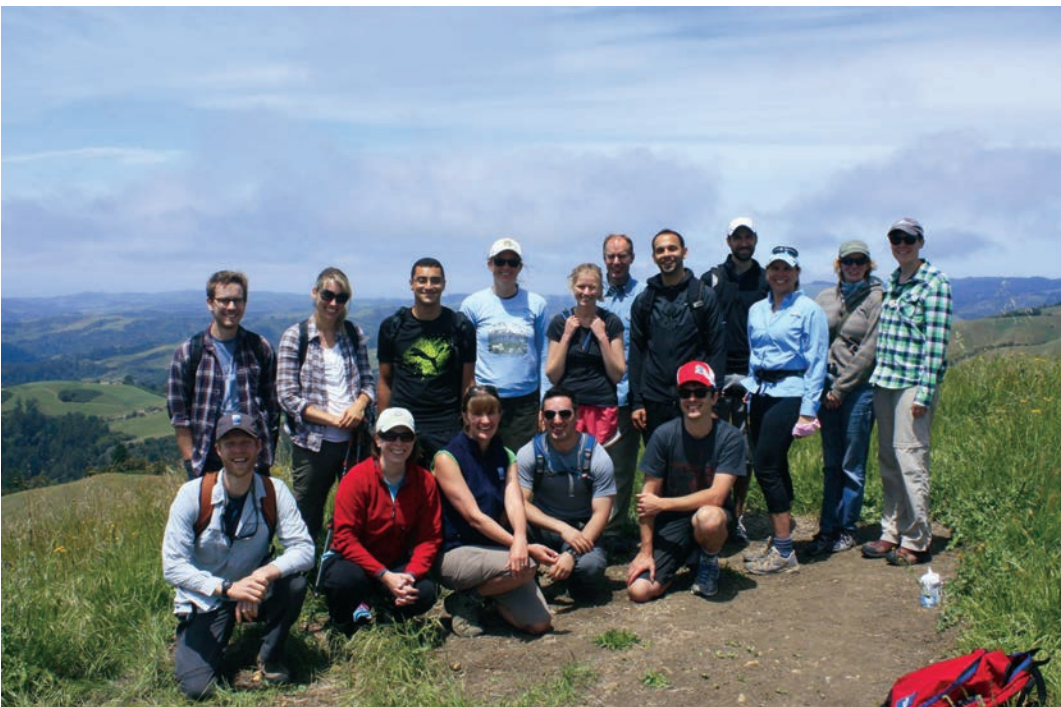


NextGen Conservation:

Peninsula Open Space Trust engages Millennials in its mission.



Peninsula Open Space Trust's NextGen Committee hosted a hike in June. Gordon Clark, director of program development, appears at the lower left front.

PENINSULA OPEN SPACE TRUST

Much has already been written about the Millennials—the generational group born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. They were the first generation to grow up fully wired—with social media, cell phones and the Internet. They're now the largest generation in the United States, making up roughly a third of the population. All kinds of analysts have pigeonholed the Millennials—calling them everything from entitled and self-absorbed to pragmatic and socially minded.

Looking beyond the generalities is this one fact: The 80 million-plus Millennials in the United States represent the next generation of potential land trust supporters and advocates. A 2014 “Millennial Survey” by the firm Deloitte found that Millennials are eager to make a difference: 63% donate to charities; 43% actively volunteer or are a member of a community organization; and 52% have signed petitions.

The membership demographics of land trusts often skew toward older generations, but last year the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) in Palo Alto, California, launched a program with the specific goal of engaging Millennials. “We had long acknowledged the importance of replenishing our donor base,” explains Gordon Clark, POST’s director of program development. “We recognized that a lot of our supporters were older, and both board members and staff knew that we needed to reach out to younger people.”

To address the issue, POST formed a NextGen Committee last fall. The group is comprised of 12 Millennials in their early 30s who help the land trust raise awareness by reaching out to their networks and peers. They organize and invite their friends and colleagues to join events in urban areas, where most Millennials live, as well as monthly hikes and bike rides held on POST-protected properties.

To form the committee, POST identified a small group of co-chairs to lead it—young people who had already expressed an interest in the land trust. One co-chair had just come onto POST’s board of directors and had a family history of involvement in local land conservation; another was a recent donor.

The co-chairs then recruited friends to fill the remainder of the slots. The common denominator other than age: a love for the outdoors.

Clark, himself a Millennial at age 34, serves as POST's staff liaison to the NextGen Committee. Once the group formed, he brought them together for an all-day retreat, with the morning spent "going on a hike and getting inspired," and the afternoon devoted to figuring out the group's purpose, how it should function and what audiences it wanted to target.

"All of the people on the committee were at a point in their lives where they were starting to think about philanthropy and getting involved with an organization they believed in," says Clark. "For us, [this age group] is a sweet spot before people have kids and less time to get involved. Our hope is that we'll build a lasting relationship with them over time."

But it's not a traditional fundraising committee, he's careful to point out. "People who come on outings and events are not expected to make donations to POST. We're trying to create an informed, knowledgeable, passionate group of Millennials who can be ambassadors for the organization. The [NextGen] group does not have any explicit fundraising goals. Next year or the year after that, they may be more comfortable setting those types of goals, but for now we're focusing on building awareness and getting the word out about POST."

In addition to getting their friends engaged, the NextGen Committee serves as a focus group of sorts, giving POST staff valuable feedback on how they can better market their message to younger people. The committee has other benefits too: it's a potential training ground for future board members. And some older supporters feel more confident investing in POST because they see a new generation picking up the reins and getting involved, Clark says.

The hikes, often exclusive opportunities to hike on POST-protected land that park agencies have not yet opened to the general public for recreational use, are the commit-

tee's ultimate tool for engaging Millennials and letting them know about the land being protected where they live, Clark believes.

"I start off each hike with an overview about the organization, explaining what a land trust is and how land protection works," he says. "The property is a way of telling that story. As we're hiking, we can talk about how this land epitomizes the work that we do. Land trusts have this secret weapon: We all have these beautiful places we can take people to and staff who can tell stories about them."

Tips for Starting a Next Generation Committee

Starting a NextGen Committee to engage Millennials is something just about any group could do, says Clark. "It's easier than you think. All you need is two to three young people who care about what you do

the committee and people coming to the hikes."

3. Facebook is an easy way to market events to younger people. POST formed a Facebook group for the NextGen Committee members as well as one for a "POST NextGen Community" open to anyone who wants to join, where it posts details of the hikes and other content. "Every time we do a hike, we collect people's names and emails and invite them to join the group and post photos. Our hope is we will grow the following over time."
4. Let the committee set its own goals (while setting expectations, so they realize what is possible). "Studies show Millennials want to get involved in shaping things, creating things. They don't want to come into something

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and have a diverse network of friends and colleagues they can recruit to join in the effort. You need buy-in from your board and executive-level staff, and some time must be dedicated to coordinate the effort."

Clark offers lessons from POST's experience:

1. Identify your co-chairs and then ask them to invite friends to join instead of zeroing in on your organization's top prospects. "What we've found is that it's better to find co-chairs and have co-chairs recruit their friends and not worry about how much money everyone makes."
2. Remember that this is an unproven method for fundraising; view it instead as a way to build awareness and loyalty. "We see this as an opportunity to grow a long-term relationship with people on

half-created already. We've really tried to be hands-off. As long as what the group wants to do is not in conflict with our land trust's mission, we're okay with letting them run with it."

5. The committee doesn't have to make a major time commitment. POST's group meets three times a year for a short meeting and attends an all-day retreat in spring. Members are encouraged to come on monthly hikes but don't need to attend each one.
6. Your protected properties are the best way to generate interest in your work. Many young people like to hike and the idea of hiking on properties not open to the public holds special allure. 🌿

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