



Community Center Investment
Program | **CASE STUDY**



Squam Lakes Association - Holderness, New Hampshire

A Hub for Watershed Conservation

Located in the heart of New Hampshire's Lakes Region, the Squam Lakes Association (SLA) serves as a community hub for recreation, education, and community engagement. Driven by its long-term vision, the SLA has grown into a professional watershed organization that addresses socioeconomic divides, fosters inclusivity, and promotes environmental conservation. Through funding from the Community Development Finance Authority's (CDFA) Community Center Investment Program and private donations, the organization now has a state-of-the-art facility to support its mission and continued growth as a community resource.



From an Old Motel to a Purpose-Built Facility

The Squam Lakes Association has been operating since the turn of the century. In the early 1990s, it moved out of the public library basement into a former motel to expand its operation. The organization's ambitions for the watershed community quickly outgrew this space and the building needed upgrades. Initially envisioned as a small-scale renovation, the project expanded into a full-scale transformation thanks to the CDFA funding.



"We took the shell of the building, emptied it, and transformed it into a purpose-built structure tailored to our work," said EB James, SLA's Executive Director. "The building has become a perfect fit for everything we've envisioned over the past 15 years," he added.

The project repurposed the outdated motel rooms and adjacent barn, creating ADA-compliant spaces for community gatherings, a fully equipped laboratory to advance scientific research, and offices for SLA staff and the three non-profits using the building. By insulating and upgrading the barn with plumbing and energy-efficient heating, the SLA extended its usability from three to ten months per year and added dedicated equipment storage and maintenance space.

Expanding Programming and Partnerships

The SLA's revamped buildings have allowed the organization to expand its programming and deepen its community partnerships. Its robust offerings include nature walks, bird identification, adventure ecology programs, campsites, kayak and paddleboard rentals, and summer camps. Additionally, the SLA's Gear Library offers free outdoor equipment rentals, removing financial barriers to recreation.



"By providing free access to gear and maintaining 70 miles of trails, we're breaking down barriers to outdoor recreation for community members in Holderness and surrounding towns," said James.

The new facilities also support the SLA's growing science programs, which now operate at a level comparable to university labs. "We're hosting groups like the New England Trails community and partnering with Plymouth State University. These collaborations amplify our impact and foster a stronger conservation network," James noted.

Bridging Socioeconomic Gaps

In addition to its environmental work, the SLA has evolved to become a community convener, addressing the region's socioeconomic disparities. "We've gone from being seen as gatekeepers to becoming a much more welcoming organization," explained James. "Over the last decade, we've worked hard to reverse perceptions, increase public access, and create a space where everyone feels they belong." The organization collaborates with local programs like Got Lunch to combat food insecurity and offers scholarships for summer camps to ensure equitable access.



The Lakes Region Conservation Corps AmeriCorps program has been a cornerstone of this effort. These volunteers bring passion, energy, and a deep commitment to environmental stewardship, and their mandate is to build a community beyond conservation.

The Role of CDFA in Facilitating Change

The recent renovation project made possible through \$998,947 in funding from CDFA and \$600,000 in private donations, expanded SLA's capacity, and strengthened its role as both a conservation leader and a vital community resource.



"This project gives us the resources and space to provide a focal point for the community in a meaningful way," James shared.

SLA's Executive Director also credits CDFA with more than just financial support. Technical assistance with energy efficiency and grant administration also helped the SLA navigate the complexities of the funding process, ensuring the project's success.

Beyond funding, CDFA elevated the SLA's visibility and connected it to other resources. "They showcased our work on energy efficiency during a statewide webinar. That caught the attention of Volunteer New Hampshire which facilitated a visit by Senator Maggie Hassan's office.

Key Learnings:



Long-term goals and vision help guide project planning and targeted investments



A purpose-built facility can match both organizational goals and community needs



Community partnerships ensure buy-in and amplify the association's mission