



OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE

October 17, 2024

First Light Community
c/o New Learning Journey
700 Bragg Hill Road
Fayston, VT 05673

Re: Open Space Institute Letter of Commitment

Dear First Light Community,

The Open Space Institute (OSI) is fully committed to the goals of the First Light Learning Journey and is honored to participate in the 2024-2025 Cohort. OSI has made progress since our former staff member, Jennifer Melville, and current Trustee, Sam Huber, participated in the First Light Learning Journey, but we recognize that there is much more to learn and do. Nick Richardson, our Senior Vice President of Capital Strategies, and Sarah Wells, our New England Program Manager for the Conservation Capital Program, will fully participate in this Cohort and support OSI's evolving practice of equitable conservation.

OSI has taken several steps to better prepare our organization to meaningfully engage with Indigenous partners. Through our Internal Equity Committee, annual cultural audit, and staff learning initiatives, we are institutionalizing OSI's commitment to building and maintaining an internal climate of equity and inclusion. Prioritizing this internal work prepares us to be better partners externally.

We recognize that the land we've helped protect throughout the eastern United States and Canada holds a long and tragic legacy of forced removal and cultural degradation of Native American and Indigenous people. In 2021, we completed a significant step toward translating that recognition into action by returning Papscaanee Island (in what is now known as New York) to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community.

Our work in New York includes our coordination of the New York Land Trust Indigenous Land Working Group, created in 2019 to mobilize the collective tools and resources of the land trust community in service of Indigenous communities. This work led to a partnership with the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry to develop programming to prepare New York land trusts to be good partners to Tribal Nations.

In Maine and throughout New England, OSI primarily functions as a re-granter of funds that catalyze and support local efforts to conserve land, protect biodiversity, and bolster community resilience to the impacts of climate change. We are committed to making our grant-making more equitable and just. Our most recent grant round featured new criteria, requesting applicants to specifically address their proposal's benefits to Indigenous communities, including returning land to Indigenous stewardship. These are important steps, but our grant-making is not yet embedded in a network of relationships with Indigenous partners. As we begin envisioning the next stage of our investment and engagement in Maine, we have a critical opportunity—and responsibility—to develop and practice equitable principles for Wabanaki engagement.

While we don't currently hold title to any land in Maine, the practices we cultivate in this experience will directly inform our relationships with places and Indigenous people in other geographies. As both a land trust and a re-granter of funds, OSI holds dual layers of accountability for the First Light Learning Journey's explicit goals of expanding Wabanaki access and stewardship of land and co-creating a stronger conservation movement that reflects Indigenous expertise and perspectives.

We are honored to be part of this work and community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erik Kulleseid', written in a cursive style.

Erik Kulleseid
President and CEO