

What Our Partners Say

Understanding the Value of the Stewardship Network in New Hampshire and Beyond

The Stewardship Network: New England (the Network) is an initiative based at the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension that involves over 165 partner organizations, including conservation groups, state and federal agencies, municipalities, and volunteer leaders. The aim of the Network is to increase our collective capacity to care for and study the environment of New England and to mobilize volunteers to help.

In 2016, three years after its launch, the Network staff examined the value of the Network to its collaborating organizations. The Network held a series of **partner input sessions** in New Hampshire, followed by an **online survey** of actively involved members across New England.

2016 New Hampshire Partner Input Sessions

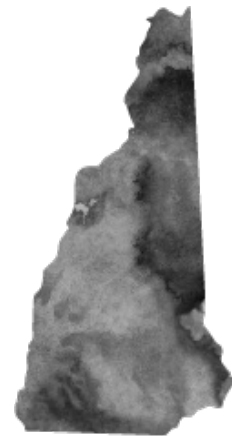
UNH Cooperative Extension hosted three meetings in early 2016 with NH-based collaborating partners involved in the Network initiative. The sessions revealed how partners value the Network and its services, as well as how they view their role within the Network structure.

Input Session Findings:

- **Partners value the Network** because it connects volunteers to opportunities and offers organizations a view of other stewardship actions that they can learn from and replicate. The Network is professional, positive, and their staff is an asset to those working in stewardship and citizen science.
- The **most valued** aspects of the Network include the interactive online calendar and registration system, weekly e-bulletin, and staff. Training opportunities are also working well.
- Some **challenging** aspects of the Network include that it attracts younger volunteers to partners who aren't used to working with this group, and that partners don't know enough about who participates. Partners want to increase participation in all regions of NH.
- When asked **what else the Network could be providing** to partners, participants mentioned more training and education, information on volunteers' skills, and increased student connections and participation.
- There was **little interest for developing regional hubs** with formal meetings in NH, but partners would like to be able to search volunteer opportunities by region on the website.
- Further, NH **partners are satisfied with the existing feedback** mechanisms, see the Network as fair and transparent, and don't see a need for an advisory group or shared governance of the Network.



70% of New England partners find it very useful that the Network raises awareness about the importance of stewardship



NH partners want to increase participation in NH and expand the geographic scope of the Network across the state.

2016 New England Partner Survey

The Network implemented an online survey in summer 2016, sent to 427 contacts who had participated in the launch, start-up, or operations of the Network.¹ The survey received a 31% response rate, with a total of 133 individuals responding.

Survey Results:

- The **largest group of respondents** were from not-for-profit organizations, followed closely by volunteer board members and public agency staff. Educators and uncategorized participants were the smallest groups of respondents. The majority (72%) of respondents focus their work or volunteering in New Hampshire.
- About three quarters of respondents **use the Stewardship Network** to regularly read the weekly bulletin, and about half have regularly shared stories or participated in Network social media posts. Occasional use of the Network occurs around connecting to new collaborators (46%), attending volunteer events posted on calendar (39%), and posting events on the calendar (38%).
- Respondents see the **most useful aspects of the Network** as raising awareness about stewardship and citizen science and mobilizing volunteers through the online events calendar. However, every activity of the Network was somewhat or very useful to at least 86% of the respondents.
- To further understand **partners' greatest needs**, the survey asked respondents about their challenges. A majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they need help with volunteer recruitment and training. Additional funding to pay for stewardship work is another common challenge. About half of respondents agreed that citizen science, tools, volunteer management, and organizational support are challenges.
- The survey asked respondents about their **top stewardship needs** requiring help by volunteers. Invasive plants, education and outreach, trails, and easement monitoring were all highly ranked topics.
- The Network is **most highly valued** for bringing awareness and resources to volunteer stewardship and citizen science activities in the region. Respondents also strongly value that the Network brings awareness of successful collaborative stewardship efforts and provides a resource for volunteer management and recruitment. 72% of respondents agree that the Network teaches best practices on stewardship, citizen science, and working with volunteers, and that they see more value in working with volunteers as a result of the Network. 74% of respondents also valued the Network for recruiting more diverse volunteers.

Full reports on each research effort are available on the Network website: newengland.stewardshipnetwork.org



“The Network has without a doubt been a benefit to my program. It has provided resources (larger volunteer pool, resources on best practices, vehicle for recruiting) that I would not otherwise have access to, and provided me with a greater understanding of the role of volunteers in accomplishing NH’s research and stewardship goals related to natural resources.”

—Partner Survey response



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