

TECHNICAL ADVANCE

Special Issue: Biocultural and Relational Approaches to Care-Based Stewardship

Stewardship Salons: Sharing biocultural approaches to foster many ways of knowing and caring for land

Lindsay K. Campbell¹  | Natalia C. Piland²  | Julie Capito-Hernández^{1,3}  |
Erika Svendsen^{1,4}  | D.S. Novem Auyeung⁵  | Neha Savant⁵  |
Nichole McClain⁵

¹Northern Research Station, U.S. Forest Service, New York, New York, USA

²Center for Environment, Community, and Equity, American University, Washington, DC, USA

³Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State, Syracuse, New York, USA

⁴Yale School of the Environment, New Haven, Connecticut, USA

⁵Department of Parks and Recreation, City of New York, New York, New York, USA

Correspondence

Lindsay K. Campbell, Northern Research Station, U.S. Forest Service, New York, NY, USA

Email: lindsay.campbell@usda.gov

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Abstract

We present Stewardship Salons as meaningful engagements with different ways of knowing and caring for ecosystems. They are facilitated as non-hierarchical gatherings where everyone has the ability to be a teacher and a learner. This approach was first inspired by an exchange between NYC-based practitioners and Native Hawaiian educators and practitioners in 2017. Since then, partners from U.S. Forest Service and NYC Parks have organized experiential salons that engage land managers, artists, researchers, and practitioners in learning from place and each other. Salons are rooted in co-learning, engaging personal lived experiences, and amplifying frequently untold narratives about ecosystems. They have been led by Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge holders, performance and visual artists, community activists and stewards, and different cultural and religious groups who share artistic and embodied ways of knowing and biocultural stewardship practices as pathways towards more holistic approaches to the land rooted in reciprocity and care. This technical article presents our Stewardship Salon approach and draws upon qualitative, mixed-methods participant observation and program evaluation data (2017–2024). We identified three primary salon impacts on individuals: personal and professional development, relationship building to people and to place, and bolstering stewardship capacity. We discuss outcomes of salons beyond direct participants as well as barriers to participation and limitations of the current approach. We conclude with exploring how salons have the potential to scale from individual impacts to foster organizational change, bolstering care-based approaches to stewardship in urban areas and beyond.

KEYWORDS

biocultural stewardship, capacity building, co-learning, organizational change, professional development

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INTRODUCTION

Natural resource management—including the management of and care for lands and waters—in the United States often focuses on government mandates to care for public lands, including parks, forests, and trees. Parks departments often take on the mandate and use technical information to make planning decisions—with varying levels of community engagement and consultation (Campbell et al., 2016). The hierarchical approach to daily operations within land management organizations, including chains of command and firm boundaries between agencies and communities, have their purpose, especially in emergency management and maintenance operations (FEMA, 2017). Public agencies are not the only ones that take care of lands and waters—stewards can include private property owners, renters, and traditional knowledge holders, as individuals or members of civic and community-based groups (Campbell et al., 2016; Svendsen et al., 2016). These groups express their stewardship knowledge, care, and agency (Enqvist et al., 2018) but are not always included in environmental decision-making (‘Āina of Ka’ōnohi et al., 2023; Checker, 2007). To address potential exclusion, we draw from literature on biocultural stewardship and co-learning to present the *Stewardship Salons*, an approach to collaborative learning hosted by the New York City Urban Field Station, with demonstrated impact on land management.

A *biocultural stewardship framework* allows an appreciation of varied ways to be a steward, viewing stewardship not just as care of resources, but a system of practices where stewardship of place is inseparable from stewardship of people. This framework has been written about extensively in rural and Indigenous contexts but is only recently being explored in urban areas, where a large number of biocultures meet (McMillen et al., 2020). The exchange and sharing of different biocultural frameworks and approaches can lead to action and change in land management organizations (see, e.g., Pérez-Volkow et al., 2022; Varese et al., 2023). In urban contexts ranging from O’ahu, Hawaii to Auckland, New Zealand to Saskatoon, Canada, traditional knowledge holders and environmental stewards have revitalized ancestral practices with an aim of fostering ecological sustainability, biocultural continuity, regenerative forestry, and community wellbeing (‘Āina of Ka’ōnohi et al., 2023; Finegan, 2021; Hall et al., 2021). While gaining traction in sustainability sciences and conservation (Sterling et al., 2017), incorporating biocultural approaches that have historically been ignored in land management practice has the potential to change relationships, cultures, and norms within organizations (Hanspach et al., 2020; Wengerd & Gilmore, 2022).

Co-learning, where we learn from each other, recognize differences, and co-produce knowledge, is one pathway for organizational change. Knowledge production builds worlds, defining them such that we can better understand them and take action (Abson et al., 2016). Co-learning decenters the role of those deemed “expert” by their job title, making space for all to bring themselves, their prior knowledge, and their cultural histories into the learning process—a strategy shown to be more effective than learning by one-way transmission or communication premised on an “information deficit model” (Narayan et al., 2013; Simis et al., 2016). Informal co-learning spaces can help integrate and legitimize knowledge gained from individuals’ unique experiences due to their relaxed, storytelling, and activity-based nature (Barrett & McPhail, 2023; Blanchard & Nix, 2019; Classens et al., 2021). It allows for an “institutionalized arena of discursive interaction,” where both matters of private and public concern can be brought up (Fraser, 1990, p. 57). Creative approaches are strategies to engage in novel ways, because “singing and doing drama and dancing and laughing and tell-ing stories... [are] a part of their life” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 168). These co-learning spaces are most effective when they are facilitated as “brave spaces” (Arao & Clemens, 2013), which allow people to be authentic and vulnerable, validate each other’s views and stories, engage in generative conflict, and create conditions that enable action (Fals-Borda, 1987) and care (West et al., 2018). Via capacity building of people within institutions, these mindsets and relations can persist and result in structures that reflect collective visions for a sustainable future (Horton & Freire, 1990; Klein et al., 2022; Whyte, 2019).

Learning with a broad array of communities and coinhabitants (both human and otherwise) allows for a more holistic understanding of the histories and contemporary stories of stewarded lands—including in urban areas (‘Āina of Ka’ōnohi et al., 2023; Roman et al., 2018; Rozzi, 2015). From this perspective, we explore how the NYC Stewardship Salons, a series of events organized by public land management agencies in the largest city of the United States, prioritize co-learning as an approach for individual capacity building and organizational change focused on bolstering care-based stewardship approaches.

DESIGN

Stewardship Salons are collaborative learning spaces that foster a practitioner network for land stewardship. From 2017 to 2025, Stewardship Salons were hosted by the NYC Urban Field Station, a boundary-spanning

collaboration between federal and municipal agencies along with nonprofit, academic, and community-based partners that focuses on strengthening the science and practice of land management and understanding urban social-ecological systems (<https://research.fs.usda.gov/nrs/centers/nyc>; Campbell et al., 2016). Lead partners included the U.S. Forest Service Northern Research Station (Forest Service), which advances scientific knowledge to care for the land and serve people and the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks), the largest land manager in NYC. The Stewardship Salon concept had its origins in a 2017 workshop inspired by then-postdoctoral researcher Heather McMillen and organized by the NYC Urban Field Station called “Learning from Place” that brought Kekuhi Kealiikanakaolehailani, a Native Hawaiian kumu (teacher), and her learners from Hawai‘i to exchange with NYC stewardship practitioners. Rather than seeking to address a single, siloed “problem,” the goal of the workshop was capacity building through sharing knowledge, learning from place, and learning from each other in order to strengthen biocultural stewardship. Kekuhi encouraged us to organize our own community prior to the exchange, to prepare ourselves to be in dialogue with multiple ways of knowing, including Indigenous practices (see McMillen et al., 2020 for details). We named these organizing spaces “salons” in a nod to different meanings that the term evokes to participants: role-playing activities in high school history classes, the Enlightenment salons and coffeehouses that ran counter to the “public sphere” (Fraser, 1990), beauty salons, and “third spaces” outside of home and work. Among all these conceptions, the common thread is learning in community through conversation, curiosity, and trust. The field station sustained these salons over 9 years because of our commitment to creating learning spaces that can support personal growth, professional development, and organizational change from within the field of land management.

The salons are not field tours, but co-created experiences, with a rotating series of featured speakers, where all participants have an opportunity to be a teacher and a learner. Invitees represent the “stewards of stewardship”—land managers, scientists, artists, educators, and practitioners focused on stewarding urban ecosystems. In addition to a core set of invitees, the Stewardship Salon organizers curated a list of stewards who were invited to each salon, and who were, in turn, invited to suggest additional attendees, topics, and sites for future salons. While trainings usually available to natural resource managers are compliance-based or focus on “technical” skills and licensing (e.g., commercial drivers license, pesticide application, legal mandates), the focus of salons is

TABLE 1 Ground rules.

Stewardship Salon ground rules	
ALL IN/BE ATTENTIVE	To ensure an intimate, distraction-free, community-building space. Honor the time together, be off devices, and focused on the discussion.
MAKE SPACE AND TAKE SPACE	Some of us feel comfortable to immediately participate verbally in a conversation, others need space to feel comfortable—so share the “microphone” with others, and also have the courage to grab it.
LESSONS LEAVE, STORIES STAY	It can take courage to share personal stories and we acknowledge this. We want to respect participants and keep identities confidential.
IT’S OKAY TO DISAGREE	We all won’t have the same perspective.
ASSUME GOOD INTENT, BUT ACKNOWLEDGE IMPACT	Create space to acknowledge that we don’t know everything, and that our words can hurt unintentionally.
CHECK YOUR HIERARCHY AT THE DOOR	This is a space where organizational position does not impact your ability to be heard, validated, and to participate.
CHECK YOUR EGOS	Egos can be a barrier to the cooperative goals of the space.

on strengthening our shared ability to work in and with communities on caring for lands and waters. Salons generally lasted 2 h and followed a scaffolded format to allow for personal and professional storytelling, deep listening, and learning-by-doing.

Our Stewardship Salons followed this general sequence:

1. *Opening welcome* (~30 min)—include co-created ground rules that function as community agreements which are revisited at each subsequent salon to guide the discussion (see Table 1; see also Arao & Clemens, 2013) and an opening prompt that helps connect participants to place, to one another, and to begin reflecting personally and professionally.
2. *Host-guided activity* (~75 min)—a place-based conversation and activity led by the featured host. Activities often include “learning by doing,” whereby taking part in the activity, knowledge is gained and shared among participants through sensory observation and past insight.
3. *Closing circle discussion* (~10 min)—includes a final discussion prompt where participants can share what

resonated with them, what insights or relationships they will take away from the salon.

4. *Concluding goodbyes* (~5 min)—includes announcements about future events, opportunities to network and share beyond the salon. (See Campbell et al., 2025 for more details on format and implementation.)

METHODS

This technical article presents a mixed-methods qualitative analysis of the impact of salons on participants and organizers, drawing upon multiple sources of program evaluation data. In reflecting on the positionality of the author team, we recognize that our organizational affiliations with the U.S. Forest Service and NYC Parks shape the way in which we situate this work (see also Appendix S1 for author positionality statements). Forest Service authors are required to undergo manuscript review by the agency for scientific quality and policy compliance, including compliance with Executive Order 14151. From 2017 to 2025, the organizing team (LC, ES, NA, NS, NM) kept implementation notes and conducted team debriefs after each salon. These debriefs focus on both content and process—what resonated and what learnings we took away as well as what worked and what didn't in the facilitation of the learning space. In 2022 and 2023, program evaluations were conducted with participants offering feedback on the salons via voluntary, anonymous questionnaires deployed by NYC Parks ($n = 36$). In 2024, we conducted a series of voluntary, confidential focus group discussions. Following a description of research aims and receipt of oral consent to participate, focus groups were recorded and later transcribed. These discussions focused on insights gained, how those have been applied to personal and professional life, how the salon process affects working with others, examples of organizational change inspired by the salons, and feedback on improving salons. Facilitated by two moderators (JC, LC), these focus groups included organizing team members ($n = 5$), agency employees ($n = 4$), and other participants ($n = 4$). Written materials from debrief notes, focus group transcripts, and evaluation questionnaires were coded in NVivo for emergent themes by dual coders (JC, NP). Coding frequencies were compared for consistency among coders and the finalized coding scheme was applied to the full text. The most frequently identified themes across all of these sources are identified and described in the application section. Where quotes are included, they are attributed to a participant code, for example, (P2).

APPLICATION

From 2017 to 2025, we hosted 32 salons with an average of 18 attendees. In curating our attendee list, we intentionally focused on smaller group sizes of fewer than 25 people to promote intimacy and provide space for participation from all attendees. The events were free and did not require an RSVP. Topics and locations focus on a variety of subjects including land and water stewardship, the arts, Indigenous knowledge, and other culturally rooted knowledges (see Appendix S2: Table S1). Past salon participants, hosts, and planning team members highlighted three main impacts created by Stewardship Salons. Through providing a unique professional and personal development experience, an opportunity for relationship building with people and place, and an atmosphere that bolsters individual stewardship capacity, Stewardship Salons offer an opportunity to widen the understanding and approach to land stewardship. Each of these impacts is explored in detail below, followed by a discussion of the ways in which salons have the potential to scale from individual impacts to organizational change.

Professional and personal development

Stewardship Salons are a professional development experience which brings to light new perspectives, skills, and language that apply both to participants' professional and personal lives. The exposure to new perspectives is one of the most appreciated aspects of these events, as participants walk away with new ways to see and approach a topic, concept, or place. One participant reflected that often we bring our own "lenses" to a space dependent on our own interests and background, but salons are "that opportunity to open up and see the depth of what other people see when they're engaging with a place that's meaningful to them" (P2). These new perspectives uplifted by the salon are often "nondominant or silenced ways of knowing that are also important to consider when making natural resource or stewardship decisions" (P12). Participants referenced the meaningful experience of learning with Hmong artist and designer Tommy Cheemou Yang, Ramapough Lenape Tribal member Michaeline Picaro, and Aminta Kilawan-Narine and Rohan Narine from Sadhana, a Hindu spiritual group. This approach highlights the importance of local knowledge and context, which are less well documented compared to scientific knowledge on land management.

Each salon has a unique location, host, and theme, providing the opportunity, as one participant reflected,

“to take off my expert hat and to be a learner” (P2). Stewardship Salons facilitate creative methods that are incorporated into the space. This, in part, can be attributed to the integration of artists into the land management professional development space. For example, artist Ania Upstill led a salon that used “process drama”—an immersive theater technique where participants create imaginary worlds—to engage in a stewardship scavenger hunt, drawing on embodied environmental education techniques (see also <https://www.thenatureofcities.com/TNOC/2023/10/30/discovering-stewardship-through-play-using-applied-theater-techniques-for-environmental-education/>). Playfulness contributes to people’s comfort in sharing their perspectives while also allowing “participants to relax (especially in hierarchical government spaces) and consider other ways of approaching natural resource management” (P12). As expressed by one attendee, the freedom provided by the Salon format in land management fields “is rare.” The playful, creative, and nonhierarchical attributes act as a gateway to greater engagement in these collaborative learning spaces leading to openness, excitement, and inspiration in learning from others and place.

These salon-featured perspectives model new skills and language. Participants are exposed to new ways to communicate complex topics across organizational boundaries, with the public, and with individuals who have different perspectives and backgrounds. Interpersonal skills and a greater sense of empathy are built through exposure to the breadth and depth of perspectives and places that the Stewardship Salons reach. These skills can then be applied to sensitive topics land management practitioners interface with daily, especially in more public-facing roles. Similarly, the salons create space to imagine new language for communicating ecological phenomena, using “more positive framings to draw people into environmental stewardship,” and for articulating “how important it is to invest in people, invest in relationship building, invest in workforce development” (P4). For example, the salon featuring artist Michele Brody’s work on the migration of people, insects, and plants facilitated a conversation about language often utilized for native/invasive species in land management and how revisions are being made to include more welcoming framing in the discourse. New framings for complex ideas introduced at salons may originate from individual suggestions and through sharing ideas with others, the framings pick up power to impact practice. The co-learning spirit of Stewardship Salons and the exchange of perspectives, skills, and language leads to “things that are possible that we might not otherwise imagine” (P2).

Relationship building to people and to place

Stewardship Salons bring people together to “learn along with one another” (P3), providing a setting for relationships to be built between stewards and to place. Participants interact with both people within and external to their agency or division, including land managers, scientists, educators, and artists. This type of intermingling across organizations and fields was mentioned as valued by all focus group participants and is typically an unprioritized activity in everyday work. As one salon participant reflected, “I often feel siloed in my work” (P12). Yet, Stewardship Salons are an exception, being a space that cultivates “conversations with scientists, with people who work at the city, state, civic, [and] federal level” (P9). Stewardship Salons are a “community of people that understand the connections among culture, nature, caring for the Earth and ourselves” (P12), helping those in attendance build (and sustain) relationships with new individuals. A participant reflected on the long-term value of interacting with multiple ways of knowing: “And they’re multi-layered and so finding ways to unpack slowly and unpack with so many different kinds of, like, people who think differently and who work in different sectors and different parts of the world” (P9).

Due to the space’s nonhierarchical nature, which is reinforced at the start of each salon via the ground rules, participants come “without the titles,” and as a result “there’s a lot more trust that happens” (P13) a condition vital for relationship building. One focus group participant referenced the Stewardship Salon that led to them being able “to see a whole new part” of a coworker on their team that they had been working with for over a year. The unique and relatively laid-back format of the salons and their activities enables people to be themselves, enriching relationships (P13). As another person noted, simply sharing the experience of attending a Stewardship Salon together, they feel “a personal connection with them [other attendees] in a way that you don’t get in like any other kind of way because of how engaging it is” (P2).

In addition to growing relationships with other “stewards of stewardship,” the salons nurture new and deeper connections to place. Every Stewardship Salon is hosted in a different park, waterfront, or building around the region. One focus group participant mentioned that they selectively attend salons to visit “parks that I normally would not have gone to” (P5). In doing so, they both see a new site and learn a story about that place that otherwise might go untold during typical field work. Stewardship Salons can provide a microscopic or macroscopic lens to a site, highlighting under-told site histories

or perspectives. They give participants “more sensitivity and consideration of space and place” while doing their work, including a “greater cultural awareness of the long history of human settlement in the NYC area” (P22). Examples of this include reading the book *Trace* by Lauret Savoy and walking the site and discussing the history of the former Black settlement, Seneca Village, that was displaced to create Central Park. The participant also reflected on relationships to “salamanders living in areas where we’d do desire line [informal trail] closures” (P22). In the salon led by Neha Savant and Brady Simmons of NYC Parks, participants were invited to “think like a salamander and consider what you need to thrive” as an opening reflective prompt. Many of the slow, observational, and reflective processes that open participants’ minds to a space, causing the location to become “alive” in a way previously unimagined, also cultivate greater individual capacity.

Stewardship Capacity

Stewardship Salons bolster individuals’ stewardship capacity by providing an opportunity to be reflective and a source of inspiration, empowerment, and sustained energy for care that otherwise is rarely afforded time in the workplace. As one focus group participant responded, they feel like “these salons are kind of breaths of fresh air and they help me... they provide you just that little window... of reflection and thinking what is possible” (P3). Salons have been described as “illuminating,” as they elevate understanding of the complexities to a place and the beings who share it, inspiring those who participate. A researcher explained that “it’s very dry out in the academy and these [salons] are food for the soul and food for so many other things... so generative” (P7). Part of what makes these spaces so generative is that they require participants to slow down, take a few hours to be reflective, and be “with one another in real time” (P3). Having time specifically allocated to stop and reflect on “those small details that you don’t get to see on a regular basis because you’re moving so quickly or you’re in a specific focus with your job” (P14) is vital for sustaining yourself in your work. Examples of slowing down and being present included listening to Underground Sounds at artist Nikki Lindt’s soundwalk in Prospect Park, Brooklyn; doing mindful walking with artist Bibi Calderaro at Battery Park; sharing food, song, and conversation at Tu B’Shevat Seder with Mierle Goldsmith, and practicing tree care while conversing with colleagues in Sunset Park with artist Cecile Chong and the NYC Parks stewardship team.

Beyond providing time to reflect and feel inspired, Stewardship Salons also are a “welcoming” space where

participants can feel seen, legitimized, and validated among their land management peers and are comfortable to bring their multiple identities into the space. One participant reflected that “professionally, the salons have allowed me to see myself as more than my natural science training, and personally, it has allowed me to gain confidence and value in my own ways of knowing—cultural, religious, artistic, and generationalvsoutside of my profession” (P12). It was noted that hearing other voices being uplifted in the space helped them to “uplift that within myself in ways that they weren’t really allowed to exist in other spaces” and that Stewardship Salons act as a “really nice home where like multiple parts of me can exist” (P12). There often is not the space nor the openness for individuals to bring their full selves into the workplace. Yet when organizations embrace these spaces, participants feel a “renewed pride in working” for their agency due to the prioritization of individual capacity building by acknowledging the multiple identities individuals carry into the workplace (P3). Likewise, building individual stewardship capacity and partaking in spaces like salons that transform us can lead to organizational change. As one participant said, “there’s so much to learn from one another, and by opening the door into those kinds of spaces [Stewardship Salons]... we can all learn together and really, literally walk together through these kinds of big, big picture challenges” (P9).

Scaling

Salons have the potential to scale up from individual impacts to foster organizational change through sharing new processes, relationships, and concepts. Participants shared examples of ways in which the salons have influenced their work culture, programs, and partnerships beyond the bounds of the salons themselves. In terms of processes, NYC Parks has implemented the use of ground rules as community agreements at some meetings held in their Environment and Planning Division. Salons also foster new relationships across different agency divisions: “via the salons, [I] have started to work a lot more closely with some of my peers” (P13) as well as with external partners beyond the agency, “[salons] allowed me to bring partnerships that I wouldn’t have thought could come into New York City” (P12). NYC Parks went on to hold a longer workshop focused on Indigenous collaborations separate from the salons: “it definitely kind of came out of some of the collaborations there [in the salons] and kind of the need identified in the Stew Salon” (P2). Concepts, relationships, and terminology shared in salons have informed and supported participants’ work. This includes staff building confidence to integrate new terminology into

workplace practices, such as using “locally evolved” instead of “native” when referring to plants. These shifts are being formalized at NYC Parks into agency-wide “Voice and Tone Guidelines” on how to discuss biodiversity management with the public. Finally, concepts have inspired and informed successful grant proposals in both the environmental and arts domains. A participant shared that, in addition to broadening the reach of potential collaborators and types of grant programs that their agency applied for, “our participation in the stewardship salons, I think, was instrumental to us getting those NOAA and IRA [Inflation Reduction Act] grants because those grants are filled with language that we picked up from the stewardship salons” (P4). Likewise, an artist shared, “the experience inspired a recent proposal I wrote for a public arts festival. I feel like I wrote it with a line of inquiry mixed with some social science aspects” (P35). These successful proposals reveal the cross-pollination of ideas that are facilitated by the salons.

Participants reflected on ways in which salons’ reach could be extended to more attendees to increase their impact. Most of the critical feedback received across the program evaluations and in the debrief discussion pertained to how to increase the reach and scale of the salons. The intimate nature of the setting that facilitates relationship building and dialogue is in tension with the desire to reach more attendees. This tension directly informed the creation of the Stewardship Salon Guide (Campbell et al., 2025) with the goal that other stewards-of-stewardship will uptake and adapt the method to their context. Indeed, a salon attendee said, “I feel like other, you know, civic agencies could benefit from this level of care and collaboration” (P9). The salon approach has been presented and shared across multiple divisions of the Forest Service and has been taken up by practitioners in different locations, including Atlanta, GA, and New Haven, CT.

Currently, while the salons are structured to avoid hierarchies, the bulk of attendees are entry to mid-career professionals—they rarely include senior leadership and field-based staff not directly involved in outreach or education. One participant reflected, “I appreciate this and I’m also wondering if there is potential to extend beyond somehow, maybe not necessarily inviting 1,000 people to a salon, but it’s like how, how can these sorts of things extend to folks who maybe aren’t afforded the opportunity to think as deeply?” (P8). Moving into the future, NYC Parks would like to widen the range of salon attendees to include gardeners, maintenance workers, up to senior-level leadership. We recognize that focusing on different groups of attendees will involve tradeoffs and require care and learning. For example, focusing on attracting participants from senior leadership roles and/or with more privileged identities might help with uptake and visibility. At the same time, protecting brave spaces for newer staff

might help support these staff in feeling welcomed and included within their organizations. Finding the balance between these distinct purposes will help integrate individuals across traditionally siloed organizational structures towards change. We recognize the importance and challenge of engaging in discussions with generative conflict. Depending on the topic and the attendees, this may require specialized facilitation approaches that more directly engage consensus-building.

In extending the reach of Stewardship Salons, partners might consider existent barriers that can restrict participants’ attendance in these spaces. Several participants expressed the difficulty in prioritizing attendance; you’re “balancing that with the rest of your job duties” (P1). Some may not have the support of their supervisors and may “need to be somewhere during the work day” (P5). The relaxed, co-learning experience provided by the salons does not always seem immediately transferable to workers’ daily duties. One participant stated that they “love the community of practitioners aspect and creating a forum for us to talk shop but also recognize that we may need to have more defined goals/outcomes to justify taking the time” (P49). Similarly, activities, topics, and themes of Stewardship Salons can feel “philosophical” but, as stressed by a participant, “it’s also practical and it’s connected to the work” (P3). These overarching goals of Stewardship Salons—building relationships, networks, and development opportunities through exposure to new perspectives, ideas, and skills—are effective methods to prevent employee burnout, increasing capacity for one to do their job (Habeger et al., 2022; Pienkowski et al., 2023). Participating in activities that are more exploratory, playful, and reflective aren’t equally prioritized in professional practice for public servants and land managers. Often, for land management practitioners, mandatory trainings are more rigid and goal-oriented, but salons are an opt-in experience and, as emphasized by participants, “looser,” making them harder to justify to leadership but also more enriching for personal stewardship capacity building. Artists and researchers who come to these spaces typically have greater exposure to these reflective practices, which are built into both the scientific and artistic exploration process. Leadership support and integration of capacity building activities, like the Stewardship Salons, into the compensable activities included in a land manager’s work plan are steps that could expand the impacts of these activities from the individual to the organization (Franks, 1999).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Organizational change is slow, deep work that requires time, relationships, and resources. The organizational

change that the Salons help facilitate is rooted in the relationships fostered in the space. Participants described the connections between people woven like a web of relationships, forming a community that can be called upon when needed. Time is another critical factor as it takes time for the relationships within salons to spark, grow, and deepen enough to build trust and move forward together. Intentional capacity building at the individual scale has the potential to cascade upward to create change at the organizational level (Amato et al., 2021; Lam et al., 2020). In the face of pressing management priorities, hiring freezes, and budget cuts, finding the space in employees' work plans for deep, relational work can be a challenge. Yet, participants overwhelmingly acknowledged the need for and intent to devote more time for this. Stewardship Salons cannot reach everyone at once, but the people who are called to join become open to new perspectives and knowledge, build relationships, and feel reenergized for their work and communities. Salon participants have been inspired to engage more deeply with organizations in their communities, strengthening both local capacity in and visibility of the natural resource management landscape. For individuals and organizations yet to see value in attending a Salon but could benefit, organizers and participants have opportunities to reframe the content in ways that may resonate more with this audience's values.

In this technical article, we show how Stewardship Salons provide a chance for environmental stewards, both inside and outside land management agencies, to learn together in ways that temporarily disrupt hierarchical structures and promote alternative ways of engaging with people and place. Stewardship Salons can provide a forum for opportunities to be created and shared from the field, turning collaboration and inspiration into a fundamental aspect of an organization's culture and structure. We show how salons can further support personal and professional development and relationships to people and place for the practitioner, increasing capacity for land management practices that acknowledge the complex social-ecological systems they influence. The application of the Stewardship Salon approach presented here reflects on 9 years of work in the context of New York City, as we worked collectively to foster an urban biocultural stewardship ethic ('Āina of Ka'ōnohi et al., 2023; McMillen et al., 2020). In reflecting on our evaluation evidence, we find that this approach could be applicable to any setting globally across urban, urbanizing, and rural contexts—where there is a need to understand, acknowledge, and explore different ways of understanding and caring for the land in order to strengthen relations of care (see also Enqvist et al., 2018; Rozzi, 2015; Sterling et al., 2017).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Lindsay K. Campbell: Conceptualization; investigation; writing – original draft; methodology; writing – review and editing; formal analysis; project administration; supervision; resources; data curation. **Natalia C. Piland:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; formal analysis; data curation; conceptualization; investigation; methodology. **Julie Capito-Hernández:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; formal analysis; data curation; methodology; investigation. **Erika Svendsen:** Conceptualization; methodology; resources; writing – review and editing; investigation; supervision; project administration. **Dolaporn Siuyau Novem Auyeung:** Conceptualization; investigation; writing – review and editing; resources; supervision; project administration. **Neha Savant:** Conceptualization; investigation; writing – review and editing; project administration. **Nichole McClain:** Project administration; supervision; resources; writing – review and editing; conceptualization; investigation.

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ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for program evaluation involving human participants. All participants were informed of the purpose and methods of the evaluation, questionnaires were fully anonymous, and verbal consent was obtained from participants involved in confidential focus groups.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ORCID

Lindsay K. Campbell  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7065-8997>

Natalia C. Piland  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4176-0773>

Erika Svendsen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5831-5003>

D.S. Novem Auyeung  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4038-3865>

Neha Savant  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1162-5981>

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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