

 Pillar 2.
COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

HIGH TIDE FOUNDATION

Funding high-impact climate mitigation solutions

- **Country:** United States of America
- **Number of staff:** 5
- **Year of incorporation:** 2004
- **Type:** Private foundation
- **Endowment:** No
- **More information:** hightidefoundation.org

High Tide Foundation was established as a private foundation in 2004 by Richard and Dee Lawrence. After 30 years of building and managing a successful investment firm in Hong Kong, in the early 2000s Richard Lawrence Jr. moved back to the United States where he sought a way to ensure his children would have a balanced view of global life. This led Richard and his family to volunteer as translators on a medical brigade in rural Honduras after a hurricane season wiped out much of the Caribbean country's infrastructure. Eventually, these early experiences became the basis for High Tide, a leading climate philanthropy with global impact.

While volunteering, the family encountered many rural poor women and children who were being treated by medical staff for serious respiratory issues. But the air was clean, and no one smoked cigarettes, so the Lawrences' started to find the root cause. During a visit to a local home, where the family was cooking their evening meal, the reason became apparent. The house was filled with smoke, posing serious health risks for women and children that are never far from their mothers.

To address the root cause of the problem, rather than just manage symptoms, the Lawrence family decided to build improved cookstoves for the families, which became the seed for the Proyecto Mirador Foundation¹.

¹ Proyecto Mirador Foundation, 2023, <https://www.proyectomirador.org/>

Mirador is now a Gold Standard-certified carbon emission reduction project that has already built nearly 300 000 fuel-efficient stoves in rural communities in Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

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“We found a stove that had a chimney to rid homes of smoke while reducing fuelwood use by half. We sourced components locally and created more than 250 jobs in Honduras. We ran it as a non-profit organisation but operated the project like a business.”

— RICHARD LAWRENCE JR., DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER OF HIGH TIDE FOUNDATION²

While the positive climate impact of the project was not their initial goal, the Lawrence family realised that reducing the amount of wood burnt for cooking also reduced CO₂ emissions by nearly half³. By being able to monetize the benefits of that reduction in emissions after meeting stringent Gold Standard carbon crediting program requirements, the project was dramatically improved and able to scale. “They got really interested in this idea that we can verifiably stop carbon from going into the atmosphere,” shared Marisa de Belloy, High Tide Foundation Executive Director. This experience inspired the family to start working to tackle climate change.

Finding their climate philanthropist profile

A few years later, the Lawrence family decided to ramp up their giving and set up the High Tide Foundation – a small organisation to leverage the family’s expertise and strategically support the most critical areas for climate mitigation for maximum impact.

² “Glenn Ong, “Richard Lawrence Jr.: An investment guru who believes in the rise of Asia”, Ivey Energy Policy and Management Centre, Policy Commons, December 2021, <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/2104459/richard-lawrence-jr/2859755/>

³ “Mirador Stoves Can Reduce Your Greenhouse Gas Emissions”, Proyecto Mirador, <https://www.proyectomirador.org/stove-benefits/mirador-stoves-can-reduce-your-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

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“They are very entrepreneurial. They did not want to just hand out money to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Yes, we have to send out the money. This is an important part of the Foundation. However, the family does a lot more. They sit on the board, they will help to make the right introductions and help grantees to negotiate deals – whatever is necessary to make the grantees successful.”

– MARISA DE BELLOY, HIGH TIDE FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Building on the family’s business background, High Tide’s approach is focused on measurable and data-led projects, such as those that involve carbon credits. “When done correctly, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, carbon credits can have a trackable impact in a way that a lot of activities in philanthropy are not,” affirmed de Belloy. For them, this is a way to boost short-term action with long-term systemic impact – a characteristic that the Foundation seeks in all the projects it supports.

Another example of High Tide’s data-led, high-impact, high-reward approach is the effort to reduce methane emissions. Why methane? Because of its enormous contribution to global carbon emissions: emissions of methane are responsible for more than 25% of the global warming that Earth is experiencing today⁴. Because of the clear demand, instead of abstractly tackling the problem, subnational governments and community climate initiatives need accurate information on the key territories in which emissions must be reduced.

This targeted approach also has a strong positive impact on improving people’s health. Thus, the Foundation supported the creation of Carbon Mapper⁵ – a coalition between NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the State of California, the University of Arizona, and others. This private-public partnership combines expertise and resources in advancing remote-sensing technology to potentialise an operational satellite data service, to help track ongoing methane emissions.

⁴ “Facts about Methane”, United Nations Environment Programme, <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/energy/facts-about-methane>

⁵ Carbon Mapper, <https://carbonmapper.org/>

Learning how to match funds with other philanthropists

The Foundation's efforts to reduce methane emissions are evidence of its eagerness to address the most significant climate issues, even if High Tide is the sole funder of a project. However, the Foundation soon realised that everything in the climate field is underfunded and that, to move faster and scale up, collaboration with other funders was a strategic lever.

“Getting everybody [funders] to align has enormous benefits. [By collaborating], we can really hash out strategies and figure out the right ones. And then we don't have this field where everybody is trying everything on a small level –that does not get us anywhere. Because then we won't have the effort, the money, and the support to really accomplish stuff. That is part of the problem.”

— MARISA DE BELLOY, HIGH TIDE FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Global Methane Pledge⁶ is an interesting example of this philosophy. Launched at COP26, the Pledge – which counts the support of several philanthropies and other stakeholders – demonstrates a commitment from participating countries to take voluntary actions to contribute to a collective effort to reduce global methane emissions by at least 30% from 2020 levels, by 2030. To deliver this commitment, High Tide and several philanthropies joined efforts to fund the Global Methane Hub⁷: structures designed to support governments to achieve the Global Methane Pledge. After fundraising for the Hub, High Tide Foundation helped set up a team based in Santiago, Chile, with the mission to scale up cost-effective solutions in methane mitigation across the energy, agricultural and waste management sectors.

By working with other philanthropies like the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies, High Tide realised that coordinating and matching different organisations' expertise, resources, strategic thinking and access to policymakers and corporations is the best way to advance solutions at a large scale.

⁶ Global Methane Pledge, <https://www.globalmethanepledge.org/#about>

⁷ Global Methane Hub, <https://globalmethanehub.org/>

This kind of coordination also benefits grantees, who usually deal with the enormous burden of meeting various demands from different funders for the same project. Working collectively saves grantees a lot of time, money, and other resources that can be more effectively invested in the field.

“We think that this is the way to go. None of us wants to create a big new entity. We can create something that is way more efficient to the field by combining interests, reporting and strategies.”

— MARISA DE BELLOY, HIGH TIDE FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

High Tide Foundation is continuously seeking opportunities to work with other stakeholders to support more ambitious action on climate change. Considering the Foundation’s background and its willingness to act fast, it is a matter of time before new collaborations are formed at the intersections of health and climate in the climate philanthropy landscape.

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