

# Inside Philanthropy

Who's Funding What, and Why

## Deep Blue Money: An Effort to Untangle a Growing Web of Ocean Conservation Funding

April 24, 2017 / Tate Williams

Ocean conservation philanthropy is global, and it's local. It's market-based and regulatory. It's about blue whales and microbes. It's as expansive and varied as, well, the ocean.

This is an area of philanthropy that consistently stuns in terms of amounts given and strategies pursued, hoisted up by longstanding foundations like Packard, California tech icons like Eric and Wendy Schmidt, and newcomers like the Marc and Lynne Benioff.

The space is definitely dominated by huge players like the Packard, Moore, and Walton Family foundations, and it's also one that can be baffling, with the variety of work happening and the complex science behind the issue. This can leave small or new donors feeling like they have to reinvent the wheel or build a big professional staff to make an impact. And it can leave grant seekers feeling like they're stuck on the outside, peering in on an exclusive club of anointed members.

A new online effort backed by a couple of those big funders, and some smaller ones, hopes to provide a centralized entry point into the variety of work happening in marine conservation and its funding sources. Built by the Foundation Center, [FundingtheOcean.org](http://FundingtheOcean.org) is a combination of a holding tank for research and news, an online network, and a data mapping service that aims to track and encourage ocean conservation, with a focus on funding.

For a while now, the Foundation Center has been developing data-driven tools based on its database of grants info. This one actually got started based on the efforts of a funder, the SunLight Time Foundation, which is based on the wealth of tech startup guy Alan Chung and wife Buffy Redsecker. The couple were dismayed by the fact that philanthropy is such an insiders' club when it comes to figuring out where funds should go, so they backed small nonprofit Marine Watch International in its efforts to connect up ocean conservation efforts.

Then, Buffy Redsecker and the Foundation Center connected, and started to spin that work into something bigger, in partnership with Marine Watch. The couple's SunLight Time Foundation seeded the project, and drew in heavyweights like the Packard Foundation, Oak Foundation, the Helmsley Charitable Trust, and the Tiffany & Co. Foundation to build it out.

If it were just a bunch of links to reports and articles, that wouldn't be too noteworthy, but FundingtheOcean.org is quite a bit more than that. For one, it's got this social network element hosted by Marine Watch, which may or may not gain significant traction (it's hard to get people to chat freely about funding—we should know!) but is a cool idea nonetheless. Probably the thing people will be most drawn to up front is the data analysis.

It presents Foundation Center's store of grants since 2009, related to ocean conservation, in multiple formats, including a world map, graphs, flow charts, and really cool mode called "Constellations." That last one is kind of an interactive spider web that lets you explore where funders are sending money, and where there are connections and overlap. For example, even at a quick glance, it's remarkable how massive the Moore Foundation's presence is, right alongside that of the NSF and U.S. Department of Commerce in terms of its size and reach.

Like all philanthropy tracking projects, it's eternally a work in progress to fill in our gaps in knowledge, but this is a very useable point of entry to what can be a dizzying field. Check it out.