funds.



75%



² NCVO (2019) 'UK Civil Society Almanac 2019'
³ IOF, CFG & NCVO (2020) 'Impact of Covid-19 on the charity sector'
⁴ EFN (2019) 'Where the Green Grants Went 7'

It would be good to have partners on board who would maybe give pro-bono support. We could really do with more support for things like our website and getting integrated systems running.

Buglife Director of Fundraising and Communications, Paul Hetherington

Instability and stunted impact

The environmental sector is stuck in a vicious cycle: resources vs. impact.

The urgent need for work addressing environmental challenges – compounded with the tough funding landscape mentioned above – often leaves environmental organisations with insufficient resources and staff capacity to carry out work to their fullest potential.

Insufficient resources directed towards the environmental sector have negative implications on organisational stability and staff capacity. Our survey revealed that 75% of organisations find financial sustainability a big challenge, and almost 60% of organisations struggle with capacity.

💧 *[We need further] support for the sector to employ and train more members of staff to deliver the environmental impact needed to tackle the ecological and climate crisis.*

Another clear message from the survey is that limited resources and staff capacity make environmental impact difficult. Almost 80% of organisations are unable to achieve their strategic impact goals because they cannot raise funds as quickly as they need to.

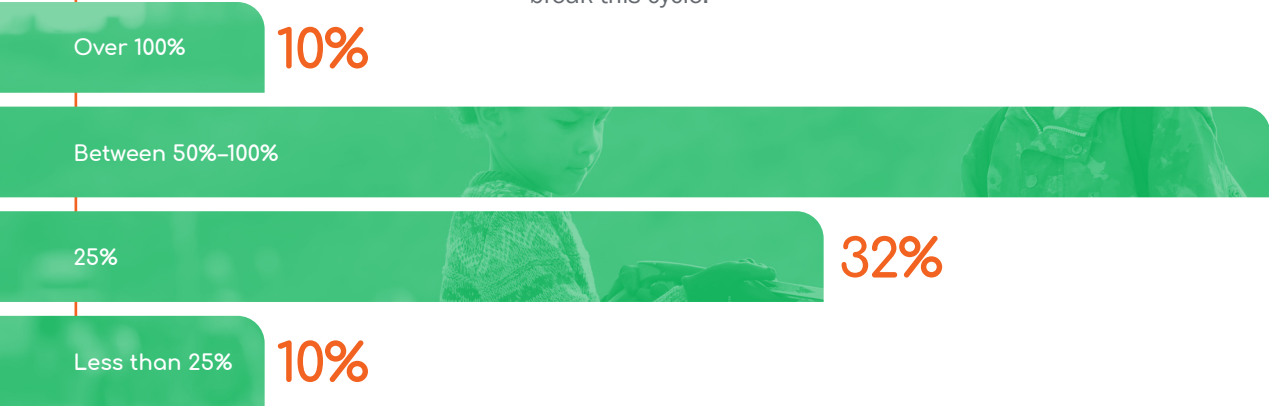
💧 *The post-Covid-19 green stimulus, COP26 and the immediate follow-up [...] represent key opportunities to achieve massive change and environmental impact – but there is not sufficient funding to allow the step up that is needed by charities and organisations in the sector.*

In order to reach their strategic goals, nearly 60% of organisations would need an additional 50% of income. This reveals a significant resource gap.

The environmental sector is clearly stuck in a vicious cycle. Limited resources do not enable staff to carry out impactful work at scale, and poor programmatic work will, in turn, be unlikely to attract funds. Both environmental organisations doing the work, and grant makers who enable it, will need to work together to break this cycle.



How much more annual income would your organisation need in order to meet your strategic goals?



Moving forward: towards a more impactful sector

Better storytelling, strategic funding and policy work are key to strengthening the sector.

2020 was set to be a big year for the environmental sector, with summits such as COP26 paving the way for global decision makers to commit to new and more ambitious environmental policies and actions moving forward. Despite the postponement of these global reunions, **2020 still could be the year for critical discussions**, and this report is intended to play a role in that. With Covid-19 having drastically changed the way the world lives and provided space for reflection on how society functions, **there is a clear opportunity for both non-profit organisations and funders to ensure our economy is rebuilt to be just, equitable and sustainable.**

💧💧 *This isn't just about funding technical solutions – it involves people, communities, changing behaviour and national policy and regulation to encourage low carbon futures.*

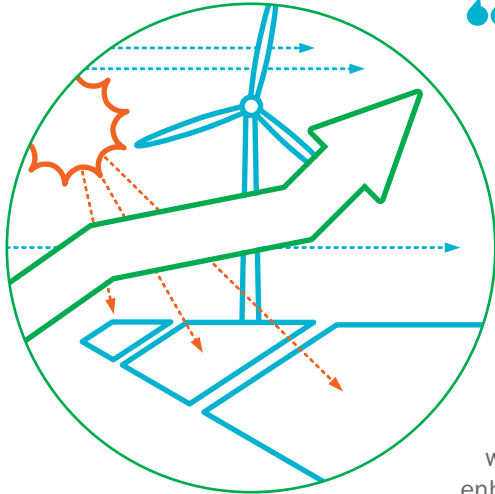
Advancing environmental impact

Organisations told us what they think needs to happen to further environmental impact in the UK. The most common answers included:

Better storytelling

To rebuild a greener society, everybody will need to understand climate and environment issues and the role they must play in them. The UK environmental non-profit sector will be critical to this. Charitable organisations need to become strong storytellers – to effectively communicate their story and goals in a way that attracts funders, as well as inspire greater public action. In addition, funders will need to be willing to invest in capacity building, with charities ensuring this support is directed at enhancing communications.

💧💧 *[We need] clear, simple, coordinated urgent messages and actions, backed up by money, that will move climate change and biodiversity loss to the level of importance given to Covid-19.*



It's so clear now that the environmental and nature crises are intrinsically linked with issues of social inequality and it would be fantastic to have more funders recognise that.

RSPB CEO,
Beccy Speight



Foundations are diverse when it comes to understanding and supporting the environment. Some appreciate conservation ... fewer engage deeply with the systemic and long-term change that is needed.

Woodland Trust CEO,
Darren Moorcroft



As a sector our communication needs to change ... The 'expert' voice which many use doesn't always translate into good communications and it can simply be too abstract ...

Hubbub Founder and
CEO, Trewin Restorick

Investment in preventative solutions and systems change

Some organisations indicated that work to counteract environmental damage tends to have more tangible outcomes and is therefore prioritised over solutions preventing harmful practices. The survey highlighted a need for greater funding towards preventative efforts, in particular work that addresses the root causes of a problem.

💧💧 *Much more funding needs to go to solving the core problem driving climate change [...] Conservation work gets around 50 times more funding than reducing [material] demand [...] But [...] spiralling demand for goods [...] may well render conservation efforts pointless.*

Organisations also believe funders should ensure they incorporate a systemic approach to understand the complexities and intersections of climate and environmental work and other social issues. Charitable organisations can also support this by helping funders understand the complexities of their work.

💧💧 *[We need] dialogue with funders about how we can achieve the system change towards an equitable and sustainable world.*

Stronger environmental policies

Organisations expressed the need for strong policies to protect the environment. Over a quarter of organisations fear Brexit and Covid-19 are weakening charitable efforts, and many pointed to a severe lack of government policies protecting the environment. In parallel, many organisations mentioned difficulties fundraising for policy and advocacy work, which can hold the government accountable for limiting environmental harm. There is clearly a need for large-scale funding behind public and political movements in support of the environment, and sustained momentum in order to protect and strengthen environmental policies.

💧💧 *There needs to be a significant injection of funding. The post-Covid-19 green stimulus, COP26 and the immediate follow-up to COP represent key opportunities to achieve massive change and environmental impact – but there is not sufficient funding to allow the step up that is needed by charities and organisations in the sector.*



...this time I am hopeful that the public mood is looking for change, the Government also seem to be going in the right direction and they have a real moment to invest in a green economy. We very much feel this is the moment for real change...

Hubbub Founder and
CEO, Trewin Restorick

It would be good if funders considered giving core funding to organisations working on environmental projects so that the organisation can decide what is needed to make the most difference. All too often, you only get funding for a project if you deliver it in a certain way. We need freer parameters.

Buglife Director of Fundraising and Communications,
Paul Hetherington

What organisations need from funders

To achieve environmental impact, funders need a knowledgeable, well-resourced environmental sector to award grants to, and non-profits need funders willing to provide financial and non-financial support in a flexible and strategic way. Organisations told us what they would prioritise if they were a grant maker, and their main pieces of advice were:

- encourage and enable organisations to move beyond managing and monitoring of projects, and incorporate communications and engagement elements as a critical part of their work
- invest in organisational infrastructure by allowing full cost recovery and providing core, multi-year funding
- take time and invest in learning to understand the complexities of climate and environmental work and incorporate this into grant-making strategies
- be transparent and agile in your grant-making, to meet the urgency with which we must act
- fund preventative environmental solutions, not just counteractive ones
- collaborate with other funders for greater influence and impact



💧💧 *[I would prioritise] unrestricted funding to help charities support core costs or allow overhead cost recovery.*

💧💧 *My starting point would be to recognise the interconnectedness of elements of systems and [...] see where I could collaborate with other funders to leverage impact, and support charities taking the same collaborative approach [...] We have 9 years to make the changes needed to stop climate disaster. Yet most funding rounds take 6 months from application to funds paid.*

Conclusion

Summary of findings

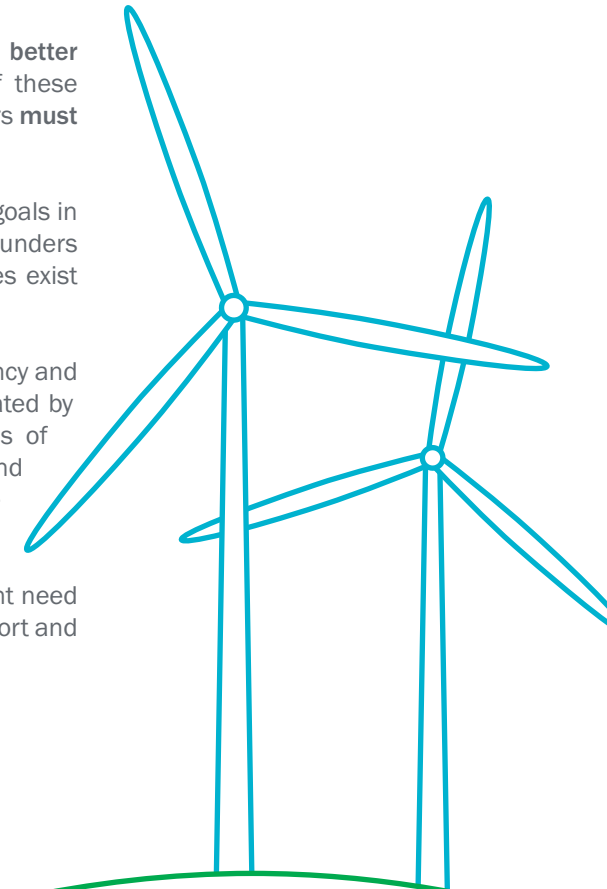
The UK environmental non-profit sector is struggling to achieve the impact needed to move the needle on environmental issues. Organisations' main obstacles are: persuading their key audiences of the urgency to respond; a challenging and limited funding environment; and a vicious cycle where limited resources stunt their impact, keeping them from securing more resources from impact-focused donors.

The survey highlighted three core gaps that need greater attention to strengthen the sector: **better storytelling, investment in preventative solutions, and stronger policy work**. However, each of these requires significant resource, and **both** environmental organisations doing the work and grant makers **must play an active role and support each other** to ensure these needs are met.

Organisations need to commit their available resources to effectively communicate their story and goals in a way that inspires faster and greater public action, and funder attention. They must also help funders understand how their work impacts their funding remits, demonstrating that environmental issues exist now, and demand immediate action.

In turn, funders must prioritise grant-making towards the environment, understanding that the urgency and dangers presented in this area threaten all other grant-making work, and impact can only be created by sustainable organisations. Funders must invest in learning and understanding the complexities of environmental work and the toxic systems that organisations are trying to change and be willing to fund in a way that provides organisations with the resources and flexibility to carry out their work to the fullest potential.

Similar to the urgent need to respond to the environmental and climate crisis, the sector is in urgent need of constructive dialogue between environmental organisations and grant makers to build trust, support and enable a thriving environmental sector.



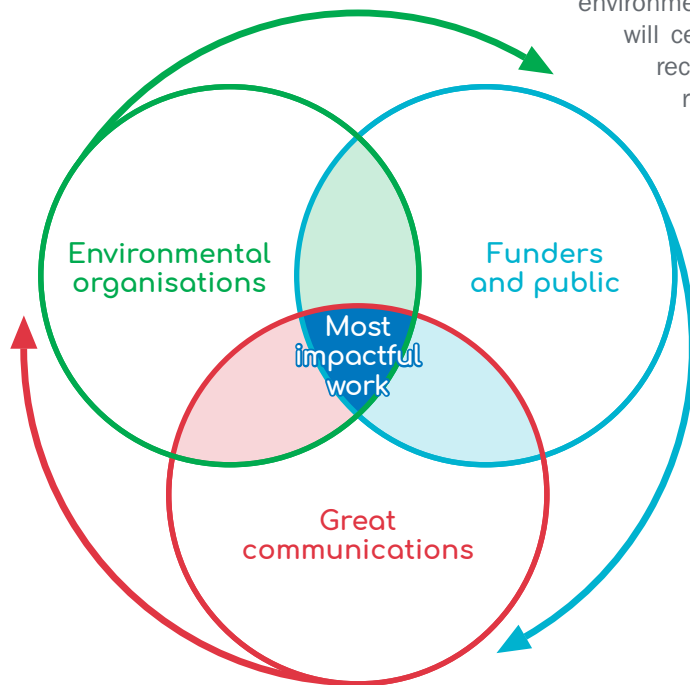
Closing statement

This report has highlighted the need for powerful conversations between environmental organisations, grant makers and the public, to ensure that excellent environmental organisations are able to do what they do best.

Funders, environmental organisations, and the public have tremendous capacity for change, but this impact is even greater when these three groups work closely with each other. When this does not happen, we lose both impact and momentum. The messages clearly inter-relate, bringing to mind a virtuous or a vicious circle; with each element acting to reinforce the impact of the others. When organisations have clear messages, the public will understand and be motivated to act and funders motivated to provide support; which in turn enables organisations to do more of their work, and so the cycle continues.

From a funder perspective, the messages from the survey were enlightening and motivating, and are already informing our grant making. Our first action has been to partner with The Media Trust to develop a programme specifically for environment charities to help them build capability and confidence with their communications, messaging and profile-raising. This will run during 2021 and was developed in response to such a clear need highlighted by the survey respondents so it merited swift action. We also note the environment sector unequivocally asking funders to support core activity as well as projects; so we will certainly be encouraging a pragmatic approach to cost recovery in the proposals we receive. We will also be placing emphasis on practical, preventative solutions and will re-double our efforts to understand the wider policy implications of on-the-ground activity.

Creating a virtuous circle



All issues relating to the environment across the UK, including climate change, biodiversity, natural resources and conservation remain a key priority for Garfield Weston Foundation; so, if you are a UK registered charity undertaking environmental work, please do visit our website for information on how you can apply to us: www.garfieldweston.org.

Thank you again to all those who contributed to this report, and particular thanks to I.G. Advisors whose thoughtful and thorough approach was much appreciated. There is a clear imperative to act on the messages from this survey and, above all, this report invites everyone to 'Prioritise our Planet'. We hope you find it useful.

About the Foundation

The Garfield Weston Foundation is a family-founded, charitable grant-making foundation, which supports a wide range of causes across the UK, donating over £88 million annually. It was established in 1958 by the Weston family and is one of the largest and most respected charitable institutions in the UK, having donated over £1 billion in total. The Trustees are descendants of the founder and the Weston family continues to take a highly active and hands-on approach.

The Foundation aims to be responsive to where need is greatest and therefore supports a wide range of charitable activity in the following categories:

- Arts
- Environment
- Museums & Heritage
- Community
- Faith
- Welfare
- Education
- Health
- Youth

Almost 2000 charities across the UK benefit each year from grants made by the Foundation, ranging from small community and volunteer projects to large national organisations. Despite this range, the common theme is that charities demonstrate they are meeting a need effectively with clear outcomes and benefits, good leadership, sensible business plans and a commitment to excellence.



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