



First Light Ambassadors
Commitments to Deepen Solidarity with Wabanaki Communities



This Working Document ¹was finalized in December 2022 after a process of engaging 33 First Light organizations and 9 separate revisions between May and October. Our thanks to everyone, Wabanaki and non-native, who contributed thoughts, aspirations and critiques to create this document.

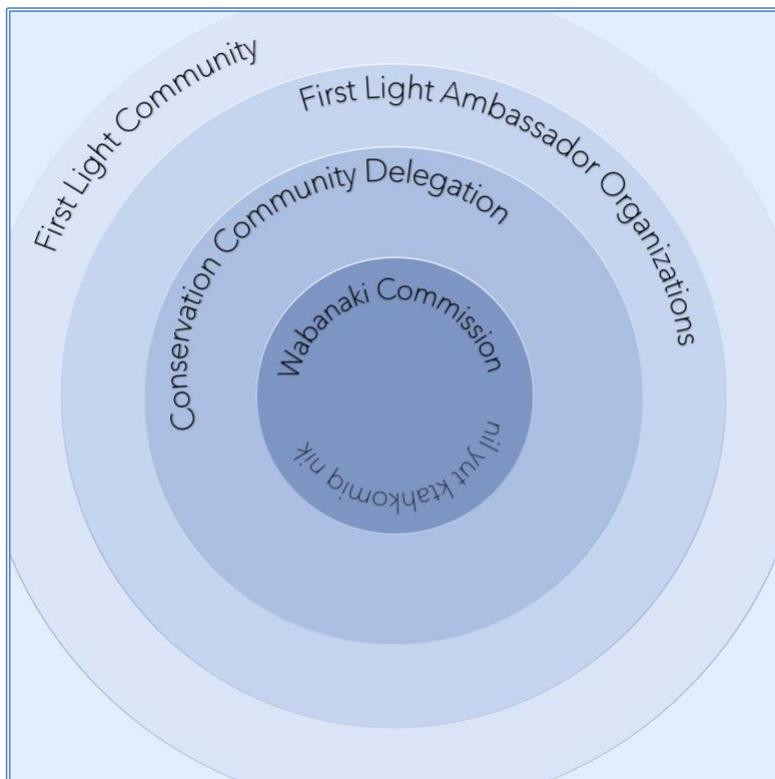
¹ As the Ambassadors program begins, our thinking is likely to grow and change. This working document reflects our best collective thinking at the moment and offers a starting point for us to begin this journey, and in the future will be open for additional revision as we learn more.

Concept

First Light is a collaboration in Maine between hundreds of leaders, 65 organizations and five Wabanaki Tribal Governments and the Abenaki of Western Maine to re-learn history, recenter Indigenous voice and to return land, money and power. We commit to working collectively with the understanding that we are stronger together; many organizations might be able to achieve what one organization could not. No organization who shares these aspirations will be left out of future First Light training and organizing.

For those who seek to move forward in their commitment, there is now a path. While there's an important role for every organization to play in helping to expand Wabanaki stewardship of land, we know that bold commitment is necessary to truly make steps towards meaningful redistribution of power and support of Wabanaki land relations.

First Light Ambassadors is a way for organizations in Maine to demonstrate their solidarity to Wabanaki communities by stepping forward into another level of commitment to increasing Wabanaki access to land and waters through organizational change, resource sharing, and constant and continued learning. Each organization decides their own path and pace to become an Ambassador organization. The stepping stones along this path aspire toward forward movement and continued momentum in our collective and individual commitments in support of Wabanaki People.



Imagine First Light as four concentric circles at the very center of which is the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship. The next concentric circle is the Delegation, that group of organizations most prepared and staffed to support the land return work of the Commission, the third circle is Ambassador organizations working on many projects in their local geography and beyond, the fourth circle being the wider audience of organizations learning and preparing their organizations to embrace commitment to this work. All of us are needed, we all move forward together.

The Path Forward

The Ambassador program developed out of what was shared in listening sessions hosted by First Light catalysts, Peter Forbes and Ella McDonald, in November 2021 when many nonnative organizations were coming out of the learning journey hungry for a map, or stepping stones, for how to deepen their work with Wabanaki communities. They asked for help keeping their organizations actively engaged with purpose, direction, and accountability. Similarly, Wabanaki colleagues asked for deepened commitments of First Light organizations.

Furthermore, In June 2022, at the third First Light Katahdin Gathering, Wabanaki participants affirmed their three top priorities for First Light: returning land and facilitating land access to Wabanaki communities; education and relearning efforts across Maine's conservation community; and the development of the Wabanaki Self Determination Fund, a Wabanaki-held and Wabanaki-managed fund for rebuilding relationships with returned land.

The following stepping stones along the path to deepened commitment are First Light's response to these calls from non-Wabanaki and Wabanaki communities. They offer a way forward for organizations to tangibly commit to redistributing wealth and resources to Wabanaki communities. These commitments build power-sharing, transparency, and accountability into typical land trust and other organizational practices. They create space for both land-holding and non-land-holding organizations to enter and pursue this work.

We know that organizational change takes time. Often, we need to help each other, we need more conversation and more learning to clarify the paths towards sharing resources and power. For that reason, we ask Ambassadors to commit both to changes that we can enact now (Phase 1), as well as committing to process, to walking alongside First Light as we uncover new paths towards aspirations and hopes for future change (Phase 2).

Stepping Stones



Phase 1 Commitments – What actions can my organization commit to right away?

Phase 1 commitments reflect actions each First Light organization can begin to take as soon as they decide to become an Ambassador. As they become Ambassadors, organizations commit to...

1. Making Wabanaki access to land, resources, and programs a priority, in recognition of centuries of dispossession. First Light has collected [a series of tools](#) to promote Wabanaki access, from written invitations through land return. Ambassador organizations commit to pursuing one or all of these pathways on their land or with their programs;
2. Making financial contributions to the Wabanaki Self Determination Fund, a fund of privately raised dollars from our members to be held by Wabanaki people and used for Wabanaki purposes. The Wabanaki Commission has affirmed the creation of this Fund. In 2022-2023, we are affirming our steadfast commitment to the creation of the Fund with a \$1 million Solidarity Deposit made up of contributions from First Light organizations, Maine philanthropies, and national philanthropies. More information on the Fund and how your organization can contribute to the Solidarity Deposit is available [here](#);
3. Starting a process with Boards and members to revise organizational mission/purpose statements in line with Commitment 1 above, recognizing the denial of Wabanaki land relationship, and committing at a formal, core mission level to restoring Wabanaki relationships with land.

4. Seeking out additional organizational learning, through...
 - a. Organizational participation in a Wabanaki REACH training, or
 - b. Beginning the *Preparing your Organization* self-guided curriculum created by Ella McDonald and Eliza Oldach (available [here](#));
 - c. Taking part in *Rethinking the Promise of Conservation*, a virtual seminar series on some of the themes of First Light (available [here](#)).
 - d. Committing involvement of at least 2 board members to the next available First Light Board Training (first training is underway November 2022 - January 2023);

5. Committing to collective work, by...
 - a. Learning together and holding each other accountable through continued engagement with First Light programs;
 - b. Working together to raise resources for Wabanaki land access projects;
 - c. Using the name *First Light* (rather than our individual organization names) on shared projects, in recognition that we all have a stake in making every Wabanaki land access project a success.

6. Establishing 2 staff members within the organization to serve as liaisons for accountability to these commitments.

Phase 2 – What processes can my organization move toward over time?

We know that, as the First Light community, we also need to ask for further commitments from each other—but the pathways toward these organizational changes are not yet clear. It will take time, as a community, to find these pathways. It will take time, as individual organizations, to ready ourselves to follow these paths. Different organizations will move towards these paths at different speeds.

As Phase 2 Ambassadors, organizations commit to...

7. Starting a process with the Board and members to change the organization's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws so that, should the Ambassador organization dissolve, decisions around how to distribute its assets would occur in consultation with the Wabanaki Commission or other Wabanaki entity;

8. Contributing experience and suggestions to the development of a land acquisition consultation process in which land trusts consult with the Wabanaki Commission before acquiring land, so that Wabanaki needs can proactively shape land acquisition outcomes;

9. Pursuing their own processes to develop and institute creative changes unique to their organizations which truly share decision-making, resources, programs, facilities, and land with Wabanaki communities.

Becoming an Ambassador

Developing the community commitments

This Working Document was finalized in December 2022 after a process of engaging more than 58 individuals across 33 First Light organizations, and creating 9 separate revisions between May and October.

Submitting Letters of Intention

When an organization is ready to become an Ambassador, commitments are to be expressed in a written Letter of Intention signed by the board chair and staff leader. Letters can be submitted to ellie@firstlightmaine.org. These will be shared with the Wabanaki Commission and posted on the First Light website.

We expect most organizations will submit their Letters of Intention in the 2023 calendar year, from January 1st through December 31st, but organizations can submit Letters of Intention to become Ambassadors at any time in the future. Organizations can rescind Letters of Intention if they are no longer able or willing to participate.

Given the emergent nature of this work, we recognize that not all commitments are perfectly clear at the time of sharing this document. A Letter of Intention is a promise to work with these processes as they continue to develop and emerge.

Organizations that aren't ready to become Ambassadors are still a valued part of the First Light community and can serve on Working Groups and take part in First Light events and trainings.

Supporting Ambassadors

We hope that every First Light organization could one day become an Ambassador and make tangible contributions to Wabanaki prosperity and land return. Given that, we are working to support the ability for organizations to become First Light Ambassadors. For example, we are contracting with Passamaquoddy attorney Corey Hinton and non-native attorney Rob Levin to advise on these changes. We will be seeking someone to serve as Ambassador Catalyst, to convene peer-to-peer learning conversations and help each organization find their way into the Ambassador designation. Please don't hesitate to point out places where your organization needs more support from First Light to make these commitments and serve as an Ambassador. You can direct questions, comments, or concerns to ellie@firstlightmaine.org.