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Climate Smart Missoula

Nonprofits Unite to Lower Emissions, Advance Equity

Climate Catalyst Fund supports Home ReSource solar, launches campaign for YWCA e-bikes

MISSOULA – When a community comes together to address a problem, sometimes a seemingly impossible gap becomes a powerful opportunity to multi-solve. That's the story of the Missoula Climate Catalyst Fund, a community-powered initiative operated by Climate Smart Missoula, and its newly announced campaign to raise $15,000 to provide electric bicycles to the clients of the YWCA.

Formerly known as the Footprint Fund, the program brings together individuals, businesses and event managers to provide gap funding for local projects that reduce carbon pollution while advancing community resilience and equity.

Since launching in 2020, the fund has helped the Missoula Housing Authority install energy-efficient heating and cooling systems at Cornerstone Apartments; repair solar inverters at Homeword's Orchard Garden property; fund low-income weatherization projects through the Human Resource Council, NeighborWorks and Front Step; ensure the Poverello Center's new Clark Fork Inn Veteran Housing is solar-ready; and, most recently, close the final $8,000 gap in Home ReSource's 60-kilowatt solar installation.

"The Climate Catalyst Fund leverages donations to accelerate local climate solutions that directly benefit our Missoula community, particularly our lower-income neighbors," said Amy Cilimburg, executive director of Climate Smart Missoula. "Most of the projects we've supported have happened behind the scenes, with little public celebration or involvement. This fall, we're excited to invite our community into the story to help catalyze the next solution."

A new campaign: e-bikes for the YWCA

On October 1, the Catalyst Fund will launch its first-ever public-facing fundraising campaign, with a goal of raising $15,000 by the end of the year to provide electric bicycles to clients of the YWCA.

The campaign will provide e-bikes, helmets, lights, locks, tune-up gift cards and safety training to YWCA clients. The goal is to help reduce transportation barriers while providing a low-cost, low-emissions way to get to work, appointments, school and other essential destinations.

"Reliable transportation is a major barrier for many of our clients," said Becky Margolis, communications manager for the YWCA. "The Catalyst Fund's initiative will not only offer independence and cost savings for the families and survivors we serve, but it will also have a positive ripple effect for overall community health."

The campaign already has $5,000 in seed funding from the Missoula Marathon and The Rut Mountain Runs, both longtime contributors to the Climate Catalyst Fund, as well as the Ethel MacDonald Charitable Foundation, given in honor of Ethel's lifelong love of cycling and the freedom it afforded her. Missoula Bicycle Works has also committed in-kind support for several aspects of this new campaign.

"To already have a third of our funding secured before the public launch shows there is real community interest in making this happen," Cilimburg said. "Now we want to build on that momentum, not only to support the YWCA, but to create a sustainable source of funding for future climate-equity projects."

Closing the gap on solar

The Catalyst Fund's most recent project demonstrates how this community funding model can help turn ambitious plans into reality.

Home ReSource's 60-kilowatt solar installation came together through a creative combination of grants, foundation support, tax credits and financing. To close the final $8,000 gap would have meant pulling money from the organization's critical community efforts. Instead, the Catalyst Fund stepped in.

"Having the final gap in our project covered by the Catalyst Fund allowed us to keep providing community programming and education, rather than pulling from our operations budget," said Kelli Hess, executive director of Home ReSource. "We were then able to build an interactive model that will help educate every fifth grader in Missoula, our customers, and members of the public about solar energy, hopefully catalyzing even more climate action."

With fewer federal funding opportunities available for climate and equity projects, local gap funding is increasingly important, Cilimburg said.

"Often climate solutions don't fail because they aren't possible," she said. "Sometimes, they just need that last piece of funding, expertise, or community support to get across the finish line. That's the space the Catalyst Fund is designed to fill."

Celebrate solar, kick off the e-bike campaign

Community members are invited to celebrate the completion of Home ReSource's solar project and help kick off the YWCA e-bike campaign on **Thursday, October 1, at 8:30 AM at Home ReSource**.

The gathering will include coffee and pastries, brief remarks at 8:45 AM from Climate Smart Missoula, Home ReSource and the YWCA, and an opportunity to explore the new solar array and interactive education model.

To learn more about the Climate Catalyst Fund or make a donation, visit missoulacatalystfund.org.

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Climate Smart Missoula *builds and accelerates climate solutions for Missoula and beyond, through collaborative programs, advocacy and catalyzing diverse climate leadership.*