

# SUSTAINABILITY HEROES

## April 2019



### The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation

David Grant, Michelle Knapik, Chris Daggett, Margaret Waldoock, Molly de Aguiar, Wendy Liscow, Sharnita Johnson and Meghan Van Dyk

---

**Sustainable Jersey Celebrates a Decade of Impact:** This year Sustainable Jersey turns ten. To celebrate this milestone, Sustainable Jersey is spotlighting the people, organizations, businesses and agencies that have been a part of our evolution. The [Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation](#) is Sustainable Jersey’s first funder and has been a program underwriter for over ten years. Since 2006, beginning under the leadership of board chair Christopher “Kim” Elliman, and continuing under current chair, Preston Pinkett, the Dodge Foundation has provided over \$3.8 million dollars to grow and sustain Sustainable Jersey.

The Dodge Foundation board of trustees remain essential to the Foundation’s early and continued funding; they also provide Foundation staff the resources and tools they needed to be active participants in Sustainable Jersey’s development. The board recognizes the opportunity to take sustainability to scale in New Jersey by leveraging local action, and that steady and flexible foundation support is essential to Sustainable Jersey’s development and evolution.

The Sustainable Jersey program has benefited from the creative, thoughtful staff at the Dodge Foundation. Thank you to all of the Dodge Foundation sustainability heroes who have been a part of Sustainable Jersey’s #DecadeofImpact including David Grant, Michelle Knapik, Chris Daggett, Margaret Waldoock, Molly de Aguiar, Wendy Liscow, Sharnita Johnson and Meghan Van Dyk.

**Taking a Risk on a Big Idea:** The Dodge Foundation took a risk on a big idea when it decided to fund Sustainable Jersey. In 2006, The College of New Jersey received a Dodge Foundation grant to create a Sustainable Communities Leadership Network. The network was tasked with supporting municipal progress toward sustainable development by identifying best practices, facilitating peer to peer learning, developing metrics to judge performance and providing direct technical support and training. Around the same time, a group of mayors at the New Jersey League of Municipalities formed a “green mayors” group to support similar activities. Concurrently, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities were also working on sustainable community–related initiatives. The four parties agreed to come together under one banner and collaborate on the program that eventually became Sustainable Jersey.

David Grant was the Dodge Foundation’s President and CEO for twelve years from 1998 to 2010. In November 2009, at the New Jersey League of Municipalities’ conference, he was one of the first people to promote Sustainable Jersey. He spoke at the Annual Luncheon and said, “Sustainable Jersey is a high-leverage program and a shining example of how the nonprofit and local government sectors can work together, create an atmosphere of cooperation and move the needle on positive social change.”



**Michelle Knapik** has been a Sustainable Jersey champion for more than ten years. She helped direct the first and many other grants to Sustainable Jersey when Knapik was the Environmental Program Officer at the Dodge Foundation (2005 through 2011). Through the Dodge Foundation role, and subsequent grantmaking and thought partner roles during her time as a Program Director at the Surdna Foundation, Knapik helped join Sustainable Jersey with the local and national environmental community in terms of best practices and learning. Currently, as president of the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation, she remains connected to Sustainable Jersey through Tremaine's support for the Sustainable States Network, of which Sustainable Jersey is a key leader, and through a peer to peer exchange between Sustainable Jersey and Sustainable CT, which has elevated Sustainable Jersey as a replicable model.



When asked about Sustainable Jersey, Knapik said, "I see the power of Sustainable Jersey as the trifecta of 1) equitable, civic leadership, 2) innovative, community-led sustainability solutions and 3) a leverage point that can drive broader, systemic shifts." She feels that the proximity of New Jersey's urban, suburban and rural centers has accelerated community exchanges and learning, all while collecting data that underscores statewide impacts, as well as the promise of Sustainable Jersey as a national model. She added, "The work is at a point where prospective supporters can say, 'wow, you are proving out a model through a rare combination of quantitative and qualitative learning and information – this is a community platform for our times.'" She concluded by saying, "It has been nothing short of thrilling, by my self-proclaimed policy wonk standards, to bear witness to the start-up, growth and maturity phases of Sustainable Jersey. May your success continue to drive heartfelt community connections and innovations."

**Chris Daggett** became the President and CEO of the Dodge Foundation in 2010. Seeing Sustainable Jersey's impact at the local level, he championed the renewal and expansion of support for the program. In this position, Daggett worked with Sustainable Jersey staff from 2010 until he stepped down in 2018. Daggett led efforts to build the capacity of Sustainable Jersey by connecting leaders across sectors and fostering a culture of collaboration. He understood that in order to work toward a sustainable future, the focus needed to be on strengthening collective impact.



When asked about Sustainable Jersey in 2012, Daggett said, "Just three short years ago, we asked, 'Is it possible to successfully develop a statewide program that helps towns build community, so that they can maintain a high quality of life for their residents over the long term?' With 358 of New Jersey's 566 municipalities registered, and 96 already certified, the answer is a resounding yes." In 2019, the Sustainable Jersey program numbers have continued to grow; currently, there are 449 municipalities participating and 203 that have achieved certification.

Daggett brings decades of federal and state government and nonprofit experience to his leadership role, having served as U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator and N.J. Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner. Daggett was the perfect speaker to open Sustainable Jersey's 2017 New Jersey Sustainability Summit.

**Arts, Education, Environment and Informed Communities:** For more than forty years, the Dodge Foundation has nurtured leaders, ideas and institutions that use creative problem-solving to promote a sustainable future. The Dodge Foundation's focus is New Jersey, carrying out its work in program areas that have evolved over time in response to social, economic and cultural changes. Today, these program areas include the arts, education, environment, informed communities and poetry in addition to a technical assistance initiative aimed at building grantee capacity. Sustainable Jersey staff and Board members have benefited from the Dodge Foundation's workshops including the [Board Leadership Series](#) and workshops to strengthen communications. Since 2009, the Dodge Foundation has shared a Sustainable Jersey story every month on its blog: <http://blog.grdodge.org/category/sustainable-jersey/>. Sustainable Jersey is able to work

with different program directors at the Dodge Foundation because sustainability encompasses the arts, education, environment and informed communities.

**Margaret Waldock** is the Dodge Foundation’s Environment Program Director. She has been an invaluable partner, working with Sustainable Jersey by making introductions and helping staff think through big problems. The relationship has always been about more than the financial resources; Waldock said, “Healthy land and water resources are the foundation for sustainable, healthy communities. We focus investments in organizations and initiatives that advance conservation and protection efforts that produce tangible outcomes for communities across the state.” She added, “Grantees like Sustainable Jersey make New Jersey communities greener, better places to live and connect people with the natural world, and support residents to participate in decisions that affect their own and their communities’ health.”



Waldock is on the steering committee of Jersey Water Works, a statewide collaborative effort working to transform the state’s water infrastructure through sustainable, cost-effective solutions. She also serves on the board of the 1772 Foundation and is co-chair of both the Council of New Jersey Grantmakers Environmental Funders Affinity Group and Sustainable Frenchtown, which is the Sustainable Jersey green team for her town. Waldock has more than 20 years of experience in land conservation and stewardship including eight as executive director of the Hunterdon Land Trust where she helped preserve over 5,000 acres of land and oversaw the transformation of the organization from its volunteer roots to a professionally-staffed land trust.

**Molly de Aguiar** is a great supporter of Sustainable Jersey; her candor, approachability and willingness to understand that the issues the Sustainable Jersey staff are working on are complex and, at times, messy, led to superior results relative to the goals of the grant. De Aguiar spent twelve years at the Dodge Foundation where she designed and directed its Informed Communities grants program that attracted partnerships with national funders and helped New Jersey become a model for local journalism innovation. She is currently the President of the Independence Public Media Foundation. Before this position, she served as the Managing Director of the News Integrity Initiative at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at City University of New York. The Independence Public Media Foundation funds and supports media projects, educational initiatives and research that connect communities and increase understanding among people in Greater Philadelphia.



**Wendy Liscow** has guided Sustainable Jersey for ten years as the Dodge Foundation’s Program Director for Education. She serves on the Arts Task Force for Sustainable Jersey’s municipal and schools programs as well as the Sustainable Jersey for Schools’ Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (i-STEAM) Task Force. Liscow is a consensus builder and a great facilitator. She guided the thirty-person i-STEAM Task Force by shaping the group’s input into discreet actions and was invaluable in keeping the task force focused. Liscow commented on the I-STEAM Task Force; she said “We believe wholeheartedly in the power of integrating arts into STEM teaching practices. Studies have found that integrating arts instruction with other academic subjects increases student learning and achievement and helps teachers more effectively meet the needs of all students. In fact, researchers are discovering potential benefits to increasing long-term memory. As we prepare students for the 21st and 22nd century workforce we need students who are critical thinkers, creative and adaptable—all skills developed through arts practices. We need more students falling in love with STEM subjects and if we continue to teach the same way we have in the past, we will not be providing our children with the opportunities they deserve.”



Prior to joining the Dodge Foundation staff in 2003, Liscow worked for 25 years as a professional theatre administrator, director and producer. She was Associate Artistic Director and resident director of George Street Playhouse in New

Brunswick for 12 years, and then served as the Director of Programs and Services for the New Jersey Theatre Alliance where, among other responsibilities, she led the New Jersey Arts Access Task Force of which she is a founding member.

**Sharnita Johnson** directs the Dodge Foundation’s Arts program, overseeing grants and support to New Jersey’s non-profit arts sector aimed at fostering a diverse and vibrant arts ecosystem. She’s brought her knowledge and expertise to the Sustainable Jersey Arts and Creative Culture Task Force, and as a reviewer for certification actions related to arts and creative culture and creative placemaking. Born and raised in Detroit, and a long-time place-based philanthropic professional, Johnson brought her passion for connecting community and the arts to New Jersey when she joined the Dodge Foundation in 2015. Prior to joining the Dodge Foundation, Johnson worked at several foundations in Michigan including the W.K. Kellogg and Skillman Foundations.



Johnson is a 2019 Career Pathways Fellow, a program of the Council on Foundations, board secretary of Grantmakers in the Arts, a national affinity group for arts grant makers and a board member of Tapology, a Flint, Michigan-based organization preserving and presenting tap dance. Johnson holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of Michigan-Dearborn and a Bachelor of Arts from Marygrove College in Detroit.

**Meghan Van Dyk** is the Dodge Foundation’s Informed Communities Program Officer and Communications Director. Van Dyk helped build Sustainable Jersey’s communications by sharing the organization’s stories and developing funding for Sustainable Jersey’s public involvement and outreach program area. For the Dodge Foundation, she fosters civic engagement through inclusive, people-powered news and information projects across New Jersey. She also manages partnerships and grants with outside funders toward supporting a connected and collaborative news and information ecosystem. Van Dyk develops strategic communication strategies; shares news and stories about the Foundation and its grantees; and coordinates events and opportunities that foster relationship-building among organizations within the Dodge community. Prior to joining the Dodge Foundation staff, Van Dyk was a reporter and editor at a local newspaper and an early champion of engaged journalism.



**Equitable New Jersey through Creative, Engaged and Sustainable Communities:** The Dodge Foundation wholly embraces all elements of sustainability—the environmental, economic and human—and the entire staff, program and administration have participated in varying degrees with the Sustainable Jersey program by contributing time to task forces, regional hub meetings, trainings, summits, connecting resources and partners, building Sustainable Jersey’s network across sectors and serving on local green teams. Sustainable Jersey is appreciative of all of the talented staff at the Dodge Foundation including: Wendy Baron, Program Associate, Poetry; Marisa N. Benson, Grants Manager; Naeema Campbell, Program Associate, Environment and Informed Communities; Cynthia Evans, Interim President and CEO, Chief Financial Officer; Martin J. Farawell, Program Director, Poetry; Ysabel Y. Gonzalez, Assistant Director, Poetry; Judy Ha Kim, Technical Assistance and Office Manager; Kathleen Hofmann, Special Assistant to the President and CEO; Sharnita C. Johnson, Program Director, Arts; Victoria Russell, Poetry Program Associate; Richard Simon, Senior Program Associate, Arts and Education; and Hesham Tamraz, Director of Technology and Grant Operations.

Cynthia Evans, the Interim President and CEO at Dodge Foundation provided insight into the future; she said, “Looking forward with a refreshed vision for an equitable New Jersey, through creative, engaged, and sustainable communities, the Foundation is committed to addressing the structural barriers to people of all races and communities having what they need to realize a quality life, and to a continued fruitful partnership with Sustainable Jersey.”

