

CLUB FOSTERED COMMUNITY GRANT REPORT 2024



AMERICANCANOE.ORG/PARTNERSHIPS

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ABOUT THE ACA

Founded in 1880, The American Canoe Association (ACA) is a national nonprofit organization serving the paddling public by providing education related to all aspects of paddling, stewardship support to help protect paddling environments, and sanctioning of programs and events to promote paddlesports competition, exploration, and recreation.

In partnership with L.L.Bean, we believe the CFC Grant program's role is to support paddling opportunities and access for underserved community members through the framework of existing paddling clubs, non-profits, and volunteer groups. By leveraging the existing clubs and projects that are already in place, this project will not need to "reinvent the wheel." In 2024, the CFC funding was used to amplify diversity and inclusion efforts of existing groups/projects, rather than developing brand new programs from scratch. The new paddlers engaged by the CFC DEI efforts now have a community group or club to call "home," which results in lasting relationships and a long-term interest in experiencing and exploring the paddling world.

CLUB FOSTERED COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAM OVERVIEW



Since 2002, the ACA has partnered with L.L.Bean to sponsor the Club Fostered Stewardship (CFS) Program. The ACA is proud to help local paddling clubs and organizations build their communities and improve their waterways. Through funds provided by L.L.Bean, the ACA's CFS Program provided nearly \$175,000 to over 185 different stewardship initiatives since its inception. In 2021, The CFS grant was refocused as the "Club Fostered Community" program; funding is now used to amplify diversity and inclusion efforts of existing groups/projects through education, stewardship, competition, recreation, and waterway exploration events.

With the continued support of L.L.Bean, the ACA will continue to support paddling clubs and grassroots organizations around the country in their efforts to make this world a better place to paddle for everyone. For more information, please visit: americancanoe.org/partnerships

In 2024, the ACA funded nine (9) organizations and the following projects:

CANYON RIVER INSTRUCTION

NARI NAUKA WOMEN'S RAFT GUIDE SCHOOL



In March of 2024, Elisha McArthur (of Canyon River Instruction,) Jeremy Anne Anderson and Julie Sutton - all long time whitewater professionals - traveled to Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India to teach a whitewater raft guide school to fourteen local Hindi women, in order to help women become raft guides on the Ganga (Ganges) River for the first time in history! Nari means "Woman" in Hindi, and Nauka means "Boat" in Hindi, so it basically means... "Girl Boat!"

The fourteen women who had signed up for Nari Nauka Women's Whitewater Guide Training varied in age from 17 to 38, and from backgrounds as diverse as "blue-collar single mom" to "Himalayan mountain guide." To exemplify the diversity of these Indian women, all from the North Eastern state of India called Uttarakhand, three of them are professional kayakers, and three of them are non-swimmers.



There have never been women raft guides on the Ganga River in India, not because men have been preventing women from training to guide, not because men believed that women "shouldn't" be raft guides. Women have never been raft guides on the Ganga River in India because no-one believed that women "could" be raft guides, specifically Indian women. There has been the occasional Kiwi or American female guide who has spent a season on the Ganga, But white women are seen as "big & strong."

CANYON RIVER INSTRUCTION

NARI NAUKA WOMEN'S RAFT GUIDE SCHOOL

Having three pro-kayakers and four other recreational kayakers in the program, it was apparent that kayaking is seen as a place where women can be, because kayaks are small and light, so “obviously” women can paddle kayaks. But rafts are big and heavy, so “obviously” women can’t guide rafts. It wasn’t a mean attitude, it wasn’t an attempt to keep women subservient, it was simply a view of the “nature” of things. The mentality was along the lines of: “Cows can’t fly, because cows don’t have wings. Girls can’t guide big heavy rafts, because girls are small and light.”

Nari Nauka was just the beginning of something profound. The India Government has expressed an interest in funding the program for the future. Jeremy, Julie and Elisha are committed to seeing it through to the point where there will be Indian women that can run their own Nari Nauka program, training and supporting other women guides, building community indefinitely, on the Ganga and other Indian rivers, for Indian women. Nari Nauka not only inspired a generation of Indian women to follow their dreams and pursue their passion in spite of their world telling them it is impossible, showing them that with support and community, “impossible” becomes in fact, “I’m Possible.”

“I’m incredibly grateful for the Nari Nauka course. It not only improved my river guiding skills but also changed my perspective on empowerment. The program opened valuable economic opportunities and connected me with a vibrant community of whitewater enthusiasts. This experience boosted my confidence, helped me face new challenges, and developed my leadership skills. The supportive environment encouraged my personal growth and resilience, inspiring me to make positive changes in my life and contribute to my community.”

Priyanka Rana, 22-Year old program participant



COMMUNITY BOATING CENTER ECOADVENTURE S.T.E.M. CAMP



Community Boating Center's focus is on enabling youth to experience the joy, wonder, and confidence that results from learning to paddle and sail, while also experientially acquiring key STEM competencies; skills that youth will rely on for the rest of their educational and professional careers. CBC youth programs provide low-income, inner-city, and mostly at-risk youth the opportunity to actively experience a new environment, expand their knowledge, develop new skills, and make new friends; a healthy, valuable alternative to time unsupervised at home or on the street.

Charitable support from CFC grant funding has been vital to meeting the needs of under-served youth in Rhode Island. Community Boating Center's EcoAdventure STEM Summer Camp paddling and sailing programs were provided to at-risk youth, meeting an increasing need for out-of-school programs. This grant helped us meet the increased demand for safe and engaging summer programming, while also helping lower-income children to bridge the education gap between them and their peers.

This grant funded full scholarships for 7 youth and helped meet the continuing critical demand for low-income youth summer programs for 137 youth total.

GEORGIA CANOE ASSOCIATION BEAVER CREW PROGRAM

The Georgia Canoe Association (GCA), in partnership with the Georgia River Network (GRN), joined forces this year to continue the implementation of the GRN Beaver Crew Training Program. Since 2022, GRN has been reaching out to area nonprofits, community-based organizations, and outdoor recreation programming in municipalities across Georgia to identify individuals who are already doing paddlesports programming for their community but may not have had any formal training or credentialing. It is the strong held belief of both participating organizations that securing instructor certification is essential for anyone offering water safety skills and paddling instruction to the public. To this end, a structured mentorship program for acquiring the paddling and teaching skills required to secure instructor certification was developed.

The program creates a common-ground environment where individuals join a training cohort to acquire the necessary skills to complete their entry level ACA certification. By casting a wide net, individuals were encouraged to participate in the training. The cohorts themselves are diverse in nature, however, to encourage underrepresented populations to participate in the program the funds provided by the LL Bean/ ACA Citizen Fostered Community grant were utilized to create a scholarship program that enabled applicants to participate in the cohort as well as the instructor certification class at no cost to the individual. Although all cohort applicants were encouraged to apply for the funds, individuals who demonstrated a commitment to increase diversity in paddlesport education were given preference.



GEORGIA CANOE ASSOCIATION BEAVER CREW PROGRAM

Further, scholarship recipients are expected to give back to the program by volunteering in training future cohorts after receiving certification. The grant allowed us to fund five individuals.

The cohort meets on scheduled Fridays, May through September. The expectation is that instructor candidates will attend at least four of the sessions but are welcome to attend as many as their schedule allows. The class is taught by previous cohort members who have received their certification. To be fully prepared for the Instructor certification course, cohort members need to attend one lake class, one river class and at least two additional preparation sessions to be exposed to teaching methodology and have a chance to practice their skills. GCA provided volunteer safety boaters on the water during these sessions.

Since the implementation of the program, 41 paddlers have completed the Beaver Crew training program and have become certified kayak instructors. These paddlers are now trainers themselves and use their credentials to lead river trips and expand the paddlesports community to even more people. These trained instructors are taking their skills back to their own organizations and communities across the state. Nineteen of these leaders identify as paddlers of color and/or represent other diverse populations. Engaging leaders in these communities is crucial for increasing water safety and inviting everyone to connect with Georgia's rivers. One thing we do know is that over the course of the summer training, the program builds relationships that transcend any credential. The result is that they create friendships and bonds of community that bridge historical barriers, empower leaders in our community-facing programs to be more successful in their jobs or volunteer commitments, and ultimately foster diversity in our clubs.



Looking ahead, we are committed to sustaining and expanding upon the success of this initiative. The support of the CFC Grant Program will be instrumental in advancing our mission of creating a more diverse and inclusive paddling community. We are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with the ACA and L.L. Bean in achieving these impactful outcomes.

'OHANA WA'A LAULIMA INCLUSIVE CANOE RACE



The members and board of 'Ohana Wa'a Laulima would like to express our deeply felt thanks to the American Canoe Association and L.L. Bean for their generosity in awarding us this grant. The funding provided by the CFC Grant was used by 'Ohana Wa'a Laulima to purchase a new beach wheelchair. Since its arrival, we have been using the wheelchair at our weekly practice sessions to help transfer our athletes that require mobility assistance. It has quickly become an essential piece of equipment and will remain so for years to come. In addition to the weekly benefit our members and volunteers receive from the new chair, it was essential in helping us at two marquee events this year.

The first event was the International Va'a Federation's World Sprints event. World Sprints was held this year in our home waters of Hilo Bay. Our new wheelchair was an essential part of what was a very successful event, both for our athletes and the international canoeing community. The loading area was rocky and difficult to traverse for all athletes, so having the chair was an absolute blessing for those with the need for additional assistance.



'OHANA WA'A LAULIMA INCLUSIVE CANOE RACE

We also used to chair to help load athletes into canoes for a special IDD Exhibition race for over 40 athletes with intellectual and developmental delays. This was a first of its kind exhibition, and we strongly believe that representation and visibility matter and are excited to see what the future holds for IDD athletes. The excitement and thrill of participating in the World Sprints event was quickly followed by our annual King Kamehameha Awesome Athletes Inclusive Canoe Race. This was our third annual race and another fantastic shared experience for our community of athletes. Our annual race is open to athletes of all abilities, and having our new wheelchair certainly aided our ability to load all the participants safely. We had over 100 athletes participate this year. Mahalo nui loa!

PRIDE DAY ON THE RIVER

Thanks to the grant from L.L.Bean and American Canoe Association, four people participated free-of-charge in the Beginner Whitewater Kayaking clinic delivered by Zoar Outdoor on Saturday, June 8 to Sunday, June 9 in Charlemont, MA. Further, when promoting the free clinic registrations, we had an additional 24 people who registered for the waitlist. Given that promotion for the clinic was light, we expect there to be many more potential clinic participants in the future.

All members of the clinic identified as having a LGBTQ+ identity. There were four Zoar Outdoor Paddlesports instructors throughout the weekend. The clinic instruction oriented participants to whitewater kayaks and took them to a flatwater pond to practice wet exits and basic kayak strokes and boat control. On the second day, the group went to a section of the Deerfield River to practice eddy turns, peel outs, and ferries on moving Class I-II water.

The clinic concluded with a debrief for the clinic participants and identified opportunities for further whitewater experiences. On Saturday after the clinic, the participants joined the "Pride Day on the River" After Party at Zoar where they met people within the local paddling community, ate food from local restaurants, and participated in a free raffle of swag, supplies, and gear from NRS, AquaBound, Immersion Research, American Whitewater, Zoar Outdoor, Pyranah, and Werner. Most of the group inquired about or made plans to continue their whitewater learning. Participants were added to the email list of LGBTQ+ whitewater paddlers in the Northeast.



PRIDE DAY ON THE RIVER

By the numbers:

- 4 L.L.Bean/ACA funded participants in the kayaking clinic
- 4 clinic instructors through the weekend
- 16 hours of clinic instruction
- 4 volunteers
- 80 volunteer hours
- 90 boaters on the Deerfield River for Pride Day on the River community paddle
- 90+ clinic participants and community paddlers

Participant Testimonials:

"I've been out on the water 3 times since and have practiced the skills I learned. I feel a lot more confident which makes it all more fun."

"I also want to thank the others in our group. I really enjoyed meeting you all and getting to share such a special event together. Lots of courage on display and I'm honored to have shared it."

"A special shout out for all the effort with the sponsors and warm welcome to whitewater kayaking for the LGBTQ community."

"That was all so much fun. I'm grateful to have met you all and have had this opportunity to try something new and challenging."

"You are a fantastic leader in this space and I'm so grateful for your work in bringing us all together."



TAMPA BAY KAYAK ANGLERS LA RAZA EXPLORERS



The CFC Grant Funding was instrumental in facilitating Tampa Bay Kayak Angler's La Raza Explorers, a two-day kayak event aimed at engaging the Hispanic community. The funds were utilized to provide necessary equipment, including kayaks and life jackets, ensuring all participants had access regardless of their financial situation. The event was free to attend, making it accessible to a broader audience.

Engagement: The event had a significant impact, engaging 30 participants over two days. The participants were all from Hispanic backgrounds, including individuals from Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Mexico. This included first-time paddlers and non-English speakers, highlighting the inclusive nature of the program.

Community: This event enhanced diversity and inclusion efforts by providing a safe and welcoming environment for Hispanic individuals to experience kayaking, often for the first time. The program was specifically designed to accommodate participants who may not have had prior access to outdoor recreational activities, strengthening their sense of belonging and community.

One of the most memorable moments from the event was witnessing first-time paddlers, particularly those who didn't speak English, gain confidence on the water. For many, this was their first time experiencing Florida's natural beauty from a kayak.

TAMPA BAY KAYAK ANGLERS LA RAZA EXPLORERS



The participants were taught essential skills, such as how to properly wear a life jacket, the different types of kayaks, and basic paddle strokes. As they ventured down the paddling trail, the group engaged in conversations about the local wildlife and mangroves, deepening their connection to the environment.

This event not only provided an opportunity for participants to enjoy the outdoors but also created moments of wonder and discovery. The program's impact was evident as participants expressed their gratitude, noting how restorative and empowering the experience was for them.



TEAM RIVER RUNNER

ALL INCLUSIVE AFFINITY PADDLING CLINIC

On August 5 near White Bird, Idaho, 15 veterans and 7 LEAP river guides embarked on a 5-day, 74-mile, life-expanding, healing, adventure down the Lower Salmon and Snake Rivers.

Objectives:

- Recruit new minority disabled veterans and introduce them to paddlesports and the healing qualities of the outdoors
- Recruit existing minority TRR veteran members to develop their paddling skills as well as build and encourage leadership within the organization



The focus of this event was on creating opportunities for underserved BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and women veterans of diverse age groups to participate in a multi-day river trip. Several of the participants identified with more than one marginalized identity and of the total 15 veteran participants, 9 identified as women, 2 identified as transgender/non-binary, 8 identified as LGBTQ, 8 identified as people of color, and ages ranged from 25 to 63 years old. Six participants were brand new to the organization.



Ensuring program equity, emotional safety, and a culture of belonging involved very intentional outreach and thoughtful planning. As part of our goal to recruit and engage minority veterans in paddlesports, the organizers recognized the necessity of creating a safe space where every participant could feel emotionally secure enough to be themselves.

The organizers understood that representation matters for marginalized individuals and that they can be inspired to take on new challenges when seeing others like themselves engaging in similar challenges.

TEAM RIVER RUNNER

ALL INCLUSIVE AFFINITY PADDLING CLINIC



To promote equity in our selection process, interviews were held with applicants and selections were not based upon merit, skill set, or time with the organization but upon whether the person felt like an event such as this would benefit them in their healing journey.

The days were filled with paddling rapids, games, lots of free-time and socializing, evening debrief circles, sharing stories, processing challenges, gratitude, costume/dress-up evening, and leadership development. Together we were able to face our fears, overcome adversity, and celebrate our accomplishments.

“I have more confidence and feel more empowered than I have felt in 15 years!”
Melanie B. - Los Angeles, CA

“This trip was life changing for me! It was literally the first time in years where I haven’t felt like I had to explain and/or argue the case for my existence.” Jason T. - Portland, OR

“My experience is that most veteran or paddling events tend to be white, straight, and male-dominated. I think minority-focused events create space and representation for minorities in a way that makes us each feel more seen, valued, and appreciated.” Alicia W. - Atlanta, GA

“It is important for me to feel seen and heard. I felt as though this was a sacred space, where my identities and experiences were validated from the very start. The fact that we all had experienced some form of marginalization meant that it felt easier for connection to take place. Being able to participate in this type of program helped me build community with people who have had similar experiences.” Michelle K. - Eden, NY

TEAM RIVER RUNNER - MIAMI WEST PALM BEACH PADDLERS



30 veterans and their family members participated and were positively impacted through the introduction to kayaking and education surrounding safety and basic kayak strokes. Three different kayak events amplified diversity and inclusion efforts by serving:

- 14 members who identified as female
- 16 members who identified as male
- 9 members who also identified as Hispanic
- 7 members who also identified as African American
- 1 member who identified as Native American

John S. felt the restorative benefits of kayaking in the Loxahatchee River. He had finished treatment for thyroid cancer and had been isolated at home for months. He was emotional, stating that “I finally got out of the house.”

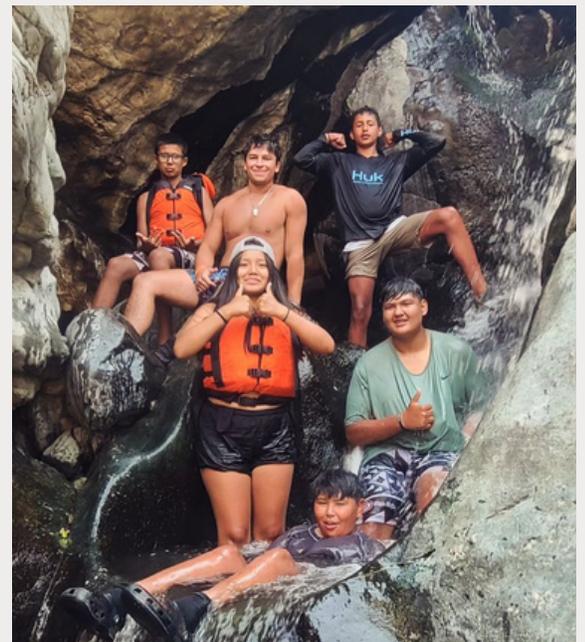
WILD SCIENCE EXPLORERS

NEZ PERCE NATURAL HISTORY AND PADDLING PROJECT

The Nez Perce Natural History and Paddling Project allowed us to take Nez Perce tribal members on a whitewater rafting trip for the first time. All eleven tribal members live very close to the Lower Salmon River, but none of them, including the adult chaperones, had ever been on this stretch of river.

The trip served mainly middle school boys on this trip and they were go, go, go from the minute they woke up until bedtime. Half of these kids were selected because they do not have a connection to their tribe's traditional fishing and gathering activities. For them, getting to camp, fish and row boats was all new - and they were all in! A notable moment of the trip was when the chaperones got the teens to share some of their traditional stories around the campfire.

The importance that the trip has had within the community is highlighted by having tribal member James Holt join the trip, who has been in tribal leadership positions and also works for the Nez Perce wildlife program. He was able to give us historical context for our river trip and also discuss how the Nez Perce are applying traditional ecological knowledge to dealing with climate change issues within the Lower Salmon River watershed. James was quoted as saying, "I haven't been to this place before, but it feels like home."



Thank You!



L.L.Bean

