

MOVING FORWARD AFTER COVID-19

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The Tishman Environment and Design Center stands in solidarity with the [Green New Deal Network](#) and the [Climate Justice Alliance](#), both groups have released core principles outlining a just and equitable response to COVID-19 and climate change and amplifying the voices and efforts of frontline communities and leaders. In order to protect our children, ourselves and future generations, we need to recognize that the Coronavirus pandemic is a dry run for future climate-related impacts, which will only grow in severity and frequency. This pandemic provides numerous lessons relevant to the climate crisis on the systemic responses needed to equitably protect society.

It is clear that the federal government is woefully unprepared for this pandemic and other emergencies, such as wildfires, sea level rise, and drought. Instead of improving preparation for crises, the federal government is using COVID-19 as an excuse to further undermine government regulations and responsibilities. For instance, President Trump's [EPA recently announced the relaxation of environmental regulations](#) designed to safeguard communities and public health. Combining the long term dismantling of government regulations and safety nets with structural, racial and economic inequalities results in unequal distribution of COVID-19 health and economic outcomes, which mirror the distribution of climate impacts.

Without radical systems change we risk vulnerability to increasingly severe events that will eventually overwhelm society and result in systems-wide collapse.

The good news is that there is much we can do now to both mitigate climate change and the outbreak of additional communicable diseases. While there is growing mistrust of government among Americans, [the response has been an increase in social movements and civil society](#) with grassroots leaders, workers and organizations taking charge in caring for communities. This type of collective action can be what saves our society.

Some of the most important steps we need to take now include:

- **Prioritize marginalized and vulnerable Environmental Justice communities.** The communities most impacted by COVID-19 and climate are also most impacted by legacy pollution and environmental degradation, economy-wide breakdowns, and financial insecurity. These are also the same communities spearheading collective action in response to both COVID-19 and climate change, putting together replicable systems to protect neighbors and alleviate suffering. Prioritizing vulnerable communities must include undocumented immigrants, the homeless, prisoners, and the uninsured.
- **Re-fund, protect and strengthen government safety nets that are designed to protect people and communities, especially those on the margins of society.** This includes social security, medicare/medicaid, food stamps, WIC,

unemployment insurance, FEMA, LIHEAP, and paid sick leave. Institute universal health care.

- **Increase political engagement, ensure fair and full elections and invest in strengthening our democracy.** A well-resourced central government is needed to orchestrate responses to these types of crises, not only global or national events, but also more localized events such as hurricanes and floods.
- **Fight Disaster Capitalism and invest in the infrastructure and systems needed for a healthy and safe society.** Part of any long lasting and equitable economic recovery requires a deep investment in US infrastructure including transitioning away from fossil fuels and an extractive economy. This type of large scale, national investment can stimulate the economy, grow jobs, decrease pollution, and mitigate climate change.

The question many of us are asking is about where we can find hope and how can we help our community. The answer may lie in the collective, bottom-up response from grassroots leaders and organizations across the country. As a nation, we must use all the tools at our disposal to invest in those systems that are going to provide relief from this crisis and the crises yet to come and ensure that our responses protect those on the frontlines. The systems we put in place today will save lives tomorrow.