



WILDFIRE
RESILIENCE
FUNDERS



2025 WILDFIRE RESILIENCE FUNDERS NETWORK ANNUAL CONVENING SUMMARY REPORT

May 21-23, 2025



Wildfire Resilience Funders (WRF) hosted its third annual convening in May of 2025, bringing more than 40 representatives from 25 grantmaking member organizations together with leading issue experts over three days in Santa Barbara, California.

Some in attendance were old friends, others had never met in person, and a few were new to the network, so the meeting proved to be a great way for everyone to get to know each other while sharing knowledge and building collaborations. Many thanks to the planning committee, as well as all of the speakers, sponsors, and participants who made this convening such a success.



The organizing throughline for the convening was, "Lighting the Path Ahead." This captured an agenda focused on enabling funders to reflect on the lessons to be learned from local efforts to develop more fire-adapted landscapes and then explore collaborative strategies for building resilience and living with fire across the West.

HIGHLIGHTS

Agenda Summary

- **An optional pre-convening** meeting with Los Angeles fire survivors and a tour of the Palisades fire scar, hosted by Southern California Grantmakers and the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES).
- **A welcome reception** where participants were provided with a [meeting program](#) and offered inspirational comments from retired Santa Barbara County Fire Marshal and Division Chief Rob Hazard, followed by an informal walk on the beach.
- **Panel discussions** featured expert perspectives on wildfire resilience strategies and measures of success, community-led preparedness efforts, and the opportunities and challenges associated with funding resilience during recovery. Panelists included an array of experts in local history, community engagement, land management, firefighting, and insurance issues.
- **Site visits** to the headquarters of [Direct Relief](#), [The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County's Arroyo Hondo Preserve](#), and [Roblar Vineyards](#), which provided additional opportunities for discussions about living with fire on the landscape.
- **Interactive sessions** about the role of the network, with breakout discussions centered on the topics of the two current Wildfire Action Groups, which are teams of funders working together to better understand particular issues of shared interest around wildfire and climate change.

Convening Themes

- **Engaging community members in preparedness and action:** Many of the panelists and much of the conversation centered on the importance of early and ongoing community engagement. Insights gathered from the local experiences in both Santa Barbara and Los Angeles provided concrete and timely experience or these discussions. Experts stressed the importance of listening to community members; understanding their interests, needs, and barriers; and then sharing information using credible messengers as a means of moving together from engagement to education to action.

Convening Themes Continued...

- **Navigating uncertainty in the funding landscape:** Actions and funding cuts by the current federal administration are impacting NGOs, funders, and wildfire preparedness efforts. Operating in this atmosphere of instability and uncertainty will remain and continue to be a challenge. The WRF network should continue to play a key role in ensuring that members are provided a supported space for managing this uncertainty going forward.
- **Building relationships and collaborations among funders:** Many participants opined that coordination and collaboration among funders is essential, though challenging, and expressed appreciation to organizers for the role of the network and the opportunity to meet in person. They also provided feedback on the network's ongoing Wildfire Action Groups and suggestions for how the network can build on its success going forward.
- **Maintaining hope and momentum for the future:** While the increasing and undeniable challenges that have come with a changing climate change remain top of mind after the recent fires in Los Angeles County, there also was an underlying sense of hope, grounded in the way so much progress has been made in understanding effective approaches and the ways to work together in order to, as one participant put it, not just live, but "thrive" with fire.

Key Takeaways for Funders

- Funders can play an essential role in supporting the co-development of research based on needs coming from the communities and the partners on the ground, and then sharing those findings.
- Funders can support coordination and collaboration, resources for which are often difficult to find, and recognize that building relationships takes dedicated time and focused effort.
- Funders can continue to rely on WRF to help navigate emerging federal funding and policy impacts on the wildfire resilience ecosystem, as well as ongoing strategies for building wildfire resilience.

Acknowledgements

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- **Lily Bui**, SoCal Grantmakers
- **Keytra Meyer**, Humboldt Area Foundation
- **Laura Seaman**, League of California Community Foundations
- **Marion Wittmann**, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

With appreciation for the ongoing guidance from the WRF Advisory Committee:

- **Genny Biggs**, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
- **Jennee Kuang**, Resources Legacy Fund
- **Katie Oran**, Northern California Grantmakers
- **Mark Valentine**
- **Marion Wittmann**, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
- An anonymous funder

Thanks again to all of the grantmaking organizations whose participation made this convening such a success:

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Resources Legacy Fund, Direct Relief, Santa Barbara Foundation, League of California Community Foundations, SoCal Grantmakers, Tahoe Fund, Marin Community Foundation, March Conservation Fund, Center for Disaster Philanthropy, The Community Foundation San Luis Obispo County, Bezos Earth Fund, Conservation X Labs, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Humboldt Area Foundation, Latino Community Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, McCall MacBain Foundation, National Forest Foundation, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, Pasadena Community Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Waltons Trust, Water Foundation, and anonymous funders.

Thank you to those who joined panels and discussions to share their expertise:

Community Brigade, U.S. Fire Administration, UC Santa Barbara, Western Fire Chiefs Association, National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council, Community Environmental Council (CEC), California Environmental Nonprofit, Ventura County Community Foundation, California Fire Foundation, USDA Forest Service, Land Trust For Santa Barbara, Cachuma Water Board, and Santa Barbara County.

A special note of appreciation to the following organizations that provided support to make this convening possible:

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Resources Legacy Fund, Direct Relief, Santa Barbara Foundation, League of California Community Foundations.



RECAP

The convening officially opened with a welcome reception

At the reception, participants were welcomed by Climate Resilience Fund's (CRF's) Kayla Calkins and John Nordgren, as well as retired Santa Barbara County Fire Marshal and Division Chief Rob Hazard. Chief Hazard, who also serves on the Santa Barbara County FireSafe Council Board of Directors, shared his deep understanding of fire in the region, as well as the progress that he has seen in building resilience and improving resilience outcomes. He emphasized that educating communities may be the most critical piece of the puzzle, given the number of vulnerabilities in the built environment. He noted that with increased awareness of the communities role in preparedness, many may experience the same change in vision that he did, moving away from an image of individuals fighting fire by standing on their roofs with hoses, to one of all of us living with fire and working together to understand and address the risk.

Chief Hazard's message came at the right time, as public engagement was one of the recurring themes of this convening. (It was also the topic of the network-wide online meeting in June.) It also resonated with those who had opted to arrive early in order to visit the areas just to the south that had been impacted by the recent



wildfires in Los Angeles County. Outings organized and led by SoCal Grantmakers in collaboration with the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and Los Angeles County Fire provided members with an opportunity to not only see the damage, but to hear directly from survivors and firefighters who have been directly impacted. Many thanks to both SoCal Grantmakers and Cal OES for making this possible.

The next day featured a full agenda filled with panel discussions and site visits

The first session featured leading experts in wildfire resilience and mitigation.

Moderator Marion Wittmann of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation was quick to note that the panelists all appropriately had a connection to UC Santa Barbara, before asking them to share their thoughts and answer questions from the group.

- **Sarah Anderson**, Professor in the [Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at UC Santa Barbara](#), echoed some of the themes raised by Chief Hazard, emphasizing the importance of considering the ecological and social aspects of a place. She encouraged the group to think about not only living with wildfire but thriving with wildfire.
- **Max Moritz**, Statewide Wildfire Specialist with [University of California Cooperative Extension](#) and Adjunct Professor at the [Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at UC Santa Barbara](#), noted the impact of the Thomas Fire that hit the region in 2018, and the way it raised three key questions: How to better prepare the homes and shared infrastructure, including the water supply? How to better identify the vulnerable populations that are often 'hidden,' and get them plugged in? How to better assess the landscape, looking at both the value and the risk of fire in different areas from the agricultural belt to native trees.
- **Retired Fire Chief Dave Winnacker** then offered his expertise on critical considerations related to household and community actions to reduce the destruction from fire. He returned to the theme of engaging the community, noting that if we can prepare communities to receive fire, then we can use fire to help manage the landscape. He was clear about the challenges ahead, stating that with climate change we will continue to see circumstances similar to those that led to the destruction in LA County, where the conditions are difficult and efforts are won or lost at the moment a fire transitions from wild areas into urban areas. Chief Winnacker cautioned the group not to mistake any mitigation activity with progress when it comes to building resilience. The importance of mitigations that matter: with a focus on home hardening and defensible space are required at the parcel, neighborhood, and community level to reduce risk and increase the likelihood of insurability.

- **Ben Halpern**, Executive Director of the [National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis \(NCEAS\)](#) and a Professor in the [Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at UC Santa Barbara](#), added that there are two key questions to assessing actual progress in building resilience: Can you resist? And can you recover? With those questions in mind, he spoke to how his team is trying to understand the values, vulnerabilities, and opportunities to build resilience within the landscapes, and create a corresponding index that is coming soon in the [Western Wildfire Resilience Index](#).

In conclusion, the group emphasized that, in the words of Chief Winnacker, “First and foremost, we’re all in this together,” and that funders can play an essential role in supporting the co-development of research based on needs

coming from the communities and the partners on the ground, and then sharing those findings and incentivizing the communities to do the work to take calculated and coordinated actions for resilience before the fire arrives.

“First and foremost, we’re all in this together”

- Chief Dave Winnacker

The second session focused on lessons learned in community-led preparedness, with a panel discussion moderated by Joan Hartmann, 3rd District Santa Barbara County Supervisor. Supervisor Hartmann began the session by telling the group of her own experience of twice being evacuated from her home, then introduced the members of the panel and noted the different perspectives represented.

- **Anne-Marie Parkinson**, Executive Director of the [Santa Barbara County FireSafe Council](#), along with, **Dustin McKibben** of [Santa Barbara County Fire](#), spoke to the importance of going out to talk with community members, so as to understand their interests, needs and barriers, and then put that information out in a way that will resonate.
- **Em Johnson** of the [Community Environmental Council/Wildfire Resilience Collaborative](#) emphasized that this is especially true when working with disadvantaged or disinvested communities, noting that there is an intersection between so many issues - fire, smoke, heat, air pollution - and that communication with these community members has to be ongoing, and two way, treating them with the respect they deserve.

- **Liz Alves**, a member of the Trout Club Community, echoed the importance of that engagement and education before adding that, “what really makes a difference is moving from education to activation,” which for community leaders often means not just delivering a message but actually participating in the action.
- **Evrin Bunn**, Director of the Strategic Engagements and Partnerships at the [U.S. Fire Administration](#), then spoke to the role of collaborations in enabling partners to gather community input and develop appropriate guidance, taking care to note that ‘one size fits all’ guidance is not practical given how different the different regions of the country can be, including in their understanding and defining of risk.

The session ended with questions from the group, and the panelists stressed the importance of coordination and collaboration, adding that funders should recognize that doing so takes time and effort, especially when thinking beyond the development of plans to the cultivation of meaningful relationships that result in coordinated action.

For the afternoon sessions, the group boarded a bus that would make three stops. The initial field trip stop was a panel discussion and lunch sponsored and hosted by [Direct Relief](#). CEO Amy Weaver, along with COO Byron Scott, welcomed the group to the organization’s impressive headquarters, before turning the floor over to Laura Seaman, CEO of the League of California Community Foundations, for a panel on funding resilience during recovery.

- **Lily Bui** of [SoCal Grantmakers](#) spoke to what she learned from her recent experience mobilizing and vetting funds after the LA fires. She emphasized the importance of continuing to improve coordination within the philanthropic sector and focusing on resilience in addition to recovery.
- **Mike Silacci** of the [Ventura County Community Foundation](#) praised the role played by Southern California Grantmakers, and also noted the importance of working with the coalitions of responder organizations known as Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs).

- **Annie Vu**, Associate Director for US Emergency Response at [Direct Relief](#), built on the theme of developing partnerships and building trust.
- **Angie Carmignani**, Executive Director of the [California Fire Foundation](#), added that trust is essential when times are tough, as responding to needs can require making quick shifts in priorities and cutting red tape.

After the panelist presentations, in Q&A with the audience, panelists again pointed to the importance of collaboration and communication, emphasizing that philanthropy has been learning to “not just talk, but listen to survivors,” with a goal of understanding the social dynamics and anticipating how to keep improving before the next disaster strikes. The session concluded with comments focused on the significance of conversation and collaboration leading to better science, as well as better plans and policy. As Angie put it, “We’re so much stronger together, and, it may be cheesy, but the more we collaborate the stronger the fabric we weave.”

Afterwards, the group toured the warehouse of Direct Relief and learned about the organization’s extensive efforts around the world, including the more than \$8 million in financial and material aid, from essential medications and medical supplies to burn zone re-entry kits and operating grants, provided in response to the LA Fires. An impressive facility, and such amazing work. Our sincere thanks to Direct Relief for hosting this session.



The next field trip stop was the **Arroyo Hondo Preserve** for a quick tour and discussion of approaches to land management in the context of wildfire resilience.

- **Meredith Hendricks**, Executive Director of [The Land Trust of Santa Barbara County](#), which manages the preserve, greeted the group and delivered remarks highlighting some of the history of the preserve, showcasing where fires have burned and the actions taken to reintroduce resilient native plants while eradicating invasive species. She provided additional background on the structure and role of a land trust in preservation and community engagement.
- **Tim Robinson**, Senior Resources Scientist at the [Cachuma Operations and Maintenance Board](#), where he manages the Fisheries Division, added details about the wildfire debris flow and water systems, including the innovative ways they've helped protect the area's fish populations. After losing trout during the Alisal Fire on the preserve, lessons learned were applied to subsequent efforts to move trout from the LA fires to safety on the preserve.
- **Dr. Nicole Molinari**, [U.S. Forest Service](#) Province Ecologist, walked the group through the integrated strategies the U.S. Forest Service uses to sustainably manage lands and fire risk in Southern Californian landscapes.

The group still had a few minutes to take a short hike to explore the creek and local vegetation before re-boarding the buses.

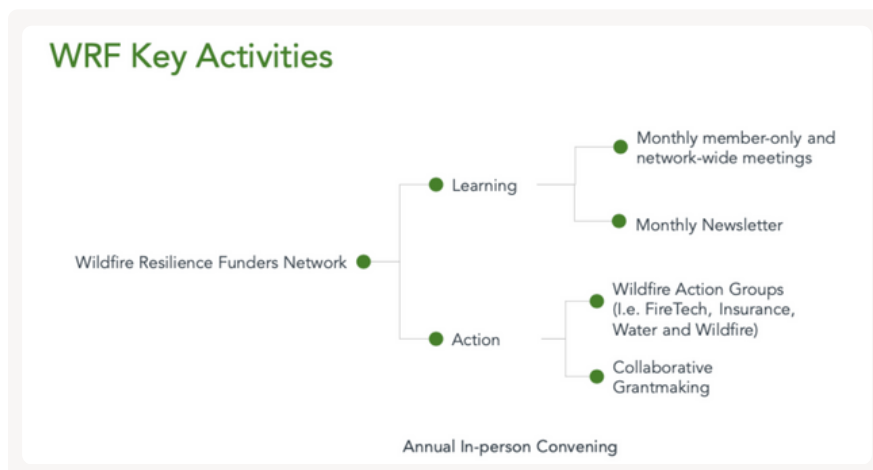


The final field trip stop was the Roblar Winery in the Santa Ynez Valley, which allowed the group to discuss the impact of wildfire on a local business, with the added benefit of sampling some of the winery's excellent offerings.

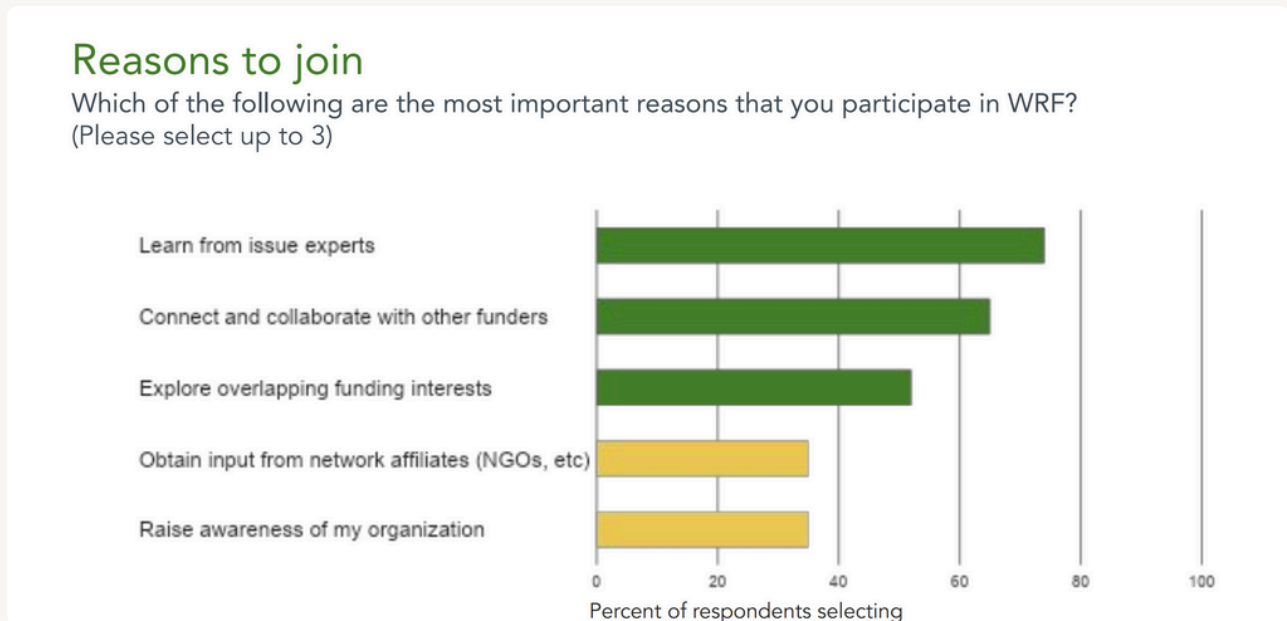
- **Anne Whatley** of the [Santa Barbara Foundation](#) welcomed us, while [Roblar Winery and Vineyards](#) General Manager **Matthew Beiszard** spoke about the winery's experience preparing for fire and serving as a hub for community members during wildfire events.
- **Keegan Gibbs**, a co-founder of the [Community Brigade](#), then shared a stirring account of personal experience developing and leading this inspiring community-based effort, initially focused on Malibu and now expanding into other communities. After hearing Keegan speak about his transformation from someone angered by the loss of his family home to someone committed to assisting others, it is no surprise that his story was showcased in the recent PBS documentary, [The Real Story of the LA Wildfires](#).

The third and final day centered on reflection and smaller group discussions

The day opened with CRF's John Nordgren providing an overview of the evolution of WRF, from the initial spark of an idea to its current reality as an active and expanding network that connects more than 75 grantmaking organizations, building knowledge and enabling collaboration. John reflected on a few network highlights, including the extent of topics that have been covered in network-wide and member-only meetings, the widespread participation in Wildfire Action Groups, and the interest in co-funding efforts, all before pivoting to discuss the path ahead, as the network shifts to a membership-based model.



The discussion then shifted to the results of a survey of the grantmaking organizations in WRF, which participants completed upon arrival. The survey showed the value WRF provides through learning and connecting, with one respondent reflecting a dominant theme by writing that they valued, “the collaborative brainstorming and gaining a deeper understanding of various funders and their specific areas of interest, allowing for potential collaboration.”



Respondents gave the network high marks for being responsive to their interests and needs, offering access and insights from leading experts, and providing opportunities to explore topics of shared interest, while highlighting the potential to increase attention to trending topics and expand efforts to help members align approaches and develop collaborations.

With those reflections in mind, participants broke into smaller groups to talk about the current and future role of the WRF network and how it could best support funder efforts going forward. The reports from those breakouts expressed appreciation for the opportunity to gather in person, with an emphasis on understanding the issues and each other’s perspectives. In the words of one funder, “We don’t often have face time, especially not when we’re actively going through recovery, so this was a really meaningful opportunity to meet, triangulate the truth, and also make connections.”

A follow on topic was the balance to be struck in such convenings between understanding the specifics of a place as opposed to exploring the wider themes; yet, on this point, the convening received praise, with one funder from Canada reporting that, “You did a great job as, yes, it was locally based, but it (also) broadened my understanding of the range of impacts and how to think about (these issues) in a holistic way, which was very very helpful.”

Others had suggestions for the network, with one sharing the idea of expanding the network’s directory to show the organizations and efforts that each funder is supporting, while another

recommended that each Wildfire Action Group should start by identifying a shared goal and a shared target to avoid the potential of those “petering out.” Yet the group kept returning to the importance of gathering in person and getting to know each other, as exemplified in one of the concluding comments, “I learned so much over a bowl of yogurt from (another funder) who will never fund in my area but there was still so much we could learn from each other.”

“WRF has been critical to my ability to get connected with the wildfire ecosystem.”

- WRF Member



Returning to the topic of the Wildfire Action Groups, the participants split into breakouts based on the two groups that are ongoing, with one focused on insurance and wildfire, the other on water and wildfire.

- **The insurance and wildfire group** reviewed themes and current funding on the issue while diving deeper into strategies for linking risk reduction and insurance availability. The recently launched pilot in Incline Village, Lake Tahoe, was a strong example of coordinated efforts across stakeholders.
- **The water-fire nexus group** was comprised mainly of funders new to this WAG and curious around the interaction of water and wildfire resilience topics. Continued learning was the main focus with discussion focusing on the draft co-chair proposal and next steps.

These discussions continued through lunch and beyond the call to depart, a hopeful sign of much more to come.

Anecdotal connections and next steps from the convening include:

- Additional members being added to Wildfire Action Groups.
- WRF convening a small group of funders to explore the Boreal Forest and wildfire.
- Cal OES and Department of Angels have scheduled a follow-up meeting to better understand survivor stories and the State's role in supporting local government and long-term recovery groups. (This relationship had been nascent before the WRF Network convening optional field trip.)
- Center for Disaster Philanthropy and Pasadena Community Foundation plan to follow up on ways CDP can support PCF with disaster case management and LTRG funding.
- IAFC and CRF are discussing the pursuit of FEMA support for a Wildfire Resilient Communities Initiative/ hub.
- SoCal Grantmakers followed up with the CAL FIRE Foundation after the lunch panel to explore potential opportunities for collaboration throughout the recovery process.
- Conversations are progressing between FEMA, LA County, and the Moore Foundation following their burn scar tour.

APPENDIX:
2025 CONVENING PROGRAM AGENDA

CONVENING AGENDA

WED, MAY 21 | ARRIVAL & WELCOME

6:00 PM - 7:30 PM

**Welcome Reception,
Mar Monte Hotel Ocean Front Terrace**

6:00-7:30 PM

 *Mar Monte Hotel, 1111 E Cabrillo Blvd, Santa Barbara, CA 93103*

- **John Nordgren**, Climate Resilience Fund
- **Chief Rob Hazard**, Retired Santa Barbara County Fire Marshall and Division Chief and Santa Barbara County FireSafe Council Board of Directors

Optional: Sunset Beach Walk


7:45 PM

CONVENING AGENDA

THURS, MAY 22 | PANEL SPEAKERS & FIELD TRIP

9:00 AM - 6:15 PM

Welcome & Overview of the Day 9:00-9:10 AM

 *Mar Monte Hotel Fireside Ballroom, Mar Monte Hotel, 1111 E Cabrillo Blvd, Santa Barbara, CA 93103*

Wildfire Resilience Panel 9:10-10:00 AM

- **Ben Halpern**, National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis, Western Wildfire Resilience Index
 - **Max Moritz**, Regional Wildfire Mitigation Program
 - **Sarah Anderson**, UC Santa Barbara, county-wide wildfire assessment
 - **Chief Dave Winnacker**, Western Fire Chiefs Association
 - **Marion Wittmann**, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation (Moderator)
-

Community-Led Preparedness Panel 10:05-11:00 AM

- **Anne-Marie Parkinson**, Santa Barbara County FireSafe Council
 - **Dustin McKinnon**, Santa Barbara County Fire
 - **Em Johnson**, Community Environmental Council/Wildfire Resilience Collaborative
 - **Liz Alves**, Trout Club Community Member
 - **Evrin Bunn**, FEMA Community Evacuation Tabletops
 - **Joan Hartmann**, Santa Barbara County Supervisor (Moderator)
-

Break and Board Bus for Field Trip 11:05-11:30 AM

CONVENING AGENDA

Lunch at Direct Relief & Funding Resilience in Recovery Panel 12:00-1:30 PM

📍 *Direct Relief Headquarters, 6100 Wallace Becknell Rd, Santa Barbara, CA 93117*

Sponsored by Direct Relief & League of California Community Foundations

- **Mike Silacci**, Ventura County Community Foundation
- **Annie Vu**, Direct Relief US Emergency Response
- **Lily Bui**, Southern California Grantmakers
- **Angie Carmignani**, California Fire Foundation
- **Laura Seaman**, League of California Community Foundations (Moderator)

Arroyo Hondo Preserve 2:00-3:30 PM

📍 *A-1, Goleta, CA 93117*

- **Meredith Hendricks**, The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County
- **Nicole Molinari**, U.S. Forest Service
- **Tim Robinson**: Cachuma Operations and Management Board

Depart for Roblar Winery 3:30 PM

Wildfire and Wineries 4:00-5:30 PM

📍 *3010 Roblar Ave, Santa Ynez, CA 93460*

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Foundation

- Wine Tasting and Appetizers
- **Anne Whatley**, Santa Barbara Foundation
- **Matthew Bieszard**, Roblar Winery
- **Kegan Gibbs**, The Community Brigade

Board Bus, Return to Hotel 5:30-6:15 PM

CONVENING AGENDA

FRI, MAY 23 | WRF FUNDER MEETINGS & DEPART 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

WRF Update 9:00-9:30 AM

Small Group Debrief Discussions 9:30-10:30 AM

Break 10:30-10:45 AM

Wildfire Action Group Breakouts 10:45- 11:45 AM

- Insurance and Wildfire
 - Water and Wildfire
-

Wrap-up 11:45 AM

Lunch & Depart 11:45 AM-1:00 PM



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