

Sewall Foundation Statement of Intention: First Light Community Organization

Note: The Sewall board voted to approve this letter on Friday January 26 2024.

This statement represents a formal commitment by the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation (Sewall) to become a First Light Community Organization and naming explicitly ways in which we are and will continue to strive to be a good partner to Wabanaki communities and tribal governments. Sewall believes it is important to make this public commitment given the unique realities of Wabanaki people, including the relationship of Wabanaki with the place now called Maine; the unique nature of the relationship between Sewall and the Wabanaki sovereign nations; and as manifestation of Sewall's equity principles that acknowledge the ongoing harm of colonialism and commit us to repairing harm.

Sewall is a private, independent foundation committed to building a healthier, more equitable Maine where people, animals, and the environment thrive. Sewall's belief in and commitment to the interconnectedness of all living things is aligned with and has much to learn from Indigenous practices, beliefs, and worldviews.

We recognize that the philanthropic sector has built wealth from extractive, exploitative, and inequitable systems and practices and as such we have an obligation to repair harm. We also recognize that Sewall sits on and benefits from unceded Wabanaki territory, and as such, has a responsibility to support Land Back and repatriation efforts.

We ground our commitment to First Light's mission in Sewall's Equity Principles, which affirm that Sewall take bold and consistent action to achieve social and economic justice, while recognizing the harmful and ongoing impacts of colonization.

As part of our intention to become a First Light Community Organization, we believe it is important to be transparent about what Sewall has done and what we plan to do as part of our commitment to repairing harm.

What Sewall has done so far:

- Established a **dedicated grants program area**, Wabanaki Communities and Tribal Governments, that is exclusively for Wabanaki-led efforts and tribal governments. In 2021, the Wabanaki Communities and Tribal Governments, grants program area was launched. Grants to Wabanaki-led efforts totaled \$4,693,609 over the past 5 years, growing from \$323,859 in 2019 to \$1,424,000 in 2023.
- Prioritized integrating **Wabanaki perspectives and collaboration** across all our focus areas.
- Supported **land access and Land back** through grant funds, relationships, and other strategies.
- Supported the **Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund** through
 - Serving as a member of the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund working group

- o Conducting outreach and education to encourage Maine-based and national funders to participate and contribute to the fund
- o Provided grant support for the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship (\$50,000/year for 2 years)
- o Contributions to Self-Determination Fund
 - 2022: \$25,000
 - 2023: \$170,000
- Because Sewall is committed to learning about colonization and the true history of Maine and of Wabanaki nations, we **deepened our equity learning** through participation in First Light Learning Journey and Wabanaki REACH webinars. We have focused board learning and shared resources on Wabanaki history and current state with our partners and grantees.
- We **work with Wabanaki partners, an affinity group of funders for Indigenous communities, and peer funders in Maine and beyond** to build an informed community of learning about Wabanaki history, as well as collaboration and support for current sovereignty efforts and repatriation work of Wabanaki communities.

We're committed to moving toward specific actions and we aspire to build on longer-term aspirations:

- Continuing to support the **Self-Determination Fund**
 - \$100,000 allocated in 2024 grants budget, and **continued commitment** at the same or higher level in future years for as long as the Fund exists.
 - Ongoing fundraising through the **Wabanaki Self-determination Fund working group** in support and under direction of the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship.
- Committing **staff and board** time and resources
 - Hiring Sewall's first **full-time Wabanaki Communities and Tribal Governments community partner in 2024**.
 - Committing at least 1 staff member + the board Equity Committee to **renew and update Sewall's commitments and to ensure Sewall's accountability** to Wabanaki partners and communities on these commitments.
 - Each Sewall board committee will review annually how it has worked toward Sewall's commitments.
 - Continuing to **build and deepen relationships** between Sewall board and staff and Wabanaki leaders, working toward more direct engagement and potential for shared decision-making.
- Through Sewall's **Grants Programs** and **community partnership work**
 - Continuing to support the staffing and capacity needs of the **Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship**.

- Working intentionally across Sewall's program areas to bring **Wabanaki perspectives and collaboration** into the broad range of our work.
- **Engaging with our grantee partners and peers** in the conservation and environmental fields to amplify Wabanaki community priorities and hold intentional conversation about land-back and repatriation efforts.
- **Exploring internally and with our Wabanaki partners and philanthropic peers** what it means to be an equity-informed funder stewarding significant resources with a commitment to repairing harm, inclusive of exploring traditional and nontraditional ways of bringing resources to the communities of what is now Maine, inclusive of Wabanaki communities.