

A Philanthropy at Its Best® Report

CULTIVATING THE GRASSROOTS

A Winning Approach for Environment and Climate Funders

By Sarah Hansen

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Executive Summary

The pace of social change is quickening in the United States and across the world. From a historic presidential election in 2008 to the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, long-standing barriers to justice and equality are being challenged in every corner of the globe. Unfortunately, the environmental movement is not keeping up. New environmental initiatives have been stalled and attacked while existing regulations have been rolled back and undermined. At a time when the peril to our planet and the imperative of change should drive unyielding forward momentum, it often seems as if the environmental cause has been pushed back to the starting line.

The goal of this report is to help environment and climate funders become effective resources of a strong and successful movement for change. **This report argues that we can secure more environmental wins by decreasing reliance on top-down funding strategies and increasing funding for grassroots communities that are directly impacted by environmental harms and have the passion and perseverance to mobilize and demand change.**

History supports this approach. From women's suffrage to the civil rights movement to early environmental wins, grassroots organizing has clearly been a vital lever of victory. Campaigns against dirty energy as well as, notably, the success of grassroots campaigns *against* environmental regulations show the power and impact of community-driven change. It's not merely that grassroots organizing wins change at the local level but, in case after case, builds the political pressure and climate for national change as well. Moreover, testing a given agenda at the local level is a practical threshold assessment to determine whether a campaign can

resonate more widely, building from the ground up to create broad public demand for change.

The case for supporting grassroots environmental efforts is especially strong. Grassroots organizing is particularly powerful where social, economic and environmental ills overlap, as is all too common in lower-income communities and communities of color. By engaging with the organizations that serve these communities and nurturing the growth of their leaders, we not only are investing in a healthy planet and people now, but also building a movement that reflects the future demographic majority of America.

This funding strategy will require a dramatic shift in our philanthropy. In 2009, environmental organizations with budgets of more than \$5 million received half of all contributions and grants made in the sector, despite comprising just 2 percent of environmental public charities. **From 2007-2009, only 15 percent of environmental grant dollars were classified as benefitting marginalized communities, and only 11 percent were classified as advancing "social justice" strategies, a proxy for policy advocacy and community organizing that works toward structural change on behalf of those who are the least well off politically, economically and socially.** In the same time period, grant dollars donated by funders who committed more than 25 percent of their total dollars to the environment were three times less likely to be classified as benefitting marginalized groups than the grant dollars given by environmental funders in general. In short, environmental funders are expending tremendous resources, yet spending far too little on high-impact, cost-effective grassroots organizing.

The good news is there are many effective, powerful organizations on the ground,

advancing a pro-environment agenda every day. But they are under-resourced and under-utilized in our overall advocacy infrastructure. As environment and climate harms build up, the number of communities ripe for organizing also continues to grow. Around the globe, there is a constituency for environmental change, one that can expand and mobilize at a massive scale if we fund the infrastructure needed to do so.

This report is written for funders working on the full range of environmental change – from conservation to environmental health, green jobs to climate science, environmental justice to global sustainability. It shows that success will require grantmakers who:

- Provide at least 20 percent of grant dollars explicitly to benefit communities of the future.
- Invest at least 25 percent of grant dollars in grassroots advocacy, organizing and civic engagement.
- Build supportive infrastructure.
- Take the long view, preparing for tipping points.

Filled with case studies and examples that illustrate the impact of funding grassroots organizing for environmental change, this report provides concrete recommendations on how funders can increase their engagement with this vast potential constituency. Together, we can and must support and expand motivated, grassroots communities that, by speaking out and taking collective action, can help advance the bold changes we all desire.

I. A Call to Opportunity

If you are reading this report, you are likely among those advocates and activists clamoring for positive change to heal our ailing natural world. And, as this report is targeted at individual donors and institutional foundations, you may have some wherewithal to effect such change. The goal of this report is to help you channel your resources to organizations that are best equipped to transform your financial support into a healthier planet, backed by a resilient community of people committed to protecting it. Grassroots organizing has been a central strategy of almost every major social and economic transformation in world history. Why, then, is the environmental funding community not supporting grassroots organizing?

A. THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

Social movements are at once the symptoms and the instruments of progress.

—Walter Lippmann

The recent struggle to pass cap and trade legislation is a classic example of environmental advocates' stymied attempts at winning change, and shows how such issues do not gain traction if policy strategies are not directly linked to and organized around self-interest and grounded in broad-based support of on-the-ground constituencies.

Cap and trade ideas began in efforts to regulate national air pollution in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Acid Rain Program used a cap and trade structure to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions in the 1990s. As it has in other situations, the financial industry sought to capitalize on these schemes for its own benefit. In 1993, the Enron Corporation pro-

posed a system through which companies would pay for and trade the right to emit carbon dioxide.¹ Then, in 2008, Goldman Sachs spent \$3.5 million to lobby Congress on climate issues, including an aggressive push for cap and trade proposals. Its focus was on creating new markets for carbon.

According to polls, by a two-to-one margin, Americans would rather tax all carbon emissions than create a cap and trade system.² Communities most directly impacted by dirty energy in particular oppose cap and trade legislation, given the likely impact of carbon offsets on their already-overly polluted neighborhoods – concentrating pollution next to their homes. Yet, large national environmental organizations and leading politicians in Washington continued to promote cap and trade as the hallmark of environmental reform. Advocates and funders supporting this agenda believed this was a high risk/high return strategy. They believed that it was absolutely critical to the future of our planet to limit carbon emissions as soon as possible, and their politi-



CBE organizer Alicia Rivera at an action outside the California EPA Building in Sacramento. CBE joined with the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (CRPE) in bringing a couple of hundred California residents to a hearing of the California Air Resources Board on AB 32, California's landmark 2006 climate change solutions legislation. Image courtesy of Communities for a Better Environment.

cal calculations indicated that cap and trade was the most likely policy vehicle to make that happen. They might have believed that local struggles would be more successful once federal legislation passed. It was not completely unreasonable to suspect they might have succeeded.

However, Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, observes that environmental advocates “did little to nothing substantial (or at least effective) to inform, educate or sell cap and trade to the American people.”³ It is a complicated idea especially hard to communicate when other Wall Street markets are swirling with corruption and controversy.

Proponents failed to sell the concept – or did not even try. Says Leiserowitz: “I think they decided to pursue a primarily inside-the-Beltway legislative strategy and got burned.” The national advocacy groups lacked sufficient power on their own to push the legisla-

tion through, especially when many grassroots activists, if they understood cap and trade, did not support it. Many communities already were dealing with extensive air pollution and related health problems from dirty power plants and were rightly concerned about the lack of public health protections built into most cap and trade plans. Where would the “trades” allowing dirtier operations go? Not to mention several business model-based studies that raise profound questions about the efficacy of market strategies to regulate carbon.⁴

Had environmental advocates engaged with grassroots communities up front, those concerns and legitimate critiques would have been paramount in the discussion or might have been sufficiently convincing, perhaps leading to another more viable policy approach entirely. **In other words, grassroots organizing is not only a strategy for building public pressure on an issue, but also can determine whether public will exists in the first place.**

Environment and climate funders tend to favor influencing national policy directly – whether because, in their personal experience, change has always been top-down or because, faced with the urgency of our warming planet, they believe top-down approaches are the most expedient option.⁵ Perhaps this approach has its appeal because of current philanthropic trends whereby the boards and CEOs of large foundations desire big impact, or maybe, especially for large funders, it’s easier to make grants to a small number of top-down institutions than many smaller grants to smaller grassroots organizations or even funding intermediaries that regrant smaller amounts.

Whatever the reason, the tendency toward funding large, national, top-down environmental organizations carries with it the assumption that if we assemble and concentrate resources, we can move the needle. Sometimes it works, but more often than not, the power of anti-environment campaign donors with immense financial resources, combined with the disinclination of policymakers to rupture the status quo, means that

Environmental Grantmaking: The Landscape

According to the Foundation Center, a national sample of 1,384 larger grantmakers (including 800 of the nation’s largest grantmakers by total giving) gave \$1.4 billion to environmental causes in 2009.⁶

Environment grants claimed the sixth-largest share (6.3 percent) of total foundation dollars in 2009 – following education (23.3 percent), health (22.6 percent), human services (13.1 percent), public affairs/society benefit (11.8 percent), and arts and culture (10.5 percent).⁷

Grantmakers made at least \$10 billion in grants to environmental causes from 2000 through 2009,⁸ funding primarily top-down strategies.

Yet, we have not experienced significant policy changes at the federal level in the United States since the 1980s remotely commensurate with the level of funding invested toward these ends. **From 1989 to 2009, among all environmental public charities, environmental organizations with budgets higher than \$5 million consistently received 40-50 percent of the contributions, gifts and grants, and 50-60 percent of revenue.**⁹

an anti-environmental agenda dominates.

Significant change usually comes about when a critical mass of ordinary people engages directly with decision-makers, voices its concerns and pushes for changes that elites would not otherwise have made.

“We’re not going to make big changes in climate as long as climate is seen solely as an environmental issue,” says Ed Miller, environment program manager of the Joyce Foundation. Especially at a time when government is under attack for infringing on individual liberties, it is all the more essential to link our agenda explicitly with the ways in which it helps people and communities and to invest in base-building organizations that make that link.

As the adage goes, you can change policy by whispering in the king’s ear, but someone might whisper differently tomorrow, and the king might change his mind. A vocal, organized, sustained grassroots base is vital to achieving sustained change.

B. WE HAVE TO CHANGE TO MAKE CHANGE

Curiosity, obsession and dogged endurance, combined with self-criticism, have brought me to my ideas.

—Albert Einstein

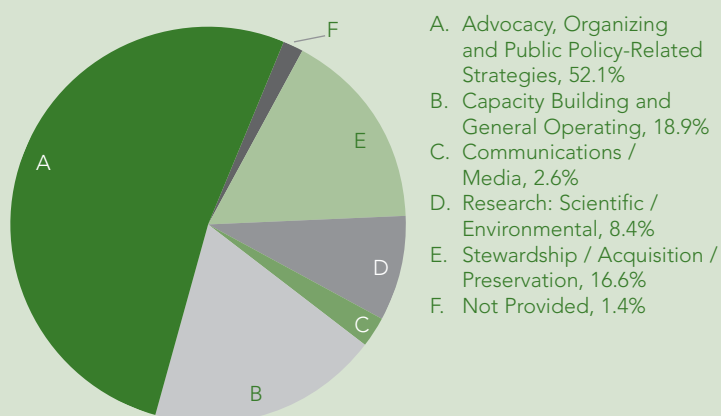
The problem is not what environmental advocates and funders have done – but what we have *not* done.

Most environmental activists and funders share a gnawing sense that something has to change. Few environmental activists would argue that we have done what is needed to respond to environmental degradation. It’s not that we’re not trying. But we are repeatedly banging our collective head against walls of politics and public opinion we thought we tore down 30 years ago. We have achieved some important victories. Why are we not achieving transformative wins to address environmental problems and climate change and to advance holistic environmental solutions that serve people and the planet?

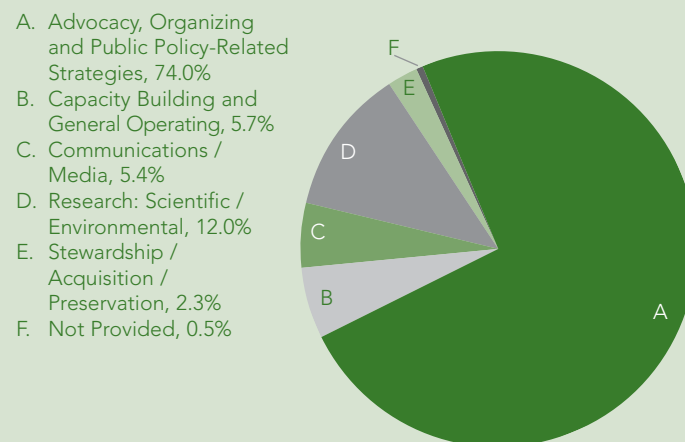
Advocacy and Organizing Giving by EGA Members

Data from the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA) reveal significant funding of advocacy, organizing, movement-building, education and youth organizing and public policy-related strategies. **In a survey of 196 EGA member foundations, more than half of respondents’ environmental grant dollars and nearly three-quarters of climate dollars went to these strategies in 2009.**

Distribution of Environmental Grants Awarded by EGA Members Based on EGA Strategies, Circa 2009



Distribution of Environmental Grants Awarded by EGA Members Based on EGA Strategies for Climate and Atmosphere, Circa 2009



Source: Environmental Grantmakers Association, *Tracking the Field Report*.

Recent data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics document that funding resources generally go to larger, national organizations, even while the number of new grassroots environmental groups has grown significantly.

According to the Internal Revenue Service, there were 28,692 environmental public charities in 2011, reporting nearly \$7.5 billion in total revenue and \$21 billion in assets.¹⁰

In 2009, those organizations with budgets of more than \$5 million made up just 2 per-

cent of environmental public charities, but they received half of all contributions and grants made in the field.¹¹ Similarly in 2009, nonprofits in just four states – California, New York, Virginia and Massachusetts – and the District of Columbia accounted for 48 percent of contributions, gifts and grants to environmental groups.¹² These five areas are home to a quarter of environmental groups and earn nearly half of the environmental sector’s total revenue. That’s not to say these large nonprofits are not doing worthwhile

Environmental Funding: Who Benefits and How?

Using screens developed by the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA), NCRP developed custom datasets from the Foundation Center’s grants sample database, which includes detailed annual grants information on more than 1,300 of the largest foundations in the United States (1,339 in 2007; 1,490 in 2008; and 1,384 in 2009). The database includes all grants of \$10,000 or more awarded to organizations by these larger foundations.

All NCRP data are based on a three-year average (grantmakers appearing in each of the 2007-2009 samples), which avoids the influence of potential outliers, such as a large grant made only in one year that could influence the data. The resulting sample was a matched set of 880 largest foundations (foundations that appear in all three annual samples), of which 701 grantmakers (80 percent) made at least one grant on average to the environment.

Over the time period analyzed, these 701 grantmakers collectively gave an average of \$18 billion, including \$1.6 billion for the environment (9 percent of total grantmaking).

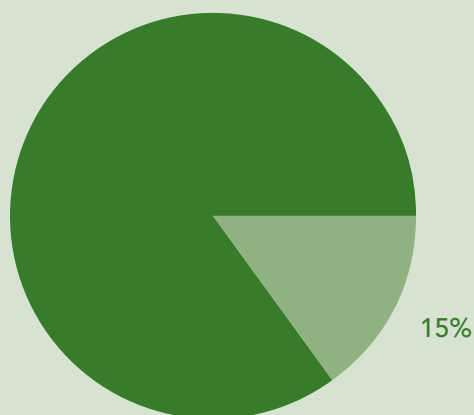
Grants then were analyzed by intended beneficiary to determine the proportion that were classified as intending to benefit one or more of 11 “marginalized” or “underserved”

populations, including but not limited to lower-income communities and communities of color.¹⁵

Collectively, **only 15 percent of environmental grant dollars were classified as benefiting one of the 11 marginalized populations included in NCRP’s analysis.**

A report from the Foundation Center and the Environmental Grantmakers Association discovered a similar trend examining the reported beneficiaries of environmental grants in 2007. Among grantmakers in that sample, 18 percent of environmental grant dollars were intended to benefit the economically disadvantaged, and 3 percent of grant

Percentage of Environmental Grant Dollars Classified as Benefitting Marginalized Communities



work or should not be receiving *any* funding but, rather, we should question why grassroots organizing groups are not receiving more grantmaking support.

The federal climate change legislation example above and others throughout this report prove the ineffectiveness of directing significant funding to national advocacy organizations while under-resourcing the grassroots base-building capacity without which national organizations lack muscle and credibility.

Bradford Plumer, associate editor of *The New Republic*, observed, “**Green groups do have vast resources at their disposal that they don’t seem to be using effectively.**”¹³

As these data show, a majority of foundation dollars are going to larger, well-resourced organizations, suggesting a preference for a top-down strategy. Just as we know that environmental problems disproportionately impact lower-income communities and communities of color,¹⁴ case studies in this report and elsewhere show that organizing in these

dollars were intended to benefit ethnic or racial minorities. Grants may benefit one or more of the populations indicated, including the general public. The authors noted that “the vast majority (87.1 percent) of environmental grants awarded in 2007 were either intended to benefit the general public or had no specified beneficiary.”¹⁶

NCRP further analyzed the 701 grantmakers using the Foundation Center’s “social justice” screen to determine, as closely as possible, which environmental grants had policy or systemic change as a goal and, as such, likely included funds for advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement. The

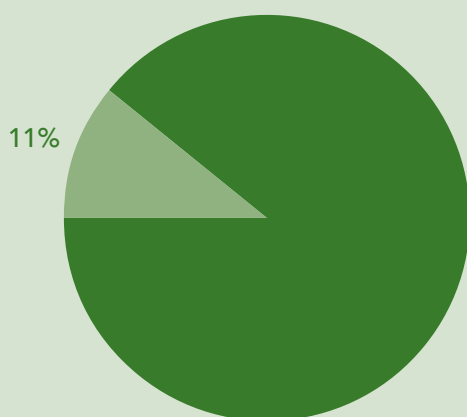
Foundation Center defines “social justice philanthropy” as “the granting of philanthropic contributions to nonprofit organizations based in the United States and other countries that work for structural change in order to increase the opportunity of those who are the least well off politically, economically, and socially.”¹⁷

Only 11 percent of environmental grant dollars were reported as advancing social justice.

In fact, there is a seemingly contradictory correlation: analysis shows the greater a funder’s commitment to the environment, the less likely it is to prioritize marginalized communities or advance social justice in its environmental grantmaking. For instance, grant dollars donated by funders that committed more than 25 percent of their total dollars to the environment were three times less likely to be classified as benefitting marginalized groups than the grant dollars given by environmental funders in general.

If you want to learn more about your own foundation’s data and your institution is part of the Foundation Center database, please email research@ncrp.org.

Percentage of Environmental Grant Dollars Classified as Advancing Social Justice



Source: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, analysis of custom Foundation Center datasets, 2011.

communities strategically advances the broader change agenda that affects us all. There is a strategic opportunity to fund communities affected by environmental ills. By ensuring that these communities are explicitly identified as the beneficiaries of our philanthropy, we would boost our collective impact while simultaneously contributing to the public good. Not only would we be solving environmental hazards in these communities, we would be building powerful constituencies to demand change nationwide as well as building social capital.

Systemic problems require systemic solutions.

This report asks us to examine how we can best effect change on a complicated environmental, political and economic system. The environmentally devastating status quo is caused by a tangle of backward policies, perverse economic incentives to pollute and unsupportive public opinion and voting patterns. It will take more than a single, national advocacy strategy to untie this complex

knot. **If we lean too heavily on one strategy to advance our environmental goals, we are diminishing our potential to win the fight.**

Through “systems thinking,” we can understand how a particular dynamic, norm or structure is connected to an entire, interdependent system of other dynamics, norms and institutions.¹⁸ Although such thinking might seem natural to those of us who are intimate with the complexities of the natural world, in actual practice, systems thinking is underused. Put differently, ignoring the interconnectedness of any system’s constituent parts will inevitably lead to a diminished impact. Race, gender, class and other identity markers work to constrain and keep communities and individuals from equality of opportunity.

We cannot view the issue of poverty in isolation if we want to have impact; we must view it alongside all the other factors that influence the prevalence of that poverty. We need a holistic approach to solve the complex problems such as those our environment and climate face today.

A Case Study in Community Organizing

by Kolu Zigbi, Program Officer for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems, Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation

Systems change in agriculture isn’t typically an alluring process, though the outcomes, when they reach our plates, often are enticing. For example, shoppers purchasing pea tendrils and other delicacies from Hmong farmers at a farmers’ market in Massachusetts may be falling in love with a new delicacy. What they don’t know – and shouldn’t really need to know – is the back story of policy development, organizing and advocacy that allowed the pea tendrils to be grown and reach their market. However, funders do need to know that story. They need to understand how grassroots organizing and national policy advocacy combine to create positive change.

In this case, the pea tendrils were the outcome of relationships between the group of

Hmong farmers, a local immigrant farmer organization called Flats Mentor Farm and a decades-old national advocacy coalition that the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation has supported for many years, the Rural Coalition (RC). RC is accountable to a membership of diverse rural grassroots organizations whose needs and interests drive its advocacy agenda. It listens to its members’ needs and then works with them to develop new policies and advocate for their implementation.

That’s what happened with the pea tendrils. Small farmers observed that the Natural Resource Conservation Service had money for on-farm innovations but would not fund what the immigrant farmers wanted most – hoop houses to extend their growing season. RC

Problems in our environment stem from a long chain of complicated reactions and overlapping factors. We cannot divorce the problems of fisheries from problems facing fishermen. We cannot separate concerns about factory pollution from concerns about high unemployment in factory towns, especially when more than 8 in 10 Americans live in a metropolitan area.¹⁹ We cannot separate the increase in poverty and decline in household income from the desire of businesses to manufacture goods in China and pollute the oceans shipping them to sell to struggling consumers at rock-bottom prices. These issues are all linked and, perhaps more importantly, they are linked in the minds of everyday Americans. Conceptually and practically, science is never isolated from culture, society and the economy.²⁰

The State of Oregon's recent adoption of the most stringent water quality standards in the nation is a testament to the power of an integrative approach to environmental problems. Under the Clean Water Act, states are responsible for setting their own water quali-

We cannot view the issue of poverty in isolation if we want to have impact; we must view it alongside all the other factors that influence the prevalence of that poverty.

ty standards, subject to the approval of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). States derive their standards, in part, by determining how much fish people eat and then regulating the concentration of pollutants in their waterways so that people can safely consume that amount of fish. State fish consumption rates must be at least as high as EPA's national baseline rate of 17.5 grams per day (roughly enough to top a cracker). EPA has acknowledged for years that its baseline standard is not sufficient to protect certain consumers, such as subsistence fishermen. However, states have

started a letter writing campaign, mobilized members to attend listening sessions and seek support for this practice in the Farm Bill and by the USDA, and engaged in "insider organizing." This resulted in the agency agreeing to fund a pilot study to determine whether hoop houses are linked to environmental conservation by reducing the amount of water and other inputs needed to grow vegetables.

Unsurprisingly, once the pilot was created, out of the many groups that applied to receive funding, the winner was Flats Mentor Farm. The group's relationship with RC had helped develop its capacity so that it was able to steward the application process forward with farmers who were "shovel ready." What's beautiful about this story is that immi-

grant farmers piloted the project, and they continue to see the benefits, with their production in the high tunnels surviving a severe flood in the wake of this summer's hurricanes that destroyed the rest of their production. However, once USDA evaluates high tunnels as successful, the long-term result will be that all farmers, whether fifth generation or first generation, will be eligible to take part. Already, many more farmers who have not utilized USDA ever or in recent years, are coming back for this and other services. This story demonstrates the power of true systems approaches – empowering those who remain at the margins results in broad benefits for all in the long term.

almost uniformly adopted EPA's default fish consumption rate in the interest of retaining businesses that might relocate to take advantage of more relaxed water quality standards in another state.

This regulatory scheme created a serious environmental justice problem among members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Oregon's water quality standards did not permit Umatilla Indians to safely subsist on fish, so the tribes helped orchestrate a fish consumption survey and fish contamination study establishing that tribal members face a disproportionate cancer risk based on the amount of fish they eat. This information was so influential on the EPA that the agency ultimately rejected its own baseline fish consumption rate when Oregon submitted it for approval. A cooperative effort by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Umatilla tribes and the EPA to determine a fish consumption rate that was more protective of Native Americans followed, and the EPA ultimately approved water quality standards based on a fish consumption rate of 175 g/day. The State of

Washington now is in the process of revising its standards, and Native American fish consumption rates are again driving the discussion. Both of these states are going to have healthier people and cleaner water because Indian people put a face on a pernicious environmental problem.

For too long, national environmental advocates and scientists have been hanging pleas for environmental change on the apolitical hook of rational appeals, expecting decision makers to do the right thing when confronted with powerful evidence. Yet, in many ways, complex political systems are like the human body. No matter how smart and articulate our agenda, our pleas for change will continue to be ignored if we lack the power to back them up. Even if we fund in single, focused-issue areas, we can benefit from a broader analysis of the systemic forces behind environmental crises and understanding how any one solution complements or contradicts others. We must make our demands for change impossible to ignore. That means working at every level of the system to achieve change, including the grassroots.



II. The Case for Funding Grassroots Organizing

The most persuasive reason for funding grassroots organizing as a strategy to achieve environmental victories in public policy and public opinion is quite simple: mobilized and organized communities can challenge power and create lasting change with ripple effects that benefit us all.

A. CHANGE CONSISTENTLY GROWS FROM THE GROUND UP

A body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.

—Mohandas K. Gandhi

The American environmental movement by no means began as a grassroots enterprise. At the start of the 20th century, conservationism was led by elites like President Theodore Roosevelt and groups like the Boone and Crockett Club – “American hunting riflemen” drawn from the top ranks of politics, business and the military. Their concern was not industrial waste poisoning crops or pollution sickening new immigrants in tenement housing. The early environmentalists primarily wanted to conserve nature for their recreational enjoyment.

In the 1960s, the movement changed. Through her groundbreaking book, *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson showed everyday Americans how environmental degradation was threatening their health and way of life. Americans who had no real stake in conservation of nature for hunting and horseback riding came to understand how they were directly affected by pollution and toxics. Carson, a biologist by training, was concerned early on with the dangerous effects of

pesticides. When, in 1958, she read a letter from a friend about the spontaneous death of flocks of birds resulting from aerial DDT spraying, Carson launched the research that would lead to *Silent Spring*. Carson spoke to the concerns of tenement residents and workers’ rights activists who had long been concerned with urban and industrial pollution but channeled their critiques into housing and workplace reforms, not environmentalism. Carson paved the way for local communities across the United States to advocate for environmental health.

Around the same time, several high profile events raised awareness among ordinary Americans of the extraordinary environmental risks facing their families and communities. For example, in 1969, the Cuyahoga River in Ohio caught fire. The intensely polluted river had caught fire before, but this time the blaze was worse and ignited a national debate. As *Time* magazine wrote, “Some river! Chocolate-brown, oily, bubbling with subsurface gases, it oozes rather than flows.”

In 1970, the first Earth Day was organized with the goal of sparking a national grassroots movement. Founder Gaylord Nelson wrote, “I was satisfied that if we could tap into the environmental concerns of the general public and infuse the student anti-war energy into the environmental cause, we could generate a demonstration that would force this issue onto the political agenda.” On the first Earth Day, 10,000 schools and 2,000 colleges organized special classes about environmental issues. In Pittsburgh, community-based organizations – derided as the “breathers’ lobby” by the *Wall Street Journal* – marched through downtown wearing gas masks and carrying a coffin to demonstrate against the poor quality of the city’s air.

In 1978, in the community around Love Canal in upstate New York, mothers and families organized to protest widespread health problems caused by 21,000 tons of chemical waste buried under their town's public schools. According to the leading Love Canal organizer, Lois Gibbs, "Our struggle, like the struggles that had come before, changed public opinion."

The seeming increase in grassroots advocacy and growing public awareness of the era led to strong environmental laws like the Wilderness Act (1965), the Clean Air Act (1967), the Occupational Safety and Health Act (1970), the Clean Water Act (1973) and the Superfund Act (1980).²¹ Awareness of the power of organizing to effect such changes, combined with the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation especially on lower-income communities of color, drove the emergence of the modern environmental justice movement that informs the critiques and ideas contained in this report.

Throughout the environmental movement, grassroots organizing often has been the linchpin for bringing an important issue to the nation's attention. For instance, the pros and cons of nuclear weapons had been debated before the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. Scientists were concerned about the potential for environmental and human catastrophe. The bombing of Hiroshima raised those issues for American citizens and people around the world, but most advocacy to ban nuclear weapons came from the scientific and academic communities.

Then, in 1961, spawned by increased weapons testing on U.S. soil, a grassroots organization called Women Strike For Peace organized 50,000 women to march in 60 cities across the country demonstrating

against nuclear weapons. As a direct result, two years later the United States and the Soviet Union signed a nuclear test-ban treaty.²² According to historian Lawrence S. Wittner, grassroots anti-nuclear organizing led directly to other policy shifts throughout the 1950s and 60s.²³ In its September 1975 issue, *Forbes* magazine stated, "The anti-nuclear coalition has been remarkably successful ... [and] has certainly slowed the expansion of nuclear power."²⁴ The recent very human tragedy at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant in March 2011 and the resulting activism against nuclear power is once again sparking this important public debate.

Throughout history, across issues, the greatest political, economic and social changes have come about when people join together to demand a better future. Grassroots energy made the difference in the suffrage movement when, together, ordinary women fought for the right to vote, and their work began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. Although a few individual, wealthy white women were allowed to vote, even in colonial times, and Jeanette Rankin was elected the first female member of Congress in 1914, women did not get the legal right to vote until grassroots voices gained momentum through the years and rose up. The National Women's Party staged the first protest outside the White House in 1917, and three years later, women won the right to vote.

Mobilized grassroots and local communities made the difference in the labor movement when ordinary working people formed unions and demanded reforms that helped not just themselves but all workers – from safety standards to minimum wage laws and more. Grassroots organizing is a means toward an end – building a coherent move-

Grassroots organizing is a means toward an end – building a coherent movement that impacts change on a larger scale. It is a vital tool in the history of social change, one that the environmental movement clearly cannot do without.

ment that impacts change on a larger scale. It is a vital tool in the history of social change, one that the environmental movement clearly cannot do without.

Grassroots activism made the difference in the Civil Rights movement when ordinary black people demanded equal rights. In 1955, the Montgomery bus boycotts began and in 1960, four black students sat down at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, N.C., and refused to leave, helping spark mass movements throughout the North and South. Base-building and mass mobilization were critical components. Four years later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law.

It was, in fact, the grassroots engagement aspect of the Civil Rights movement that influenced the environmental movement to embrace issues of justice more broadly. Similarly, significant grassroots efforts led to the last major piece of environmental policy change. In 1994, President Clinton recognized the prominence of the environmental justice movement, signing an executive order requiring federal agencies to identify and address “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects” of government programs and policies “on minority populations and low-income populations.”²⁵ President Obama reaffirmed and extended this order²⁶ and, under his administration, the Justice Department has met with grassroots organizations to investigate opportunities for litigating environmental justice claims under the authority of the Civil Rights Act. Worldwide, the growth of the international “climate justice” movement is yet another sign of this vital trend. It is in part an outgrowth of the Civil Rights-rooted environmental justice frame in the United States, as well as its intentional connections with impacted communities in other countries and the broadening global movement for social justice.

Grassroots-led movements can create broad-scale change.

The following examples from the struggle against coal plants are illustrative of the power of grassroots-led movements to affect



Image courtesy of Communities for a Better Environment.

large-scale change. In 2001, 17 proposed projects for new coal-fired power plants were on the table. Local environmental groups, understanding the need for a health-centric message, created a platform for health constituencies, brought in the local American Lung Association chapter, the respiratory health association and others. Today, a well-coordinated constellation of 40 organizations, from village associations to local Mexican-American organizations, public health groups and large national groups like Greenpeace, are focused on shutting down the two remaining Chicago coal plants, built in 1903 and 1924, through a Chicago city ordinance.²⁷

In Texas, the group People Organized in Defense of the Earth and her Resources (PODER) successfully shut down a major dirty power plant in the state. In Mingo County, West Virginia, coal-mining waste was polluting families’ drinking water wells. With the help of the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, residents organized and were provided a municipal waterline plus a legal settlement against the mining industry. Ultimately, the construction of more than 150 proposed coal-fired power plants in more than 30 states has been blocked because of the efforts of local grassroots groups – which continue to take proactive steps to address the full life cycle of coal and dirty energy – transitioning innovatively

[Recent] positive developments underscore both the power of grassroots organizing in shaping public discourse and the value of linking environmentalism to other causes.

toward a clean energy economy. Including the advocacy of local Sierra Club chapters, grassroots organizing was able to effect change. This is just one of many examples where grassroots organizing has led to broad environmental change made possible by strategic philanthropic investments.

The potential impact of grassroots organizing evident in the opposition to pro-environment goals also is instructive. In 2008, no one had heard of the modern-day “Tea Party.” By 2010, the movement was a household name and, more importantly, a force to be reckoned with in Washington, D.C. The Republican Party and its most prominent public faces now work relentlessly to gain support of the Tea Party and use its cache to support their interests. The 2010 midterm elections ushered in a crop of Tea Party-endorsed members of Congress who upset established Republicans’ rule. During the debt crisis negotiations in the summer of 2011, mainstream commentators observed that the Tea Party Caucus held the political debate “hostage.” And, regarding environmental policy, the Tea Party has vigorously and effectively opposed every promising proposal on Capitol Hill.

The New York Times reports, “Skepticism and outright denial of global warming are among the articles of faith of the Tea Party movement.”²⁸ Dick Armey, author of *Give Us Liberty: A Tea Party Manifesto*, told a congressional committee that environmentalists are “hypochondriacs” and that worrying about global warming is “pretentious.”²⁹ Tea Party activists have railed against everything from clean water regulations to efficient light bulb standards. Defending the

incandescent light bulb, conservative radio host and Tea Party icon Rush Limbaugh said, “It’s not causing global warming; it’s not causing a carbon footprint. All of this is a hoax.”³⁰ Another Tea Party group argued that the regulation of carbon emissions should be “left to God.”³¹ Sentiments like these have been echoed at local Tea Party rallies all across the United States.

As a grassroots mobilization, the Tea Party offers environmental activists two important lessons. First, the fact that conservatives have effectively mobilized communities against environmental protection/conservation suggests the power of organizing in general and the need for a pro-environment grassroots movement in particular.

Calling the Tea Party “grassroots” can be controversial. After all, major national organizations backed by major establishment political donors have fueled much of the infrastructure for Tea Party energy. But still, social movement scholars like Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson note the Tea Party authentically engages and mobilizes grassroots energy among conservatives, albeit a far smaller and less representative swath of extreme conservatives than the Tea Party projects itself as representing.³² The values of the Tea Party reflect exclusively the opinion of a small segment of the white population. It does not reflect the overall population’s views on these issues, and, as other statistics cited in this report suggest, communities of color and lower-income communities still seem to place a high value on addressing environmental and climate harms.

Through organizing and spreading its message locally, the Tea Party has influenced many other Americans. Polls show that Americans are less concerned about global warming today than they were just a few years ago.³³ And, according to Gallup, Americans now believe economic growth should take precedence over environmental protection – reversing a 25-year trend in previous opinion polls.³⁴ This downturn in opinion is particularly acute among conservatives. According to the Pew Research Center, in October 2010, 53 percent of Republicans said there is no solid evidence the earth is warming,

while only three years prior 62 percent of Republicans said they did believe in global warming.³⁵ In an exposé on failed climate change legislation, *New Yorker* writer Ryan Lizza summed it up best: “The Republican Party had grown increasingly hostile to the science of global warming and to cap-and-trade, associating the latter with a tax on energy and more government regulation.”³⁶

Polls show that Tea Party loyalists are a small minority of Americans.³⁷ Nonetheless, by effectively organizing that minority, the Tea Party has a major influence on political debates. Despite concerns about the economy and the right’s efforts to sow doubts around climate change, the vast majority of Americans still support enacting and enforcing environmental policies and regulations in general.³⁸ Imagine what pro-environment grassroots organizing could achieve.

The second instructive lesson to be learned from the Tea Party is the role that funders can play in prioritizing support of grassroots organizing. In a job at the Tea Party, President Barack Obama’s senior advisor David Axelrod called it “a grassroots citizens’ movement brought to you by a bunch of oil billionaires.”³⁹

But jobs aside, the oil industry billionaire Koch brothers who have funded much of the infrastructure that supports the Tea Party see

grassroots organizing as a key political strategy. “To bring about social change,” Charles Koch said in one interview, “a strategy” is required that is “vertically and horizontally integrated,” spanning “from idea creation to policy development to education to grassroots organizations to lobbying to litigation to political action.”⁴⁰ Through their support of the Tea Party, the Koch brothers and other anti-environment funders did not just wish for a grassroots movement, they financed it. Since 1997, the Koch brothers have funneled at least \$55 million to bolster anti-environmental organizing at the grassroots level.⁴¹ The rapid advancement of their abhorrent goals makes a strong case for pro-environment funders to understand the value of grassroots organizing.

Fortunately, there is emerging, contemporary evidence of the effectiveness of grassroots organizing to help the environment rather than hurt it. In 2011, community activists in the Midwest and across the United States mobilized to protest the extension of the Keystone pipeline that would bring toxically extracted oil from Canada’s tar sands through sensitive aquifers and farm lands to refineries in the South. Through grassroots pressure, opponents of the pipeline won over unusual allies such as the conservative governor of Nebraska, who early on



The huge tar sands protest crowd starts to circle the White House on Nov. 6th, 2011. Photo by Javier Sierra, courtesy of the Sierra Club.

supported the expansion but came to understand the environmental threats to his state and ultimately advocated against it. Activists also mobilized nationwide, including a series of actions with protesters chaining themselves to and being arrested in front of the White House fence. These actions, engaging local activists coupled with the support of national environmental organizations, led the Obama Administration to delay its decision to approve the pipeline, and ultimately, in January 2012, not to grant permission for the pipeline extension.

Combined with (at the time of this writing) the still-growing impact of the Occupy Wall Street movement, these positive developments underscore both the power of grassroots organizing in shaping public discourse and the value of linking environmentalism to other causes. Occupy Wall Street is an example of authentic grassroots energy that was so intense it needed little funding to mobilize; now that it is spreading, funders are rushing to catch up. As of this writing, the Occupy Wall Street movement is larger than the Tea Party and enjoys broader public support.⁴²



Some signs at the Keystone XL tar sands protest at the White House on November 6, 2011. Photo by Javier Sierra, courtesy of the Sierra Club.

Self-interest sparks collective action.

There is confusion in our sector about exactly what we mean when we use terms like “community organizing,” “movement building” or “infrastructure.” Some people think that getting neighbors to sign a petition is community organizing. Others believe that Internet-based activism is community organizing. For the purposes of this paper, the following definitions will clarify what we mean when we use these terms.

Community organizing builds power by helping people understand the source of their social or political problems, connect with others facing the same challenges and take collective action to win concrete change. The classic example of a community organizing campaign is the residents in a neighborhood worried about a dangerous intersection with only a stop sign banding together, pressuring the town government and winning a new stoplight. But, as noted above, community organizing was integral to ending slavery in America, obtaining the franchise for women to vote and catalyzing legislation requiring cleaner land, air and water.

One network of environmental base-building groups defines grassroots organizing as “the process by which people in communities rally around a common cause, acting on their own behalf with allies and networks, often against powerful interests, often building new institutions needed to win a lasting change.”⁴³ The Funders Network on Transforming the Global Economy (FNTG), which advocates for grassroots organizing and movement-building, defines community organizing as:

- Rooted in and accountable to the frontline communities directly impacted by the issues addressed.
- Building local power, developing indigenous leadership, membership and institutions.
- Contending for power locally, but also, increasingly, at a much larger scale as well.
- Developing new kinds of alliances and

coalitions to build political strength across organizations, bridge issue silos, have greater impact on national policy and sustain the infrastructure needed for mass movements.⁴⁴

Importantly, this definition draws a line between national organizations that might parachute into local communities for one-time policy campaigns versus authentic, local organizations that not only work on those same short-term campaigns but, just as importantly, build long-term leadership and capacity in the community to amplify change in the future.

In short, community organizing engages people to win real changes for themselves and for all of us.

Movement building is community organizing and mobilization taken to a mass scale. While community organizing groups may be relatively confined (such as to their own members or own issue agenda), social movements spread out from such boundaries to engage a much wider group of people in a much broader demand for change. According to social movement scholar Doug McAdam, a social movement thrives on the interplay of four factors:⁴⁵

- The right political moment or opportunity.
- Readiness of indigenous, grassroots organizations to take advantage of that moment.
- A belief that the movement is leading in a successful direction.
- The support of external groups and allies.

In other words, social movements can and often do grow from grassroots organizations, but not necessarily so. Grassroots organizations can make the leap to be a part of a much broader, national or even international call for change, but that leap is not necessary or automatic. While there are many finer distinctions that could be made here, for purposes of this paper, our assumption is that mass movements for environmental health and justice are desirable and that such movements can grow strategically from community organizing at the grassroots level.

...Community organizing engages people to win real changes for themselves and for all of us.

Infrastructure is part of what makes not only social movements and grassroots organizations more effective but what ultimately can knit them together. According to *Funding Social Movements*, a 2003 report by the New World Foundation, social movements are not built overnight, but in stages.⁴⁶ They require strong anchor organizations, grassroots organizing, strategic alliances and networks among multiple constituencies. Groups that provide media training, fundraising skills, leadership development or even just shared meeting space can be essential back-end supports for movement organizations and formations.

One example is the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ), which provides everything from technical assistance on local advocacy campaigns to small capacity building grants. By nurturing emerging groups and providing ongoing feedback and coaching for more seasoned organizations, while convening meetings and alliances for all groups to connect and work together, CHEJ helps till the soil and spread the nutrients in which grassroots organizing and movement building thrive.

The Institute for Conservation Leadership (ICL) is another organization that provides training, coaching and other technical assistance to build the capacity of grassroots environment and climate-focused groups and coalitions. ICL is an outgrowth of a small project initiated as part of the National Wildlife Federation and became an independent group in 1990 with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts. It now offers a full range of capacity building and leadership development services to organizations at the local, state, regional and national levels focused on protecting the environment and addressing climate change issues.

A Case Study in Funding Community Organizing

by Denise Joines, Program Officer at the Wilburforce Foundation

Because protecting our shared resources on public lands is the major focus of my funding portfolio, building public support for our grantees' efforts is critical to our foundation's strategy. Grassroots organizing is an important component of our strategy.

Our grantees find that connecting people to place and building bonds to our public lands through volunteer efforts is an effective means of organizing citizens to take an active role in voicing their opinions on how our lands should be managed. As just one example, we fund the Sky Island Alliance (SIA), based in Tucson, Ariz., a grassroots organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the rich natural heritage in the Sky Island region of the southwestern U.S. and northwestern Mexico.

SIA engages a diversity of volunteers in a variety of on-the-ground efforts, from physical restoration of public lands (removing roads, restoring streams and springs) to training volunteers to track wildlife to identify wildlife connectivity corridors. At the end of every training and field session, SIA staff and volunteers sit together and write letters to decision makers and agency staff about their experiences during their project, and how important continued conservation of our public lands is to them. They also comment on specific management plans, providing input that can be entered into the public record and considered during key decision points. Sky Island maintains relationships with volunteers over time, encouraging them to either praise decision makers when programs and policy align with conservation or hold them accountable when they do not.

The result of SIA's efforts is an engaged citizenry in southern Arizona that looks very different than in the rest of the state. Congressional representation from the region is among the most conservation-oriented in the country, and agencies managing both lands and wildlife in SIA's landscapes work collaboratively with NGOs and citizens in the development of their planning processes. Although there are many factors contributing to the social and political salience of conservation in any landscape, we see SIA's grassroots organizing as a strong factor in Arizona and are committed to supporting their capacity for the long term.

B. THERE IS EFFECTIVE ORGANIZING ON WHICH WE CAN BUILD

The need for change bulldozed a road down the center of my mind.

—Maya Angelou

Awareness of environmental impacts begins at a local level – in a backyard, a nearby field, a creek at the end of the street or simply where you breathe the air in your neighborhood.

Grassroots groups often have been the ones to discover environmental hazards. And the hazards are significant. Consider, for instance:

- High levels of toxic flame-retardants have been found in pregnant women in California.⁴⁷
- Light bulbs in New York City public schools contain the carcinogen PCB.⁴⁸
- Arsenic levels found in Mott's apple juice are five times higher than what's considered safe in drinking water.⁴⁹
- Incidences of childhood cancer have risen steadily since 1992.⁵⁰
- One in 12 Americans has diabetes.⁵¹
- Asthma prevalence remains at "historically high levels," affecting 24.6 million people in the United States, with higher rates among females, children, African American and Puerto Rican persons, and those with family income below the poverty level.⁵²
- Primarily because of our use of fossil fuels, the surface of the earth is about 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than it was 100 years ago, and that even slight warming is causing an increase in the number and danger of storms – including hurricanes, tornadoes and blizzards.⁵³

From these hazards arises an opportunity to grow our constituency for positive environmental change. Grassroots organizations are uniquely suited to take advantage of this opportunity because, as explained below, they are adept at drawing people together who are affected by a common environmental ill and helping them transform their stories into lasting environmental and social change.

You would not think of Benham and Lynch, Ky., as likely hotbeds of political activism. Lying in a small valley at the base of Black Mountain – the highest peak in Kentucky – these are historic coal mining towns where over the years people from 34 different countries have made their homes and worked the mines. The lingering effects of the mine economy are felt in the soil of the region and its residents' lungs. Determined to define a future beyond coal, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) organizes the communities of Benham and Lynch to enforce existing mining laws and advocate for stronger regulations. Led by grassroots community leaders, KFTC also is developing sustainable economic alternatives to mining and promoting renewable energy sources, key to getting all residents of the job-starved state on board with change. As a result, the towns are revitalizing economically and the residents now are engaged participants in their democracy.

KFTC is a statewide membership organization with a 30-year history of advancing economic, social and environmental justice at the local, state and national levels. What does its organizing look like? KFTC has helped thousands of individuals and hundreds of communities like Benham and Lynch learn their way around federal laws and administrative processes. KFTC has held technical workshops (on topics such as how to read mining maps, get permits enforced and test water samples), and trained people in basic organizing skills (such as how to run meetings, speak in public and use nonviolent direct action). The organization has built alliances with grassroots organizations in other coalfields from Montana to Wyoming, from West Virginia to Virginia, and from Black Mesa, Ariz., to Colombia, South America.

Since 2008, the coal industry has invested millions in local propaganda campaigns that have heightened the level of fear and hostility throughout tight-knit rural communities such as Benham and Lynch. Despite that, says organizing and leadership development director Lisa Abbott, "KFTC's persistent and patient organizing created the conditions for ordinary

people's voices to be heard. While we are a long way from launching an economic transition in the mountains or ending destructive strip mining, we're closer than ever before. And it's hard to imagine where we would be were it not for the long-term efforts of grassroots organizing of groups like KFTC."

Heeten Kalan, senior program officer for the Environmental Health and Justice Fund at the New World Foundation, has been funding KFTC for many years and encourages other funders to consider the strength in such multi-issue organizations. "Kentuckians for the Commonwealth is a multi-issue organization working with thousands of its members to connect issues of criminal justice to jobs to the environment to people's livelihoods and community resilience," says Kalan. "They make the connections, their members make the connections. Why can't funders make those connections and start funding outside our narrow silos? **We are going to need more than just the traditional environmental organizations to get anywhere, and it is time for the philanthropic community to look beyond traditional environmental organizations.**"

This is just one example of the work of KFTC, and KFTC, in turn, is just one example of many grassroots organizations that harness the anger and frustration of environmentally devastated residents and communities to achieve positive change. In organizations that set their agendas and build power according to the passions and needs of everyday people, **community engagement is not an afterthought but is built into the process.** In this manner, organizations like KFTC mobilize thousands upon thousands of people to win change at the local, state and national levels. There are organizations like KFTC in every corner of the world, and even more communities like Benham and Lynch hungry for organizing.

Investing in and building existing grassroots organizations is more efficient and effective than "parachuting in" national consultants and organizations for short-term campaigns. John Mitterholzer, program officer at the George Gund Foundation in Ohio, talks about the growing coalition of grassroots environmental organizations building

power in his state. Mitterholzer wishes that, when national environmental funders want to invest in Ohio around election time or a particular policy campaign, they would invest in existing local groups rather than dropping in on national groups or specialists. “When you parachute people in, if they’re really good, they are good, but when they leave, the data-

base and the resources leave, too,” says Mitterholzer.⁵⁴ Community groups can be supported to achieve the same goals for short-term campaigns. Plus, investing in grassroots organizing builds the community’s capacity to win not just around elections, but consistently over time, potentially building toward even more change in the future.

New Constituencies for the Environment: A Case Study

by Danielle Deane, former program officer for the environment at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation⁵⁶

In 2004, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation launched a California grantmaking initiative called “New Constituencies for the Environment” (NCE).⁵⁷ The foundation invested more than \$20 million over a seven-year period to strengthen the environmental movement in California by expanding the range of groups advocating for clean air to include medical, faith-based and labor groups, as well as environmental and health organizations that had evolved in minority communities. Hewlett had traditionally supported larger NGOs focused on these issues but, because of concerns about slowing progress and in the face of a rapidly growing and diverse population, the foundation theorized that including a broader range of groups would ensure continued high-level public support for balancing growth with a healthy environment.

The NCE grantmaking differed from Hewlett’s usual way of functioning in some key ways. For example, the Environment Program conducted more extensive than usual pre-grantmaking outreach over several months to identify potential grantees, assessing their organizational capacity and overlap with the program’s strategies. To be strategic, and informed by outreach feedback, grantmaking was targeted to organizations focused on air pollution policy and related climate and energy issues.

Hewlett invested in strengthening the organizations in a number of key areas. Hewlett engaged communications consultants to work specifically with small and medium-sized organizations, bolstering their communications

capacity and ability to interact with journalists, editorial boards, elected officials and other policy leaders. Hewlett also realized that it needed to engage with ethnic media more intentionally and made changes to its annual environment poll to include ethnic media briefings that included some of the NCE grantees. The foundation invested significant funds into improving information sharing and collaboration among regional and state grantees. Hewlett often supplemented regular grants with “Organizational Effectiveness” grants, to allow leaders to choose consultants to help build some aspect of staff capacity. This proved especially useful for smaller groups. Most sought consulting to beef up their staff’s fundraising strategies and skills, pointing to a real need – the underfunding of these groups. This must be addressed to help generate the pressure needed for solutions that align with the scope of the problems we face.

We ensured researcher consultations with grantees before, during and after reports were commissioned. This helped us build trust and foster peer learning, as well as bolster our grantees’ ability to interpret and use data. We leveraged Hewlett’s convening power, giving grantees increased opportunities to build deeper relationships with influential leaders, e.g., through meetings with the California Latino Legislative Caucus Foundation and the Black Chamber of Commerce Foundation. NCE grantees noted an increase in the attention paid to air pollution issues from minority leaders once they heard more directly from the communities they served about the dis-

Communities are ripe for engagement.

Because environmental issues so deeply affect our daily lives, many people readily engage in environmental activism when issues are presented on their terms. Philanthropic activist Cathy Lerza describes a compelling example of this in her 2011 report produced for the Funders Network on

Transforming the Global Economy, “A Perfect Storm: Lessons From The Defeat Of Proposition 23.”⁵⁵ There also is a valuable and poignant, nine-minute documentary on the case, *Where We Live: The Changing Face of Climate Activism*.

In 2006, the California State Legislature passed a groundbreaking law to restrict

proportionate harms being suffered. In keeping with Hewlett’s general grantmaking approach, we strove to provide as much multiyear and general operating support as possible.

This support, together of course with important contributions by other foundations and partners, contributed to grantees’ advocacy successes. An example was California’s adoption of its landmark diesel truck rule a few years into the initiative: several members of the environmental community from different camps said it was the best collaboration they had seen across the different elements of the environmental community. More grassroots groups were strategically engaged and consulted, and this win was particularly impressive as it came during the economic downturn. California’s diesel truck standards are among the strongest in the nation. And at the nation’s largest gateway for receiving imports, the Los Angeles-Long Beach Port, air pollution from trucks is now 70 percent lower as the result of a program the grantees helped to advocate for. In California’s most polluted region in the Central Valley, better science and medical expertise must now be part of the clean air decision, and many have commented that the public process has significantly more – and more effective – participation than in the past. When some interest groups tried to weaken California’s landmark climate change efforts, the strengthened web of relationships to build on to educate and organize played a valuable role. Many foundations contributed to a wide

range of organizations on each of these issues, but independent feedback indicates that the field has benefitted from Hewlett’s channeling more funding into the NCE organizations.

Funding smaller organization is more time-intensive, particularly in the nascent stages, but the effort to fund and grow the small and medium-sized organizations delivers. It is vital if we hope to make our air, water and land healthier for everyone. Not every group we invested in worked out and some efforts died on the vine; some barriers of capacity, trust and leadership could not be overcome. This is not a story of giving to groups without high expectations, or giving equally to all grantees out of a sense of “fairness.” But it is a narrative about patient, high-reward grantmaking where everyone, including the funder, learns. To keep us on track, we engaged savvy evaluators who were not slaves to numbers but who make sure to help grantees quantify what is meaningful. Payoff is significant in some ways that are measurable and some that are not easy to quantify.⁵⁸

Given the scale of our environmental problems and the challenges of our political system, we need to scale up the resources for small and medium-sized organizations that are doing great advocacy work. More systematic relationship building and information flows between large and small organizations is needed, and it must be done with care, humility and high standards. This is essential if we are to win the battle to achieve growth that is healthy for businesses, people and the environment.



Image courtesy of Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN).

greenhouse gas emissions in the state. Just four years later, a group of Texas oil companies used California's ballot measure process to attempt to stop the implementation of the law.

The oil companies backing the repeal measure – called Proposition 23 – claimed that clean energy programs would increase unemployment and stifle the economy. It was a classic attempt to alienate lower-income communities and communities of color from the environmental movement, suggesting that environmental regulation was causing the high unemployment from which its communities suffered, and that more regulations would make the problem worse. But environmental, economic and racial justice organizations in California joined forces to create Communities United Against the Dirty Energy Proposition to

organize in the lower-income communities of color most impacted by environmental ills and, thus, inform the debate and spread opposition to the ballot measure.

Contrary to stereotypes of environmentalism as a predominantly white, upper class issue, lower-income communities and communities of color were actively engaged in this fight. A broad set of multi-issue groups built a coalition of hundreds of grassroots organizations including businesses, unions, health care providers, public health organizations and faith based groups. For instance, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) built on its 18-year history of organizing Asian communities in California to mobilize voters against Proposition 23. Although early polling showed that only a quarter of Asian-Pacific American voters were likely to vote against the measure, APEN launched a comprehensive campaign to educate and inform its community using mail, media, and voter contact strategies. APEN had direct conversations with more than 15,000 voters of Chinese descent, the largest Asian ethnic group in California and the U.S., primarily in their native languages of Mandarin or Cantonese and ultimately identified more than 11,000 “no” votes on the ballot measure. Not only did seven out of ten voters commit to voting “no” on Proposition 23, the turnout of voters APEN contacted and identified was 8 percent more than the statewide turnout rate of registered voters. With minimal resources, APEN showed that Asian immigrant voters care about environmental issues – and they also turn out to vote.

Overall, Communities United Against the Dirty Energy Proposition, the anti-Proposition 23 coalition, had one-on-one conversations with more than 250,000 households across California, and organized six college events specifically designed to speak to the community members they needed to reach. These events featured prominent hip hop artists, and secured favorable media coverage in ethnic newspapers and on ethnic radio stations. Grassroots

groups talked about the measure not in terms of air quality and carbon alone but in relation to housing, jobs and quality of life – as multi-issue organizations, intuitively understanding the importance of framing environmental issues in ways that resonate with communities on the ground. When the votes were tallied, 73 percent of voters of color opposed Proposition 23, while 57 percent of white voters voted against it. Not only was organizing within communities of color effective in and of itself, but it was this organizing that made the pivotal difference in winning the campaign and protecting clean energy standards statewide. And Communities United and on-the-ground groups like APEN accomplished this with just a small fraction of the overall resources of the entire No on 23 Campaign. Resources for electoral campaigns, unfortunately, follow the same pattern as environmental funding when it comes to engaging lower-income communities and communities of color. Yet, the work in California shows the effectiveness of long-term investment in organizing and electoral infrastructure in communities of color.

Savvy community-based organizations working block-by-block in diverse neighborhoods were not only able to beat back millions spent by big oil but perhaps, more importantly engage new, active constituencies supporting environmental change going forward. As just one ongoing example, Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) mobilized to stop the city of Vernon in southeast Los Angeles County from building a 943-megawatt fossil fuel plant that would have emitted 1.7 million tons of toxins annually, as well as 2.5 million tons of greenhouse gases. The campaign against the plant was led pri-

marily by Latina immigrant women and Latino high school students, which could be indicative that organizing for environmental rights in California’s communities of color will continue for generations. Moreover, this suggests the power of underserved communities to challenge power when the grassroots are mobilized and well-resourced. APEN created the Asian Pacific American Climate Coalition in 2010, trained more than 100 diverse organizations on how climate change impacts health, housing, transit, jobs, and other community-level issues, and engaged them in defeating Proposition 23.

APEN, CBE and other groups in California are educating and activating people of color in much larger numbers, not only winning key campaigns in the present, but also making possible bigger, proactive wins in the future. The coalition opposed to Proposition 23, for example, continues and has shifted its on-the-ground fight for clean energy and jobs at the local, regional and state levels. Additionally, both APEN and CBE – as part of the coalition California Environmental Justice Alliance – were invited by Governor Jerry Brown to participate in California’s renewable energy task force, acknowledging the increasing political power of the coalition and its constituents.

The significance of this campaign victory cannot be overstated. Big energy and oil interests pumped massive financial and political muscle into rolling back California’s clean energy standards, but were defeated by a band of scrappy but strategic grassroots organizations, mobilizing communities of color and lower-income voters across the state to defeat the well-heeled special interests. It is a resounding example of the power of grassroots organizing.

Not only was organizing within communities of color effective in and of itself, but it was this organizing that made the pivotal difference in winning the campaign and protecting clean energy standards statewide [in California].

A Case Study on Funding Grassroots Organizing

by Lisa Pike Sheehy, Director of Environmental Initiatives, Patagonia, Inc.

Patagonia's mission is to "build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm and use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis." An active, informed citizenry is our best chance for positive change. Therefore, we support grassroots environmental groups – people working together to protect land, air, water and wildlife.

Our environmental grants program funds primarily grassroots groups sometimes overlooked by other funders because of their small size or edgy, activist approach. We have seen evidence that such groups are effective and we recognize the power of engaged citizens taking radical and strategic steps to protect habitat, wilderness and biodiversity. We're talking about regular people who just want the government to live up to its obligation to protect our air, water and other natural resources: mothers fighting to clean up toxic dumpsites, neighbors working together to stem urban sprawl. These are the people on the front lines, trying to make government either obey its own laws or recognize the need for a new law.

For example, in 2010, 70 Patagonia employees traveled to Louisiana to help activists uncover the social, economic and health impacts of the Gulf oil spill on affected communities. Patagonia hadn't budgeted for the unforeseen disaster, but we found \$300,000 in additional grant money to help with recovery. Two-thirds of it went to emergency funding divided among the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, SkyTruth, Southwings, Gulf Restoration Network and Gulf Coast Fund, among others. Approximately \$30,000 went toward turning every \$100 in employee donations into \$300. And the remaining \$70,000 paid for seven groups of 10 Patagonia employee volunteers to spend a

week in the Gulf working in seven different communities. Because of our in-depth relationship built over time with groups on the ground, we were able to get involved beyond just giving money – we were able to respond right away and deepen the experience.

The first group of employees arrived in Louisiana amid a July 2010 swelter to work with the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, an environmental health and justice group based in New Orleans. Our employees walked door-to-door in communities across southeastern Louisiana's coastal parishes surveying residents about the public health, cultural and financial impacts they'd felt from the spill. In other words, we didn't just offer money to groups to get other people involved – we got involved ourselves.

"I'd never done anything like this before," Naomi Helbling, an employee from our Seattle store, wrote upon her return from five days in Empire, La. "The feeling was indescribable as I walked down a long, exposed driveway to the door of a complete stranger to ask, 'How has your family's health and livelihood been impacted by the world's largest oil spill?'" We helped the Bucket Brigade *and* helped explain community organizing throughout our own company.

The Bucket Brigade took the information we collected in our 954 surveys and combined it with eyewitness reports from Gulf residents about odors, tar balls, mysterious coughs and other impacts. With it, the group created a web-based Oil Spill Crisis Map (www.oilspill.labucketbrigade.org) that visualizes the effects of the spill. The map provides important information for use by NGOs, government agencies, state and local wildlife agencies and the public, and should prove invaluable in documenting impacts.

We can win the future.

In Kentucky, California and elsewhere, environmental degradation is increasing and the number of people who desire environmental change is on the rise. While funders continue to underinvest in organizing, the potential for such robust organizing grows.

The next generation of leaders, in particular, acutely feels the sting of environmental degradation and is already engaging in the fight for change. At the 2011 gathering of Powershift, a youth-led conference put on by the youth-led organization, Energy Action Coalition, there were more than 10,000 participants – making it one of the largest activist gatherings of the year. In the 2008 elections, young people made their presence felt as a pivotal voting block in the presidential election. In politics and activism in general, young people are “an increasingly powerful force that political elites are actively courting,” noted a 2009 article in *The Ecologist*.⁵⁹

The New Organizing Institute (NOI) notes that younger people between the ages of 18 and 29 comprise nearly one-third (29 percent) of the “Emerging Majority,” made up of Latino, African American, Native American and other communities of color. In contrast, youth make up only 16 percent of the rest of the population. Nearly two-thirds (or 59 percent) of all U.S. citizens in this age group are a part of this “emerging majority.”⁶⁰

This also is a worldwide phenomenon. In 2008, 12-year-old Alec Lorz founded Kids Versus Global Warming, which organizes youth marches worldwide to support environmental change. Recently, Kids Versus Global Warming has held 170 events in more than 40 countries – from Nigeria to Indonesia. One march was even organized by the son of an oil executive in Kuwait.⁶¹ “Young people are some of the most creative and dedicated activists now,” says Lorz. “We have a voice.”⁶²

One young leader at the Powershift conference remarked not only on the growth of youth activists but also on their strategies. Young people, said Courtney Hight, execu-

tive director of the Energy Action Coalition, are frustrated with the lack of progress on environment issues at the federal level, and believe that they must demonstrate a public commitment to real change on climate policy, which is “why we’re so focused on movement building.”⁶³

The Gulf Coast Fund provided funds to rent buses and organize a delegation of more than 200 students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Gulf South to attend Powershift. Dr. Beverly Wright at the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice leveraged funders to support a delegation of students and faculty advisors from HBCUs to the UN Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa, as well as to the last Conference of the Parties (COP) summit. Not only are these students from areas acutely vulnerable to climate change and environmental degradation (as Hurricane Katrina, the BP oil spill and countless other examples attest), more importantly, they are hugely invested in creating a clean, sustainable future.

Our nation is becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. By 2042, Census data estimate that “minorities” will become the majority in the United States.⁶⁴ New immigrants may come from countries with robust histories of social change movements that, combined with **the increasing racial diversity of America’s communities, provide an opportunity to diversify the ethnic composition of the environmental movement.**

Unlike many of the professional advocates in Washington, D.C., people of color, immigrants, poor people and young people often are living face to face with the devastating impacts of environmental degradation. Polls suggest that this rising community of voters – unmarried women, African Americans, Latinos and young people in particular – support green jobs proposals and environmental justice laws at significantly higher rates than other constituencies.⁶⁵ These growing communities have the self-interest to do something and, increasingly, the collective power to potentially make real change but may lack the support or resources to organize.

C. NATURE FAVORS DIVERSE STRATEGIES

The human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery – not over nature but of ourselves.

—Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

“People need many things from the forest.” That is the mantra of Hari Prasad Neupane, a grassroots leader with a network of community forestry organizations that dot the land-

scape of Nepal. The Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal (FECOFUN) helps communities sustainably harvest trees and equitably distribute the proceeds from logging to benefit Nepal’s most impoverished residents.

In 1992, the government passed a law transferring ownership of forests from the state to the people of Nepal. The people then lease the forests back to corporations or the government, and, through participatory processes designed by FECOFUN, hold the companies and state accountable. Just as forests are inter-

A Case Study: Listening and Learning with the People of the Land

by Jeffrey Y. Campbell, Director of Grantmaking at the Christensen Fund

When Shagire, a traditional indigenous elder and an experienced farmer from the Gamo region of Southern Ethiopia speaks about climate change at international conferences and global meetings, everyone listens. A hush falls on scientists and advocacy groups alike as Shagire speaks the unadorned truth, disarming in his honesty and humility and steeped in a deep knowledge of a landscape and a set of relationships that bind people and the land together. Shagire worries about the changing nature of the wind, the fickle and fluctuating rains, the variations in temperature. He says the crops are confused and that it is his fault! At this point the audience usually turns dead silent.

Shagire explains that he is no longer paying the kind of close attention to his community, to the signals of the plants and to the ceremonies and celebrations that have marked the agricultural calendar with meaning and vitality. This reflects the larger breakdown in the relationship between humans, and between humans and nonhumans, the land and natural processes. Shagire’s statements are more powerful because they possess an immediacy and a directness that is lost in abstruse scientific treatises, and the haughty wordplay of global declarations.

Shagire’s sentiments are disturbing because they do not attempt to simply pass the blame to others, and in this wise self-assessment, are even more effective in making others turn inward and examine their motives, behavior, footprint. Shagire’s talks are so strong because they come from a real intimacy with the crop and plant varieties, the birds and animals, the water and the rituals in the place he comes from.

At The Christensen Fund, we believe that voices like Shagire’s and the millions of indigenous peoples and local communities that still practice and transfer traditional knowledge and are dynamically adapting this knowledge on a daily basis are absolutely critical components of an environmentally sensible future for the planet. We know that the distribution of biological diversity closely matches the distribution of languages and cultural diversity – and that complex biocultural landscapes that combine humans and nonhuman systems maintain vital ecological processes. “Living in our territories and practicing traditional knowledge allows us to achieve what scientists call resilience to climate change,” says Alejandro Argumedo, coordinator of the Indigenous Peoples’ Biocultural Climate Change Assessment (IPCCA), an international initiative that works with indigenous

connected ecosystems of water, soil, plants and animals, FECOFUN represents a socio-economic ecosystem. It keeps the profit-making needs of business in balance with the well-being of local communities and the long-term health of the forests. FECOFUN has grown into a formidable social movement representing almost one-third of Nepal's communities. Jeff Campbell, Director of Grantmaking at the Christensen Fund in San Francisco and one of FECOFUN's first leading funders, says the organization echoes other

integrated models in which environmental activism is inseparable from economic development and democratic participation. Just as the whole community is involved in the process of change, the whole community is changed in the process. And as the FECOFUN leader Neupane contends, they could not change the fate of Nepal's forests without changing the fate of Nepal's communities.

Scientists call this inextricable link among people, culture and nature "biocultural diversity."⁶⁶ Nature isn't separate from human

communities to amass the native knowledge on conditions and trends in the critical ecosystems in which they live. Alejandro was at symposium at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. as part of an exhibition of participatory video and photography there on Indigenous Voices, put on by Christensen grantees – Conversations With the Earth. The Christensen Fund, in collaboration with The Ford Foundation and the UNDP Small Grants Program of the Global Environmental Fund are supporting Alejandro to coordinate a network of indigenous people assessments. Through separate funding to the United Nations University – Traditional Knowledge Institute, we are able to ensure that traditional knowledge is fed into the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, whose lead authors are very keen to combine such grounded assessment with their more scientific research-based data.

So, our grantmaking works to ensure that the international discourse on climate change mitigation and adaptation includes the needs, wishes, knowledge and advice of Indigenous

peoples and local communities. Through our Global Program, we are supporting the development of practical tools rooted in Indigenous knowledge and wisdom to assess the impacts of climate change on local communities and landscapes; and we support Indigenous participation and representation in climate change fora in our regions and around the world. This helps ensure that the voices of people like Shagire and of indigenous peoples and local communities who are normally marginalized and undervalued are recognized as being a key part of the solution. Sarah James, an elder of the Gwich'in people in Alaska, offered an optimistic vision of the future in a quote included in the exhibit at the Smithsonian. "There is a solution," she says. "It's not the end of the world yet. One thing we have to do is gain back respect of the animals, for all nature. We pray and give thanks for everything we use. But if it's going to work, it has to be both Western and traditional. We have to meet halfway – and we need to find balance."

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—Jeffrey Y. Campbell, Director of Grantmaking at the Christensen Fund

*We need to apply the global
principal of interconnected
biodiversity to our environmental
change strategies everywhere.*

experience and culture – and human beings are a part of nature. Many international conventions, agreements and reports, such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment or the United Nations Forum on Forests, have made explicit reference to “cultural drivers when dealing with biological diversity and vice versa.”⁶⁷ Those charged with safeguarding both people and nature fully recognize the impossibility of protecting just one or the other. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the “sustainability and resilience” of human and environmental conservation depends on the maintenance of their interconnectedness.”⁶⁸

Strategic environmental funding translates the principle of biocultural diversity to advocacy, recognizing the inherent benefits of diverse and interconnected approaches to winning change – specifically, grassroots organizing alongside top-down advocacy, litigation alongside public education and engagement. **Social change relies on the interconnectedness of multiple levels of institutions and leaders, including a robust grassroots infrastructure.** To have an impact, environmental philanthropy must be just as interconnected.

Global Greengrants Fund supports work at the nexus of environmental change and human rights, recognizing that people around the globe see their land, water and livelihoods as connected to one another. Greengrants directs small grants support to locally led groups in developing countries, primarily in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Their grantees are tackling complex issues related to climate change,

biodiversity, energy, extractive industries, food and agriculture, water supplies and the rights of women and indigenous peoples – approaching multifaceted problems with multi-issue organizing.

Since 1993, Global Greengrants Fund has awarded more than 6,600 grants in 141 countries, totaling more than \$33 million. The majority of these grants were between \$500 and \$5,000, demonstrating that even a small infusion of support goes a long way to fight environmental degradation and social injustice. Imagine the impact of even larger grants over the long term.

Consider Cabo Pulmo, Mexico, a small coastal area on the Gulf of California. In the 1990s, its waters had been overfished and reefs destroyed by commercial fishing operations. The future of the marine ecosystem and the local economy was left in the hands of the community. With their sustenance, livelihoods and environment at stake, local leaders decided to protect the area from destructive fishing practices to restore it to a functional and productive ecosystem. Grassroots groups supported by Greengrants and other funders campaigned to turn Cabo Pulmo into a “no-take zone,” which would limit human disturbance to the reefs. Through organizing, the community won a 71 square kilometer protected national park declaration from Mexico’s federal government.

Today, the park is teeming with life; the total number of fish in the area has increased by more than 460 percent – a level similar to remote pristine coral reefs that have never been fished. The reserve also provides economic benefits through successful ecotourism ventures, a valuable source of income for local communities. All of this success has occurred because of the determination of a community of coastal villagers – truly grassroots environmental protection at its greatest.

Interestingly, international funders like Greengrants often intuitively appreciate the value of addressing human and social needs in tandem with environmental goals. Around the globe there are cultures and languages that do not have the words to sepa-

rate “environment” from “people.” At a recent funder gathering, one philanthropist observed, “When we work internationally, it seems somehow more natural to us to be thinking hard about how local peoples need to be carefully engaged.” These funders readily admit the cultures in which they are working are foreign to them and quickly see the need for indigenous, grassroots leadership. And yet, the funder noted, “We don’t necessarily apply that same lesson when we’re working in our own backyards.”⁶⁹ We need to apply the global principle of interconnected biodiversity to our environmental change strategies everywhere.

Diverse strategies demand diverse leadership.

Diversity is our destiny, ecologically as well as culturally. By 2042, a majority of Americans will be people of color.⁷⁰ In fact, nearly half of all children in the United States today are black, Latino or Asian American.⁷¹ The coming demographic shift in America should encourage us to look more quickly at diversifying our strategies, leaders and audience. One facet of this demographic change includes immigrants from all over the world who come from cultures where people are conceptually inseparable from the environment. The demographic shift includes the rising influence of young people, many of whom have grown up surrounded by environmental consciousness. These are the voters of our future. This is a cultural shift. Environmental advocates and funders need to understand and organize these communities or risk being left behind.

This is a clear matter of strategy. As referenced above in the Proposition 23 example, poll after poll indicates that African

Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans are strongly in favor of robust government action to protect the environment and community health.⁷² Communities of color often are situated in those areas of the country where environmental problems are worst. They are overwhelmingly working class, and more inclined to understand the link between the environment and jobs. And communities of color are concentrated in key political geographies, specifically the South and Southwest as well as the destitute Rust Belt. In addition to all of this, communities of color are becoming even more important as they become a demographic majority in America. In this context, arguably, **any push for environmental change that fails to prioritize communities of color is a losing strategy.**

Despite future population projections and the fact that, as shown above, environmental activism touches all communities including communities of color, national environmental groups are mostly led by white, affluent individuals. Jerome Ringo, former head of the environmental Apollo Alliance, reveals he is “often the only environmentalist in the room who is not white.”⁷³ As Angela Park stressed in the Environmental Support Center’s 2009 report, *Everybody’s Movement*: “Like other pockets of environmental and conservation movements, climate change still suffers from the perception, and arguably the reality, that it is a movement led by and designed for the interests of the white, upper-middle class.”⁷⁴

This observation does not negate the extraordinary and invaluable work of white environmental leaders past and present. But it does demonstrate that we need to lift up and value diverse leadership and the diversity of ideas and strategies that are brought to the

“Like other pockets of environmental and conservation movements, climate change still suffers from the perception, and arguably the reality, that it is a movement led by and designed for the interests of the white, upper-middle class.”

—Angela Park, *Everybody’s Movement*

table. There is a moral argument for diversity, but also a strategic one – based on the observation that, especially going forward, environmental advocacy cannot succeed if its leadership does not reflect the communities it seeks to mobilize and benefit:

- In a study of 158 environmental institutions, the Minority Environmental Leadership Development Initiative found that 33 percent of mainstream environmental organizations and 22 percent of government agencies had no people of color on staff.
- Another study found that people of color make up only 11 percent of the staff and 9 percent of the boards of organizations that are members of the Natural Resources Council of America.⁷⁵

A winning strategy for change must prioritize funding for groups led by and representative of communities of color. Yet, these groups also must connect with and rally other sectors of society – including white communities, especially the white working class. In movements throughout history, the core of leadership came from a nucleus of directly affected or oppressed communities while also engaging a much broader range of justice-seeking supporters. To build mass pressure for change, the environmental movement must not seek to impose its agenda on communities from the top down but, rather, its agenda and power must emanate from communities themselves, communities providing both the inspiration and the energy in the push for change.

Pursuing diversity entails more than racial diversification; it includes exposing narrower swaths of the environmental movement to a broader agenda shaped by gender, class and other ways that individuals identify themselves. Julian Agyeman, chairman of the Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University, says that in the absence of diverse leadership, social concerns are not “on the radar” of many large environmental organizations.⁷⁶ Until the broader concerns – and leadership – of all communities are on the radar of environmentalists, it will be hard for environmen-

talists to be on the radar of all communities.

Unfortunately, even while our country as a whole is becoming more diverse, most of our backyards are increasingly segregated and isolated, both in the racial and economic makeup of our neighbors and the variety of plants and grasses that grows in our yards. As the principle of biological diversity illuminates, environmental funders must subvert creeping monoculture strategies and support a diversity of voices and approaches to achieve environmental change. The environmental movement is based on science and the study of complex systems. It is time for our funding to reflect this as well.

As the example of FECOFUN shows, our strategies must include grassroots organizing in a wide range of communities, especially those most affected by environmental ills. Organizing is a direct route to authentic, expansive community engagement. And especially when considering the hard numbers of shifting demographics and the fact that we need an activist plurality to win, it is hard to make a logical case for *not* pursuing diversity in our strategies and leadership.

Targeted funding, universal impact

The impulse to pursue universal policies and solutions is almost automatic in a democratic society. Presented with a problem such as environmental degradation that so clearly hurts us all, it is logical to pursue a solution with the same far-reaching profile. Yet, as funders, we have limited resources. Evidence-backed theories suggest that **the best way to reach universal goals may be through strategically focused means.** As Kolu Zigbi, program officer for sustainable agriculture and food systems at the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation argues, empowering those who remain at the margins results in broad benefits for all in the long term.

According to Professor John A. Powell, an internationally-recognized authority on issues of civil rights, liberties, race and democracy, the notion of “targeted universalism” supports “the needs of the particular while reminding us we are all part of the same social fabric.”⁷⁷ Targeted universalism

recognizes that while broken economic, social and political systems harm everyone, racial disparities are particularly magnified within such broken systems. All people suffer from under-regulation that permits corporate pollution, but because poor communities of color are disproportionately likely to live near industrial sites, they disproportionately suffer. According to Powell, not only are communities of color and poor white people the metaphorical canaries in the coalmine, their suffering a warning sign for everyone else, but by trying to resolve the specific manifestations of injustice in these communities (i.e. “targeting”) also improves the system for everyone (“universalism”).

An example from Los Angeles illustrates the efficacy of targeted universalism in grant-making. Los Angeles, Calif., has a tremendous problem with smog and pollution and the city’s communities of color suffer the most. According to studies, African Americans and Latinos in Los Angeles are three times more likely than whites to live close to hazardous facilities.⁷⁸ The community-based Liberty Hill Foundation granted funds to the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) to organize community residents, churches and unionized workers around the Port of Los Angeles to create a Clean Trucks Program. The unprecedented effort to retrofit diesel trucks with clean-burning engines not only provided greater economic security for more than 10,000 truck drivers and reduced emissions in the poor neighborhoods immediately surrounding the ports, but the new standards reduced pollution for the city as a whole. According to the Port of Los Angeles, carcinogenic diesel emissions have been reduced by a whopping 70 percent from 2007 levels.⁷⁹ The Los Angeles Clean Trucks Program is serving as a model for other Port cities around the country, even while it contends with a legal challenge from the powerful trucking industry. In this way, targeting a particularly impacted sub-community had the systemic and strategic effect of improving outcomes for the entire region. Not only are communities of color the emerging leaders of the future, but they are the ones suffering most today.

III. Funding the Grassroots to Win

Given the immense challenges facing our environment and the many obstacles to achieving positive change, the imperative question is: **How can we afford *not* to try something different?** Clearly, grassroots organizing has been essential to winning policy changes past and present. It’s time we invest in this winning strategy – and build a winning, inclusive movement for change.

We invite you and your philanthropy to play a bold leadership role commensurate with the scale of the environmental problems we face. If you do not fund grassroots organizing, now is the time to start. If you already fund grassroots, fund it even more. In addition to the ideas in this report, the staff of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), the advisory committee members of this report, as well as many resources discussed below are available to help you. Below are four concrete recommendations interwov-

en with examples of environmental funders that have successfully backed socially inclusive grassroots organizing efforts.

1) PROVIDE AT LEAST 20 PERCENT OF GRANT DOLLARS TO BENEFIT EXPLICITLY COMMUNITIES OF THE FUTURE

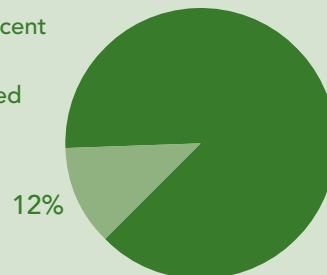
As recommended in NCRP’s *Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best*, consider identifying explicitly the intended beneficiaries of your philanthropy. For those of you who work at foundations where reaching the 50 percent level of giving to underserved communities might be difficult, we suggest an alternate level of at least 20 percent of grant dollars being allocated in this way. Our philanthropic resources are limited relative to the problems we seek to ameliorate. Prioritizing funding for lower-income communities and communities of color is not only strategic given

Environmental Funders Giving to Marginalized Communities

When lower-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by pollution and environmental damage, intentionally directing funds to these communities and tracking such grantmaking over time ensures that the gains that intended to benefit everyone actually reach everyone.

NCRP’s *Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best* recommends that foundations provide at least 50 percent of their grant dollars to benefit people from marginalized communities. For foundations whose specific missions make this goal difficult, NCRP suggests an alternate benchmark – that 20 percent of grant dollars be directed to benefit marginalized communities.

Environmental Funders Giving 20 Percent or More to Marginalized Communities



Of the 701 foundations in our recent sample, only 82 grantmakers (12 percent) directed at least 20 percent of their environmental funding to benefit marginalized communities.

Source: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, analysis of custom Foundation Center datasets, 2011.

that these communities are becoming the majority *and* support environmental change, but also because change that targets the most impacted populations has a positive multiplier effect for society as a whole.

Funding that purports to be “universal” too often fails to acknowledge that different people and communities are differently situated in relationship to environmental injustice.

“For racially marginalized populations, particularly those who live in concentrated-poverty neighborhoods” writes Professor John A. Powell, “there are multiple reinforcing constraints.”⁸⁰ These constraints include environmental and climate harms, not just race, gender, class or other ways that people identify themselves. Put differently, acknowledging that, location, marital status and other factors work together to keep certain communities from equality of opportunity places an obligation on grantmakers to use more intentionality in ensuring that these groups benefit from your philanthropy, particularly when these communities are impacted disproportionately by environment and climate injustice.

In this context, scholars like John A. Powell and Theda Skocpol propose “targeted universalism” – recognizing that if we can address injustices in the most marginalized communities, those solutions will apply to and benefit all communities. According to Powell, “Targeted universalism recognizes that life is lived in a web of opportunity” and looks for high-impact levers to reimagine and reshape the entire web. The concept, backed by Powell and Skocpol’s research, is that the benefits of interventions do not always trickle down to everyone, but if grantmaking can improve the situations of marginalized communities most affected by environmental harms, the benefits will ripple to all communities.

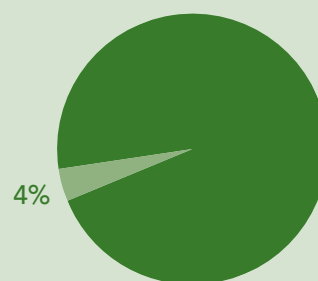
2) INVEST AT LEAST 25 PERCENT OF GRANT DOLLARS IN GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY, ORGANIZING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Make a large investment in organizing – whatever large means for your philanthropy, in whatever issue area or region you work.

Environmental Funders Giving to Social Justice

NCRP recommends that funders provide at least 25 percent of grant dollars for advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement to promote equity, opportunity and justice in our society.⁸¹ Our sample revealed that only 28 funders (4 percent) of environmental funders gave 25 percent or more of their environmental grant dollars to social justice.

Environmental Funders Giving 25 Percent or More to Social Justice



Source: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, analysis of custom Foundation Center datasets, 2011.

We recommend that you allocate at least 25 percent of your grant dollars for social justice purposes, specifically with a focus on grassroots advocacy, organizing and civic engagement led by the communities most affected by environmental ills and climate change. We need to win a majority of public opinion and mobilize mass numbers of Americans. We need to value and lift up leadership from every corner of our broad-based movement.

There is no single metric or amount of grant dollars that is appropriate for every grantmaker. The point of using the figures attached to these two benchmarks is to provide a consistent, intentional framework to add to your grantmaking strategy and to inject additional rigor to the discussions you have at your institution. Some of you may already provide the levels of support for this work, in which case we challenge you to consider doing more. Each foundation will need to identify the appropriate levels of support based on mission and vision. We offer

these metrics as guides to improve current grantmaking practice, and to address the current and long-standing imbalance that exists in prioritizing national agencies over local community organizations.

The way to build a broad movement around environment and climate solutions is to mobilize diverse communities of people around issues that are much closer to their self-interest (such as stopping toxic pollution, creating viable new jobs and reducing energy bills) and then work intentionally to connect those individuals and campaigns to a larger understanding of communal and global interests. Grassroots groups need resources to be able to engage effectively at all levels (local, state, national and international). It is not the case that we need to invest in grassroots organizing with one pot of money and in unrelated top-down advocacy campaigns with another. We have to provide specific resources to grassroots groups so that they can link together and collaborate with regional and national groups, and bring their vision, voices, policy ideas, strategy and power to the national political arena.⁸² This means building knowledge at multiple levels simultaneously and also understanding issues of scale at each level to inform possible policy solutions informed by the values of the communities your philanthropy seeks to benefit.

Learning from Experience

Consider learning from the strategies of veteran funders in this arena. For instance, the Solidago Foundation was founded in 1955 to invest in long-term, systemic social change. Solidago developed a “theory of change” that articulates their approach to funding organizing. Among its many insights, Solidago’s model points to key questions to ask when choosing a grassroots organization to fund, including:

- Does the organization frame its work around movement building and achieving a long-term vision beyond current political constraints?
- Does the organization have an appreciation of local, state, national and even global political arenas and how they

impact each other?

- Does the organization have an analysis of how its work targets the root causes of the environmental crisis, inequality and injustice?
- Does the organization connect with other organizations to build a larger force for change?
- Does the organization build the leadership of local community members?
- Does the organization design and run legislative or electoral campaigns that succeed?⁸³

Of course, Solidago developed insights like these after decades of funding community organizing. It is helpful both for evaluating established community organizing groups or setting goals for emerging start-ups.

3) BUILD SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Grassroots groups need resources to develop and make more use of their innate assets such as roots in and knowledge of local communities, representation of and influence within demographic communities that are becoming the majority and desire to stay with issues from legislation to implementation and enforcement. Grassroots groups need support to work with other groups that provide additional technical expertise like the Alliance for Justice, or groups that provide research and science like the Institute for Energy and Environment Research, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, and Global Community Monitor. Grassroots groups need support for more community-based participatory research projects bringing academics into helping communities get information they need for policy work, and for other capacity-building like leadership development, technology assistance or communications strategy (such as the Institute for Conservation Leadership, SmartMeme and the Progressive Technology Project).⁸⁴

There are several networks of community-based environmental organizations, as well as organizations that join environmentalists in partnership with allied groups from other

fields like labor or faith-based organizations. These types of member groups may be good fits for your funding – networks like Partnership for Working Families, the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, the Blue Green Alliance, Grassroots Global Justice or the Indigenous Environmental Network.

Being a funder can be a lonely, isolating experience, and funder networks, such as the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA), can provide both the inspiration and learning environment with peers that brings your philanthropic practice to a deeper level – both for the communities and organizations funded and for the grantmaker herself. At the same time, engaging in a funder community will allow you to contribute to a more accountable and transformative sector. Additional vibrant examples include:

- **The Health and Environment Funders Network (HEFN)** – Committed to grantmaking at the nexus of environment and health, HEFN supports an increasingly powerful movement towards healthier people, ecosystems and communities. It provides information and updates for its members, organizes funder events, engages in outreach to philanthropy and enables funders to collaborate around shared ideas and projects. HEFN has a working group on “environmental health and environmental justice” as well as a working group on “women’s environmental health.”
- **The Funders Network on Transforming the Global Economy (FNTG)** – An alliance of grantmakers, FNTG is committed to building just and sustainable communities around the world. It provides a space for collaboration across issues and funding strategies among domestic and international grantmakers who recognize the global and systemic nature of our current social and environmental challenges. FNTG is for domestic and international funders who understand their work within a global context and recognize the impacts internation-

al policies and processes can have on grantmaking at all levels.

- **The Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO)** – FCYO supports the field of youth organizing by increasing the philanthropic investment in and strengthening of the organizing capacities of youth organizing groups across the U.S. It runs a grantmaking initiative that supports grassroots and youth-led efforts to champion environmental justice.
- **The Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace** – Founded to increase the effectiveness of grantmaking for social justice and peace, it develops best practices, shifts the narrative in philanthropy to one that places social justice and peace at its core, and creates and supports a community of practice.

In addition, throughout the United States there are several community-based public foundations that are led by grassroots organizers in partnership with grantmakers and private activist donors. In this model, the community groups work with funders to allocate resources, ensuring that grantmaking is seen as strategic to all parties involved. Moreover, community-based public foundations such as the Liberty Hill Foundation (Los Angeles, Calif.), North Star Fund (New York, N.Y.), the Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund (Oakland, Calif.), the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund and Headwaters Foundation for Justice (Minneapolis, Minn.) are excellent training grounds for those new to funding grassroots organizing in a given community. Often, community-based public foundations can host site visits to introduce funders to the depth and breadth of organizing work in a city or region. These intermediaries also can be invaluable regranteeing partners for large foundations or donors that want to support small organizations but cannot make dozens or hundreds of small grants on their own because of programmatic constraints or lack of in-house expertise around a particular issue or region.

A valuable example of this type of investment is the Gulf Coast Fund for Community Renewal and Ecological Health, a special project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. In 2005, motivated by the environmental destruction and multiple injustices laid bare by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, members of the Health and Environmental Funders Network (HEFN) and EGA started the Gulf Coast Fund. The goal was to create a partnership between national philanthropic institutions and local grassroots leadership to provide grantmakers with a vehicle to invest in a meaningful way in rebuilding the region in a manner that focused on empowering communities, just and sustainable rebuilding, and addressing the underlying causes that led to the severity of the disasters.

Working in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas and Florida, the Gulf Coast Fund has granted in excess of \$4 million to more than 250 grassroots organizations working on a broad spectrum of environmental and social justice issues. The Gulf Coast Fund, by providing an effective vehicle for investment, has successfully leveraged new resources for grassroots organizing in the region. Much of the fund's support has come from national environmental funders who, without the Gulf Coast Fund, might have made less strategic investments in the region or simply not made grants there at all.

The Gulf Coast Fund utilizes the expertise of grassroots leaders, supports small, local organizations, empowers local communities, and, in addition to making grants, invests in relationships, networks and movement building. Because of this, the Gulf Coast Fund has been able to make a significantly positive impact with relatively few resources, and has been pointed to by many as one of the most effective philanthropic efforts in a region that is chronically under-supported by philanthropy. The Gulf Coast Fund is just one of the many public social justice foundations across the country, along with the other effective institutions mentioned above, all of which are a part of a larger web of organizations that support and sustain community organizing.

In other words, even if you cannot or will not fund grassroots organizing groups directly, you can fund within a wide range of institutions and groups that support grassroots organizing. There are ways to integrate the suggested recommendations in this report into your existing funding strategy without sidelining your current focus, as demonstrated by the examples provided above.

4) TAKE THE LONG VIEW, PREPARE FOR TIPPING POINTS

Undertaking systemic change requires patience and stepping into a somewhat untraditional space for some foundations. Although the concept of changing structures and institutions seems academic and unwieldy, we have the tools to implement these changes concretely. Put differently, systems change is an iterative process but funding social justice and investing in grassroots organizing and advocacy are linear and tangible ways to make them happen.

Supporting grassroots organizing may require a paradigm shift in a foundation's grantmaking strategy. Depending on how your philanthropy currently supports grassroots organizations or does not, this can mean shedding expectations of microscopic, quick deliverables and embracing the slow, patient process of movement building. Legal work to overturn Jim Crow laws began in the early 1930s with Thurgood Marshall representing the NAACP lawsuits in Maryland. Imagine if early funders of the Civil Rights Movement had tried to "evaluate the impact" of their grants in the ensuing 20 years – before the popular movement took hold. Movement building takes time.

In his important monograph *Just Another Emperor: The Myths and Realities of Philanthrocapitalism*, former Ford Foundation director Michael Edwards cautions that one of the downsides of increasingly infusing the nonprofit world with business ideals is that social change organizations are expected to churn out good,

quarterly metrics.⁸⁵ Extreme advocates of these ideas expect social change organizations to report mounds of data and compete with one another for funding based on “numbers” and “deliverables.” But on February 1, 1960, sitting at a “Whites Only” lunch counter at a Woolworth’s in Greensboro, N.C., there were only four African American students from a local college. Although those may not appear to be impressive metrics, consider the scale and scope of the movement they helped launch. Edwards writes:

“When investors evaluate a business, they ultimately need to answer only one question – how much money will it make? The equivalent for civil society is the social impact that organizations might achieve, alone and together, but that is much more difficult to evaluate, especially at the deeper levels of social transformation.”⁸⁶

In other words, if we want large-scale change, we need to take a longer and more holistic view of evaluation, rather than resort to pushing grantees to perform quickly for the sake of their funders. It is a balance: of course we want to know what our grantees are doing and how they’re planning to scale their impact for the future, but when critical opportunities come to mobilize a critical mass of the population to seek bigger change, grassroots organizations should have their eye on the opportunities – responding to pressing needs rather than nervously looking over their shoulders while writing reports for funders. Funders can pursue monitoring and evaluation methods that allow grantees to take risks and patiently build power over the long term, with feedback loops that support mutual learning and accountability rather than antagonistically forcing grantees’ feet to the fire.

The path to movement building and massive change is never straightforward and clear. Our grantmaking and evaluation must recognize this.



IV. Conclusion

While pro-environment legislation stalled at the federal level, New Mexico enacted perhaps the most forward-thinking environmental standards in the nation. At the end of 2010, the state adopted strict greenhouse gas standards and banned incineration as a method of solid waste disposal. In addition, the Navajo nation in New Mexico – home to one of the largest uranium deposits in North America – banned uranium mining within its territory, a significant blow to those trying to spin nuclear power as the “clean energy” solution of the future.

Although the supportive research and advocacy work of national environmental groups undoubtedly laid the groundwork for these victories, New Mexico’s noticeable shift in policy did not result from top-down pressure but the bottom-up organizing of grassroots groups. Organizations like the Southwest Organizing Project, the Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment, the Black Mesa Water Coalition and the New Mexico Environmental Law Center achieved in a conservative-leaning state what national groups had failed to accomplish nationwide, even with a pro-environment president and Congress. It should come as no surprise that all the national studies and reports tend to pale in comparison to angry, organized community members – in this case, Mexican and

Chicano families in southern New Mexico who were outraged at a medical waste incinerator a stone’s throw from their children’s school. Patiently organizing in communities of color, increasing the turnout of historically disenfranchised voters and giving them a voice in the political system, grassroots organizations in New Mexico shifted the state’s policies and balance of power. In fact, several members of local indigenous and Latino communities have since run for elected office in the state – paving the way for long-term change.

The point of this report is not to diminish or deny the importance of national environmental advocacy organizations. Their daily contributions to advancing change are undeniable and irreplaceable. But suggesting that top-down advocacy can and should be our only strategy to achieve victory is dangerously short-sighted and, as we have seen in examples throughout this report, arguably to blame for our movement’s lack of broad and lasting success. We know that community organizing that engages the most marginalized communities has been essential in dramatically improving our future, from abolishing slavery to ensuring clean air. If we continue to underinvest in organizing, we undercut our chance at lasting success.

When Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*,

The key to healing our planet and our communities is healing our democracy - a process that begins not in Washington, D.C. conference rooms but in the living rooms of Mexican-American mothers and in community centers filled with African American kids.



Image courtesy of the SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP).

the choice of the word “silent” was not an accident. Throughout the environmental movement, we have relied on strategic sentinels calling attention to those harms that, for whatever reason, have either escaped collective notice or been intentionally ignored. These are the innovators, the path setters, often the troublemakers – shedding light on that which is invisible, hidden, obscured. And they have had the bravery to refuse to accept the status quo as it is but instead see the world as it could be and demand that we live up to our potential for justice, equality and sustainability.

We have seen the policies and practices that result when our political system is commandeered by the allies of big oil and toxic

chemicals. Imagine the result from a truly democratic and inclusive political system with the vigorous participation of grassroots communities, especially the economically and racially marginalized communities that supposedly share in our nation’s dream but so often bear the brunt of its nightmares. The key to healing our planet and our communities is healing our democracy – a process that begins not in Washington, D.C. conference rooms but in the living rooms of Mexican-American mothers and in community centers filled with African American kids. It is time to uproot ineffective strategies for achieving environmental change and plant new seeds in communities across the country and the world that will grow into sweeping, transformative change.

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CULTIVATING THE GRASSROOTS

A Winning Approach for Environment and Climate Funders

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“From toxic chemicals to dirty energy, contemporary environmental challenges are broadly distributed and deeply embedded in our society. An effective defense must be equally distributed and embedded. This NCRP report underscores how far communities living amidst environmental health hazards have stretched modest investments to protect their families and the places where they live, work and play. It provides pragmatic guidance for philanthropy to better equip affected communities to raise awareness, strengthen policy initiatives and mobilize majority support for stronger environmental protection.”

—Kathy Sessions, Director, Health and Environmental Funders Network (HEFN)

“We're not going to make big changes in climate as long as climate is seen solely as an environmental issue”

—Ed Miller, Environment Program Manager, The Joyce Foundation

The pace of social change is increasing rapidly in the United States and around the globe but unfortunately the environment and climate movement has failed thus far to keep up with movements for justice and equality. Existing environmental regulations have been diminished and new initiatives have been attacked and stymied. From 2000-2009, grantmakers provided \$10 billion for environment and climate work, funding primarily top-down strategies; yet, we have not seen a significant policy win since the 1980s. Our funding strategy is misaligned with the great perils our planet and environment face.

This report contends that environment and climate funders can be more effective and secure more environmental wins by investing heavily in grassroots communities that are disproportionately impacted by environment and climate harms. By engaging meaningfully at the grassroots level, grantmakers have the opportunity not just to support efforts that are especially strong but to use their work at the local level to build political pressure and mobilize for national change. Grassroots organizing is especially powerful where economic, social, political and environmental harms overlap to keep certain communities at the margins. By acknowledging the coming demographic shift in the United States and investing in lower-income and other underserved communities, environment and climate funders can increase their impact and build a movement that is more aligned with the future of our country. The report includes case studies that illustrate the impact of funding grassroots groups that are organizing for environmental change, and provides concrete suggestions for how environment and climate funders can engage with this vast potential constituency.

This is the fourth in a series of reports from the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) that invites grantmakers focused on specific issues to reconsider their funding strategies to generate the greatest impact. A report for education grantmakers was published in October 2010, one for health funders was published in April 2011, and one for arts and culture funders was published in October 2011.

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