

Centering equity and justice in climate philanthropy



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About Ariadne

Ariadne is a European peer-to-peer network of more than 700 funders who support social change and human rights. Ariadne aims to increase philanthropic support for social change and human rights issues and helps those using private resources for public good to achieve more together than they can alone by linking them to other funders and providing practical tools of support.

About Candid

Candid is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides the most comprehensive data and insights about the social sector. Every year, millions of nonprofits spend trillions of dollars around the world. Candid finds out where that money comes from, where it goes, and why it matters. Candid was formed in 2019 when GuideStar and Foundation Center merged. Candid combined GuideStar’s tools on nonprofits and Foundation Center’s tools on foundations with new resources to offer more comprehensive, real-time information about the social sector.

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Foreword

In 2019, Ariadne, a network of European foundations supporting social change and human rights issues, organised a grant skills workshop for our members focused on funding with a climate justice lens. At the time, many of our members were just starting to think about how they could integrate climate into their work and, while they recognised the climate crisis as an urgent and existential issue, they were not sure how to pivot to addressing climate in the context of their human rights programs.

For so long, climate change has been viewed as the purview of scientific or environmental funders. Funders interested in social issues struggled to recognise climate as an issue relevant to their own portfolios. They were concerned that shifting attention to climate would mean drawing resources away from the other issues they care about, and they wanted to better understand the intersections of climate with their existing work.

We invited a few funders working on climate from a justice perspective to share their experience with others, but at the time we struggled to find any resources for funders on what it means to take a climate justice approach to funding or examples of funders who had successfully integrated this perspective into their work. We really wanted to capture the learnings of funders who were already deeply immersed in climate work as well as those who had more recently found their way to the topic through work in other areas. Following the event, we turned to Candid to explore the idea of a tool for funders, and the concept for this guide emerged from those discussions.

As more and more foundations wake up to the urgency of addressing the climate crisis and commit themselves to investing more in climate work, we hope that climate justice will become a priority not just for human rights funders but for a wide range of foundations that want to tackle the root causes of climate change. Ultimately, the climate crisis is deeply interconnected with questions of equity, which must be part of the analysis and embedded in the solutions. As this guide notes, the countries bearing the greatest burden of climate change are often far from the greatest contributors to the crisis. And those most affected often lack the resources to adapt. The nations in the Global North that have produced the most significant levels of carbon emissions have a historic responsibility to shoulder the burden of adaptation and act urgently to address the impacts of the climate crisis globally while addressing their own fossil fuel reliance. However, powerful corporate interests can stand in the way of needed change, while corporations evade responsibility for the damage they have caused to the environment and to communities.

Private philanthropy can make an important contribution to addressing the climate crisis by supporting not only policy advocacy but also the agency of affected communities, including the next generation, to participate in the design of solutions. We hope this guide, which includes examples of how a range of different types of foundations with different approaches have moved to incorporate climate justice into their work, will be an inspiration to funders and give them the tools to enhance their own grantmaking with a climate perspective. Together, we can have a positive impact on the future of our planet.

Julie Broome
Director, Ariadne

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Climate justice: An overview

The ominous consequences of the climate crisis are all around us. Extreme weather events are increasing worldwide, causing damage, displacement, and death. Rising sea levels threaten the very existence of coastal communities. Droughts and other climate-related changes are destroying crops, thus compromising our global food supply. It is not hyperbole to say that the climate crisis is an existential threat for all of us.

Although climate scientists and climate activists on the front lines have been ringing the alarm for decades, it is only in recent years that many are recognizing the urgency of the situation. Indeed, in 2021, the International Panel on Climate Change released a major report synthesizing more than 14,000 studies on the climate crisis, with the following takeaways:¹

- Human activities, unequivocally, are responsible for the climate crisis, particularly through our burning of coal, oil, and other fossil fuels. No region of the world has been spared the effects of these actions.
- Even if we were to take immediate action, the damage we've already done to the planet means we will continue to see worsening climate impacts for the next 30 years.
- Although climate changes have increased over the past few decades, they are now occurring at a much faster pace.
- There is still time to make a difference. As dire as the current circumstances are, there are opportunities to avert the most catastrophic scenarios of climate change.

As the effects of the climate crisis intensify, philanthropists are paying increasing attention to climate.² New pledges for climate funding, often of staggering amounts, are seemingly made every week. Although this represents a hopeful trend, it remains to be seen how new philanthropic investments will be deployed, to what extent investments will address the root causes of the climate crisis, how investments will touch the

hardest-hit communities, and how effective new initiatives will be in generating climate solutions. Indeed, data from ClimateWorks shows less than 2% of global giving goes to climate change mitigation.³ Of the approximately \$1.6 billion supporting such efforts in 2019, only a small percentage (about \$60 million) supported justice and equity-oriented efforts.

This Candid Learning field guide calls on funders to play a role in changing the perilous trajectory we are on by incorporating not only climate, but also climate *justice* into their portfolios. Intended for grantmakers who are new to this work as well as seasoned grantmakers who want to deepen their practice, this guide seeks to:

- Define key terms and lift up the ways in which the climate crisis disproportionately affects particular populations and geographies
- Identify common barriers and contradictions that get in the way of more holistic, justice-centered philanthropic strategies to address the climate crisis
- Illustrate how foundations are integrating climate justice into their grantmaking portfolios, both through examples and in-depth case studies
- Describe the critical role intermediaries play in advancing climate justice
- Outline opportunities to move the needle on philanthropic support for climate justice

What is climate justice?

The climate crisis is largely manmade—the product of an economic system that is rooted in the extraction of land, resources, and people

Methodology

We conducted interviews with 30 funders, practitioners, and field leaders who shared their insights on how grantmakers can incorporate climate justice into their portfolios.

We sought out the perspectives of a diverse array of organizations, from large, private foundations to smaller family foundations, as well as representatives from intermediaries and frontline organizations. We also aimed to incorporate geographic diversity, with interviewees representing perspectives from the United States, Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America.

In addition, we culled through a rich and growing repository of publications that have explored this topic and highlight a curated set of resources throughout the guide.

and comes at the expense of sustainable and regenerative practices that allow us to protect our limited natural resources. Indeed, it is widely recognized that the responsibility for the climate crisis rests disproportionately on wealthier countries as well as the exploitive and extractive practices of large corporations. The Global North is responsible for 92% of excess carbon emissions. In addition, research has shown that 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988 can be attributed to just 100 companies.

“The climate crisis that we face is a result of historical injustices, the nature of colonial development, and the extractive nature of capitalism. And, those who bear the brunt of the impact of climate change are those that are least responsible.”

—Masego Madzwamuse, Oak Foundation

At the same time, those that incur the harshest consequences of climate change live in communities that are the least resourced and most historically excluded (whether they are in the Global North or Global South). Those most impacted by the climate crisis are young people and are more likely to be poor, women, people with disabilities, people of color, Indigenous Peoples, and other already marginalized communities. Moreover, those most affected often have the fewest resources available to them to adapt to the climate crisis.

Ironically, the climate solutions that receive the most attention and funding are generated by the very entities that are the most responsible for the climate crisis. Communities that are the most impacted by the climate crisis are generating innovative and transformative solutions that are community-driven, borne out of their lived reality, and rooted in ancestral knowledge and practices. Yet all too often, these solutions are under-resourced and under-appreciated.

Climate justice is an orientation to the climate crisis that recognizes this reality. Although there is no standard or universally agreed-upon definition of the term, and although the origins and meaning vary across global contexts, we offer this definition from A People's Orientation to a Regenerative Economy/United Frontline Table as a north star.

Climate justice focuses on the root causes of climate crisis through an intersectional lens of racism, classism, economic injustice, and environmental harm. Climate justice focuses on making systemic changes that are required to address unequal burdens to our communities and realign our economy with our natural systems.

As a form of environmental justice, climate justice means that all have the right to access and obtain the resources needed to have an equal chance of survival and freedom from discrimination. As a movement, climate justice advocates are working from the grassroots up to create solutions for our climate and energy problems that ensure the right of all people to live, learn, work, play and pray in safe, healthy and clean environments.



Tip

The term *climate justice* can be sliced and diced in different ways depending on local political and cultural norms. Consider local context in how people are framing the issues.

In our interviews, we found that some funders have an explicit definition of climate justice that guides their work, whereas others, particularly those working outside the U.S., use a more general equity or rights frame. For example, Vinita Sahasranaman, co-lead at Urgent Action Fund—Asia & Pacific, says of its emerging climate justice work, “I don’t think as an organization we have defined what climate justice is for ourselves. We heavily rely on how it’s typically defined in its relation to human rights. Organizations and defenders who work on climate-related issues with a human rights lens are typically people who seek our support and in turn, are people whose advice we seek as we expand our work.”

In other cases, funders defer to the ways their grantee partners articulate their own work. Peter Kostishack, director of programs at Global Greengrants, says the organization is hesitant to be too prescriptive about definitions because many of its grantee partners, more than half of whom represent Indigenous communities worldwide, do not necessarily describe their work as climate-related, even though the relevance to climate justice is clear. Kostishack observes, “If you look at their proposal, you might not find the word *climate* in them. They’re standing up for their territorial rights, their culture, their food security. Those are the day-to-day challenges and problems [the climate crisis] causes. These are climate activities, but you won’t always see that term used.”

Lindley Mease, director of the CLIMA Fund, and Solomé Lemma, executive director of Thousand Currents, encourage funders to recognize the multiple layers of action embedded within climate justice, describing it as an outcome, process, and a practice.⁴ Reflecting this framing, the definition of climate justice we have highlighted here, as well as alternate definitions of climate justice, share the following commonalities.

Climate justice takes a systems perspective on the climate crisis and focuses on its root causes, particularly historical systems of oppression. How we define a problem dictates how we address it. Traditionally, the climate crisis has been defined by technical metrics, such as carbon emissions. As a result, proposed solutions tend to be correspondingly technical. Climate justice moves away from this approach and acknowledges that the climate crisis is embedded within

larger systems and is incapable of being solved by technology and market solutions alone.

A climate justice orientation asks the critical question, “Why is it that we are where we are?” Instead of focusing on the impacts of the “symptoms” of the climate crisis (i.e., emissions, rising temperatures and sea levels), climate justice focuses on an interconnected set of root causes, including racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism, that have contributed to deep and lasting inequity and injustice. For example, colonialism has resulted in the exploitation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities and their lands as well as an imposition of capitalism as an economic system. Capitalism, in turn, is rooted in extractive, profit-driven practices that have prioritized convenience, luxury, and accumulation at the expense of sustainable stewardship of our natural resources.

Heather McGray, director of the Climate Justice Resilience Fund, puts it this way: “What we see now from the climate justice movement is a demand for systems change, demand for decolonization, a demand for really questioning the basis for capitalism, and a demand for equality. The drivers of greenhouse gas emissions are the same drivers that give us inequality. And that inequality drives the destructiveness of climate change.”

Climate justice centers the experiences and solutions of frontline communities. A climate justice approach acknowledges that those who are most impacted by the climate crisis are best positioned to articulate how climate change is affecting their communities and to provide the leadership and knowledge to generate and implement the solutions needed to address the crisis. Centering frontline communities means not only following their lead on climate solutions, but also ensuring they are at the table and have decision-making power for the issues affecting their communities.

For example, many climate funders come in wanting to reduce emissions as their ultimate goal, but this objective may not be relevant for some under-resourced communities, where emissions are already very low. Instead, relying on communities to define the problems for themselves leads to solutions that resonate with local context and address the wide-ranging harms caused by climate change, not just the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Centering frontline communities is not only about generating the best and most relevant solutions. It is also about ensuring accountability. Climate Justice Alliance, a U.S.-based organization that connects frontline communities impacted by climate inequities, pushes to do just that and places race, class, and gender at the center of its climate solutions. Holly Baker, philanthropic partnerships director at Climate

Justice Alliance, asserts, “It is critical to have accountability to frontline communities, recognizing that those communities have been impacted for decades by industries driving the crisis. Their experience fighting to protect the health of their communities and local environments fuels their leadership on climate solutions that work for both people and the planet.”

Climate justice elevates the power of movements. Those committed to climate justice understand that investing in direct action, community-based decision making, and organizing builds *collective* power on the ground and is often the catalyst needed to drive systemic change and challenge both corporate power and government inaction. Groups like Friday for Future and La Via Campesina, for example, have been able to mobilize millions both globally and locally to articulate a set of demands and put pressure on governments and corporations to adopt more progressive climate solutions. Likewise, local, regional, and national groups and coalitions on the front lines have effectively placed pressure on mining interests, dirty power plants, and other government and corporate entities to spur climate action in their communities. Young people, who have some of the highest stakes in mitigating the climate crisis, have been especially effective in bringing the climate discourse to the fore through their organizing and movement-building efforts.

Climate justice acknowledges work at the intersections of fields and identities. Too often, climate philanthropy and climate solutions are siloed. A climate justice lens recognizes that the impacts of the climate crisis touch upon every aspect of our lives and that addressing the climate crisis means working across a wide array of issue areas, from health to education to the economy. Similarly, climate justice recognizes that climate solutions must account for intersectional identities and the myriad ways a person’s lived experience can influence how the climate crisis is experienced inequitably. For example, the ways in which a poor woman living with a disability in Southeast Asia experiences the climate crisis is likely to differ from that of a middle class, able-bodied, white man living in Europe.

Key climate & climate justice terms

For grantmakers newer to climate justice philanthropy, it can be helpful to clarify key terminology, including terms that apply more broadly to the climate crisis and those that are more specific to climate justice.

General climate terms

Climate change is long-term alteration in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth's local, regional, and global climates. These changes are driven by human activities, particularly the burning of fossil fuels, which have led to an increase in the Earth's average surface temperature.

Key climate change indicators include, but are not limited to, global land and ocean temperature increases; rising sea levels; ice loss at Earth's poles and in mountain glaciers; changes in the frequency and severity of extreme weather, such as hurricanes, heat waves, wildfires, droughts, floods, and precipitation; and cloud and vegetation cover changes.⁵

Climate change mitigation is work to *prevent* climate change, specifically by stopping the emissions of harmful greenhouse gases, or otherwise reducing their volume in the atmosphere.

Climate change adaptation refers to actions that reduce the negative impact of climate change, while taking advantage of potential new opportunities. It involves adjusting policies and actions because of observed or expected changes in climate.

Climate resilience is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to climate. Improving climate resilience involves assessing how climate change will create new, or alter current, climate-related risks, and taking steps to better cope with these risks.

Climate justice terms⁶

Climate justice focuses on the root causes of climate crisis through an intersectional lens of racism, classism, patriarchy, economic injustice, and environmental harm. Climate justice focuses on making systemic changes that are required to address unequal burdens to our communities and realign our economy with our natural systems.

As a form of environmental justice, climate justice means that all have the right to access and obtain the resources needed to have an equal chance of survival and freedom from discrimination. As a movement, climate justice advocates are working from the grassroots up to create solutions for our climate and energy problems that ensure the right of all people to live, learn, work, play, and pray in safe, healthy, and clean environments.

Carbon colonialism is the ability of wealthier countries to offset carbon emissions onto less wealthy countries through carbon trading schemes. It allows industrialized countries to exceed carbon caps by investing in carbon initiatives in the Global South and subsequently avoid the responsibility and impacts of carbon emissions. Carbon colonialism reinforces existing power structures and inequities between the Global North and Global South that pervade the climate crisis.

Environmental justice embraces the principle that all people and communities have a right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. It recognizes that, due to racism, patriarchy, and class discrimination, communities of color and people living in low-income neighborhoods are the most likely to be harmed by toxic chemicals and negative land uses, and the least likely to benefit from efforts to improve the environment. For additional information on the principles of environmental justice, visit climatejusticealliance.org/ej-principles.

Extractive economy is a capitalist system of exploitation and oppression that values consumerism, colonialism, and money over people and the planet. The extractive economy perpetuates the acquisition of wealth and power for a few through predatory financing, expropriation from land and commonly accessed goods/services, and the exploitation of human labor. An extractive economy views natural resources as commodities to dig, burn, and dump with no regard for the impact on communities and utilizes oppressive force to undermine democracy, community, and workers.

Frontline communities are those that experience the most immediate and worst impacts of climate change. They are most often communities of color, including Indigenous, and low-income peoples.

Just transition is a vision-led, unifying, and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. It is driven by a people- and planet-first approach, i.e., approaching production and consumption cycles holistically and striving to make them waste free. The transition itself must be just and equitable, redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations. If the process of transition is not just, the outcome will never be. *Just transition* describes both where we are going and how we will get there.

Loss and damage refers to climate change-induced devastations to societies, infrastructure, and the environment that exceed the adaptive capacity of communities and ecosystems. Climate impacts stem from both slow-onset processes (i.e., sea level rise and rising temperatures) and extreme weather events (i.e., floods and hurricanes). Losses and damages include harm to the economy, human health, access to land and territory, cultural heritage, and Indigenous and local knowledge. It can also refer to damage to biodiversity and habitats. Developing countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) often experience the greatest loss and damage.

Sacrifice zones are the geographic areas where low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately burdened by the impacts of the climate crisis, often through living in proximity to heavily polluting industries or high levels of chemical pollution. Reflective of the systemic racism and injustice embedded in our societies, sacrifice zones contribute to the unequal burden that communities of color face in the wake of the climate crisis.

Translocal organizing refers to community-generated solutions that are rooted in local community and decentralized enough to address and dismantle local challenges and, at the same time, interconnected enough to effect change within larger geographic spaces both regionally and across state lines. Translocal organizing models provide communities with more power and greater ability to scale up and scale out their solutions while informing and influencing local and state governments, which can in turn leverage national transformations necessary to change the rules.

Populations and places disproportionately affected by the climate crisis

Although the climate crisis ultimately affects all of us, a climate justice perspective focuses attention on the populations and places most likely to experience the adverse effects of the climate crisis, due in large part to systemic forces such as racism, patriarchy, poverty, and colonialism. As a result of societal failures to curb the excesses of capitalism, particular populations and locations are more likely to be exposed to acute and chronic climate stressors, be more sensitive to their impacts, and less likely to have the structural resources available to adapt to or to cope with change.⁷

For example, the U.S. Gulf Coast has been ravaged by a series of climate-induced disasters in recent years. A weak infrastructure for climate resilience, coupled with a long history of racism, has left many communities of color in the region impoverished and lacking in basic resources, such as decent housing and health care. These factors translate into increased exposure and sensitivity to the impacts of the climate crisis, while posing challenges for developing the adaptive capacity needed to respond.

With respect to vulnerable places, the Global South bears the brunt of the climate crisis. Given the political and economic history of the Global South, in particular colonialism and a long history of extractive and exploitive economic practices by the Global North that have decimated natural resources, many countries in the Global South will not only face the harshest impacts of extreme weather events, but they will also face more difficulty recovering from them. In addition, given the reliance on an agricultural economy in many of these places, livelihoods will further be disrupted.

At the same time, the Global South is not a monolith, and different areas will be affected in different ways. Likewise, the Global North is not a monolith, and historically excluded communities in the United States and Europe are likely to feel the adverse impacts of the climate crisis more so than wealthier communities. Indeed, wherever they are in the world, areas that are politically marginalized and poorly resourced experience the most harmful effects of climate change.

In fact, there is growing recognition that some of the most egregious injustices associated with climate change—displacement, loss of land, sudden loss of a livelihood—make adaptation impossible. With this reality, impacted countries are calling for “loss and damage” financing from developed countries. At the most recent COP26 summit, [The Children’s Investment Fund Foundation](#), along with a coalition of several other foundations, committed \$3 million to kick-start this effort.

Populations disproportionately affected by the climate crisis

For funders currently engaged in climate work as well as those seeking entrée, it can be helpful to engage in learning and analysis that elucidate the ways in which different populations are being affected by the climate crisis.

The following table is not intended to be comprehensive but provides examples of how particular groups of people are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. It is important to recognize that these identities are intersectional and that impacts of the climate crisis are often further differentiated as various identities intersect with one another.

Black and Latinx communities in the U.S.

- More than half of the people living near environmental hazards are Black or Latinx. They are more likely to experience illness or death from environmental causes.
- Hispanic/Latinx people in the U.S. work at high rates in weather-exposed industries (i.e., construction, agriculture) that are especially subject to health impacts from working in extreme temperatures. They are also more likely to face economic consequences, such as reduced labor hours due to extreme temperatures.

Indigenous communities

- Indigenous communities are culturally, economically, and socially dependent on ecosystems, and the negative effects of the climate crisis on their communities are amplified by marginalization, both past and present (broken/disregarded land treaties, divestment, poverty, lack of basic services). They therefore experience greater exposure to the climate crisis and have lower resilience to climate-related health effects.

Immigrants

- In the U.S., undocumented immigrants are excluded from government emergency response and relief efforts and thus more likely to be adversely impacted by climate-induced disasters. Language barriers also can make it harder to prepare, respond, and cope with the climate crisis.
- Language and cultural barriers, or undocumented status, might make these groups anxious about seeking out help that could compromise their immigration status and employment.

Migrants fleeing climate disasters

- Climate migrants are forced to flee their homes due to climate-related disasters (natural disasters, droughts, sea-level rise, and other weather events). They are more likely to reside in the Global South, where poverty and weak social safety nets mean a climatic event is more likely to lead to displacement.
- In 2020, more than 30 million people were displaced due to disaster events (in total, 318.7 million were displaced from 2008 to 2020). It is predicted that 1.2 billion people could be displaced by climate threats by 2050.
- Those displaced by climate threats do not fit the definition of *refugee*, making them ineligible for legal protection.

People with disabilities

- People with disabilities are often invisible to policymakers and thus often neglected in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery plans, even as they face heightened risks during climate disasters.
- The climate crisis contributes to discrimination and isolation already experienced by people with disabilities, as their full potential and ideas to confront the climate crisis are often not taken into consideration due to stereotypes about their abilities.

People living in poverty

- People living in poverty are often concentrated in areas most vulnerable to climate disasters. Due to financial constraints, they may be unable to adapt to changes in lifestyle or living conditions required by the climate crisis.
- People living in poverty experience relatively higher rates of chronic medical conditions (i.e., cardiovascular disease, asthma, diabetes, COPD) that can be exacerbated by the climate crisis.
- Likewise, socio-economic and educational factors (transportation, health education) can hinder access to resources and ability to mitigate and cope with climate change-related health risks.

Rural communities

- Some 90% of the world's population lives in developing countries. In rural areas of developing countries, dependence on natural resources/agriculture makes climate change an acute threat to livelihoods and lifestyles.
- Higher prevalence of poverty, lower levels of education, isolation, and neglect, will exacerbate the negative impacts of climate change for rural communities, particularly for smallholder farmers whose crops are increasingly at risk, impacting their economic livelihoods.

Women and girls

- Because women and girls are more likely to live in poverty, face threats to their basic human rights, experience gender-based violence, all while also serving as primary caregivers, they are more susceptible to the negative consequences of climate-related displacement.
- In some places, the climate crisis means that women and girls must walk longer distances to access water or fuel. Women and girls are also less likely to have access to nutrition and medicine in the face of climate-induced illness or resource scarcity.

Youth

- The World Health Organization estimates that youth will experience over 80% of climate-related illnesses, injuries, and deaths, given that they will have to live with the impacts of climate change longer than adults.
- Threats to youths' physical health include fatalities and injuries, illnesses, exposure to environmental toxins, and increased prevalence of diseases that occur in warmer temperatures. Exposure to climate risk factors threatens children's health, access to education, and psychological development.
- Mental health impacts include increases in PTSD, depression and anxiety, sleep problems, cognitive deficits, and learning problems.
- Youth are more vulnerable to indirect effects of the climate crisis, including food shortages, intergroup conflict, economic dislocations, and forced migration.

Philanthropic support for climate justice: The current landscape

Data from ClimateWorks shows less than 2% of global giving goes to climate change mitigation. Of the approximately \$1.6 billion supporting such efforts in 2019, only a small percentage (about \$60 million) supported justice and equity-oriented efforts.¹⁰ Organizations based in the Global South receive a fraction of this funding and, as one funder described, are largely “underfunded, underrepresented, and in most cases invisible.”

Indeed, climate funding has historically supported “Big Greens” based in the Global North, whose staff and leadership are white-dominant and/or disconnected from frontline communities and their demands. They have tended to focus on top-down, technical solutions that often

perpetuate or exacerbate existing inequities. These groups have received large sums of money over the years, but “If scaling the Big Greens was going to get us there, we would have won already,” says Ashindi Maxton, executive director of Donors of Color Network.¹¹

In addition, standard operating practices within philanthropy often further undermine justice and equity-focused efforts. Burdensome application processes, minimum requirements for organizational budgets, unequal access by groups that are not part of the funders’ socioeconomic networks, language barriers, and implicit biases often leave grassroots organizations, whether they are in the U.S. or the Global South, off grantmaking docket. This omission occurs even though these are often the organizations that are closest to community and the ones generating the most impactful solutions. Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations, whose budgets tend to be smaller, are disproportionately affected by such philanthropic practices.

In this vein, leaders in the field say it is important to consider *how* funds are deployed. Lindley Mease, director of the CLIMA Fund, asserts, “It’s not just where money’s moving, but how it’s being moved. Is power fundamentally being challenged and shifted in philanthropy? That includes everything from hiring differently to shifting the principles underlying grantmaking to changing structures to be community driven.”

As conversations about the importance of racial equity and shifting power imbalances have taken center stage in philanthropy and society at large, there are signs that modest shifts in the climate justice funding landscape are also taking place. Both legacy foundations and newer philanthropic entities have committed funding to climate justice.

Still, climate justice leaders caution that even as more funding is funneled to their organizations, it continues to make up a small portion of the overall funding for climate, contributing to ongoing disparities in how those most directly impacted by the climate crisis are supported in identifying and implementing climate solutions. As big-name donors and philanthropies deepen their commitments to the climate crisis,

Learn more about climate funding

[Foundation Funding for Climate Change Mitigation: Europe Spotlight](#)
ClimateWorks Foundation & European Foundation Centre

[Funding Trends 2021: Climate Change Mitigation Philanthropy](#)
ClimateWorks Foundation

[The State of American Philanthropy: Giving for Climate Change and Clean Energy](#)
Inside Philanthropy

there are concerns that justice-oriented efforts will continue to be disproportionately underfunded relative to overall climate funding.

The funding landscape for climate and climate justice shows current investments are far less than what is needed to address the sheer scale of this existential threat. Though philanthropic dollars are a small portion of the overall resources addressing the climate crisis, philanthropy occupies a unique position in the funding landscape, giving it a particularly powerful platform to advance innovative and effective climate solutions. Government-supported initiatives can often fall prey to the whims of prevailing political winds or bureaucracy. Corporations, meanwhile, often implement watered-down initiatives that are ultimately not independent of corporate interests.

Philanthropy, on the other hand, can deploy its resources, financial and otherwise, in flexible, far-sighted, and creative ways that can spur action in other sectors. There are a growing number of examples of how climate solutions generated by grassroots organizations are having an impact, despite receiving such little funding. What would it look like to resource these communities more equitably, and what is the potential impact of doing so?

Grassroots solutions: Achieving local and global impact

It is often said that those closest to the problem are closest to the solutions. Indeed, in the case of the climate crisis, directly impacted communities are generating transformative, innovative solutions, borne out of their lived experience.

- In Buffalo, New York, PUSH Buffalo, an organizing group that mobilizes low-income residents, pushed back against plans to convert an abandoned school building into luxury condos. The organization gathered support from government, businesses, and nonprofits to purchase the building themselves, addressing both climate justice and economic justice goals in the process. Today, the building includes affordable housing and community space, powered by a community-owned solar array. The building renovation itself was completed by workers in the community, many of whom had been involved in the organization's clean energy jobs training program.¹²
- In Mexico, a group of Mayan women beekeepers found their livelihood was being adversely impacted by Monsanto, a multinational corporation whose pesticides were killing bees, polluting the local water supply, and contaminating the women's

honey. With financial support from [Fondo Semillas](#), a Mexican women’s fund, the beekeepers organized to build their political power and ultimately won a federal lawsuit against the company and its toxic practices.¹³

- [Youth Climate Lab](#), an organization led by and for young people, who will have to contend with the impacts of climate change the longest, seeks to equip youth with the skills needed to build a climate-resilient future, create opportunities for them to understand and influence climate policy, and catalyze support for young people to start and scale their own climate solutions. Since its inception in 2017, the organization has trained more than 1,400 youth climate leaders and supported nearly 50 early stage, youth-generated climate solutions through its accelerator program.

These are just a few examples of how communities are responding nimbly to the impacts of the climate crisis, in ways that are responsive to and resonant with their local contexts. In the end, such community-generated solutions often have a better chance of making a difference because they have buy-in and are customized to local needs. And though solutions may start out as local, through a growing set of formal and informal networks, climate leaders are sharing strategies and building power across communities. In turn, bottom-up solutions and strategies are adopted and adapted for other contexts, catalyzing ripple effects globally and contributing to broader movements for climate justice.¹⁴

As Gloria Walton of The Solutions Project shares, “Frontline, place-based solutions are inherently intersectional, solving multiple problems at once because of the lived experience of community self-determination.” Indeed, The Solutions Project’s grantee partners have generated solutions that not only reduce carbon emissions and

Climate solutions from frontline communities

[Climate Advocacy Lab: Resources](#)

The resources page of this website aggregates a variety of materials, including articles about successful grassroots campaigns for environmental and climate justice.

[Soil to Sky: Climate Solutions That Work](#)

In this report, the CLIMA Fund presents findings on how vital grassroots solutions are to the climate movement. The report makes a case for why funders should include grassroots solutions in their portfolios and offers guidance on how funders can provide effective support to grassroots climate solutions.

[The Solutions Project](#)

The Solutions Project website highlights the stories of frontline communities in the U.S. and the ways they are tackling the climate crisis in their communities.

improve people's lives but also address critical issues such as affordable housing, economic empowerment, and Indigenous sovereignty.

Similarly, *Soil to Sky: Climate Solutions That Work*, a recent publication released by the CLIMA Fund, describes a range of grassroots climate solutions in detail, including agroecology; community renewables; direct resistance to resource extraction; and Indigenous Peoples as frontline defenders. Each of these strategies has a documented track record of reducing greenhouse gas emissions while also building power, promoting equity, and strengthening resilience. At the same time, interviewees for this guide bemoaned the lack of investment for these solutions, which are often dismissed by philanthropy as not having enough impact.

In the following pages, we will help funders explore how they can integrate climate justice into their grantmaking portfolios, drawing upon rich examples from the field and words of wisdom from those who have already taken this journey. We also offer reflection questions and a curated selection of key resources to begin or deepen your work.

Key takeaways

- Although there is no standard or universally agreed-upon definition of *climate justice*, at its core, climate justice focuses on the systemic root causes of the climate crisis through an intersectional lens, centering frontline communities and grassroots movements.
- A climate justice perspective centers the populations and places most likely to experience the adverse effects of the climate crisis. Consider local context in how people are framing the issues.
- Only a small portion of philanthropic support for climate goes to justice-oriented efforts focused on root causes.
- Philanthropic support for climate work is undermined by its fixation on “Big Greens” and technical solutions as well as its standard operating practices, which limit access to funding for smaller, grassroots organizations.
- Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution. Directly impacted communities are generating transformative, innovative solutions, borne out of their lived experience. These solutions are making an impact locally, regionally, and globally.

Reflection questions

- To what extent does our foundation's climate work integrate a justice or equity lens?
- Are we being intentional about which populations or geographies we are centering in our work?
- How are we engaging those most directly impacted in our climate work?
- What is the origin story of current and potential grantee organizations doing this work? Who is making decisions, and where does accountability lie?

2

Common barriers to adopting a climate justice lens

Even as more funders begin to understand the importance of bringing a justice analysis to the climate crisis, there are significant barriers to turning reflection and understanding into action. Some of these barriers are related to the complex and overwhelming nature of the climate crisis itself, whereas others are related to the norms and culture of philanthropy. In addition, the majority of foundations do not have climate-focused portfolios and lack cross-cutting funding approaches that consider the impacts of the growing climate crisis (see chapter 3 of this guide).

Understanding these barriers can help funders be aware of potential pitfalls and ultimately be better equipped to make the case for climate justice within their institutions more effectively. In this section, we explore the following common barriers to adopting a climate justice lens:

1. The **urgency and scale of the problem can feel overwhelming** to funders, making it hard to know where to start.
2. Foundations **tend to focus on traditional climate solutions or “silver bullets,”** even though they have not yielded desired results.
3. Relatedly, there is often a **focus on speed and scale**, even though speed and scale are underlying reasons for the climate crisis in the first place.
4. Traditional, top-down **philanthropic practices often perpetuate inequities** in how the climate crisis is addressed.

Overwhelming scale of the climate crisis

The latest report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, synthesizing research on the impacts of climate change, is a whopping 3,675 pages! Indeed, the daily onslaught of data and information about the climate crisis can feel overwhelming. For funders new to the issue who are trying to design strategies to combat the crisis, it can be difficult to know where to start.

As a result, funders may default to what feels comfortable—deference to technical experts, strategic planning and research activities resulting in “analysis paralysis,” and/or investments in organizations that have strong name recognition but potentially limited impact in the communities most affected by the climate crisis. Moreover, the understandable sense of urgency can result in a desire to support solutions that can be implemented quickly or easily, without fully considering issues of equity, including how different communities are being impacted by these solutions and who is making decisions about what solutions are appropriate.

As funders develop their climate strategies, a growing cadre of climate justice intermediaries offer a wealth of expertise to help support foundation learning and analysis, including equity considerations. Intermediaries have typically established a deep set of relationships with practitioners and grassroots organizations at the front lines of the climate crisis and can offer critical guidance for getting started. Chapter 4 of this guide describes the various ways that intermediaries can support funders in their learning and grantmaking activities.

Focus on technical climate solutions or “silver bullets”

Not only can the highly technical nature of climate conversations make the issue feel inaccessible, but a technical lens can also translate into a narrow set of correspondingly technical solutions. Because the scale of the crisis is so large, some funders may opt to focus on shorter-term interventions, such as supporting carbon offsets that ultimately do little to reduce permanent emissions or investing in biofuels that can speed up deforestation and promote competition for resources such as water

Learn more about false solutions

False Solutions to Climate Change

Produced by the Just Transition Alliance, this one-page document provides an overview of eight false solutions.

Hoodwinked in the Hothouse (third edition)

Authored by veteran organizers and movement leaders, this guide presents a concise compendium of false solutions and offers strategies for a more just, inclusive, and principled approach to climate solutions.

The Climate Crisis: When Doing Good Is Actually Doing Harm

This infographic, created by the CLIMA Fund, describes what funding for false promises looks like, while also lifting up alternate, community-based climate solutions.

and food. Even well-intentioned efforts, such as transitioning to solar or wind energy, can have adverse consequences for local communities that are not part of the planning process.

Climate justice leaders often call these “false solutions”—solutions that address the symptoms of the climate crisis rather than its root causes. Typically, such initiatives tend to reflect the influence of corporate interests as well as the power of the tech industry. These false solutions allow industries that are contributing to the climate crisis to avoid accountability, while often still engaging in practices that are harmful, resulting in climate inequities and reinforcing the inequitable concentration of wealth and power.

Consider efforts to install solar panels. Although it is a worthwhile and important effort, Brionté McCorkle, executive director of Georgia Conservation Voters, notes that the benefits of such initiatives go to those who can afford them, while “low-income people are paying for dirty energy that is actively poisoning their air and poisoning their water. We don’t achieve a full transformation leaving these communities behind.”

McCorkle adds, “We’re not just looking at how we can expand solar and get more renewable megawatts on the grid. That’s not the only metric of success for us. Our metric of success is whether we are actively including communities of color in these decisions as they’re being made? Are they able to access the benefits that are coming from policy changes or the money or the resources that are coming for clean energy? Those are the bigger measures of success for us.”

In this vein, Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of Grassroots International, cautions funders not to conflate strategy with projects. She says funders, in partnership with community, need to first “develop a shared vision and shared analysis of the root causes and understand who the changemakers are” and *then* figure out if particular solutions or projects align with the community vision and strategy. Heather McGray of the Climate Justice Resilience Fund elaborates on this point: “The truth is that there can be huge climate value-for-money in supporting communities to address the inequalities that are causing their climate vulnerability, but it only works if success is defined as reducing the overall harm of climate change, not just reducing greenhouse gas emissions.” Chapter 3 of this guide includes examples of foundations that have done just that, transitioning from more traditional climate portfolios to those that integrate a justice lens.

Inordinate focus on scale and speed

Grassroots solutions to the climate crisis, generated by those most impacted, are often dismissed for being too slow to address the urgency



Tip

For any given climate solution, ask who makes the decisions, who benefits, what else will it impact, and how it will build or shift power. Be attentive to unintended consequences that might exacerbate existing inequities.

of the problem or for lacking scale. Such critiques fail to acknowledge that extractive practices related to land use, energy consumption, and labor that prioritizes expediency are the reasons we find ourselves in such dire circumstances in the first place. To put it bluntly, economic development and growth have occurred at the expense of people, particularly those living in under-resourced communities.

“There’s still an underlying skepticism that climate justice is going to ‘deliver the goods.’

What are the narratives we need to disrupt about what scale looks like? How can we center a definition of scale as articulated by the grassroots?

Funder worldviews [need] to expand to embrace those different ways of understanding growth.”

Lindley Mease, CLIMA Fund

Focusing on local strategies generated by those most impacted ensures that solutions address local cultures and conditions, thus having a better chance of making a difference. Moreover, local strategies can contribute to scale and efficiencies—by connecting to national and global change in ways that are often overlooked and by informing translocal organizing.

As Alison Corwin, program director for sustainable environments at the Surdna Foundation, explains, “For our program, we define scale as translocal work. It does not mean the same solution works in every place. What scale means in translocal work is that someone in one place is able to build power and has the resources to organize and strategize with someone in another place. In turn, they get to learn from each other and build solutions that are going to cut across and connect place in a way that they determine.”

The Ford Foundation’s Ximena Warnars observes that a focus on scale and speed is closely related to funders’ desire to measure impact. A common pitfall, she says, is to focus on short-term outcomes, even though investing in social movements like climate justice is more about longer-term process. As part of its peer-to-peer advocacy with other funders to incorporate a justice lens into their work, the Ford Foundation, which has a long track record of supporting Indigenous Peoples and tackling climate injustices, leans into research, evidence, and strategic communications to convince funders of the value of investing in grassroots solutions. This approach highlights the importance of supporting movement building as a pre-condition for achieving climate goals.

Warnars says it is about “making the case theoretically, showing the research of how and why it matters, and then offering a pathway for grantmaking.” For example, in a September 2021 long-form

[post](#) on its website, the Foundation traced the work of the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities, a coalition of Indigenous and local communities of the Amazon Basin, Brazil, Indonesia, and Mesoamerica. The article documents how Indigenous communities have developed innovative and sophisticated climate solutions locally and how they have come together globally to advocate for a seat at the decision-making table to advance climate solutions that respect the rights of Indigenous communities. By telling the story of the coalition's impact on its wide-reaching platform, Ford uses its research and communications resources to make the case that global scale can in fact occur through investments in local strategies.

Philanthropic practices that perpetuate inequities

The culture of philanthropy, writ large, as well as grantmaking practices can get in the way of adopting a climate justice lens.

Most philanthropic support for climate comes from Western donors, and the vast majority of that funding is distributed to large NGOs and nonprofit organizations based in the Global North. At the same time, there is growing recognition that the “all hands on deck” nature of the climate crisis will require new and creative solutions that engage diverse communities and multiple perspectives. Yet entrenched power imbalances and inequitable grantmaking practices mean that good ideas, especially those from directly impacted communities, are left out of the conversation. This legacy raises questions as to what it will look like for foundations to be less prescriptive and more inclusive in all aspects of their climate work—from how they analyze issues to which organizations they fund to how directly impacted communities are engaged in decision making.

Indeed, the philanthropic sector has a limited track record of engaging community in decision making, and many time-honored practices

Learn more about philanthropic practices perpetuating inequity

[Climate Justice Funders Pledge](#)

Although BIPOC-led climate and environmental organizations are making significant contributions to the climate justice movement, they receive a small amount of philanthropic resources. The Donors of Color Network calls on foundations to award at least 30% of their funding to these groups and to do so in a transparent manner.

[Philanthropy's Attempts to Remain Above the Fray Are Slowing Progress on Climate Change—Inside Philanthropy, \(2021\)](#)

This blog piece asserts that philanthropy's historical reluctance to engage in ideological and political confrontations has blocked progress and inclusivity in the climate movement.

in philanthropy can exclude grassroots organizations that are doing relevant work. For example, burdensome application processes and reporting requirements; short-term, restricted grants; the notion of absorptive capacity; and transactional relationships that are not rooted in trust can prevent smaller organizations, organizations in the Global South, and BIPOC-led organizations from accessing critical resources. Moreover, some donors, particularly international aid agencies, allow only for country-based funding that fails to recognize that the climate crisis extends beyond borders.

In addition, many funders are skittish about investing in movement work, perceiving it to be too political or controversial. In a 2021 article, Tate Williams, senior editor at *Inside Philanthropy*, documents a historic pattern of “non-confrontation” among foundations in their response to the climate crisis. As a result, foundations initially favored technocratic interventions and gave a tepid response to demands for divestment by climate activists. In essence, the field deferred to government and corporate interests, distancing itself from the moral imperative of addressing the full scope of the climate crisis and its accompanying inequities. In the end, Williams writes, “An apolitical stance is actually a form of wielding power—power in the favor of incrementalism.” It is becoming clear that such incrementalism falls far short of what is needed to initiate the truly transformative changes imperative to addressing the climate crisis.

Relatedly, it is important to acknowledge that most foundations, in some shape or form, have derived their wealth from extractive and exploitative economic practices that have caused harm to people and the planet. In addition, many philanthropies continue to have investment portfolios that include positions in fossil fuels and other extractive industries.

Climate justice leaders argue that acknowledging this context helps inform strategic approaches that seek to counter this history and to usher in a new orientation that recognizes the importance of developing grantmaking practices that are restorative, reparative, and regenerative. Recognizing this context can also mean redefining impact to focus on equity and justice, rather than quantitative outputs. By reflecting on the historical roots of the field and how philanthropic practices can perpetuate inequity, foundations are considering how the totality of their work, not just grantmaking, can become more equity and justice focused. Chapter 3 includes examples of how foundations are adopting organizational and investment practices that are more aligned with climate justice principles.

Key takeaways

- Technical solutions are often called “false solutions” by climate justice leaders because of their tendency to favor the symptoms of the climate crisis over its root causes and reflection of corporate and industry interests.
- Climate funders’ focus on scale and speed undermines the value of grassroots solutions in addressing the climate crisis. Focus on local strategies generated by those most impacted to ensure that solutions address local cultures and conditions, recognizing that successful local solutions can scale in other contexts through translocal organizing.
- Entrenched power imbalances and inequitable grantmaking practices mean that good ideas are left out of the conversation, especially those from directly impacted communities.
- To aid in your grantmaking process, ask who is telling the story, who makes the decisions, who benefits, what else it will impact, and how it will shift power. Pay attention to unintended consequences that might exacerbate existing inequities.

Reflection questions

- What are some of the factors/dynamics getting in the way of integrating climate into our grantmaking portfolio? What is getting in the way of adopting a justice or equity lens to our climate work?
- As we develop our strategy, how does it account for the root causes of the climate crisis? What are the potential unintended consequences of our approach for impacted communities?
- Are we building a diverse portfolio and supporting a range of actors that advance a climate justice approach? Are some of these organizations led by the key constituencies most impacted by the climate crisis?
- What is our analysis of how change occurs? What implicit assumptions undergird this analysis? Do any of these assumptions need to be re-examined?
- Have we sought out critical friends and directly impacted communities to weigh in on our work?

3

How foundations are integrating climate justice into their work

Foundations are folding a climate justice lens into their efforts in a variety of ways, a fact that richly illustrates the diverse points of entry into this work. In this section, we highlight five distinct, sometimes overlapping, ways that foundations can bring a climate justice lens to their work:

1. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and a field-wide racial reckoning, foundations are **reflecting on their core values**, such as equity, justice, and human rights, and are thinking more deeply about how these values get operationalized in their climate work.
2. Some foundations that already have an environmental/climate focus have seen limited impact from supporting larger organizations relying on technocratic solutions and are **shifting their strategy and grantmaking to support more grassroots and justice-focused efforts**.
3. Foundations are **breaking down issue-area silos**, recognizing how issues that they are already supporting, such as health, education, poverty, and democracy, are inextricably connected to the climate crisis.
4. Increasingly, grantmakers are **bringing an intersectional lens** to their work and considering the ways that the climate crisis affects different identities and population groups.
5. Foundations are also **incorporating a climate justice lens into the totality of their work**, looking beyond their grantmaking portfolios to include decisions about investments, communications, and hiring practices.

Centering values

At the heart of effective grantmaking lies values-based leadership. Foundations that are clear and explicit about their values and, more

importantly, thoughtful and intentional about aligning their practices with their values, will be more likely to develop deep and trusting relationships with grantee partners to achieve their shared goals.¹⁶

For a critical mass of foundations, the growing attention to inequality over the last few years has prompted a re-examination of organizational values and a deeper dive into understanding what it means to be anti-racist and what it looks like to decolonize philanthropy. In turn, this reflection has resulted in shifts in grantmaking practice as well as a sharper focus on equity and justice within climate portfolios.

For example, the Minneapolis-based McKnight Foundation, a longtime climate funder, had focused on clean energy decarbonization goals, including building the advocacy ecosystem, particularly by advancing policies through “grasstops” organizations. In 2019, McKnight began to shift its strategic framework to focus on centering climate solutions that are more equitable. This shift came out of conversations at McKnight following the presidential election of 2016, which brought issues of race and equity to the fore, and deepened with the murder of George Floyd in 2020. By grounding the portfolio in values of equity and justice, McKnight sought to build a more durable climate movement centering communities that are the first, and worst, impacted.

Likewise, as the Boston-based Barr Foundation became more explicit in its commitment to racial equity in 2019, its climate team began to engage in a learning process to develop a new and shared understanding of how racial inequities show up in their work. Although the overall goal of the climate program remains unchanged, Barr adopted five new approaches to support more equitable climate solutions, including growing BIPOC leadership and supporting a racial equity analysis among legacy climate and environmental organizations.¹⁷

Learn more about centering values in climate grantmaking

[Centering Climate Giving in Frontline Communities—Libra Foundation \(2021\)](#)

In this blog post, the Libra Foundation shares how a shift toward centering solutions by frontline communities led to an increase in its multiyear, unrestricted funding to community-based, women-, and BIPOC-led groups.

[Human Rights Grantmaking Principles \(2022\)](#)

Developed by Ariadne, Gender Funders CoLab, and the Human Rights Funders Network, this resource lays out the undergirding principles of human rights.

[Money Talks. Here's What We Want it to Say—Barr Foundation \(2021\)](#)

This blog post highlights five action steps the Barr Foundation is taking to shift whom they support and how they operate to better align with their values around racial equity.

As the Oak Foundation developed its new strategy in 2021—one focused on safeguarding the future by restoring a connection to nature and changing the ways we feed and fuel our world—Masego Madzwamuse, director of the environment programme, says the Foundation’s ideals around fairness, justice, equity, and social justice and the “idea of thinking through how philanthropic resources can be used for the greater good” were the driving forces behind “putting people at the heart of our strategy.” Madzwamuse asserts that this approach recognizes that “durable impact is only possible when interventions make sense to those who are most affected, those communities at the front lines. Ultimately, this approach can address barriers and accelerate change, especially as we transition to new low carbon energy systems. We are increasingly taking a closer look at the justice and equity and how to respond to issues that are surfacing around labor, equitable access, finance and transition minerals required to support energy transition.”

In addition to commitments to justice and equity, values such as accountability and courage can also inform a justice-centered focus. Here, we take a closer look at the example of the Laudes Foundation.

Laudes Foundation: Centering courage, conviction, accountability, and adaptability

Launched in 2020, Laudes Foundation, which is headquartered in Amsterdam and has offices globally, aims to tackle the dual crises of inequality and climate change through a transition to a “climate positive and inclusive economy.”¹⁸ Its strategy is to shift major industrial sectors and the system of finance to address inequality and the climate breakdown by leveraging four strategic actors—policy makers; business and industry stakeholders; financial actors; and workers, producers, and communities.

The Foundation’s orientation to its work is rooted in a set of core organizational values, including courage, conviction, accountability, and adaptability. In the context of its climate work, courage includes bringing a bold vision, internally and externally, on the importance of addressing this dual crisis; conviction includes holding firm that these crises are indeed interlinked and must be tackled together; accountability includes looking at legal, financial, and policy levers for change; and adaptability includes bringing an entrepreneurial mindset to solving challenges.

Undergirding these values is a focus on being a force for good for people and the planet. Amol Mehra, director of industry transformation, explains, “We must understand that tackling the climate crisis must also involve addressing development and livelihoods and support

solutions that enable high standards for labor and the environment. We have to understand that economic motivations are here and now for most people of the world. To succeed, we need to find pathways to align those with climate positive policies and practices. This is what can unlock real systems change.”

Transitioning to a justice-centered portfolio

In recent years, a critical mass of foundations with grantmaking portfolios focused on climate or the environment have shifted their strategies and grantmaking to become more justice centered. In practice, this change often means a move from supporting “Big Greens”—larger, often white-dominant institutions that have a legacy of investing in top-down climate solutions—to investing in organizations led by directly impacted communities that are better poised to identify solutions that make a difference within their local context, and that are increasingly connecting translocally and globally.

Several foundations interviewed for this guide described a gradual process, sometimes taking years, of responsibly cycling out existing grantees, giving them time to phase out, while integrating newer grantees into the fold who are better positioned to address local community needs. In some cases, this transition has involved working more closely with intermediaries. For example, as the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation’s climate portfolio shifted in the last five years, it made large grants to several intermediaries, such as the Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice as well the Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund, to regrant to and support smaller, place-based organizations in the U.S.

At the same time, Hewlett has retained some of the larger NGOs in its portfolio and is supporting them to be more equity-focused in their

Learn more about using a justice lens

[Systems, Not Just Symptoms: Bringing a Justice Frame to Climate Philanthropy and Finance—Climate and Land Use Alliance \(2021\)](#)

This report advocates for centering the systemic root causes of the climate crisis—white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism—while also adapting to its symptoms. This piece also presents suggestions for how foundations can better align their funding strategies with this perspective on the climate crisis and grassroots solutions.

[Time to Act: How Philanthropy Must Address the Climate Crisis—FSG \(2021\)](#)

This report compiles research insights from private foundations, nonprofits, grassroots organizations, and others to address how foundations can support frontline climate crisis actors more effectively. FSG offers recommendations for funders who wish to become climate funders, regardless of whether they have previous experience in climate grantmaking or investing.

work. This process has occurred in parallel to Hewlett’s own journey around equity and inclusion, which has catalyzed opportunities for program officers to connect with grantee partners in a different way, paving the way for honest conversations about what it means to act on commitments to equity and justice.

Here, we highlight the efforts of two foundations—Libra Foundation and the Surdna Foundation—that have transitioned from more traditional climate portfolios to portfolios with an explicit focus on climate justice.

Libra Foundation: A trust-based approach, shifting power to frontline communities

In 2017, the Libra Foundation began a new chapter, bringing on a new executive director, Crystal Hayling, and hiring in-house staff who helped move Foundation resources across its various portfolios to those disproportionately impacted by structural oppression. For its climate and environment work, this change meant shifting from funding large, mostly white-staffed environmental organizations to supporting grassroots BIPOC-led climate justice organizations. In fact, by 2019, 78% of Libra’s U.S.-based grants to organizations working on environmental and climate justice went to BIPOC-led groups. In 2020, as Libra deepened its focus on power-building, that share went up to 91%.¹⁹

Leading up to this shift, Libra sharpened its focus on racial justice and equity and adopted the principles of trust-based philanthropy, recognizing that *how* the Foundation does its work is just as important as *what* the Foundation funds.²⁰

To this end, while Libra had previously relied on a lengthier, online application, the Foundation now uses a no-application and no-report process for its grantees—one that Angie Chen, senior program officer, says “places the burden on the program staff to get to know the organization.” Chen adds, “Rather than [grantee partners] being responsible for maintaining the relationship and informing us, we are responsible for maintaining the relationship and learning from them.” One unique feature of Libra’s approach is that many of its new grantee partners are identified through relationships and conversations with existing grantee partners. In doing so, Libra seeks to shift the traditional balance of power as grantee partners take an active role in shaping the portfolio, rather than having decisions lie solely with the Foundation’s board and staff. In addition, this approach ensures that grantee partners have a shared analysis and can continue to strengthen the relationships they already have with one another, thus helping to build collective power within the broader climate justice ecosystem.



Tip

To support a strong ecosystem of grantee partners, ask your current partners who else is doing good work in the field. This approach strengthens existing relationships, instead of creating a portfolio of partners who may lack alignment and connection.

As one of its core values, Libra believes those closest to the issues are best positioned to understand what is needed to address them. Its current environmental and climate justice portfolio includes organizations with sustained track records of engaging directly impacted communities to tackle not only climate inequities, but also the myriad and intersecting issues facing under-resourced communities, mostly communities of color. For example, through its support of the Climate Justice Alliance and its Our Power Campaign, organizations such as [Asian Pacific Environmental Network](#) and [Communities for a Better Environment](#) (also grantees of the Libra Foundation) are collaborating to foster a just transition, challenging both the negative health impacts of the oil and gas industry in Richmond, California, as well as the high rates of unemployment in the community.

Chen describes how the Foundation's shift in grantmaking strategy better embodies the values of the Foundation and honors the inherently cross-sectoral nature of the climate crisis: "The pivot to environmental justice was centering the voices, experience, and leadership of people who live in directly impacted communities. Climate justice is more systemic [and contends that] climate change is tied to all the other systemic drivers of injustice and structural racism that we experience in this country and other places. It is a multi-issue approach."

Surdna Foundation: Toward climate justice—A 10+ year evolution

Surdna Foundation's Sustainable Environments program is grounded in the belief that investing in the capacity of frontline and grassroots climate justice movements will lead to real climate solutions and more equitable environmental outcomes. The program is made up of two areas of focus—Environmental and Climate Justice and Land Use Through Community Power. Both focus areas are centered in racial justice and the lived experience of low-wealth communities and communities of color. However, this was not always the case.

A traditional approach to environmental funding. As the longest-standing program at Surdna, the Sustainable Environments program has evolved over the years. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the program invested in initiatives that were part of the smart growth movement, which focused on a range of development and conservation strategies to protect and improve the environment by creating more liveable, diverse, sustainable, and economically strong communities. Alison Corwin, program director of the Sustainable Environments portfolio at Surdna, shares that although their strategy was well-intentioned, it did not have a strong analysis around power and race. As a result, the work had unintended consequences, including displacement and gentrification, that caused harm to communities of color.

Shifting focus. In 2012, Surdna underwent a strategy refresh that shifted its grantmaking from a smart growth frame to an infrastructure frame. At the same time, it also made new hires, beefing up staff capacity in recognition that building and deepening relationships with field leaders was a critical component of the work. Within this new infrastructure frame, Surdna focused on four specific lines of work (urban storm water management; energy efficiency; transportation and equitable land use development; and regional food systems). Through the leadership of Helen Chin, former director of the Sustainable Environments portfolio, and other women of color on the team, including senior program officer Kellie Terry, the Foundation sought to recognize and remedy past harms and to listen and learn from partners on the ground. Surdna ultimately acknowledged that, although the infrastructure frame was a step in the right direction, a grantmaking portfolio focused on specific lines of work did not reflect, in Corwin’s words, “how anyone in the real world is organizing or thinking of the work.”

As Surdna engaged in its own learning and reflection, the Sustainable Environments program shifted again in 2018. Ever since, the Foundation organizes its portfolio under two inextricably linked but distinct buckets—environmental and climate justice and land use through community power, both in the service of racial justice. The current portfolio represents a shift from focusing on the outcome of infrastructure investments to centering the role of race and power. Examples of resulting changes include supporting BIPOC organizers and movement leaders to advance visions and solutions that change who has the power to decide and who benefits from climate and economic policies, land control, ownership and stewardship, and investment in communities. In this spirit, the portfolio includes grants for Black land and food justice work as well as investments that support a just transition, such as energy democracy.

Lessons learned. Corwin acknowledges the evolutions and shifts have been “slower moving than any of us would’ve liked,” and that the process was hard, requiring difficult conversations and personal sacrifices. Indeed, the evolution has been 10 years in the making, with many lessons learned along the way.

— **It’s all about relationships.** Surdna came to understand that authentic, trusting relationships with partners on the ground are essential. Indeed, its strategy evolved through deep conversations with frontline partners and efforts to bring new grantee partners into the fold, who brought fresh perspectives, analyses, and approaches. As these relationships grew, the team was better able to make the case internally for a more justice- and equity-centered approach.

- **Prioritize reflection and accountability.** As issues of racial justice have come increasingly to the fore, Surdna carved out space internally to deepen its own articulation and analysis of social and racial justice and to reflect critically on how its past approaches and practices have caused harm. This process of individual and organizational self-reflection ultimately helped inform the design and orientation of the foundation’s climate portfolio.
- **Account for different perspectives and levels of knowledge.** In hindsight, one of the things Surdna wishes it had done differently was better adapt its learning journey design for the organization and board based on the nuance of people’s learning styles and the varying levels of knowledge and lived experiences people brought to the table.
- **Follow the frontlines.** In the end, Corwin says, “It’s not the role of a funder to sit in a room with other funders and come up with what that funding strategy should be. ... our role is to be in deep relationship with folks most impacted by the issues we’re working on who already have the strategy and know how to implement the solutions. Our job is to reflect that and mobilize the resources in service of what they are doing.” To that end, Corwin says she spends more of her time these days fundraising and organizing to ensure that new funding for the climate crisis includes justice-centered approaches.
- **Question your questions.** Corwin encourages funders to shift the set of questions they’re asking and to reflect on how change happens and, in doing so, to value lived experience and the importance of ensuring that those directly impacted are in positions of decision-making power. “Part of that is the beauty of the solutions that you would have never imagined come out of this”—solutions that solve for the climate crisis at the same time they create more equitable outcomes, such as safe and affordable housing, land reparations, and public governance over community investments.

Breaking down issue-area silos

There is increasing recognition that regardless of a foundation’s areas of focus, a climate or climate justice connection to the work is sure to exist. At the same time, many of those we interviewed reflected on the often-siloed nature of foundation portfolios and lamented how such artificial silos result in missed opportunities to achieve bigger and more sustainable impacts.

Take the field of education. In a February 2022 op-ed in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* entitled “[Education and Climate Donors Should Join Forces](#),” authors Jonathan Klein, Jennifer Moses, and Sara Moss of Undaunted K12 note that millions of students in the United States have

been forced to miss school in the past year due to climate-induced disasters such as wildfires and flooding, and that the negative impacts of missing school fall disproportionately on students of color and students in low-income communities. The authors provide a host of suggestions for how funders can invest at the intersection of climate and education—ranging from building climate-resilient schools to integrating education about the climate crisis into elementary and secondary schools. They write, “Education grantmakers who ignore climate change risk seeing their work undermined by increased climate-related educational inequities.”

Likewise, for funders working on issues related to workforce and economic development, the impact of the climate crisis cannot be ignored. As Peter Kostishack of Global Greengrants states, “Whole economies are going to reorganize around the climate crisis. It’s not just energy that will be impacted. It’ll be all sorts of other industries and professions and sectors that will be adapting too.”

At the intersection of the economy and the climate, many climate justice leaders have focused on advocating for a just transition, or as some climate leaders describe it, “fighting the bad” and “building the

Learn more about breaking down issue-area silos

[Achieving a Climate for Health: Philanthropy to Promote Health and Justice through the Challenges of Climate Change—Health & Environmental Funders Network \(2015\)](#)

This report orients funders to issues at the intersection of climate change and health and highlights opportunities for action.

[Climate Justice-Just Transition Donor Collaborative Compendium](#)

This open-source, participatory resource maps funding/regranting organizations, particularly those working in the Global South, engaged in climate justice-just transition efforts. The compendium includes additional resources, including a list of campaigns, an annotated bibliography, and toolkit for donors.

[From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition](#)

This guide describes what a just transition from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy looks like.

[Funding the Future: How the Climate Crisis Intersects with Your Giving—Active Philanthropy \(2020\)](#)

This guide demonstrates how funders from any sector can incorporate climate work into their portfolio. The guide focuses on five key issues—just and democratic societies, public health, disadvantaged groups, education, and nature conservation.

[Grounding in Just Transition Toolkit—Climate Justice Alliance \(2022\)](#)

Designed for frontline communities, this three-part curriculum informs practitioners about how to support a just transition.



Tip

Often, work happening on the ground doesn't fit neatly into a program area. Set aside a portion of the grantmaking budget to invest in new or interesting organizations/projects that might fall outside your strategy.

new.” Originally developed by labor unions and environmental justice groups and led by low-income communities of color, just transition refers to a set of principles, processes, and practices that seek to shift practices associated with an extractive economy to practices that represent a living, regenerative economy. For example, recognizing that polluting industries are actively harming workers and the environment, a just transition emphasizes the importance of creating an equitable transition to alternate jobs for frontline workers who are doubly harmed by an extractive economy and the climate crisis it has caused. The driving principle of just transition is that a healthy economy and environment can co-exist and that it should not come at the cost of workers’ and communities’ physical, economic, or social well-being. A central tenet of a just transition framework is uplifting democracy and putting power in the hands of frontline workers and communities.²¹

The Dutch-based Porticus Foundation, for example, has a portfolio focused on a fair rural transition to help the agricultural sector move from extractive practices to regenerative ones that benefit both the people and the planet. The Porticus Foundation does so through a two-pronged strategy that supports grassroots movements for bottom-up change as well as top-down advocacy efforts that seek to influence funding streams and policy change.

Education and the economy are just two examples of how the climate crisis is exacerbating inequities across a range of sectors. Here, we highlight the efforts of the Kresge Foundation, which has an initiative focused on health and climate, as well as the work of the McKnight Foundation, which is working at the intersection of democracy and climate.

The Kresge Foundation: Addressing the health equity impacts of the climate crisis

“As the newest—and arguably most important—social determinant of health, climate change is one of the greatest public health threats of this century,” asserts the Kresge Foundation. With this pointed analysis, the Kresge Foundation created its Climate Change, Health & Equity (CCHE) initiative through a partnership between the Foundation’s environment and health programs. Although both teams had already been funding multi-issue work separately, they came together to explore the value of creating an initiative explicitly dedicated to the intersection of climate and health, with the goal of accelerating the implementation of climate resilience practices and policies that reduce negative health outcomes.

The CCHE initiative’s three-pronged strategy targets health institutions, practitioners, and community-based advocates. Halfway into its

five-year implementation period, the initiative currently supports 24 grantees with a little over \$22 million in grants. In addition to providing financial support, the initiative also hosts convenings, peer-learning exchanges, and technical assistance for its grantee partners.

The strategy. The initiative seeks to advance its climate resilience goals in the following ways:

1. Build the capacity of health institutions by supporting hospitals, health care systems, and public health institutions in expanding their knowledge of climate and equity to adopt equitable policies and practices that support climate resilience, promote accountability, and prioritize low-wealth communities and communities of color.
2. Support public health and health practice by deepening their knowledge about equitable climate resilience and expanding their networks and pathways to action to mobilize for sector-wide adoption of practices that center community-level impacts of climate change and equitable climate-resilience advocacy.
3. Strengthen community-based advocates' partnerships with health care and public health institutions and practitioners to accelerate adoption and implementation of equitable policies that advance climate resilience and reduce health risks for low-wealth communities and communities of color.

Creating a community of practice. Within the grantmaking portfolio, Kresge seeks to create a community of practice, carving out space for intentional peer learning and training opportunities for grantee partners. This approach includes annual convenings of the cohort, where grantee partners share their work and discuss issues such as the successes and challenges associated with changing climate and health policy and understanding community-driven approaches to climate and health.

Because equity is a core value for the foundation, it also seeks to ensure a shared understanding and commitment to equity among grantee partners. Accomplishing this goal hasn't always been easy. Shamar Bibbins, senior program officer, acknowledges that, given the mix of grantee organizations in the portfolio—some are deeply experienced in climate justice, others less so—there was an “uneven expression of equity” within the portfolio. To address this disparity, the Foundation made necessary pivots, providing peer learning experiences that are more closely tailored to where particular organizations are in their respective equity journeys. This change has been important, in part because community engagement is a central component of partners' work. Bibbins notes, “Community engagement is great, but it's not sufficient if you're not actually bringing a racial equity lens.”

Despite some of these learning challenges, Bibbins observes that institutions and communities are eager to collaborate with one another. CCHE has had success in fostering relationships, including ones between larger health care systems and local CCHE community-based groups, that leverage one another's strengths to create new vehicles for collaboration among local stakeholders. For example, one of Kresge's grantee partners, Health Care Without Harm, which has been working at the intersection of health and climate for many years, has helped to successfully bring hospital systems and government partners to the table with the Foundation's community-based grantee partners. This inclusion has resulted in the creation of new possibilities and synergies for developing climate resilience practices and policies that alleviate negative health outcomes.

In a recent initiative, hospitals of the Healthcare Anchor Network partnered with Practice Greenhealth and Health Care Without Harm to create the Impact Purchasing Commitment to promote local, equitable, and environmentally sustainable procurement. Made by 12 hospital systems, the purchasing commitment ensures that health care purchasing supports industries that decrease their carbon footprint, develop safer products and services, and create economic opportunities for people of color- and women-owned businesses by at least \$1 billion over five years.²²

Paul Bogart, executive director of Health Care Without Harm, lauds Kresge's interdisciplinary approach. Bogart says that his organization constantly runs up against the narrow nature of many funders' strategies and hopes that other funders begin to take a more holistic approach. He shares, "It's tough. ... I cannot tell you the number of times we hear from funders, 'We love your work, we just don't know how to fit you to the way we structure ourselves.'"

Bogart further elaborates, "When NGOs and funders work together on holistic, interdisciplinary work, it creates the space for deep, systems-level impact. Funders can achieve this by providing intersectional and flexible funding. NGOs can achieve this by expanding their expertise to a more multidisciplinary approach. Our take at Health Care Without Harm is that this approach is our best shot at tackling the problems we face today with the urgency and intention they deserve."

McKnight Foundation: Investing in participatory democracy to advance climate justice

"You can have the best climate policies on the books, but what if they're actually not deployed? What if they're completely vulnerable to moments where there's political storms, completely taking the legs out from underneath any good policy or any good momentum?"

Sarah Christiansen, program director of the Midwest Climate and Energy portfolio at the McKnight Foundation, asks these questions to highlight the ways that investments in a vibrant and participatory democracy are inextricably linked to climate justice investments. Christiansen notes the myriad ways in which democracy is under threat in the United States and the ways in which political discourse has become increasingly polarized. “We’re now in a context within which the basic foundations of how we operate as a democracy are pretty fundamentally being challenged. You can’t really do climate work without also doing democracy work.”

This recognition led the McKnight Foundation to structure its work so that its Midwest Climate and Energy portfolio works in close relationship with the foundation’s Vibrant and Equitable Communities Program. Investments in the long-term capacity of community organizing groups are a critical aspect of this work. For example, the Foundation’s grantmaking supports Isaiah, a multi-issue, faith-based organizing group. The Foundation’s grant funds base-building activities that engage and empower everyday citizens in recognizing and building their own political power, with the understanding that supporting directly impacted communities to identify and shape climate policies will ultimately lead to longer-term, more durable solutions. There are already signs of success. Isaiah, along with other McKnight grantee partners such as MN350, have built grassroots power and worked in coalition to expand public transit, improve infrastructure for biking/walking, and adopt Clean Car Standards (signed by Governor Walz), which allow for more affordable access to zero-emission vehicles.

Ben Passer, senior program officer for the Midwest Climate and Energy portfolio, shares, “To put it bluntly, the inequities line up when you think of access and power and climate impacts. When you think about who’s disproportionately affected by high energy burdens, who’s disproportionately lacking access to renewable energy, who disproportionately has polluting sources more in their neighborhoods and communities, it’s those folks who lack access and power to these decision-making spaces because they have historically been excluded.”

In addition to collaborative grantmaking, one of the ways the Foundation has operationalized its commitment to breaking down issue area silos is by hiring its first-ever joint Strengthening Democratic Participation program officer, who works across both the Climate and Communities portfolios at the Foundation. As the Climate and Energy team builds out this body of work, Christiansen and Passer say it is important to be both curious and humble, working in partnership with other funders and stakeholders to say, “We don’t know everything, but we’re willing to experiment.”

Bringing an intersectional lens to climate justice

Developed by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is a framework for accounting for the various ways that a person's social and political identities can foster both discrimination and privilege. In Crenshaw's words, it is "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects."

As noted in the opening chapter of this guide, the climate crisis affects different groups of people in different ways, and these impacts occur in even more nuanced and complex ways when we account for the intersection of lived experiences and identities. Interviewees for this guide assert the importance of taking an intersectional lens to climate justice funding, one that considers the nuances of gender, age, ability, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and other identities.

Maria Alejandra Escalante, climate and environmental justice advocacy officer at FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, articulates the importance of bringing an intersectional lens to its work: "The reality on the ground deals with multiple dimensions at the same time, all of the time. As funders, we have learned that it's important to respond to that reality with flexible and core grantmaking. It's about the reality of people on the ground which we cannot compartmentalize." Indeed, FRIDA's cohort of grantee partners supports the work of rural, Indigenous women in Kenya; Dalit women in India; and feminist youth climate strikers, among many other youth-led groups.

Learn more about intersectionality

[Climate Change, Environmental Activism, and Disability \(2022\)](#)

This article in *Stanford Social Innovation Review* describes how efforts to address the climate crisis must include people with disabilities.

[Climate Justice and Women's Rights: A Guide to Supporting Grassroots Women's Actions—Global Greengrants Fund \(2015\)](#)

This guide presents key takeaways from the 2014 Summit on Women and Climate, which sought to foster relationships between environmental and women's funders.

[Learning from Youth-Led Climate Action—Climate Justice Resilience Fund \(2021\)](#)

This blog outlines how young people are engaging in climate action and how funders can better support their work.

[Women's Participation: An Enabler of Climate Justice—Mary Robinson Foundation \(2015\)](#)

This report describes why it is critical to engage women in climate justice and lifts up case studies from El Salvador, Chile, and Vietnam.

To illustrate the ways funders have addressed intersectionality in the fight for climate justice, we take a closer look at the work of Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) and the Disability Rights Fund.

Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action: Working at the intersection of gender and climate

Women are disproportionately subject to the impacts of the climate crisis, yet support for their work remains overwhelmingly underrepresented in private foundation funding. Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) seeks to change this dynamic.

Origin story. GAGGA was first established in 2016 as a collaboration between three organizations—two women’s funds (Mama Cash and Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres—FCAM) and one environmental organization (Both ENDS). All three wanted to do more work at the intersection of environmental justice and women’s rights but consistently came up against barriers, such as the lack of resources or knowledge, as well as the lack of historical relationships between the two movements and bodies of work. Then, opportunity presented itself in the form of a five-year grant from the Dutch government. The three organizations came together and proposed an alliance explicitly dedicated to breaking down these artificial silos, with an emphasis on partnering with women-led, community-based organizations working to address the climate crisis, across different countries and cultural contexts. With FCAM, a Central American-based organization serving as the lead, holding primary legal and financial authority over the work, the alliance also sought to address historical power imbalances between the Global North and the Global South.

Maite Smet, coordinator of GAGGA, explains the GAGGA’s overarching value proposition: “The climate crisis isn’t delinked from environmental justice and women’s rights. ... Climate change is not a box. Many funders which we’ve seen have those boxes, right? They will put women’s rights here, climate crisis here. For us, it’s that you start seeing this as a human rights issue, a justice issue, and that it is linked to many topics. It’s not one or the other.” Furthering this analysis, Smet adds that the climate crisis is due in part to the “environmental crises communities have been facing for a long time, largely caused by an extractive economy rooted in colonialism and capitalism.”

[Blog Series: Putting Justice at the Heart of Climate Action](#)

This series of blog posts describes GAGGA partners’ work at the intersection of gender, nationality, ethnicity, ability, and other identities.

Strategic focus. GAGGA's network is made up of women's funds, environmental funds, NGOs, and women-led community-based organizations (CBOs) across Latin America, Africa, and Asia.²³ Its primary goal is to strengthen its network partners and their work at the intersection of gender, environmental, and climate justice, driven by and centered on the leadership, voices, and demands of women and women-led CBOs in the Global South. GAGGA also seeks to forge alliances between women's rights, feminist, environmental, and climate justice movements. In some regions, early work included mapping the field to identify key organizations. For example, women-led, community-based organizations were not even part of some environmental justice funds' portfolios.

By facilitating these exchanges, GAGGA has seen growth in all of its network partners. Community-based organizations improved their lobbying and advocacy capacity as well as increased leadership of women, girls, trans, non-binary, and intersex people in environmental and climate decision-making processes at local, national, and international levels. Funds and NGOs increased their understanding of the intersection of environmental justice and women's rights. These learning and relationship-building opportunities complement support from GAGGA's flexible, multi-year grants. Over its first five years, GAGGA has worked with more than 20 funds, 40+ NGOs, and more than 400 women-led community-based organizations, moving over 12 million EUROS through 1,742 grants to grassroots groups across its global network.

Why it works. GAGGA seeks to create collective ownership of the work. GAGGA has a framework for how it operates, but partners identify what that looks like in their local contexts, "using their own methodologies and their own way to do things," says Carla López, executive director of Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres. Using her native Nicaragua as an example, she notes that fights for climate and gender justice are deeply intertwined with the realities associated with political unrest in the country, and that this reality has to be accounted for in the work.

In addition to making sure grantee partners have flexibility to develop climate solutions within a shared framework, GAGGA promotes collective ownership and participatory processes through all facets of its work. For example, regular feedback loops are in place to ensure that GAGGA learns from the field along the way and adapts as needed. And in planning a recent convening, instead of the lead coordinators deciding who should attend, they asked funds to nominate community attendees. GAGGA acknowledges that this approach can be more time-consuming, but believes that it ultimately contributes to a deeper sense of commitment to the collective and, in turn, stronger collaborations among network partners.

Working at the intersections of nationality, gender, and other marginalized identities, López asserts that it is imperative to engage in practices that “shift the power,” and are “rooted in accountability.” López sums it up this way: “We build collaborations that respect the knowledge and experience of our partners, we don’t create contractual relationships. As funders, we engage multiple and intentional efforts to guarantee our partners’ participation and perspectives in decision-making processes.”

Disability Rights Fund: Engaging people with disabilities in the climate crisis

As local, regional, and national governments develop adaptation and mitigation strategies to battle climate disasters, the voices of people with disabilities are often left out entirely. In 2013, the Disability Rights Fund (DRF) sought to rectify this disparity by making climate justice a focus area in its strategic plan. The Fund’s work around climate justice is deeply intersectional. As Dwi Ariyani, the Fund’s regional head of programs in Asia, notes, “We focus on persons with disability and the most marginalized groups *within* the community of persons with disability.”

For example, in Ariyani’s native Indonesia, the frequency of natural disasters has left people with disabilities, many of whom live in rural areas or in poverty, at risk of death, injury, or being left behind. They frequently lack access to emergency response support or information on how to prepare for a climate-related disaster. Because of the scarcity of data on people with disabilities, they are not accounted for in local emergency response preparations. Ariyani shares, “Sometimes persons with disabilities are just left behind when there’s an evacuation because people don’t know how to assist them. Their assistive devices may be lost or damaged, further complicating their ability to get to safety and live independently. In most cases, shelters and other relief resources are not accessible.”

In the past decade, DRF and its sister fund, the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRAF) have awarded nearly 200 grants totaling more than \$4 million to organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in Indonesia. These grants prioritize the inclusion of those most often left behind, such as Indigenous women with disabilities and others with intersectional identities who experience multiple layers of discrimination. DRF/DRAF’s support also includes extensive technical assistance for OPDs to develop the capacities and networks for successful rights advocacy.

One example is in Klaten district, where in 2015 DRF began supporting an OPD to collect data to identify the specific villages and locations in which people with disabilities live. The organization then works with local leaders to revise emergency and evacuation response plans to include these households. This advocacy has led to the establishment of disability unit services within the local disaster management agency, where people with disabilities also fully participate in the development, implementation, and monitoring of inclusive disaster risk reduction and emergency response programming. Although much of this work starts in the villages, it has begun to move up to the district and province levels. This initiative illustrates how supporting local, grassroots efforts with a rights lens can translate into larger policy and systems change, with the added benefit of ensuring that interventions are culturally and linguistically relevant.

Key to this work is that people with disabilities themselves are involved in decision-making processes about climate disaster preparation and natural resource use in their communities, as they are the ones best situated to understand the nuances of the issue.

Incorporating climate justice into the totality of a foundation's work

Foundations can have an influence on climate justice beyond their grantmaking portfolios. In recent years, this effort has meant taking a critical look at investment portfolios that include companies whose practices are contributing to the climate crisis. But it can also encompass other areas of foundation operations, such as human resource practices, communication strategies, and building facilities.

The decade-long Divest-Investment movement started on college campuses and first got its foothold in philanthropy in early 2014, when [Divest-Invest Philanthropy](#) launched with commitments from 17 foundations (with combined assets of more than \$2 billion) to divest from fossil fuels and invest in climate solutions. Notably, that fall, Rockefeller Brothers Fund announced plans to divest, a significant

Learn more about foundation investments

Confluence Philanthropy's [Climate Solutions Collaborative](#) is a community of investors committed to emissions reduction by deploying private and philanthropic capital toward a low-carbon future.

The [Divest-Invest Philanthropy](#) coalition encourages funders to divest from all fossil fuels and invest at least 5% of their portfolios in climate solutions. Currently, there are nearly 200 foundations and family funds with assets totaling more than \$125 billion participating.

commitment, given that the family's wealth came from the oil industry. These early commitments helped catalyze a broader conversation within philanthropy about the role of socially and environmentally responsible investment portfolios in advancing philanthropic priorities. As of late 2021, nearly 200 foundations had signed the pledge.

Indeed, a flurry of foundation announcements about changes to investment strategies coincided with COP26, including that of the Ford Foundation. In October 2021, Ford Foundation made a public commitment to end any further fossil fuel investments in its endowment. In addition, Ford plans to add climate-friendly investments to its endowment, including investments in renewable energy and funds that support the transition to a green economy. The foundation also plans to phase out its legacy investments in private equity funds that have holdings in the fossil fuel industry.²⁴

Foundations can also support climate justice goals through program-related investments. For example, through an initiative called Kresge Community Finance, the Kresge Foundation provided \$30 million to 14 Community Development Finance Institutions and Development Finance Agencies for the purpose of creating opportunities for low-income people living in U.S. cities. These loans have included support for climate-related projects that support equity and justice goals, such as the \$3 million the Connecticut Green Bank received to fund solar projects in low-income communities.

Foundation investment strategies tend to receive the most attention as a way to support climate justice goals outside of grantmaking, but there are also other aspects of their operations that foundations can review to strengthen alignment. Here, we highlight how the Hewlett Foundation seeks to integrate climate justice considerations throughout its operations.

The Hewlett Foundation: Integrating climate justice across foundation operations

Several years ago, as part of a review of its diversity, equity, and inclusion practices, the Hewlett Foundation conducted a baseline assessment to understand the demographic composition of its grantee partners. Mary Flannelly, chief of staff of the Environment program, says the assessment found that not only was the Environment Program funding mostly white-dominant organizations, but it was also doing so at a slightly higher rate than other programs at the Foundation.

Since then, the program, which includes a climate and energy portfolio, has taken intentional steps to diversify the organizations it supports. Recognizing the importance of accountability, it has also signed onto

the transparency portion of the Climate Funders Justice Pledge, which calls on funders to report the percentage of their climate/environmental grants going to BIPOC-led organizations. As those shifts have occurred on the grantmaking side, Hewlett has also incorporated climate justice considerations into other aspects of its work.

For example, working with colleagues in Communications, the Foundation has come to understand how important it is to integrate an equity and people-focused narrative into its work. To that end, Flannelly says that “storytelling has become a part of our climate work.”

In the realm of hiring practices, the program has re-examined its core competencies, with a commitment to and experience around diversity, equity, and inclusion as an important factor in reviewing candidates for open positions. In the area of operations, the Foundation purchases carbon offsets through the Regional Greenhouse Gas initiative, which Flannelly notes illustrates ways that foundations can think more expansively about how to incorporate antidotes to the climate crisis into their work. Hewlett also had the first LEED certified Gold building in California, demonstrating how the Foundation has tried to “make things more sustainable from the get-go.”

Flannelly sums up, “For a foundation with a 50-year history, change often happens slowly, but I have seen important shifts since I started. I’m hopeful to see more as we further embrace our racial justice commitment at Hewlett. Other people are paying attention, and when people see where you are in the field and what you have to contribute, they move with you.”

Key takeaways

- Foundations that thoughtfully and intentionally align their practices with their values will be more likely to develop deep and trusting relationships with grantee partners, resulting in a sharper focus on equity and justice within their climate portfolios.
- It is crucial to take an intersectional lens to climate justice funding that considers the nuanced impact that gender, age, ability, race/ethnicity, and other identities have on how different groups experience the climate crisis.
- The often-siloed nature of foundation portfolios can lead to missed opportunities to achieve bigger and sustainable impacts. Consider taking a more holistic approach to grantmaking or setting aside a portion of your grantmaking budget to invest in promising organizations/projects that might fall outside your strategy.
- Foundations can incorporate climate justice into their work beyond grantmaking—consider how the totality of your work, not just grantmaking, can become more equity and justice focused.

- To support a strong ecosystem of grantee partners, ask your current partners who is doing good work in the field. This approach will strengthen existing relationships and help build movement infrastructure, instead of creating a portfolio of partners who may lack alignment and connection.

Reflection questions

- In what ways are our core values reflected in our climate work? In what ways are equity and justice being integrated into our climate work?
- To what extent are we making connections across our grantmaking portfolios to take a holistic and integrated approach to the climate crisis? Where do opportunities to break down silos exist? How are our current grantees responding to the climate crisis?
- What is our analysis of how different populations are impacted by the crisis, and how are we co-creating strategies that address the realities of lived experience?
- Are we building a diverse portfolio and supporting a range of actors that advance a climate justice approach? Are some of these organizations led by the key constituencies most impacted by the climate crisis?
- How are we thinking about equity and climate impacts across our foundation operations and investments?

4

The critical role of intermediaries

A growing cadre of intermediary organizations are proving critical to moving resources to frontline climate justice work. Intermediary organizations include public foundations that raise the funds they grant/spend; organizations that either exclusively regrant or regrant a majority of resources raised; and pooled funds, initiatives, and alliances.

These intermediary organizations serve important roles in the field:

1. Intermediaries **provide learning opportunities for funders** to build and deepen their understanding of climate justice.
2. Intermediaries can **bridge relationships** between larger/more traditional donors and smaller grassroots groups, including groups in the Global South, to ensure that funding reaches groups on the ground.
3. Intermediaries help **promote solidarity and mutual accountability** in the distribution of resources, in part through participatory processes.
4. Intermediaries also **provide critical support for technical assistance and accompaniment** to strengthen organizations.
5. Intermediaries can help **strengthen the ecosystem of climate justice work and support broader movement-building efforts**.

Provide learning opportunities

Many intermediaries and grassroots alliances provide both informal and formal learning opportunities for funders seeking to build and deepen their understanding of climate justice. These learning opportunities can range from one-time workshops to a series of progressively more advanced trainings to experiential learning exchanges to anything in between. In addition, pooled funds and funder collaboratives not only provide opportunities for joint grantmaking, but also create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning.

Thousand Currents, CLIMA Fund, Climate Justice Alliance, It Takes Roots, and Grassroots International are just a few of the intermediaries and grassroots-led formations that offer formal learning spaces. Across the board, these learning opportunities share a number of commonalities: They help donors develop and deepen an analysis of the root causes for the climate crisis, offering historical, political, and social context. They help catalyze relationships between grantmakers and grassroots leaders and organizations. And they help foster peer-to-peer relationships among funders to help facilitate collaborative and synergistic giving.

In addition, a number of these organizations have also developed publications and other resources designed to help funder audiences understand the tenets of climate justice as well as how funders can support the needs of grassroots organizations. For example, CLIMA Fund has generated a [rich collection](#) of videos, reports, webinars, and infographics designed for donors to foster an understanding of climate justice principles. The Climate Justice Alliance has assembled a [list of key resources](#) for funders on just transition, environmental justice, and climate justice, and It Takes Roots has designed a guide on how funders can help [“change the rules, stop the bad, and build the new.”](#)

Here, we spotlight the work of Grassroots International, which has made funder learning and organizing a key focus of its work.

Grassroots International: Deep donor learning and organizing to support social movements

Grassroots International, a public foundation that includes climate justice among its priority areas, engages in donor organizing and donor education as one of its core functions. Inspired by political education

Learn more about working through intermediaries

[How Funding Intermediaries Fuels Social Change—Libra Foundation \(2021\)](#)

This blog post explains the importance of funding community-accountable intermediaries, especially since institutional philanthropy can be disconnected from frontline and marginalized groups' lived experiences. The post outlines why the Libra Foundation funds intermediaries and the criteria they use to ensure that intermediaries align with their goals.

[Why Fund Intermediaries?—CLIMA Fund](#)

Drawing upon its own experience in forming long relationships with frontline activists and quickly moving money to grassroots groups, this piece makes the case for why funding intermediaries provides immediate and critical support to grassroots movements.

practices of social movements and informed by the [Giving Project Model](#), Grassroots International views donors as donor-activists who can mobilize resources to support social movements as an act of solidarity.

The organization helps donors combine grantmaking with deep political education that includes a curriculum to help them develop a shared analysis around race, gender, and colonialism as well as expose them to real-time campaigns and movement-building work on the ground. Donors become better positioned to understand the root causes of climate inequities and to understand their role as allies and partners to movements.

Pre-pandemic, Grassroots International's donor engagement efforts included organizing donor delegations to the Global South for donors to learn more about social movements firsthand. Through these trips, donors connected with social movement partners that Grassroots International had been working with for years. This way donors got a better, more transparent understanding of the local ecosystem and issues. Grassroots International has also sponsored deep dive learning immersion retreats. For example, it coordinated a learning exchange to Puerto Rico that included intensive political education and direct field visits.

Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of Grassroots International, explains the benefits of working through intermediaries to connect with frontline communities: "When donors join us to accompany social movements, they won't get a dog and pony show or one-off projects disconnected from the broader movement landscape." In this sense, Grassroots International's donor education and organizing efforts speak to building transformational, rather than transactional, relationships. Hong states, "Our goal with donors isn't just funding, but it is an invitation to become a long-term partner and to come out of the process with a shared analysis and commitment to transforming their power, privilege, and funds into tools of solidarity in service of the shared vision. That is Solidarity Philanthropy."

[Protesta Y Propuesta: Lessons from Just Transformation, Ecological Justice, and the Fight for Self-Determination in Puerto Rico—Grassroots International \(2020\)](#)

This report uplifts the stories of Puerto Rican social movements that have engaged in community-centered rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Maria, gathered through a learning exchange hosted by Grassroots International. Through these stories, the report offers recommendations to foundations and investors who are seeking to address climate and humanitarian crises across the globe.

Hong continues, “And once you are in a close relationship with movements, you can see the incredibly powerful way that grassroots communities are creating the leading edges of climate solutions—peasant-driven food sovereignty that cools the planet while ending hunger; solidarity economy projects that share the wealth, community-controlled renewable energy initiatives; restoration of land and territory through landback campaigns by Indigenous and other colonized peoples; preservation of cultural and biodiversity; feminist economies that center life and peace and so much more. ... We have no time to waste looking for answers in all the wrong places when we can focus our energies on how to mobilize more philanthropic resources to support these exciting grassroots solutions.”

Bridge relationships between funders and grassroots organizations

Because intermediary organizations have the capacity to build relationships with grassroots organizations in a way that larger foundations might not, they are able to bridge relationships between donors and grassroots organizations, including those in the Global South, in an authentic way. Funders benefit by being able to disburse funding to diverse organizations more quickly and efficiently, while grassroots organizations benefit by focusing less on fundraising and more on mission-focused activities. Intermediaries can be especially helpful for donors who want to support organizations in the Global South, particularly if they do not have the capacity, staff, and/or local knowledge to manage international grants and the accompanying due-diligence and compliance issues.

While the Ford Foundation supports a number of larger NGOs through its climate grants, it also supports Global Greengrants Fund, an intermediary that supports grassroots organizations with grants as small as \$5,000. Ximena Warnaars, program officer for the Natural Resources and Climate portfolio at the Ford Foundation, explains the value of partnering with an intermediary like Global Greengrants: “The Ford Foundation is just not going to be making a whole bunch of \$5,000 grants. Global Greengrants is able to do that. And the reason we [are] interested is that supporting social movements is key. And a lot of those social movements are grassroots organizations—they’re at the roots of who needs to be supported and then that builds up.”

The Climate Justice Resilience Fund is another such entity, a pooled fund that allows its funder members to reach both geographies and populations it might not otherwise reach.

Climate Justice Resilience Fund: Bridging relationships across populations and geographies

Originally seeded by the Oak Foundation in 2016, the Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF) was created following nearly two years of deep consultation with climate justice leaders and Oak Foundation staff across different portfolios. In addition, multiple landscape scans commissioned by Oak further informed the foundation's approach. The two-year process helped ensure buy-in, as Oak engaged grassroots partners in geographic priority areas to "groundtruth" its preliminary ideas.

The Fund now counts Kendeda Fund and Robert Bosch Stiftung among its core funders and engages a growing mix of additional funders. The Fund takes a people-centered approach to climate and focuses on three groups—women, young people, and Indigenous Peoples—who are all on the front lines of the crisis as well as three geographic "hotspots"—the Bay of Bengal (India and Bangladesh), the drylands of Kenya and Tanzania, and the North American Arctic.

Although Oak had made some climate justice grants in the past, by seeding an entity outside of the foundation, Oak believed it would help make the case for climate justice more broadly in philanthropy (at a time when there was less attention paid to climate justice) and create a vehicle for collaboration within philanthropy, thus amplifying impact. Heather McGray, the Fund's director, also notes that pooled funds with a cross-cutting, integrated approach across populations and geographic areas like CJRF's help take foundations' internal politics out of the equation and allow funding partners to "focus on the intersections of the work, rather than manage the intersections across organizational silos."

Working in this collaborative space allows funders to get connected to grassroots and movement-building organizations in ways they might not otherwise be able to do. CJRF accomplishes this goal through virtual learning exchanges, a rich collection of blogs and briefs that reflect insights from the ground, wide dissemination of partner stories and resources, and conversations with funders to share the Fund's growing body of knowledge. Through these varied channels, McGray shares that both funders and partners are able to exchange experiences and get a better perspective on what's working well, which funding approaches are needed, and how the capacity of grantee partners can be better supported.

As the Fund continues to grow and evolve, it is seeking to incorporate a participatory grantmaking model that can shift power and further bridge relationships between institutional donors and frontline

communities. McGray shares, “If we’re going to be a justice fund, it shouldn’t just be Europeans and North Americans making these grantmaking decisions. We expect the grantmaking to be more effective and more relevant once we have a more diverse set of people at the decision-making table.”

Promote solidarity and mutual accountability

Because of their close and long-standing relationships with organizations on the ground, intermediaries are often better positioned to work in solidarity with frontline organizations and are equipped to ensure greater accountability to impacted communities. In practice, intermediaries use a variety of approaches, including front-lined governed funds; participatory grantmaking; the use of advisory councils; deep, trust-based relationships built over the long term; and frequent and generative feedback loops, to name just a few. By incorporating such practices, intermediaries are able to share and shift power in ways that may be more challenging for larger or more mainstream funders.

Global Greengrants Fund, for example, relies heavily on local advisors and partners to inform its grantmaking decisions and set strategy. The organization has established local committees of movement leaders in the regions it funds. It seeks out leaders who have strong networks and are trusted by their communities.

Learn more about fostering community accountability

[Community Voices Need to be Part of the Climate Crisis Response—Alliance Magazine \(2021\)](#)

This article encourages climate funders to center community voices and lived experience by building relationships with grassroots and global health leaders. The piece highlights the numerous opportunities for funders to connect with grassroots initiatives that are addressing impacts of the climate crisis on the ground.

[Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking](#)
This GrantCraft guide describes the principles of participatory grantmaking and offers examples for implementing such models.

[How Philanthropy Can Meet the Moment: The Vital Importance of Trust—Non-Profit Quarterly \(2020\)](#)

In this piece, Shamar Bibbins explains how systemic racism has enabled lack of trust and change within climate funding. This disparity has occurred even though frontline, BIPOC-led groups have been on the forefront of transformative climate work, embodying a multi-issue approach. Bibbins calls on funders to rebuild trust with frontline leaders and use intermediary funds to invest in them.

Peter Kostishack of Global Greengrants observes that the process not only creates accountability between climate justice movement leaders and Global Greengrants as a funder but it also fosters accountability among grassroots partners: “There’s also peer accountability, because they’re members of movements. They’re not doing it alone. They work in a committee. They have to defend or show this is where this grant fits within our strategy and why this is so crucial to movements back at home.”

Although Grassroots International does not have advisors per se, its decision makers are very intentional about developing deep, long-term partnerships that are rooted in reciprocity. Doing so creates space for transformational, rather than transactional, relationships that generate a sense of mutual accountability.

The Solutions Project uses the frame of solidarity philanthropy in its work, understanding *solidarity* as a practice of deep listening, long-term commitments to grantee partners, two-way trust building, radical transparency, empathy, and relentless accountability to grantee partners and the climate justice movement. Solidarity philanthropy aims to disrupt long-standing extractive and oppressive forms of philanthropy, and instead leans into regenerative and relational forms of grantmaking.

To this end, The Solutions Project also brings accountability measures into its fundraising practices, including hosting frontline-governed funds.

Similarly, an example of how intermediaries can foster accountability to movement and to directly impacted communities comes from the Climate Justice Alliance, which aims not only to move money to the grassroots but also to promote community governance of those funds. One way the Climate Justice Alliance accomplishes this end is through a non-extractive loan fund called the [Our Power Loan Fund](#). Loans do not require collateral and include technical assistance to set up projects for success. Loan repayments are used to support future climate justice initiatives.

To illustrate some of the ways intermediaries are working to promote solidarity and mutual accountability, we highlight the work of Mosaic, which uses a participatory grantmaking model, and the Solidaire Network, which uses a set of advisory councils to inform its work.

Mosaic: A participatory model to support climate justice

Mosaic, an initiative that invests in movement infrastructure to better support people working for clean air and water and a safe climate,

employs a participatory model that engages both NGO and grassroots leaders alongside funders. In its initial round of grantmaking, led by a governance assembly consisting of 16 members (only 3 of whom were funders), Mosaic received more than 400 proposals and ultimately awarded 21 grants totaling \$3 million.

Members of the governance assembly noted that decisions were difficult and though tensions inevitably surfaced, they agreed on the fundamentals: Mosaic should prioritize BIPOC-led groups, smaller groups, and groups that center equity. Given the overwhelming response, Mosaic shared unfunded proposals on a platform available to other funders as a way to be transparent to grassroots partners and further resource the field.²⁵

Solidaire Network: Toward community accountability

At the Solidaire Network, its donor members—high-net-worth individuals—initially made grantmaking decisions. Over time, as the Network deepened its relationship with movement partners, it has made intentional efforts to shift the power. To inform its decision making and to ensure its work was accountable to movement needs and priorities, the Network established an elders’ council and a movement oversight committee. Collectively, they help set the direction of the Network’s grantmaking, providing guidelines for grantmaking and designing an application process driven by movement organizations’ stated needs.

Although shifting power often suggests participatory grantmaking, the Network’s partners have consistently indicated that they do not want to be involved in grantmaking. Janis Rosheuvel, program director, shares, “Movement [leaders are] saying to us, ‘Stay connected to us. Stay in conversation with us. Stay in dialogue with us. Get our feedback, but grantmaking is not our job. Do your job. Do it with integrity. Do it with oversight and guidelines from us.’”

This feedback has resulted in a shifting of roles over the years, with high-net-worth donors adopting more of a learning and organizing stance rather than making grant decisions. Movement leaders are valued as experts and provide their experience in setting up an equitable, justice-oriented framework to grantmaking. Program officers steeped in the nuts and bolts of grantmaking implement the framework. These shifting roles have brought a greater sense of community and movement accountability to Solidaire’s work.

It is because of these deep relationships with partners, in part, that Solidaire does not have a dedicated climate justice portfolio, though many of its grants touch on climate. Instead, by working at the intersection of race, gender, and climate justice, the Network finds that climate justice is “deeply embedded” in the work their grantee partners are doing and that work is happening in the context of other movements. The feedback they’ve received from movement partners is that Solidaire funds in a way that reflects “the way that we organize.”

Support organizational strengthening

Intermediaries provide a variety of supports beyond grants to grassroots organizations. As groups identify particular areas for organizational strengthening, intermediaries often fund them in a variety of areas—including communications, fundraising, and leadership development. Such support is often critical to frontline organizations that are thinly staffed and may not have dedicated resources for professional development. In addition, investments in organizational development help create stronger, more sustainable organizations that, in turn, help strengthen the broader ecosystem of climate justice organizations.

For example, the Clean Energy and Equity Fund supports grantee partners with its [Policy Accelerator](#), which provides policy coaching, rapid-response policy research, and technical assistance on climate and clean energy policy campaigns. Similarly, the Fund’s Communications Accelerator supports grantee partners’ development of strategic communications capacity and strategies to combat fossil fuel disinformation and accelerate the pace and scale of change.

As a part of its capacity-strengthening support to the field, NDN Collective, an Indigenous-led organization that focuses on generating sustainable solutions, supports leadership development through its Changemaker Fellowships. The Fellowship provides a \$75,000 cash award to Fellows that allows them to create and invest in their own customized leadership development plan. NDN Collective supplements this funding through online and in-person gatherings to provide additional support.

Here, we highlight how The Solutions Project supports grassroots field leaders in developing their media capacity and investing in their long-term success and well-being.

The Solutions Project: Embracing solidarity philanthropy through funding community-led climate solutions, building media capacity, and supporting wellness

The Solutions Project, a public foundation that emphasizes investments in female leaders of color on the frontlines of climate justice, observed that though their grantee partners were at the cutting edge of generating creative, intersectional climate solutions, media coverage rarely featured their voices. This omission led to a perpetual cycle of under-appreciating and under-resourcing the work of frontline communities.

To address this gap, The Solutions Project helps grantee partners develop their media and storytelling capacity so they can more effectively influence the narrative around the climate crisis. As president and chief executive officer Gloria Walton shares, “We believe we must amplify our stories and shine a light on community-based and community-driven solutions.” In doing so, grantee partners, referred to as “solutionaries,” can re-write the narrative on what is possible and fill a critical gap in climate communications.²⁶

The Solutions Project provides coaching and trainings on basic storytelling techniques, presenting to the media, and planning and implementing market campaigns. The organization also ensures that partners have the practical tools they need to put what they’ve learned into action—everything from supplying video equipment for at-home video production to creating shareable graphics for organizing campaigns. The Solutions Project also manages a team of what they call “program delivery partners” to fill capacity gaps in real time for drafting press releases, creating social media posts, and other strategic communications tactics that philanthropy has not resourced for grassroots, especially BIPOC-led organizations, to access themselves.

In addition, The Solutions Project leverages its connections with celebrities (actor Mark Ruffalo is a co-founder of the organization) and other influencers to amplify grantee partners’ stories and messages, ultimately helping to shift narratives about the kinds of people-centered, justice-oriented climate solutions that are needed. Building on this work, The Solutions Project is a core partner with Climate Justice Alliance and Center for Story-based Strategy in the Communicating Our Power fellowship. This innovative program provides dedicated funding for 20 frontline organizations to hire their first communications staff member and also receive two years of narrative and strategic communications training.

The Solutions Project also helps create sustainable organizations by investing in wellness supports, given the high level of stress and burnout experienced by frontline leaders. Before the pandemic, this effort included six \$10,000 grants to Black and Indigenous women leaders of nonprofits working in the Southern United States to use as they wished. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, wellness supports have become even more critical. The Solutions Project offers wellness grants to its frontline partners as well as virtual memberships to groups that provide a range of mindfulness practices such as meditation and yoga. At the same time, The Solutions Project is increasingly making—and advocating for—grants that allow frontline organizations to pay their staff living wages and provide essential benefits such as health care and retirement, recognizing that holistically resourcing organizations will contribute to a stronger, more sustainable climate justice movement.²⁷

Rooted in relationships of mutual trust and accountability, The Solutions Project moved more than \$10 million to grassroots climate justice leaders in 2021 alone, supporting 127 grantees with media and storytelling support, general operating funding, and climate resilience resources. Seventy percent of grantee partners are women-led and close to 90% are BIPOC-led.

Across its work, Walton emphasizes the importance of solidarity funding practices in The Solutions Project’s approach and guiding values. The Project strives to be a movement-accountable funder, supporting not only its grantee partners, but also the broader climate justice ecosystem. As a solidarity funder, Walton believes it is critical that The Solutions Project holds the same north star as its grantee partners, recognizing its health, healing, and liberation is intertwined with that of its grantee partners.

Strengthen ecosystems and movement building

Interviewees for this guide emphasized the importance of developing grantmaking strategies that help strengthen the overall ecosystem of climate justice, recognizing that the scale of the climate crisis is so big that actors must work in concert to advance justice-centered climate solutions. If foundations invest in a strong ecosystem of interconnected organizations, they support the potential for greater and more far-reaching impacts.

Moreover, taking a movement-building approach requires funders to recognize that communities are confronted by multiple crises and that the climate crisis intersects with health, economic, and political crises as well. Philanthropic support that helps create connections across movements is needed to catalyze transformative climate action.

Along these lines, intermediaries are investing in leveraging the potential of translocal organizing—the notion that local movements for climate justice can connect across geographies and help propel national and global movements. This organization can take the form of a variety of activities, including shared campaigns and projects, learning exchanges, tool development, and strategic and coordinated communications. By catalyzing such efforts, grassroots organizations become more networked across regions and are able to achieve results at scale in the way that many funders are seeking.

By helping to create and strengthen connections within the climate justice movement, intermediaries counter the “one-off” nature of funding that can occur within larger foundation portfolios and that can ultimately have limited impact.

The Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice is one intermediary that has an explicit goal of supporting and strengthening the climate justice ecosystem.

Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice: Supporting the climate justice ecosystem

The Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice notes that its name “conjures notions of collective activity” and represents the critical importance of working collaboratively across movements and sectors to address the urgency and complexity of the climate crisis. Indeed, the Hive Fund’s work includes policy advocacy, support for movement building, and investments in civic engagement to build political power and promote greater accountability from decision makers.

Much like the Libra Foundation, the Hive Fund, which focuses on the Southeastern United States, sources its grantee partners in part through deep conversations with grassroots organizations. The Fund asks them which organizations and individuals are doing interesting and innovative work on the ground. As one grantee partner shares, “Whoever’s really doing the work comes up that way.” Moreover, such an approach fosters the funding of ecosystems—of organizations that are aligned and in conversation with one another to deepen their collective work, instead of ad hoc support for organizations that may or may not be in relationship with one another.

Climate justice intermediaries

This table presents a sample of intermediary organizations that integrate climate justice into their work. Many are highlighted in this guide. Some have an explicit focus on climate justice, whereas others focus on particular populations or places. This table illustrates the range of intermediaries that exist but is not intended to be comprehensive.

Here are some questions to consider in working with intermediaries:

- How does the intermediary's work align with our values and our areas of focus (populations, issues, geographic areas)?
- In what ways does the intermediary work with directly impacted communities across populations and geographic areas?
- To what extent does the intermediary provide movement infrastructure and generate spaces for connection and collaboration?
- Does the intermediary have authentic relationships with groups on the ground? Does it practice trust-based philanthropy? How is it accountable to the movements it supports?
- What can we learn or lean into by funding this intermediary instead of or in addition to direct grantmaking to climate justice organizations?

Name	Mission/description	Geographic region
7th Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples www.7genfund.org	Based on traditional Native concepts of holistic ecological stewardship, Seventh Generation Fund and the communities it serves have long understood the direct relationships between a healthy environment, social justice, and community well-being. The Fund provides resources, technical assistance, and training to support grassroots development through Native community empowerment and action.	United States and Tribal Nations
Agroecology Fund agroecologyfund.org/	The Agroecology Fund is made up of 35 foundation members and has granted nearly \$10 million to hundreds of organizations, networks, and collaborations across dozens of countries. The Fund is committed to leveraging millions more for agroecology movements by motivating investments from philanthropic organizations, development agencies, and the private sector.	International (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States)

Name	Mission/description	Geographic region
Alianza Socioambiental Fondos del Sur (Socio-Environmental Funds of the Global South)	Fondos del Sur brings together independent socio-environmental funds situated in 9 Global South countries/regions. Each Fondo del Sur is a nationally/regionally based funding disbursement structure operating in local languages and cultures, making grants in local currencies, and offering a safe space for community leaders to develop skills that will eventually open doors to more support.	International (Africa, Central and South America, Southeast Asia)
Building Equity and Alignment (BEA) Fund bea4impact.org/fund	The BEA Fund is led by the same communities it funds: grassroots Black, Brown, Indigenous, people of color, and low-income frontline communities. The Fund prioritizes its grantees' ability to define their own agenda, build political power, and create lasting solutions for their own well-being and the planet's.	United States
CLIMA Fund climasolutions.org	The CLIMA Fund is a collaboration between Global Greengrants Fund, Grassroots International, Thousand Currents, and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights. CLIMA is a resource for funders to learn about the <i>what</i> and <i>how</i> of climate justice grantmaking. Funding grassroots climate justice movements in more than 160 countries, it's a one-stop shop for funders looking to make larger investments in climate justice.	International
Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund theequityfund.org	The Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund provides grants to community-based civic engagement, grassroots organizing, power-building, and voter turnout programs for climate and clean energy solutions in the country. The Fund also supports its grantees through its Policy Accelerator and Communications Accelerator.	United States

Name	Mission/description	Geographic region
Climate Justice Alliance climatejusticealliance.org	Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) is a coalition of more than 80 urban and rural frontline communities, organizations, and supporting networks in the climate justice movement. It focuses on fostering a just transition. CJA is an excellent resource of information for funders as they get grounded in climate justice. CJA provides trainings and, in some cases, serves as a regrantor.	United States
Climate Justice Resilience Fund cjrfund.org	The Climate Justice Resilience Fund supports women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples as they create and share their own climate resilience solutions, with an emphasis on how these solutions can drive systems-level change from the local to the global.	International (Arctic, Bay of Bengal, East Africa, plus a complementary portfolio of non-place-based global advocacy and peer learning grants)
Disability Rights Fund disabilityrights-fund.org	The Disability Rights Fund is a grantmaking collaborative between donors and the global disability rights community that provides financial and technical resources to organizations of persons with disabilities to advocate for equal rights and full participation in society. Recognizing that climate change has devastating impacts on women and children with disabilities, the Disability Rights Fund works to ensure representation and that appropriate information on the barriers that people with disabilities face are made available.	International (Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean)
FRIDA Young Feminist Fund youngfeminist-fund.org	FRIDA provides young feminist organizers with the resources they need to amplify their voices and bring attention to the social justice issues they care about. FRIDA supports organizations working at the intersection of eco-feminism to change the systems that affect the environment and inequitable gender structures.	International

Name	Mission/description	Geographic region
Fund for Global Human Rights globalhuman-rights.org	The Fund's climate justice portfolio supports visionary activists who are developing community-based solutions to environmental issues and building the foundations of a sustainable future. The Fund focuses on ensuring corporate accountability, promoting land and resource rights, developing sustainable practices, and protecting environmental activists.	International
Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) gaggaalliance.org	GAGGA's network consists of women's funds, environmental funds, NGOs, and women-led CBOs. In the GAGGA model, funds and NGOs provide women-led CBOs with technical and legal support, thematic expertise, and funding, while further enhancing their connections with gender-just environmental movements. All GAGGA actors work together in a multi-level, cross-movement collaboration, with an emphasis on participatory processes and shared leadership.	International (Latin America, Africa, Asia)
Global Greengrants Fund greengrants.org	The Global Greengrants Fund believes that the best solutions to environmental harm and social injustice come from people whose lives are most impacted. Their global network comprises people on the front lines and donors who come together to enable communities to protect their ways of life and the planet. The Fund believes that when local people have a say in the health of their food, water, and resources, they are forces for change.	International

Name	Mission/description	Geographic region
Grassroots International grassrootsonline.org	Established in 1983, Grassroots International is a global grantmaking and social action organization that partners with social movements in the Global South and progressive funders in the United States. Grassroots International partners, funds, and works in solidarity with movements and organizations around the world to nurture sustainable and equitable relationships between people, with the Earth, and between all its living systems. Its goal is to address the root causes of injustice and oppression and build alternatives that nurture human rights, ecological justice, and liberation.	International (Brazil, Haiti, Mesoamerica, Middle East, North America, Puerto Rico, West Africa)
Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice hivefund.org	The Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice supports organizations that have historically lacked access to funding and are essential to making progress in addressing intersecting climate, gender, and racial justice crises in the U.S.	United States (primarily the South)
Indigenous Environmental Network ienearth.org	IEN was formed by grassroots Indigenous Peoples and individuals to address environmental and economic justice issues. IEN's activities include building the capacity of Indigenous communities and tribal governments to develop mechanisms to protect our sacred sites, land, water, air, natural resources, health of both the people and all living things and to build economically sustainable communities.	International
Just Transition Fund justtransitionfund.org	The Just Transition Fund provides grants, offers technical assistance, and sponsors activities for community-based organizations working within the changing coal economy. The Fund prioritizes support for coal communities experiencing the most economic distress and takes into account equity factors that make transition an even greater challenge.	United States

Name	Mission/description	Geographic region
Native Voices Rising nativevoicesrising.org	Native Voices Rising is a pooled regranting collaborative that serves as a mechanism to build broad-based philanthropic support for grassroots groups led by and for Native communities—including American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities—and to amplify Native voices elevating Indigenous solutions to historic harms around environmental, racial, and societal injustices. Central to NVR is a community-led grantmaking approach with Native community members empowered to make grant decisions.	United States and Tribal Nations
NDN Collective ndncollective.org	NDN Collective is an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to building Indigenous power. Through organizing, activism, philanthropy, grantmaking, capacity-building and narrative change, the Collective aims to create sustainable solutions on Indigenous terms. Its Collective Climate Justice Campaign builds power throughout Indigenous communities in order to tackle the climate crisis.	United States and Tribal Nations
The Solutions Project thesolutionsproject.org	The Solutions Project funds and amplifies grassroots climate justice solutions created by Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and other people of color or women-led organizations across the United States. Its solidarity philanthropy and narrative strategy programs support climate changemakers, innovators, and “solutionaries” on the front lines. The Solutions Project provides its grantees with funds, media capacity building, and connections with key stakeholders.	United States, Puerto Rico, and Tribal Nations of Turtle Island
Southern Africa Trust southernafrica-trust.org	Through a grant from the Ford Foundation, Southern Africa Trust serves as a regrantor for climate-related grants focused on strengthening citizen voice, building coalitions and alliances, and providing capacity to organizations.	Southern Africa

Name	Mission/description	Geographic region
<p>Thousand Currents thousandcurrents.org</p>	<p>Thousand Currents’ grantmaking program partners with grassroots groups and movements—led by women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples in the Global South—that are creating lasting solutions to shared global challenges. The Fund supports partners that work to ensure their communities have access to healthy and locally grown food, are able to enjoy economic prosperity that generates well-being for all people, and live in a safe and healthy environment that supports abundant life.</p>	<p>International (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America)</p>
<p>Urgent Action Fund (UAF) urgentactionfund.org</p>	<p>Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights (UAF) is a feminist fund and public foundation that supports the resilience of courageous women, trans, and gender non-binary human rights defenders striving to create cultures of justice, equality, and peace. The Fund prioritizes the resourcing of land defenders and Indigenous communities across our regions, supporting their leadership and their frontline actions.</p>	<p>International (Central Asia, the Middle East, Western and Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, Russia, Turkey, the United States, and Canada)</p>

Key takeaways

- By engaging with intermediary organizations, funders can build and deepen their understanding of climate justice. Seek out workshops, trainings, peer-to-peer learning, publications, or other resources offered by intermediaries.
- Intermediaries' leadership and staff often come from movements or organizing background and hold deep relationships with grassroots organizations.
- For global grantmaking, certain intermediaries have deep knowledge of the local political context and the various players as well as capacity to meet international regulatory and legal requirements.
- Intermediaries can build relationships with grassroots organizations, move funds, and reach geographic areas or populations in ways that larger foundations might not be able to.
- Intermediaries are often better equipped to bring impacted communities to the decision-making table and thus able to ensure greater accountability to community priorities.
- Intermediaries provide a variety of supports beyond grants to grassroots organizations. Such support is often critical to grassroots organizations that are thinly staffed and may not have resources for professional development.
- Intermediaries are creating and strengthening connections within the climate justice movement, countering the one-off nature of funding that can occur within larger foundation portfolios and that can ultimately have limited impact.

Reflection questions

- What are our learning needs? Are there practitioners or intermediaries that can support our learning journey?
- Can we work through intermediaries to reach organizations, geographic areas, or populations we cannot connect with through our internal grantmaking channels?
- Whom would we like to be in relationship with that we currently are not? Are there intermediaries that can catalyze those connections?
- How can we support the full staffing and resource needs of intermediary organizations to ensure they are able to do the time-intensive work of grantmaking, relationship building, and capacity building?

5

Moving forward: Gaps and opportunities

The scale of the climate crisis is an “all hands on deck” situation. Regardless of a foundation’s current issue areas of focus, it is almost guaranteed that the climate crisis will have an impact. And although much of the current support goes to larger, white-dominant, longstanding climate organizations in the Global North, there is an important opportunity to harness innovative and often overlooked climate solutions being generated by those most impacted by the climate crisis. By investing in people-focused, justice-centered solutions, funders have an opportunity to tackle the root causes of the climate crisis and help dismantle entrenched systems of oppression that have exacerbated it.

Recommendations

Wherever funders are in their climate journey, there are opportunities to introduce and sharpen a climate justice lens. Interviewees for this guide encouraged their fellow funders to keep the following in mind:

Secure an institutional commitment to climate justice. Although program officers can sometimes lead from the middle, for climate justice strategies to have traction, there has to be a commitment from the board and executive leadership. Indeed, Carla López, executive director of the Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (lead organization of GAGGA), says, “Sometimes good intentions are limited to a few people in the middle. Without an institutional commitment, it’s not enough.” López sees part of GAGGA’s role as supporting line staff: “People inside of a foundation may need support from others to help them make the case.”

Similarly, the Hewlett Foundation’s Mary Flannelly observes, “There’s so much new money coming into this field and what I’m seeing with some other new funders is how powerful it is when they get living donors on board. I think there’s just some work to be done on helping people understand that supporting equity and justice can and should be part of

winning on climate. It's definitely been more bottom up from what I've seen, but I think it needs to be a little more top down going forward.”

Part of making an institutional commitment is also recognizing that the climate crisis has relevance to many of a foundation's existing programmatic areas of work. Foundations can not only begin to integrate climate within their current portfolios; they can also bring a critical equity lens to their work, without creating completely new portfolios.

Direct more resources to the Global South and to frontline communities in the Global North. The climate crisis is a global problem, yet only a small portion of funding goes to organizations outside Europe and the United States, even though the Global South is disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. Likewise, within the Global North, organizations led by directly impacted communities tend to be under-resourced. If we are to make a dent in averting the worst consequences of the climate crisis, it is essential to fully resource the climate justice movement. Doing so allows funders to tap into the sense of urgency that directly impacted communities feel and to harness the innovation, creativity, and expertise they bring to developing climate solutions that are working for their communities.

Investing in the Global South and under-resourced communities in the Global North often requires going beyond one's established networks. To this end, intermediary organizations that often have deep relationships with frontline communities can serve as critical resources.

Invest in efforts to connect local movements with national and global ones. A recurring critique of grassroots climate solutions is that they cannot achieve the scale needed to address the enormity of the climate crisis. But this critique does not take into account the ways in which grassroots and local movements have access to solutions and social data that can have an impact globally. These grassroots movements are especially powerful when linked to regional and international movements; they can inform and reinforce national and global climate justice strategies.

This linkage can take the form of investments in translocal organizing (i.e., organizing efforts that are decentralized enough to resonate with local contexts and communities, yet also foster connection and cooperation across geographies to inform the broader movement for climate justice). Masego Madzwamuse, director of the environment programme at Oak, lifts up the work of the Right Energy Partnership as a powerful example. The Right Energy Partnership is an Indigenous-led partnership that works to increase renewable energy systems that respect human rights and encourage the leadership of Indigenous

communities across continents to develop solutions. Madzwamuse says that the group has essentially “built a network of networks.”

Madzwamuse describes the power of this model: “The Right Energy Partnership is a global Indigenous-led network that supports national level groups in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The Right Energy Partnership is currently building its network in Africa under the leadership of Ikal Angel’ei, a Goldman Environmental Prize winner who leads a group in Northern Kenya and is well connected with other Indigenous Peoples’ networks in Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As a member of the Right Energy Partnership, she can then easily connect these networks to other members of Indigenous Peoples’ coalitions in other parts of the Global South. Therefore, the organization’s reach is vast and has the potential to accelerate the change we need now. If you were to draw a geographical footprint of what their work looks like, or which organizations are involved, the number of people that each of these organizations or the communities that they represent, the human scale of that intervention is what is needed to accelerate and create the kind of systemic change that is needed now.”

Engage in peer organizing and collective funder action. Organizations at the grassroots are coming together through networks like the Climate Justice Alliance and Pan African Climate Justice Alliance to foster shared learning and collective strategizing. Interviewees for this guide advocated for similarly robust efforts within the philanthropic community to take place in partnership with frontline communities.

One such space is the Regenerative Economies Organizing (REO) Collaborative, through which funders are working in alignment with movement leaders to advance just and equitable climate solutions. In the Midwestern United States, the McKnight Foundation spends a considerable amount of energy organizing its fellow funders in the region to share information and knowledge and invest more strategically and deeply in climate solutions with a justice lens.

Still, there is room for more to be done on this front, given the potential for collective funder action and strategy to meet the moment. Lindley Mease of the CLIMA Fund puts it this way: “We all have to become organizers and work to be in coalition with each other.”

Do not reinvent the wheel; invest in, support, and learn from intermediaries. The best grantmaking investments are typically those rooted in trust and mutual understanding. There is no substitute for the time that goes into relationship building. Intermediary organizations can bridge relationships with grassroots organizations and often have their pulse on how the field is shifting, what supports are needed, and where innovations are occurring. Along these lines, it’s important for



Tip

Look for additional ways of supporting grantee partners in addition to the core grants, including covering travel for learning exchanges, addressing language justice needs, and supporting crisis response.

institutional funders to invest appropriately in intermediaries to ensure they have the staff capacity to do all that they do—build relationships, make grants, and foster grassroots capacity.

Engage in ongoing learning and political education. The complex and shifting landscape of the climate crisis, along with the need to be thoughtful about equity and justice considerations, requires an ongoing commitment to learning. Holly Baker, philanthropic partnerships director at the Climate Justice Alliance, states, “It’s important to be honest about the learning curve and to ask for training from practitioners. The need for political education of funders cannot be overstated.” Baker believes filling this gap is all the more important as the term *climate justice* becomes more ubiquitous and new initiatives do not necessarily reflect accountability to frontline communities and to the values and principles associated with the climate justice movement.

Along these lines, Alison Corwin of the Surdna Foundation encourages funders to find their political home within philanthropy, spaces that allow for deepened analysis and peer connection. For Corwin, networks such as Justice Funders, the Solidaire Network, EDGE Funders Alliance, and the Neighborhood Funders Group meet this need.

Embrace risk. Foundations often think of smaller organizations or movement work as risky investments, yet there is also a risk to *not* investing in these organizations, as creative solutions may be overlooked and go unfunded. In particular, social movements in the Global South and frontline communities in the Global North have been historically under-resourced, yet often have the most at stake and thus have generated innovative solutions in response.

Indeed, the enormity of the climate crisis requires an expansive view of possible approaches. As Maria Alejandra Escalante of FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund shares, philanthropy has an important role to play in providing a platform for new ideas: “There’s not one good solution or one good way forward. There needs to be multiple and diverse tactics and strategies to address the complexity of the social and environmental crisis that we are in. And all of them need money. It’s not only about the money, but also the infrastructure that is needed to uplift these types of solutions.”

Paul Bogart, executive director of Healthcare Without Harm, similarly advocates for pushing the boundaries of what is possible. He advises funders, “If you’re *not* out of your comfort zone, you’re probably not in the place you need to be.”

Invest in movement building. How does change happen? Interviewees for this guide say funders must ask themselves this question as they



Tip

Listen to the most challenging voices and seek out perspectives from those you usually don’t hear. Even if the feedback is hard to hear, it will make your work better.

think about their climate strategy. Time and time again, history has shown that bottom-up movements of organized people have been critical to shifting mindsets, policies, and practices. The climate justice movement is no different, given the ways in which grassroots organizers and communities have been able to apply pressure to change business practices, spur government action, and bring increased attention to the climate crisis.

To this end, it is important to support not only campaigns to achieve climate justice wins, but also the long-term infrastructure—base building, leadership development, and grassroots organizing—needed to run those campaigns. Brionté McCorkle, executive director of Georgia Conservation Voters, laments, “I’m chasing grants to further these clean energy objectives, but it doesn’t support infrastructure building and organizing. There’s money for campaigns, but not as much funding available for the infrastructure-building that we need to achieve long-term and lasting transformation.”

Shamar Bibbins of the Kresge Foundation concurs with McCorkle’s assessment that there needs to be greater investment in long-term organizing. She also notes that funders need to be open about what that looks like: “I think funders must expand their understanding of what constitutes work on climate change. Funders have to be more comfortable funding things that they may not feel are going to be direct outcomes around climate, but that are essential to ensure progress. We fund a lot of our groups around organizing when they’re doing campaigns or advancing policy, but those groups need long-term organizing support. None of us would be in this moment of historic investments if there had not been deep investments in voter and civic engagement and democracy work. None of that would even be possible.”

In addition, funders can help support connections across movements. For example, the Disability Rights Fund (DRF) notes that for many in the disability rights movement, climate justice is a new issue. Part of DRF’s work is to connect the disability rights movement to other movements, such as Indigenous rights and climate justice, thus fostering learning and strategizing across movements, while also amplifying power and impact around shared demands.

Make long-term investments, with an emphasis on core support.

One-year grants have traditionally been the norm in philanthropy. Even when multi-year grants are awarded, they tend to cover two to three years. Multiple interviewees for this guide say that such commitments fall short of what is needed and encourage both a longer time horizon as well as a commitment to providing general operating grants that help foster organizational sustainability and nimbleness.

The Solidaire Network and FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, for example, award grants for a minimum of five years, recognizing the long-term nature of the work. Extended support is especially critical as organizations work at the nexus of interconnected movements. As Janis Rosheuvel shares, “We need to be able to do our work in a robust way. Climate is a threat, but white nationalism and fascism are threats too, and the threats to dissent and organizing are ongoing. So, we need to be able to shore up our infrastructure to be able to fight those threats in a different way.” Even a five-year grant can feel inadequate, says Rosheuvel, given that the climate crisis requires a multi-decade commitment.

Indeed, Sarah Christiansen of the McKnight Foundation and Ximena Warnaars of the Ford Foundation encourage funders to think about the work on a 10-year horizon, not only to allow for investments that are more durable and commensurate with the scale of the crisis, but also to account for the time needed to build partnerships and collaboration. Grassroots International commits to indefinite, long-term funding once a partnership is formed. As a result, it has funded some organizations for as many as 20 years. Importantly, working in this way can mean rethinking the role of program officers and changing job descriptions to reflect the collaborative aspects of the partnership.

Apply non-extractive, regenerative ways of defining and understanding “impact.” Traditional models of evaluation focus on quantitative metrics to assess impact, without always asking critical questions, such as impact for whom and to what end. Quantitative metrics have their place, but relying primarily on them can impede a broader focus on learning. By centering learning and engaging grantee partners in defining what impact looks like in their communities, funders and grantee partners alike are more likely to create learning loops that allow for iteration and innovation to discover climate solutions that are truly making a difference.

Recap of key takeaways

Climate justice overview

- Although there is no standard or universally agreed-upon definition of *climate justice*, at its core, climate justice focuses on the systemic root causes of the climate crisis through an intersectional lens, centering frontline communities and grassroots movements.
- A climate justice perspective centers the populations and geographies most likely to experience the adverse effects of the climate crisis. Consider local context in how people are framing the issues.

- Only a small portion of philanthropic support for climate goes to justice-oriented efforts focused on root causes.
- Philanthropic support for climate work is undermined by its fixation on “Big Greens” and technical solutions as well as its standard operating practices, which limit access to funding for smaller, grassroots organizations.
- Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution. Directly impacted communities are generating transformative, innovative solutions, born out of their lived experience. These solutions are making an impact locally, regionally, and globally.

Common barriers to incorporating climate justice into grantmaking portfolios

- Technical solutions are often called “false solutions” by climate justice leaders because of their tendency to favor the symptoms of the climate crisis over its root causes and reflection of corporate and industry interests.
- Climate funders’ focus on scale and speed undermines the value of grassroots solutions in addressing the climate crisis. Focus on local strategies generated by those most impacted to ensure that solutions address local cultures and conditions, recognizing that successful local solutions can scale in other contexts through translocal organizing.
- Entrenched power imbalances and inequitable grantmaking practices mean that good ideas are left out of the conversation, especially those from directly impacted communities.
- To aid in your grantmaking process, ask who is telling the story, who makes the decisions, who benefits, what else it will impact, and how it will shift power. Pay attention to unintended consequences that might exacerbate existing inequities.

How foundations are integrating climate justice into their work

- Foundations that thoughtfully and intentionally align their practices with their values will be more likely to develop deep and trusting relationships with grantee partners, resulting in a sharper focus on equity and justice within their climate portfolios.
- It is crucial to take an intersectional lens to climate justice funding that considers the nuanced impact that gender, age, ability, race/ethnicity, and other identities have on how different groups

experience the climate crisis.

- The often-siloed nature of foundation portfolios can lead to missed opportunities to achieve bigger and sustainable impacts. Consider taking a more holistic approach to grantmaking or setting aside a portion of your grantmaking budget to invest in promising organizations/projects that might fall outside your strategy.
- Foundations can incorporate climate justice into their work beyond grantmaking—consider how the totality of your work, not just grantmaking, can become more equity and justice focused.
- To support a strong ecosystem of grantee partners, ask your current partners who is doing good work in the field. This approach will strengthen existing relationships and help build movement infrastructure, instead of creating a portfolio of partners who may lack alignment and connection.

The critical role of intermediaries

- By engaging with intermediary organizations, funders can build and deepen their understanding of climate justice. Seek out workshops, trainings, peer-to-peer learning, publications, or other resources that have been produced by intermediaries.
- Intermediaries' leadership and staff often come from movements or organizing background and hold deep relationships with grassroots organizations.
- For global grantmaking, certain intermediaries have deep knowledge of the local political context and the various players as well as capacity to meet international regulatory and legal requirements.
- Intermediaries can build relationships with grassroots organizations, move funds, and reach geographic areas or populations in ways that larger foundations might not be able to.
- Intermediaries are often better equipped to bring impacted communities to the decision-making table and thus better able to ensure greater accountability to community priorities.
- Intermediaries provide a variety of supports beyond grants to grassroots organizations. Such support is often critical to grassroots organizations that are thinly staffed and may not have resources for professional development.
- Intermediaries are creating and strengthening connections within the climate justice movement, countering the one-off nature of funding that can occur within larger foundation portfolios and that can ultimately have limited impact.

Reflection questions

- What level of commitment do we have for climate justice funding among our leadership and board?
- Can any of our grantees or applicants be supported to impact other communities and networks through a translocal approach?
- Does the way we think about risk have built-in biases that disadvantage smaller groups?
- How can we support movements for climate justice?
- How can we re-imagine assessment to go beyond purely quantitative metrics?

Resources highlighted

1 Climate justice: an overview

Learn more about climate funding

[Achieving a Just and Sustainable Economic Recovery](#)

ClimateWorks Foundation, The African Climate Foundation, Climate and Land Use Alliance and Ford Foundation, and Natural Resources Defense Council

[Foundation Funding for Climate Change Mitigation: Europe Spotlight](#)

ClimateWorks Foundation & European Foundation Centre

[Funding Trends 2021: Climate Change Mitigation Philanthropy](#)

ClimateWorks Foundation

[The State of American Philanthropy: Giving for Climate Change and Clean Energy](#)

Inside Philanthropy

Climate solutions from frontline communities

[Climate Advocacy Lab: Resources](#)

The resources page of this website aggregates a variety of materials, including articles about successful grassroots campaigns for environmental and climate justice.

[Soil to Sky: Climate Solutions That Work](#)

In this report, the CLIMA Fund presents findings on how vital grassroots solutions are to the climate movement. The report makes a case for why funders should include grassroots solutions in their portfolios and offers guidance on how funders can provide effective support to grassroots climate solutions.

[The Solutions Project](#)

The Solutions Project website highlights the stories of frontline communities in the U.S. and the ways they are tackling the climate crisis in their communities.

2 Common barriers to incorporating climate justice in grantmaking portfolios

Learn more about false solutions

[False Solutions to Climate Change](#)

Produced by the Just Transition Alliance, this one-page document provides an overview of eight false solutions.

[Hoodwinked in the Hothouse \(third edition\)](#)

Authored by veteran organizers and movement leaders, this guide presents a concise compendium of false solutions and offers strategies for a more just, inclusive, and principled approach to climate solutions.

The Climate Crisis: When Doing Good Is Actually Doing Harm

This infographic, created by the CLIMA Fund, describes what funding for false promises looks like, while also lifting up alternate, community-based climate solutions.

Learn more about philanthropic practices perpetuating inequity

Climate Justice Funders Pledge

Although BIPOC-led climate and environmental organizations are making significant contributions to the climate justice movement, they receive a small amount of philanthropic resources. The Donors of Color Network calls on foundations to award at least 30% of their funding to these groups and to do so in a transparent manner.

Philanthropy's Attempts to Remain Above the Fray Are Slowing Progress on Climate Change—Inside Philanthropy, (2021)

This blog piece asserts that philanthropy's historical reluctance to engage in ideological and political confrontations has blocked progress and inclusivity in the climate movement.

3 How foundations are integrating climate justice into their work

Learn more about centering values in climate grantmaking

Centering Climate Giving in Frontline Communities—Libra Foundation (2021)

In this blog post, the Libra Foundation shares how a shift toward centering solutions by frontline communities led to an increase in its multiyear, unrestricted funding to community-based, women-, and BIPOC-led groups.

Human Rights Grantmaking Principles (2022)

Developed by Ariadne, Gender Funders CoLab, and the Human Rights Funders Network, this resource lays out the undergirding principles of human rights.

Money Talks. Here's What We Want it to Say—Barr Foundation (2021)

This blog post highlights five action steps the Barr Foundation is taking to shift whom they support and how they operate to better align with their values around racial equity.

Learn more about using a justice lens

Systems, Not Just Symptoms: Bringing a Justice Frame to Climate Philanthropy and Finance—Climate and Land Use Alliance (2021)

This report advocates for centering the systemic root causes of the climate crisis—white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism—while also adapting to its symptoms. This piece also presents suggestions for how foundations can better align their funding strategies with this perspective on the climate crisis and grassroots solutions.

Time to Act: How Philanthropy Must Address the Climate Crisis—FSG (2021)

This report compiles research insights from private foundations, nonprofits, grassroots organizations, and others to address how foundations can support

frontline climate crisis actors more effectively. FSG offers recommendations for funders who wish to become climate funders, regardless of whether they have previous experience in climate grantmaking or investing.

Learn more about breaking down issue-area silos

[Achieving a Climate for Health: Philanthropy to Promote Health and Justice through the Challenges of Climate Change—Health & Environmental Funders Network \(2015\)](#)

This report orients funders to issues at the intersection of climate change and health and highlights opportunities for action.

[Climate Justice-Just Transition Donor Collaborative Compendium](#)

This open-source, participatory resource maps funding/regranting organizations, particularly those working in the Global South, engaged in climate justice-just transition efforts. The compendium includes additional resources, including a list of campaigns, an annotated bibliography, and toolkit for donors.

[From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition](#)

This guide describes what a just transition from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy looks like.

[Funding the Future: How the Climate Crisis Intersects with Your Giving—Active Philanthropy \(2020\)](#)

This guide demonstrates how funders from any sector can incorporate climate work into their portfolio. The guide focuses on five key issues—just and democratic societies, public health, disadvantaged groups, education, and nature conservation.

[Grounding in Just Transition Toolkit—Climate Justice Alliance \(2022\)](#)

Designed for frontline communities, this three-part curriculum informs funders about how to support a just transition.

Learn more about intersectionality

[Climate Change, Environmental Activism, and Disability \(2022\)](#)

This article in *Stanford Social Innovation Review* describes how efforts to address the climate crisis must include people with disabilities.

[Climate Justice and Women's Rights: A Guide to Supporting Grassroots Women's Actions—Global Greengrants Fund \(2015\)](#)

This guide presents key takeaways from the 2014 Summit on Women and Climate, which sought to foster relationships between environmental and women's funders.

[Learning from Youth-Led Climate Action—Climate Justice Resilience Fund \(2021\)](#)

This blog outlines how young people are engaging in climate action and how funders can better support their work.

[Women's Participation: An Enabler of Climate Justice—Mary Robinson Foundation \(2015\)](#)

This report describes why it is critical to engage women in climate justice and lifts up case studies from El Salvador, Chile, and Vietnam.

[Blog Series: Putting Justice at the Heart of Climate Action](#)

This series of blog posts describes GAGGA partners' work at the intersection of gender, nationality, ethnicity, ability, and other identities.

Learn more about foundation investments

Confluence Philanthropy's [Climate Solutions Collaborative](#) is a community of investors committed to emissions reduction by deploying private and philanthropic capital toward a low-carbon future.

The [Divest-Invest Philanthropy](#) coalition encourages funders to divest from all fossil fuels and invest at least 5% of their portfolios in climate solutions. Currently, there are nearly 200 foundations and family funds with assets totaling more than \$125 billion participating.

4 The critical role of intermediaries

Learn more about working through intermediaries

[How Funding Intermediaries Fuels Social Change—Libra Foundation \(2021\)](#)

This blog post explains the importance of funding community-accountable intermediaries, especially since institutional philanthropy can be disconnected from frontline and marginalized groups' lived experiences. The post outlines why the Libra Foundation funds intermediaries and the criteria they use to ensure that intermediaries align with their goals.

[Why Fund Intermediaries?—CLIMA Fund](#)

Drawing upon its own experience in forming long relationships with frontline activists and quickly moving money to grassroots groups, this piece makes the case for why funding intermediaries provides immediate and critical support to grassroots movements.

[Protesta Y Propuesta: Lessons from Just Transformation, Ecological Justice, and the Fight for Self-Determination in Puerto Rico—Grassroots International \(2020\)](#)

This report uplifts the stories of Puerto Rican social movements that have engaged in community-centered rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Maria, gathered through a learning exchange hosted by Grassroots International. Through these stories, the report offers recommendations to foundations and investors who are seeking to address climate and humanitarian crises across the globe.

Learn more about fostering community accountability

[Community Voices Need to be Part of the Climate Crisis Response—Alliance Magazine \(2021\)](#)

This article encourages climate funders to center community voices and lived experience by building relationships with grassroots and global health leaders. The piece highlights the numerous opportunities for funders to connect with grassroots initiatives that are addressing impacts of the climate crisis on the ground.

Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking
This GrantCraft guide describes the principles of participatory grantmaking and offers examples for implementing such models.

How Philanthropy Can Meet the Moment: The Vital Importance of Trust—NonProfit Quarterly (2020)

In this piece, Shamar Bibbins explains how systemic racism has enabled lack of trust and change within climate funding. This disparity has occurred even though frontline, BIPOC-led groups have been on the forefront of transformative climate work, embodying a multi-issue approach. Bibbins calls on funders to rebuild trust with frontline leaders and use intermediary funds to invest in them.

Endnotes

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⁴Mease, L., and Lemma, S. (2021). *Systems, Not Just Symptoms: Bringing a Justice Frame to Climate Philanthropy and Finance*. Climate and Land Use Alliance. Hereafter cited as Mease and Lemma (2021).

⁵NASA (August 24, 2021). “Overview: Weather, Global Warming, and climate change.” *NASA—Global Climate Change*. Accessed from <https://climate.nasa.gov/resources/global-warming-vs-climate-change>

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⁸For funders who wish to identify how climate change is operating in particular regions of the world, the International Panel on Climate Change operates an [interactive atlas](#) that allows users to hone in on regions of interest and get a sense of both current and projected impacts of the climate crisis.

⁹Mease and Lemma (2021).

¹⁰Menon, Balasubramania, Fedirko, Gupta, Yazaki, Fakir, Lerda, and Shahyd. (2021).

¹¹Kavate, M., and Harris, K. (2021). “The State of American Philanthropy: Giving for Climate Change & Clean Energy.” *Inside Philanthropy*.

¹²Ruffalo, M., & Ghirmatzion, R. (July 9, 2020). “To Solve the Twin Problems of Racial Injustice and Climate Change, We Need to Stop Parachuting in ‘Experts.’” *TIME*. Accessed from <https://time.com/5864255/mark-ruffalo-rahwa-ghirmatzion-climate-change-racial-injustice>

¹³Elliott, M., Berger, M., and Bidad, H. (2019). *Soil to Sky: Climate Solutions That Work*. CLIMA Fund. Accessed from https://greenfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Soil-to-Sky_4MB.pdf

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¹⁵Williams, T. (2021). “Philanthropy’s Attempts to Remain Above the Fray are Slowing Progress on Climate Change.” *Inside Philanthropy*.

¹⁶PEAK Grantmaking (March 4, 2022). *Strategies for aligning practices and values*. PEAK Grantmaking. Accessed from <https://www.peakgrantmaking.org/resource/strategies-for-aligning-practices-and-values>

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²²Gibbons, E., Wolff, J., and Vaughn, W. (2022). *Climate Resilience for Health Care and Communities: Strategies and Case Studies*. Accessed from <https://noharm-uscanada.org/sites/default/files/documents-files/7024/Climate-Resilience-for-Health-Care-and-Communities-Strategies-and-Case-Studies.pdf>.

²³The GAGGA Alliance includes the following organizations: Fondo Centramericano de Mujeres; Fondo Semillas; Fondo ELAS; Fondo Aptaphi Jopueti; Fondo de Mujeres del Sur; Fondo de Acción Urgente—América Latina y el Caribe; Fondo Tierra Viva; FASOL; Fondo Socioambiental CASA; Fondo Socioambiental Semillas; Urgent Action Fund—Africa; Women’s Fund Tanzania; Global Greengrants Fund; Tindzila Fund; Women’s Fund Fiji; Women’s Fund Georgia; Women’s Fund Asia; TEWA—Nepalese Women’s Fund; MONES—Mongolian Women’s Fund; Keystone Foundation; NTFP-EP; Mama Cash; FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund; FIMI—Indigenous Women’s Fund.

²⁴Ford Foundation (October 18, 2021). “Ford Foundation announces plan to end investments in fossil fuels.” Accessed from <https://www.fordfoundation.org/news-and-stories/news-and-press/news/ford-foundation-announces-plan-to-end-investments-in-fossil-fuels>

²⁵Kavate, M. (May 18, 2021). “A new initiative places grantmaking power in Environment Field Leaders’ Hands.” *Inside Philanthropy*. Accessed from <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2021/3/19/to-build-the-environmental-movement-a-new-initiative-places-grantmaking-in-field-leaders-hands>

²⁶Disparities in media coverage have been identified by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, the Hewlett Foundation-commissioned Camber Report, and The Solutions Project’s own independent media tracker.

²⁷Walton, G. (December 6, 2021). “To Do Their Jobs Effectively, Nonprofit Grassroots Leaders Need Health and Wellness Support.” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. Accessed from https://www.philanthropy.com/article/to-do-their-jobs-effectively-nonprofit-grassroots-leaders-need-health-and-wellness-support?cid=gen_sign_in

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