

# VOICING THE POWER OF CLIMATE JUSTICE

**Insights on the Impact and  
Scale of Grassroots Initiatives**

**April 2025**



Tishman Environment  
and Design Center

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Authors and Contributors

This research report was written and prepared by Dr. Jennifer S. Ramirez, senior researcher; Anna Yulsman, research analyst; Dr. Yukyan Lam, research director; Dr. Ana Isabel Baptista, director; and Carly Sanchez, research assistant. It was supported by Luis Gonzalez, resource mobilization manager; Holly Baker, former director of resource mobilization; and KD Chavez, executive director at the Climate Justice Alliance.

Design: Drake Reed (Graphics and Figures) and Claire Rosenfield (Report Layout)

## About the Tishman Center

The Tishman Environment and Design Center at The New School is a collaborative community of practice that leverages research, policy, and design following the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing. We combine research and action to tackle the root causes of climate and environmental injustice and commit to change in higher education practices within and beyond The New School. We envision a future of environmental justice—a world free from racism, balanced with nature, care, and respect for all beings.

[tedc@newschool.edu](mailto:tedc@newschool.edu)

[tishmancenter.org](http://tishmancenter.org)

## The Just Returns Project

### *Clean Investments • Real Climate Impact*

This research is part of the Just Returns Project series. The Just Returns Project is a research collaboration between the Climate Justice Alliance, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, and the Tishman Environment and Design Center at The New School. The Just Returns series of research materials reflect findings across three elements that are key to understanding how capital and resources flow—or not—to grassroots environmental justice and climate justice organizations: (1) funders' investment practices, (2) funders' grantmaking practices, and (3) funders' misunderstanding of the impact and scale of grassroots-led climate solutions.



Tishman Environment  
and Design Center



# CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Grassroots Movements and Climate Justice: Articulating a New Paradigm .....	8
Evaluating Climate Action: Current Trends and New Directions .....	10
<b>Findings</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Introduction to the Findings .....	14
Baseline Data of Interview and Survey Respondents .....	15
Priority Issue Areas and Programs .....	18
Grassroots Strategies for Wins .....	29
Understanding Grassroots Impact and Scale .....	34
Measurement Practices and Challenges .....	41
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>47</b>
Appendix A: Glossary of Terms .....	48
Appendix B: Research Methods and Instruments .....	53
Appendix C: Evaluative Tools for Climate Funders and Grassroots Organizations ..	54
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	<b>58</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many foundations are directing resources toward climate-related initiatives as the climate crisis intensifies globally. However, environmental justice (EJ) and climate justice (CJ) organizations remain among the least funded in environmental philanthropy, with most resources directed to large, mainstream organizations that often promote business-as-usual solutions that overlook the frontline communities most impacted by climate change. Past studies cite several reasons for this funding disparity—including ideological divides, racism, and elitism—but many funders also see grassroots organizations as too small or risky to scale climate action.

As part of a broader research effort with the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, called the Just Returns Project, the Tishman Environment and Design Center conducted a mixed-methods investigation of the impact and scale of grassroots climate action. Through surveys and interviews with 44 CJA member groups and a review of the websites of the 48 Our Power Communities (OPC) CJA members, this study aimed to develop a

grassroots-informed evaluative framework of impact and scale that aligns with the intersectional work of CJ organizations.

Our findings show that EJ and CJ grassroots groups are crucial in advancing systemic, intersectional climate solutions at multiple geographic levels of governance and policy frameworks. Representing frontline communities, CJA members address interconnected issues across seven key areas: (1) food systems, (2) legacy pollution, (3) economic equity, (4) energy transitions, (5) social justice, (6) community development, and (7) community services. Notably, 95 percent of 40 survey respondents reported budgets under \$5 million, with a third operating on less than \$500,000. Despite limited funds, these organizations typically manage programs across five or more of the issue areas identified by the study.

The research team received dozens of examples of climate action and multi-sector climate wins, demonstrating the significant impact of grassroots organizations' initiatives despite their current limited funding. Among 38 wins reported from our survey, nearly all illustrated multi-issue impact across several

priority areas. Over half of these wins involved public policies, and three-quarters reached beyond local communities, demonstrating the broad influence of the grassroots in driving systemic change.

Our research critiques traditional notions of scalability, advocating for a more nuanced approach that aligns with grassroots leaders' perceptions of scale. In interviews, EJ and CJ leaders described their hard-fought victories achieved through seven intentional strategies: (1) base and power building, (2) forming coalitions and partnerships, (3) influencing policy and regulation, (4) challenging established norms, (5) community education and research, (6) fostering community identity and trust, and (7) ongoing learning and reflection.

These strategies prove effective in securing wins and contribute to multiple dimensions of scale—including scaling out, up, and deep; this approach stands in contrast to funders' conventional emphasis on scale through replication and quantification, which often overlooks the full, long-term impact of grassroots work.

This study urges a rethinking of climate solution funding to prioritize transformative, community-led initiatives aligned with the urgency and complexity of the climate crisis—going beyond carbon emissions reductions. By investing deeply in grassroots organizations, funders can support comprehensive solutions that are adaptable, accountable, and grounded in the lived experiences of those most affected by climate change.



# INTRODUCTION

As the climate crisis bears down on societies worldwide, public and private sectors are faced with increasing calls to mitigate the imminent impacts of climate change. These calls for urgency are usually coupled with demands for taking bold, unprecedented action in the face of the catastrophic consequences of global warming. Despite these calls, the dominant paradigm for climate action, led by policymakers, scientists, and mainstream environmental organizations (also known as **Big Greens**),<sup>1</sup> has focused primarily on the quantity and cost-effectiveness of carbon emissions reductions and market-based mechanisms for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>2</sup> Public sector climate policy continues to leave extractive systems and actors in place, sidelining fundamental questions of equity and justice. Our governance systems have failed to set us on a course that would avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

Most mainstream private and nonprofit sector actors also maintain a business-as-usual approach, leading to a wide array of **false solutions** that promise to reduce carbon emissions

to the neglect of other environmental, public health, and equity issues.<sup>3</sup> Primary among these false solutions are **carbon markets** like emissions cap-and-trading schemes, sector-specific mitigation policy goals framed as net-zero or carbon neutral, and resource-intensive technological “fixes,” such as negative emission technologies, geoengineering solutions, carbon capture and sequestration, and carbon dioxide removal. These solutions are expensive, unverifiable, and potentially harmful to local communities.<sup>4</sup> They also fail to address the root causes of the climate crisis.

Notably, the philanthropic sector has primarily followed in the footsteps of the public and private sectors, reflecting an abiding faith in market-based and technological fixes to address climate change.<sup>5</sup> The early 2000s saw environmental foundations supporting policies primarily aimed at carbon pricing and renewable energy, with less attention to broader climate policy changes at various governmental levels.<sup>6</sup> During this period, the narrow focus on carbon pricing disadvantaged smaller **grassroots organizations**<sup>7</sup> whose focus included environmental

injustices and degradation in their communities despite the continued failure to pass any federal or international policies or regulations on carbon pricing.<sup>8</sup>

Recent studies on the disparities in environmental grantmaking in the last decade have revealed that funders have not learned from the failed strategies of the past and still strongly favor and fund Big Greens to the neglect of smaller EJ and CJ organizations.<sup>9</sup> One recent expansive study on the environmental grantmaking of 220 foundations found that of the \$4.9 billion awarded over three years (2015–2017), more than half of the funding went to organizations with revenues of \$20 million or more, and grassroots organizations with less than \$1 million in revenue only received about four percent of total grant dollars. This study found that funding was so disproportionately allocated that several individual mainstream environmental organizations received more funding than all the EJ organizations combined. Big Greens such as the Sierra Club received more than \$200 million in grants, almost five times the amount that EJ organizations received in total during that same period.<sup>10</sup> This study aligns with other reports on environmental grantmaking, demonstrating that EJ groups are the least funded, sometimes receiving less than two percent of the total foundation revenue toward EJ initiatives.<sup>11</sup> Given the philanthropic sector's prominent role in the environmental arena, the divergent views on appropriate and transformative solutions to climate change represent an ideological and evaluative difficult-to-bridge chasm between funders and EJ and CJ organizations to the causes and solutions of the climate crisis.<sup>12</sup>

***At the same time, policy experts, practitioners, and funders who seek to support EJ and CJ initiatives struggle to understand the impact of grassroots-led climate solutions.***

Grassroots organizers acknowledge the challenges of measuring and evaluating activities to advance ecological and social well-being, including clean air, water, land, and systems of community control holistically, as part of a more transformative approach to climate equity and justice. Additionally, the work of EJ and CJ grassroots organizations is often part of a long-term struggle to create wholly sustainable, healthy, and thriving communities. Thus, the real significance of grassroots climate action is not fully visible exclusively through a climate impact lens. These impact “blind spots” are exacerbated as urgency becomes an excuse to de-prioritize grassroots work and prioritize more singular-focused climate change fixes that can compromise other values like democratic practices, social justice, biodiversity, and **Indigenous sovereignty**.<sup>13</sup> Now, more than ever, EJ and CJ organizations need capital investments to combat false solutions and climate change impacts in the most vulnerable communities.

To this end, it is crucial to develop an articulation of impact that conveys how grassroots organizations envision the value of their work and connect that to what other stakeholders, including climate funders, can understand. A growing body of scholarship calls for a multi-sectoral approach to grantmaking, arguing that philanthropy must transcend traditional market-based systems to address climate change's complexities.<sup>14</sup>

Both climate funders and public sector decision-makers can benefit from more diverse metrics that can capture the impact of more multifaceted, grassroots-informed, and community-centered approaches for systemic change. Communities and social movement actors with decades-long experience fighting the industries driving the climate crisis are leading innovative climate solutions that are replicable, scalable, available to us now, and ready for investment.

For example, CJA, currently comprising 88 diverse EJ and CJ grassroots organizations throughout the United States and its territories, is at the forefront of advancing climate action. The member organizations and coalitions aligned with CJA are united by a shared commitment: empowering **frontline communities** through dismantling harmful extractive economies, cultivating equitable and regenerative systems, exposing ineffective solutions, and demanding decisive action from industry leaders and governmental bodies.<sup>15</sup> CJA promotes collaboration among these frontline groups, communities, and broader networks and helps amplify their members' initiatives, priorities, strategies, and outcomes.

At the request of the CJA and as part of a broader research initiative with the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, the Tishman Environment and Design Center conducted a mixed-methods investigation of CJA member groups from 2022 to 2024 to derive a grassroots-informed articulation of impact and scale that aims to bring climate justice to the forefront of climate investments.

#### The study had several main objectives:

1. Identify the primary priorities and central areas of activity of EJ and CJ projects.
2. Explore the strategies implemented within these projects to achieve progress.
3. Understand how CJA member groups describe the impact and scale and scale of their projects.
4. Investigate the methods these groups use to assess or track their achievements.
5. Address the challenges in quantifying or qualifying their impact for funders and other stakeholders.

The diversity of CJA member groups offers a rich pool of information on grassroots organizing and impact. This research was undertaken to demonstrate how this impact is happening and to shift additional resources to the grassroots.



# BACKGROUND

## Grassroots Movements and Climate Justice: Articulating a New Paradigm

### *Climate Justice: Principles, Processes, and Practices*

For over a decade, grassroots organizations within the EJ and CJ movements have shaped equitable and robust **climate mitigation and adaptation strategies**, incorporating environmental, economic, and social justice principles, processes, and practices into their campaigns and projects.<sup>16</sup> Early EJ and CJ discourse emphasized the urgency of moving away from fossil fuel dependency and extractive economies backed by global corporations, advocating instead for diverse alternatives, including de-growth and decentralized, democratic, and regenerative local economies. Central to this evolution has been the push to shift power away from corporate and governmental control to community-driven decision-making, where those most impacted by environmental injustices hold greater agency over solutions.<sup>17</sup> Over time, this movement has evolved

further, integrating a sustainable societal vision calling for a **just transition** to an equitable and non-extractive economy.<sup>18</sup>

A prime example is the Just Transition Framework, which Movement Generation developed alongside other EJ and CJA leaders.<sup>19</sup> This framework envisions transitioning from a global, extractive economy benefiting a few to a localized, equitable, and regenerative economic system. Underpinning this transition are EJ principles, universally embraced within the movement, that champion the rights to clean air, water, land, and food, emphasizing the inclusion and protection of workers, community residents, and Indigenous Peoples.<sup>20</sup> Complementary principles, such as the **Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing**, underscore the significance of inclusion, self-determination, and solidarity, especially for frontline communities.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, in climate change mitigation and adaptation planning, a stark contrast exists between market-based and technology-driven, carbon-centric approaches and the intersectional strategies for which CJ proponents advocate. The latter group, diverging from capitalist control of energy

systems government and industry elites, emphasizes addressing the fundamental causes of climate change by changing our economic systems, investing in the just transition economic model, and confronting the intensive resource extraction and market-driven growth frameworks.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, grassroots-led CJ initiatives not only focus on mitigating global warming but also addressing the multifaceted issues arising from extractive practices, spanning human rights, equitable economic development, and public health. The uniqueness of the CJ framing is twofold: (1) solutions are rooted in bottom-up organizing, local conception and implementation, and foster **energy democracy** while attempting to remedy historical injustices, and (2) solutions reframe sustainability through a multidimensional and intersectional approach.<sup>23</sup> Prominent priorities include promoting **agroecology, food sovereignty, Indigenous traditional knowledge** in land management, **zero-waste** systems, and community-driven economic models like worker-owned cooperatives and community-owned energy.<sup>24</sup>

### *Case Studies of Grassroots Impact*

Carlie D. Trott et al. conducted a review of 74 peer-reviewed articles and studies that describe CJ actions in 69 countries and found that CJ initiatives are rapidly growing globally and involve people of all ages, including youth, adults, and elders. The study found a diverse representation of community-based initiatives aiming to bring about systemic change, including divestment campaigns, blockages against oil drilling, community-led **climate adaptation and mitigation** plans, ecosystem restoration programs, and state-level

policy campaigns, among other types of actions.<sup>25</sup> However, relatively little research on CJ initiatives has focused on evaluating their impact. Of the 74 articles reviewed, only one study was categorized as a program evaluation.<sup>26</sup> It is often difficult to understand the long-term impact of CJ activities because neoliberal systems prioritize market values, economic growth, and individual achievements, which often overlook the intrinsic human rights, cultural heritage and values, collective action, and systemic change that EJ and CJ movements emphasize.<sup>27</sup>

Despite challenges in aligning short-term results with long-term systemic change, some grassroots organizations have successfully estimated the impact of their activities on greenhouse gas emissions reduction, among other more notable climate-related metrics. A 2019 California Environmental Associates report, *Soil to Sky: Climate Solutions that Work*, examined the potential of grassroots strategies in mitigating emissions; however, this report also emphasized other social and environmental outcomes from strategies like resisting extractive industries, community governance of renewable resources, and Indigenous-led initiatives, offering case studies to exemplify multiple efficacy measures related to these efforts.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Dallas Goldtooth, Alberto Saldamando, and Kyle Gracey quantified the reduction of carbon emissions by Indigenous efforts against oil pipeline construction. Rather than just reducing existing carbon emissions, this report demonstrated how CJ efforts also prevent new sources of carbon emissions—an achievement that other solutions such as carbon capture and sequestration cannot claim. This

innovative approach to measurement focuses on what harms grassroots groups prevent rather than just what they are reacting to, highlighting the efficacy of grassroots efforts in a new light.<sup>29</sup>

Beyond carbon metrics, grassroots climate solutions demonstrate significant social impacts, such as enhancing community ownership, increasing wages, and civic engagement. For example, a recent evaluative study by Sana Mohammad et al. found that CJ approaches contained six critical elements in building equity and community. CJ organizations are: (1) more sensitive to delivering programs that meet the needs of vulnerable populations; (2) incorporate Indigenous principles into programming and redistribution of resources; (3) center programs on community engagement and empowerment; (4) provide effective local leadership; (5) understand, research, and address local community needs as related to climate action; and (6) encourage diversity within staff leadership, volunteers, and community members.<sup>30</sup> Another report by the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives also found that locally supported zero-waste initiatives can create up to two hundred times more jobs than landfills and incinerators.<sup>31</sup>

Despite these achievements, a notable gap exists in scholarly literature concerning the broader impact of the EJ and CJ movements in addressing climate change. This gap also partly stems from grassroots groups' challenges securing the necessary funding for comprehensive evaluation and reporting.<sup>32</sup> In summary, while these grassroots social movements have made strides in conceptualizing and implementing innovative climate solutions, their full potential and impact

are often understudied, under-resourced, and underrepresented in academic and public discourse, highlighting the need for more research and recognition.

## Evaluating Climate Action: Current Trends and New Directions

### *Challenges to Philanthropic Evaluative Practice for Climate Change Solutions*

As expressed previously, the history of how the philanthropic sector has supported climate solutions reflects the dominant paradigm of climate discourse centered on neoliberal principles.<sup>33</sup> A growing body of research has coined this trend as “**neoliberal environmentalism**,” which minimizes the normative concerns of environmental policy that deviate from market-based mechanisms and solutions.<sup>34</sup> Neoliberal environmental governance is reflected in how funders and resource providers evaluate what climate projects and proposals are valued and invested in over others.<sup>35</sup>

For example, some outcome-based funder initiatives link the grantee program activities to efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and quantifiable outputs and outcomes. This framing leads foundations to overemphasize business logic and terms in evaluating environmental programs and invest in organizations that model neoliberal logic and language.<sup>36</sup> Venture philanthropy, a prominent trend in the philanthropic sector, epitomizes this approach by combining venture capital tactics with philanthropy, focusing on technology-driven solutions and

demanding rigorous metric-based performance measurements to demonstrate a return on investment, where donors are likened to investors and grantees become part of the foundation's investment portfolio.<sup>37</sup> This evaluative logic often sidelines efforts that cannot demonstrate quick and quantifiable metrics for impact. With these evaluation practices, scholars warn that obsessive measurements of funding initiatives put the onus on grantees to develop simplistic measurable outcomes that do not reflect broader impacts or range of social changes.<sup>38</sup>

EJ and CJ interventions, which involve systems-level outcomes, operate across multiple areas and sectors and face complex evaluative challenges due to the diversity of actors, interactions, networks, and feedback loops involved.<sup>39</sup> Traditional evaluation tools designed for single-issue interventions often fall short in assessing these system-level programs. Melissa Edwards, Nina Burrige, and Hilary Yerbury discuss these challenges in an action-based qualitative study, noting that grassroots organizations struggle particularly with the formalized, top-down nature of evaluation processes of funders as well as their internal resource constraints.<sup>40</sup> The study found that when staff were directed to develop performance measures utilizing an appreciative inquiry evaluative design method with the researchers, they favored social impact outcomes, such as empowering constituents, raising awareness, building capacity, and increasing advocacy efforts as critical indicators for success. The researchers also highlight that grassroots-led programs often yield unintended spillover effects that benefit the community beyond the direct outcomes

for participants. Recognizing these effects can provide a fuller understanding of the broader impacts and scalability of grassroots-led climate solutions.<sup>41</sup>

### *Reframing Impact and Scale through the Field of Social Innovation*

Despite these challenges, evaluative research has shown that community organizing can lead to positive outcomes related to **community resilience**, building social capital, stakeholder engagement, leadership development, and greater civic engagement.<sup>42</sup> **Grassroots Innovation (GRI)** is another key concept that can alternately reframe the impact of grassroots activities on climate change and build a bridge to the neoliberal evaluative logic of funders. Shaphali Gupta defined GRI as a multidimensional construct of technologies, products, or solutions created by grassroots groups or residents of economically disadvantaged communities that “combine local, contextual, and traditional knowledge.” The impact of grassroots organizations on societal development and innovation is deeply interconnected with the principles of GRI, which include affordable costs, indigenous knowledge, informal innovation, sustainability, local fit, and adaptability.<sup>43</sup> Often rooted in local communities and driven by local knowledge and informal innovation processes, EJ and CJ organizations are pivotal in fostering these affordable, sustainable, and locally adapted innovations.

The traditional philanthropic approach to scaling, which focuses on expanding geographically or increasing the number of solution beneficiaries quickly, mirrors market-driven growth strategies. This perspective prioritizes rapid expansion in terms of physical

reach or sheer numbers, often overlooking the depth and sustainability of impact. Jenny Cameron and Jarra Hicks challenge the conventional approaches to scale in how we address climate change. They argue that redefining geographic scale can more clearly recognize the transformative potential of grassroots initiatives because traditional scalar thinking often overlooks local action in favor of national or international programs. They propose a move away from a hierarchical perspective that prioritizes national or international efforts over local actions toward a model that embraces “flat ontology” and “situated politics.”<sup>44</sup>

A flat ontology model values the power and innovation of local actions, recognizing the critical role of the grassroots in influencing key political actors, leveraging relationships and networks, and creating innovative and tangible results even in the face of many obstacles. The study illustrates the importance of grassroots movements in driving public policy and social change, suggesting that the accumulating effects of separate small-scale initiatives can contribute to “scaling up.”<sup>45</sup> These solutions are also enhanced by virtue of being structured specifically for the places in which they are implemented, which increases community participation and capacity building—contributing to the long-term viability of grassroots solutions due to community acceptance.<sup>46</sup>

Michele-Lee Moore, Darcy Riddell, and Dana Vocisano investigated how nonprofit organizations advance systemic social innovation through three scalability approaches: “scaling out,” “scaling up,” and “scaling deep” (see table 1 for a description of each concept and their core

strategies). They highlight the effectiveness of bottom-up, coalition-driven efforts for policy change and cultural transformation in describing the strategies employed across different dimensions of scale.<sup>47</sup> The study addresses scaling challenges, like organizational leadership and capacity, emphasizing the need for integrated strategies that crosscut all scaling types in response to these challenges. They also mention the potential of combining all three scaling types for systemic change, calling for more research on its effects in diverse contexts.

Lindley Mease also described scaling deep concerning grassroots climate action and developed an understanding of scale concerning the depth, relationships, decentralization, and power that grassroots groups develop within their communities, arguing that these elements lead to a more durable and transformative impact than traditional speed-and-quantity-focused methods to scale.<sup>48</sup> They suggest philanthropic grantmaking that prioritizes the value of this approach and provides flexible funding to grassroots solutions.<sup>49</sup> For our study, we embedded the multi-scalar conceptual framework of scaling up, scaling out, scaling deep, and cross-cutting scale, as Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano defined them within our research design. We chose this framework for its relevance and resonance with the EJ and CJ perspectives, helping to shape and guide our data collection and analysis of the results, to which we will now turn.

**Table 1: Four Types of Scaling and Their Main Strategies**

Source: Table derived from Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano, "Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep," 77.

Scaling Concept	Description	Main Strategies
Scaling Out	Impacting greater numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Deliberative replication in new communities</li></ul>
Scaling Up	Impacting law and policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Advocating institutional changes through policy or legal reforms</li></ul>
Scaling Deep	Impacting cultural roots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Altering core narratives and beliefs through cultural change and transformative learning</li></ul>
Cross-Cutting	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Broadening the problem frame</li><li>▶ Seeking alternative resources</li><li>▶ Building networks and partnerships</li></ul>



# FINDINGS

## Introduction to the Findings

This study delves into how CJA member groups articulate the scale and impact of their activities. By examining the nature and effectiveness of these grassroots efforts, this research sought to uncover insights into the most impactful CJ projects, initiatives, and proposals as perceived by the groups implementing climate justice initiatives and projects. The study focused on several key areas of inquiry:

- ▶ Identifying the primary priorities and central areas of activity of CJ projects
- ▶ Exploring the strategies implemented within these projects to achieve progress
- ▶ Understanding how CJA member groups describe the impact of their projects
- ▶ Investigating the methods these groups use to assess or track their achievements
- ▶ Examining how these organizations define “scale” in the context of their priority areas of activity

- ▶ Addressing the challenges in communicating or qualifying their impact to funders and other stakeholders

Our methodology encompassed a mix of web scraping, surveys, and interviews across CJA’s extensive member network:<sup>50</sup>

- ▶ **Web Scraping:** Data was extracted from the websites of 48 “Our Power Communities” (OPCs), a subset of CJA member organizations.<sup>51</sup>
- ▶ **Interviews:** In-depth discussions were held with leaders from 10 CJA member organizations. In addition, we spoke to four national climate funders.
- ▶ **Surveys:** Responses were collected from 40 member group participants.

Through this multifaceted approach, our study provides a detailed portrait of the current landscape of CJ activities in the US, shedding light on the strategies employed and the challenges these vital grassroots organizations encounter in measuring and evaluating climate action.<sup>52</sup>

## Baseline Data of Interview and Survey Respondents

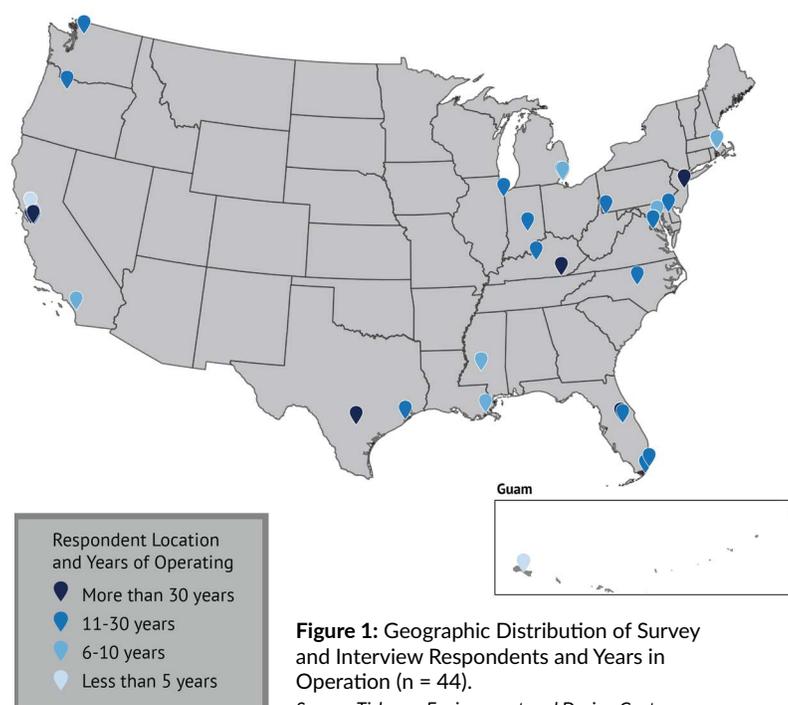
Survey and interview responses from CJA member groups offer a detailed view of the diversity within EJ and CJ organizations, characterized by their geographic distribution, years of operation, operating budgets, and funding sources. This data helps create a contemporary portrait of the strategic partnerships, programs, and approaches these groups employ to address climate change and justice issues.

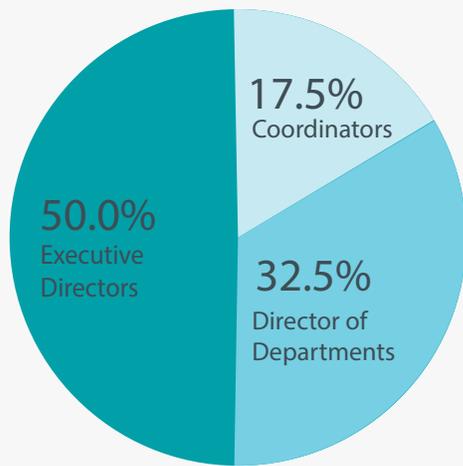
The total response rate of CJA member groups was 49 percent (n = 44), with some overlap between interview and survey respondents. The distribution of survey and interview respondents across the US regions is as follows:

- ▶ Northeast (includes CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT, NJ, NY, PA): Seven organizations (16 percent)
- ▶ Midwest (includes IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI): Six organizations (14 percent)
- ▶ South (includes DE, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, DC, WV, AL, KY, MS, TN, AR, LA, OK, TX): Sixteen organizations (36 percent)
- ▶ West (includes AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, WY, AK, CA, HI, OR, WA): Fourteen organizations (32 percent)
- ▶ US Territory (includes PR, VI, MP): One organization (2 percent)

As depicted in figure 1, the expansive reach and operational history of the EJ and CJ organizations stand as a testament to the endurance of the EJ movement. A considerable proportion (48 percent) of respondents have been operational for 11 to 30 years, and a notable portion (23 percent) have been in operation for over three decades.

Despite generally operating with smaller budgets than national environmental organizations, most EJ and CJ organizations reported having strategic relationships at multiple geographic levels and collaborating with diverse organizations, coalitions, and alliances. This robust network of partnerships demonstrates their adeptness at resource allocation, often operating with less funding while maintaining a broad scope of influence and engagement in their communities.





**Figure 2: Respondents' Job Title**  
(n = 40)

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

Most survey respondents hold high-level positions within their organizations.

**Figure 3: Geographic Focus**  
(n = 40)

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

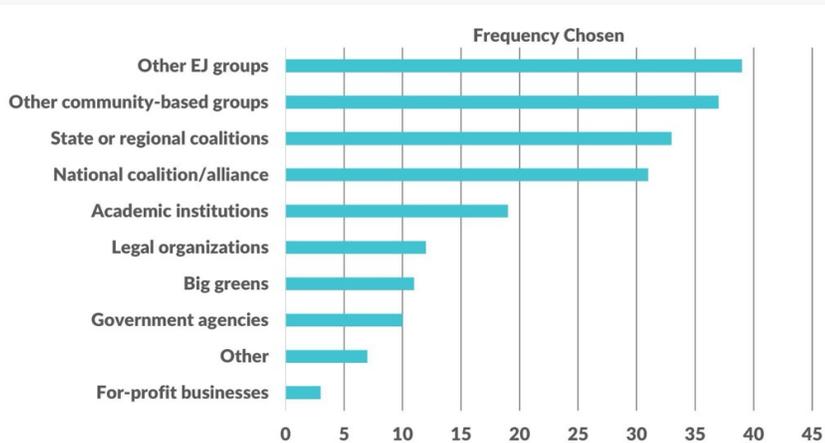
Ninety percent of survey respondents reported operating at two or more geographical levels of focus.

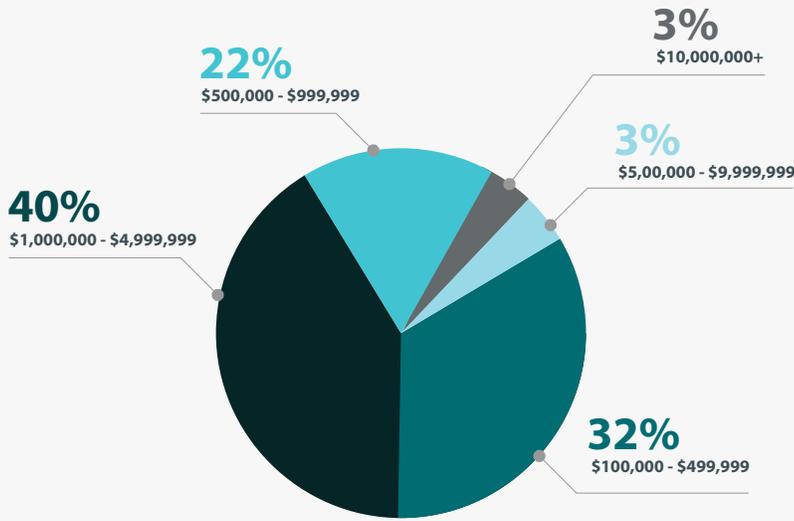


**Figure 4: Organizational Partnerships**  
(n = 40)

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

On average, survey respondents reported collaborating with more than five types of groups. They most frequently work with other EJ groups, community-based organizations, state and regional coalitions, national alliances, and universities. Notably, partnerships with for-profit businesses, government agencies, and major environmental organizations are less common among grassroots organizations.





**Figure 5: 2022 Organizational Operating Budget (n = 40)**

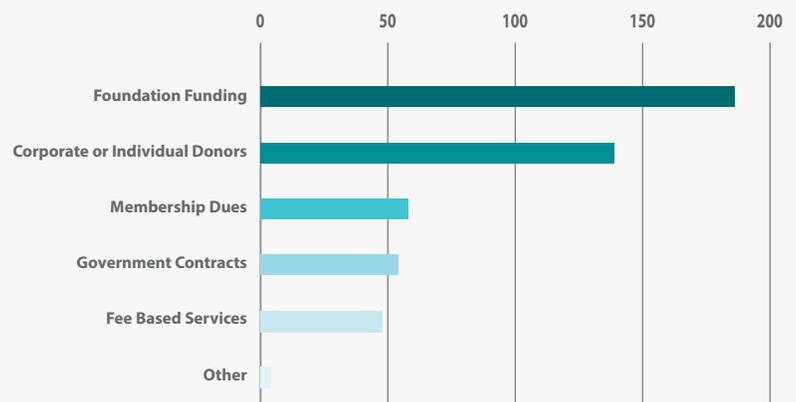
Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

In 2022, most respondent organizations operated with modest resources: 95 percent had budgets under \$5 million, and one-third managed with less than \$500,000.

**Figure 6: Weighted Rank of Top Funding Sources (n = 40)**

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

Most respondent organizations ranked foundation funding (private or family foundations) as their top funding source. In addition, over half of organizations reported that 76%–100% of their budget came from private foundations (in 2022). The second-most significant funding source was from private, corporate, or individual donors.



## Priority Issue Areas and Programs

Our review of the OPC websites revealed that groups have a wide range of missions, vision statements, and program descriptions across various sectors. These programs are central to each organization's efforts to address a wide range of environmental, social, and economic challenges. Typical areas of programmatic focus listed on websites include environmental education, improving public health, and addressing environmental racism, food insecurity, and a lack of affordable housing.

In-depth interviews with ten grassroots leaders selected from CJA's membership also shed light on many CJ activities, including sustainable housing development, community land trusts, solar-powered infrastructure, and urban farming. These discussions expanded to encompass environmental quality, public health, and broader social issues such as labor rights and gender equity. The diversity of priority areas and programs described in interviews underscores the intricate web of issues that CJA member groups confront, highlighting the intersectionality inherent in their work and the comprehensive nature of their initiatives. As one interviewee explained,

- *“Our mission is to build power among farm*
- *workers so that they are involved and take*
- *part in the social, economic, environmental,*
- *and health issues that affect their lives.”*

The categorization of these priority areas and programmatic activities presented a challenge due to the diversity of descriptions and the

breadth of topics covered. Thus, several iterations of categorizing priority issue areas and programmatic activities were conducted for the analysis.

For example, question 10 in our survey asked groups to “choose up to five environmental and climate justice issue areas your organization works on and rank them in terms of the amount of time and resources used.” Ninety-five percent of respondents opted for five areas, with many adding a sixth area in the “other” category.

The fact that most respondents selected multiple areas underscores the versatility of these groups, demonstrating their capacity to address a wide range of issues simultaneously. After analyzing OPC websites, additional literature, and responses from interviews and surveys, we triangulated our data and refined the issue areas, determining that most CJ activity fell into seven broad categories. Each issue area also included several subareas of programmatic activity illustrated in figure 7.

### *The Climate Connection*

Interestingly, our research suggests that even though grassroots organizations engage in various priority areas and programs relevant to climate justice, many EJ and CJ organizations do not directly associate their activities with addressing climate change.<sup>53</sup>

Studies distinguish between “direct” and “indirect” climate actions based on their goals, methods, and results. Direct actions involve immediate interventions to address climate issues quickly.<sup>54</sup> By contrast, indirect climate actions involve interventions that,



**Figure 7: Climate Justice Priority Issue Areas and Top Programs**

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

**Note:** Ninety-five percent of EJ and CJ member group survey respondents reported operating projects across five priority issue areas. These findings illustrate the expansive and interconnected scope of work CJA member groups undertake, demonstrating their deep commitment to addressing the multifaceted nature of issues embedded within the environmental and climate justice movements. The seven broad priority issue areas are further defined in table 2 and reported examples of direct and indirect climate benefits as found in past case studies.

while not explicitly aimed at combating climate change, still contribute to its mitigation by influencing broader societal behaviors, policies, and practices that lead to more sustainable outcomes.<sup>55</sup>

For example, when discussing climate action initiatives, many interview participants acknowledged their contributions to climate solutions but seldom described specific climate-centric goals or metrics like carbon emissions reduction. Instead, they emphasized the broader impact of their activities in addressing the vulnerability to climate change effects in their communities. Grassroots Leader 3 described how climate change is exacerbating other issues that policymakers and other institutions often ignore, such as criminal justice and immigration, but these issues are being addressed by their organization’s social justice activities.

*“We were in a 10-year battle to address racial profiling by the police and border patrol because we’re in the northern [US] border area here. . . . We did constant marches, direct action, tribunals, which we call participatory democracy. . . . Climate change is affecting border travel, border oversight, migration patterns, [as well as] how farm workers work. . . . The climate is affecting everything—and nobody else is doing anything about it.”*

Participants also shared their organizations’ responses to climate-induced disasters, highlighting the integration of climate considerations into community engagement. For example, Grassroots Leader 10 described recent efforts to address natural disasters affecting the communities they serve:

*“We have been seeing that our communities are being directly affected by climate change events, like more intense storms, wildfires, flooding. . . . And sometimes, they are displaced. They lose their home; they lose their source of income. So, we do direct assistance with helping them recover, giving them access to food [and] in some cases . . . [we] give them some funds to pay for a month’s rent and some utilities.”*

These reflections illustrate how indirect approaches intersect with national or international climate mitigation and adaptation goals, such as the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals to “strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters.”<sup>56</sup>

Our findings also align with existing literature on grassroots CJ action, which suggests an integrative connection to climate change. Trott et al. noted that only 17.6 percent of peer-reviewed articles included direct actions to mitigate climate change (such as tree planting), but 91.9 percent included indirect actions, such as increasing social influence on local environmental policy decisions. Interestingly, although nearly half (45.9 percent) of the articles Trott et al. reviewed acknowledged carbon emissions reduction as a goal, the predominant aims for climate justice action included public opinion and broader social transformations.<sup>57</sup> Table 2 lists the seven broad priority areas the research team identified, their definitions, and the types of programs CJA member groups implement. In addition, we summarize select evidence of other climate benefits from previously published peer-reviewed literature and reports in the “Direct and Indirect Climate Benefits” column.

**Table 2: Definition of Priority Issue Areas, Programs, and Their Climate Benefits**

Source: Table derived from Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano, “Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep,” 77.

Priority Issue Areas	Program Types	Direct and Indirect Climate Benefits
<p><b>FOOD SYSTEMS</b></p> <p><i>Efforts to address food issues and create sustainable, equitable, and accessible food networks that prioritize local production, healthy diets, and environmental sustainability.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Agroecology</li> <li>◆ Agroforestry</li> <li>◆ Food sovereignty</li> <li>◆ Food waste and recycling</li> <li>◆ Urban farming and gardening</li> <li>◆ Food justice insecurity</li> <li>◆ Farmworkers’ rights and protections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Enhances carbon sequestration:</b> Regenerative farming practices increase the amount of organic matter in the soil, helping to store more carbon.<sup>58</sup></li> <li>▶ <b>Improves ecosystem resilience:</b> Agroecological practices promote diverse ecosystems above and below ground, which helps stabilize the climate and balance local ecosystems.<sup>59</sup></li> <li>▶ <b>Improves food security and public health:</b> Developing locally produced climate-resilient crops improves nutrition and mitigates food shortages.<sup>60</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>LEGACY POLLUTION, WASTE, AND TOXINS</b></p> <p><i>Efforts to address and mitigate issues related to historical pollution, waste management, and toxic exposures, particularly for communities close to polluting industries and waste sites.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Campaigns to reduce harmful emissions and co-pollutants</li> <li>◆ Community-based research on environmental harms</li> <li>◆ Environmental racism</li> <li>◆ Land remediation</li> <li>◆ Public health campaigns</li> <li>◆ Toxic waste management</li> <li>◆ Chemical exposure</li> <li>◆ Air, land, and water pollution regulatory enforcement</li> <li>◆ Zero-waste initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Reduces greenhouse gas emissions from polluting industries:</b> Cities with a greater number of local grassroots organizations and multi-level organizations tend to experience a decrease in emissions over time.<sup>61</sup></li> <li>▶ <b>Reduces energy consumption and mitigates hazardous risks to toxins:</b> Construction and demolition waste recycling programs are a viable mitigation strategy for reducing the risk of landslides, reducing energy consumption, offsetting greenhouse emissions, recovering added-value materials, and creating employment opportunities.<sup>62</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>ECONOMIC EQUITY</b></p> <p><i>Efforts to reduce economic disparities, promote fair access to job opportunities in sectors that support a regenerative economy and redistribute capital and resources to communities most impacted by climate change.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Green financing</li> <li>◆ Workforce development and training</li> <li>◆ Community ownership (cooperatives, land trusts)</li> <li>◆ Advocacy for public funding</li> <li>◆ Economic justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Increases the investment and adoption of sustainable practices:</b> Cooperative banks reduce income inequality and stabilize local economies by maintaining long-term employment and supporting community-oriented credit systems reducing vulnerability to drastic economic shifts.<sup>63</sup></li> <li>▶ <b>Promotes locally controlled low-carbon economies:</b> Worker cooperatives, such as renewable energy cooperatives, have multiple environmental and economic benefits. They reduce carbon emissions and allow community members to realize profits and cost savings through energy production and sales.<sup>64</sup> For example, the development of community-owned, industrial-scale, renewable energy production by several US Indigenous communities in the northern Great Plains has put them on a tangible path to becoming low-carbon communities.<sup>65</sup></li> </ul>

Priority Issue Areas	Program Types	Direct and Indirect Climate Benefits
<p><b>ENERGY TRANSITIONS</b></p> <p><i>Efforts to shift fossil fuel-based energy systems, sectors, and facilities to develop more renewable and clean energy sources</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Energy efficiency and affordability</li> <li>◆ Energy retrofitting</li> <li>◆ Energy policy campaigns</li> <li>◆ Decommissioning fossil fuel plants</li> <li>◆ Renewable energy production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Promotes economic opportunities, particularly in creating clean energy jobs:</b> Transition programs designed to retrain fossil fuel workers and support communities near fossil fuel facilities can help mitigate the socioeconomic disruptions caused by the shift away from fossil fuels. Moreover, these programs address long-standing pollution burdens disproportionately affecting low-income and minority populations in these areas, improving environmental and public health outcomes.<sup>66</sup></li> <li>▶ <b>Reduces energy poverty:</b> Community renewable energy projects cut reliance on fossil fuels, improve access to affordable energy, and increase awareness of energy conservation.<sup>67</sup></li> <li>▶ <b>Increases community participation, social capacity, and resilience:</b> Often more trusted than government or industry representatives, community organizations leverage local knowledge to ensure renewable energy projects incorporate community feedback with better-quality installations. A review of several case studies revealed that they also enhance long-term engagement by providing relevant information, training, and after-sales services, all tailored to local needs.<sup>68</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS</b></p> <p><i>Efforts that advocate for equal rights, justice, and fair treatment of all individuals, addressing systemic inequalities and fighting for the rights of marginalized and oppressed groups</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Civil rights (general/other)</li> <li>◆ Immigrant and refugee rights</li> <li>◆ Labor rights and protections</li> <li>◆ Racial justice</li> <li>◆ Gender equity</li> <li>◆ Indigenous sovereignty and knowledge</li> <li>◆ LGBTQ+ rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Prevents new carbon emissions:</b> Direct resistance and legal challenges to stop extractive industries benefit the environment in historically vulnerable communities and give communities back the power to manage their natural, cultural, and economic resources. For example, one report found that Indigenous resistance to stop or delay 26 fossil fuel expansion projects across Canada and the US has prevented new greenhouse gas pollution equivalent to nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of annual total 2019 US emissions.<sup>69</sup></li> <li>▶ <b>Protects vulnerable populations and victims of climate disasters:</b> Community-driven land ownership projects are vital in shielding vulnerable populations from displacement and reducing climate migration after disasters. For example, after Hurricane Maria, the Caño Martín Peña communities in Puerto Rico implemented a community land trust to prevent displacement from gentrification and climate disasters. This model of collective land tenure ensured that residents could rebuild and adapt without being pushed out by market forces, offering resilience against flooding and hurricanes.<sup>70</sup></li> </ul>

Priority Issue Areas	Program Types	Direct and Indirect Climate Benefits
<p><b>COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING</b></p> <p><i>Efforts aimed to increase community participation in strategic planning and development and improve</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Affordable and sustainable housing development</li> <li>◆ Resilience, mitigation, and adaptation planning</li> <li>◆ Preventing displacement and gentrification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Promote carbon sequestration:</b> CJ community development projects are diverse and address place-based issues that have been shown to, directly and indirectly, sequester carbon, enhancing local contributions to mitigating global climate change.<sup>71</sup></li> <li>▶ <b>Develops climate-resilient infrastructure:</b> By prioritizing renewable energy sources, sustainable transportation, energy efficiency, and disaster preparedness, CJ projects decrease vulnerability to extreme weather events while maintaining community stability, reducing the impact of climate disasters such as floods, hurricanes, and heat waves.<sup>72</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>COMMUNITY SERVICES</b></p> <p><i>Efforts aimed at providing essential services and support to communities and enhancing community identity and residents' overall well-being.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Community wellness (general)</li> <li>◆ Arts, culture, and recreation</li> <li>◆ Legal aid</li> <li>◆ Childcare services</li> <li>◆ Mutual aid</li> <li>◆ Disaster relief and just recovery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Increases socioecological processes that improve community resilience and social capital:</b> In many regions, grassroots networks, often led by Women of Color, establish relationships and trust with key individuals within a community and provide arenas that promote resilience through initiatives like cultural events, community kitchens, collective food production, and locally controlled energy solutions.<sup>73</sup></li> <li>▶ <b>Creates a platform for learning about climate change:</b> Many climate justice initiatives include youth education, training, and leadership to engage multiple generations of community members in climate action.<sup>74</sup> Youth-coordinated events give students a unique insight into perceived climate change problems and an opportunity to ideate on scalable, affordable, and sometimes very creative solutions that could be implemented locally.<sup>75</sup></li> </ul>



## Most Frequently Discussed Priority Areas and Programs

### FOOD SYSTEMS

Participants in our study often discussed sustainable agricultural programs as a cornerstone of their method to address climate change. Grassroots Leader 10 argued, “Agroecology is an effective climate change solution because it traps carbon emissions more efficiently than our current agricultural systems.”

Some participants discussed the benefits of local agricultural systems with **Indigenous rights and food sovereignty**. As one interviewee explained, “The idea of building a community-based, sustainable agricultural system where people learn, not just to farm free of pesticides and other chemicals, but also recover some of those ancient farming practices . . . that in some cases have been lost.”



### Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network

**Mission:** The Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network (DBCFSN) was founded to ensure that Detroit’s African American population participated in the food movement, and because we are the majority of the population in Detroit, we are in the leadership of that movement locally.

**Priority Issue Areas:** (1) Food systems, (2) economic equity, (3) community development and planning, (4) social justice and human rights, and (5) community services.

#### Programs:

- ▶ [D-Town Farm](#) is the largest of Detroit’s many gardens and farms. The farm occupies more than seven acres inside the Meyers Tree Nursery in the City of Detroit’s Rouge Park. D-Town Farm is maintained by a small staff and volunteers who grow more than 30 fruits, vegetables, and herbs yearly using sustainable, regenerative methods.
- ▶ [Food Warriors](#) is a youth development program teaching young people about the food system, agricultural techniques, and healthy food preparation.
- ▶ [Food N Flava](#) is a program that introduces young people, ages 14–16, to food systems literacy, healthy food choices, and entrepreneurial skills through food product development.
- ▶ [Environmental Justice](#), DBCFSN represents its community through several national and regional partnerships to advance EJ goals and priorities in state and national policy.
- ▶ [Detroit Food Commons](#) is a two-story, 31,000-square-foot community development project with a mixed-use state-of-the-art facility, including kitchens, a banquet hall, and offices for community use.
- ▶ [Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund](#), in partnership with other local organizations, grants capacity awards to assist Black families in purchasing land for farming.
- ▶ [The Detroit People’s Food Co-op](#) supports the efforts of a Black-led, community-owned grocery store.

#### Reported Win:

As a result of the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund, 74 awardees are now landowners, 18.73 acres of land have been purchased by awardees, 52 awardees completed infrastructure projects, and 16 of the awardees are currently in the purchase process.<sup>76</sup>

## ECONOMIC EQUITY

Participants in our study consistently highlighted programs across all sectors that foster economic self-determination, collective ownership, and local solidarity economies as pivotal for cultivating equitable, sustainable communities. **Some participants argued that the focus on collective economic practices, such as green financing, job training, entrepreneurial programs, and cooperative ownership, also serves as a foundation for a broader social and economic transformation that will mitigate the climate crisis.** Grassroots Leader 4 described it this way, “Right now, I would say we are very involved in entrepreneurship,

looking at solidarity economies, regenerative economies, which has always been part of our work from the beginning.”

The vision for economic equity and justice also extends to creating spaces embodying these principles, such as financial community centers offering training, workshops, financial support, and community-owned land projects like farms and affordable housing. Grassroots Leader 3 shared how these efforts are spreading, “That movement of owning the means of production within the farmworker community is growing. There’s more and more coming to us saying, ‘We don’t want bosses anymore. Teach us how to form our own union, our own co-op,’ which we’re really busy doing now.”

## KHEPRW

**Mission:** Kheprw Institute works to create a more just, equitable, human-centered world by nurturing youth and young adults to be leaders, critical thinkers, and doers who see the people in any community as the most valuable assets and are committed to working with community assets to bring about change that leads to empowered self-reliant and self-determining communities.



**Priority Issue Areas:** (1) Economic equity, (2) community development and planning, (3) food systems, (4) social justice and human rights, and (5) community services.

### Programs:

- ▶ [Indianapolis Community Land Trust](#) provides permanently affordable housing for Black and Brown communities, enabling self-determination and building community wealth.
- ▶ [Youth Internship Program](#) is a middle and high school student program to grow and develop youth leadership and skills in Entrepreneurship, Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math.
- ▶ [Artist in Residence](#) is a program that bridges the gap between community and art to build a community voice and unite people around art and culture.
- ▶ [Democratizing Data](#), a program that trains the community in data skills such as R, Python, and ArcGIS, connects data experts with the community and establishes an open-source data portal.
- ▶ [Community Controlled Food Initiative](#) is a community-led food cooperative that provides fresh, affordable food and supports local farmers.
- ▶ [Alchemy Entrepreneurial Incubator](#) is a program that provides business starter support like coworking office space and consulting services to lower the barriers for community entrepreneurs.

### Reported Win:

Kheprw is raising \$1 million to launch Alchemy, which will support 40 entrepreneurs and provide them with mentorship, technical assistance, and financial resources. They are also establishing a \$5–\$20 million integrated capital fund to provide grants and low-to-no-interest loans to social enterprises.<sup>77</sup>

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

Participants recognized equitable community development and planning as pivotal in combating the adverse impacts of climate change, including intense storms, wildfires, and flooding, and they underscored the need for participatory processes to address these challenges. Grassroots Leader 3 reflected on their evolving focus of these efforts: “So that’s our participatory process—becoming more and more focused on climate impacts at the local level, with people demanding better crisis and emergency responses, as well as improved zoning

practices.” Grassroots Leader 6 also noted the lack of government response in this priority area: “We just realized that there wasn’t enough being done to uplift what the climate crisis is and ways that we need to start preparing ourselves.”

Other leaders talked about basic infrastructure to improve transportation and safety. As Grassroots Leader 2 described, “Walkable neighborhoods in [this] sense is having access to the bus stops. . . . It is more important to access those basic needs while still not putting yourself or your children in danger.”

### PUSH Buffalo

**Mission:** To mobilize residents to create strong neighborhoods with quality, affordable housing, expand local hiring opportunities and advance racial, economic, and environmental justice in Buffalo, New York.

**Priority Issue Areas:** (1) Community development planning, (2) economic equity, (3) energy transitions, (4) legacy pollution, waste and toxins, and (5) social justice and human rights.

#### Programs:

- ▶ [Sustainability Workforce Training Center](#) is a project that engages residents, provides local hiring opportunities and affordable housing, and advances economic and environmental justice.
- ▶ [Buffalo Neighborhood Stabilization Company \(BNSC Inc.\)](#) is a nonprofit housing corporation dedicated to creating affordable housing units on the Massachusetts Avenue Corridor of Buffalo’s West Side.
- ▶ [Street Team and Youth Action \(Grant Street Neighborhood Center for Youth\)](#) is a participatory education program that serves as a drop-in community center for the public, providing daily activities and programming that build critical consciousness.
- ▶ [PUSH Green](#) is a 25-square-block area on Buffalo’s West Side that encompasses green affordable housing construction, community-based renewable energy projects, housing weatherization, green jobs training, green infrastructure, and vacant land restoration projects.
- ▶ [Out of Gas, In with Justice!](#) is a program that advocates for residents who live in affordable housing to access the benefits of modern technology like induction stoves to increase indoor air quality in their homes.

#### Reported Win:

PUSH Buffalo helped lead a grassroots campaign to pass the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) in 2019. The Sustainability Workforce Training Center has helped PUSH implement the CLCPA mandates for increasing access to clean energy for BIPOC neighborhoods throughout Buffalo, New York.<sup>78</sup>



## ENERGY TRANSITIONS

Grassroots organizations increasingly understand that renewable energy is important for achieving a just transition, especially for communities facing environmental and socioeconomic challenges and those fenceline communities with a legacy of fossil fuel infrastructures in their backyards. Grassroots Leader 2 emphasized the ongoing commitment to this priority, stating, “Each year, we try to push for more and more renewable energy.” This priority is reflected in various programs to enhance the production, affordability, and accessibility of renewable resources like local solar and wind energy production. For example, Grassroots Leader 8 highlighted the local implementation of renewable energy in their urban farming program: “We have renewable energy on the farm. I think one of the few [farms] in the city with solar

panels and windmills and things like that.”

Further expanding on the innovative applications of renewable energy in local projects, Grassroots Leader 9 explained how their program addresses multiple community issues by providing clean energy production, broadband infrastructure, as well as improving civic engagement.

- *“One of the solutions our organization*
- *has is to install solar-powered mesh*
- *Wi-Fi-enabled streetlights so that the*
- *community has ownership and access not*
- *only to lighting their community but also*
- *to what has now become an essential*
- *resource: access to the internet. . . . It*
- *was much more than just relighting the*
- *city; it was empowering the community*
- *to have a voice around clean energy and*
- *these types of clean energy decisions.”*
- 

## SOULARDARITY



**Mission:** Soulardarity is building a brighter future in Highland Park, Michigan, with education, organizing, and people-powered clean energy. We are working to install solar-powered streetlights, save money on energy bills, and work together with our neighboring communities to build a just and equitable energy system for all.

**Priority Issue Areas:** (1) Energy Transitions, (2) community development and planning, (3) economic equity, and (4) community services.

### Programs:

- ▶ [Grow Solar Highland Park](#) is a public education and bulk purchasing program that makes going solar more accessible and affordable.
- ▶ [Rise Up Scholarship and Training Program](#) offers career training and workforce development to expand access to jobs in the solar industry.
- ▶ [Blueprint for Energy Democracy](#) is a plan to make Highland Park a global model for sustainability and self-determination.
- ▶ [We Lit Avalon!](#) is a citizen-led program that establishes a free, public Wi-Fi mesh network and brings solar-powered streetlights to Avalon Village in Highland Park, creating a safe, walkable, and welcoming environment for its host community.

### Reported Win:

As of March 2023, Soulardarity has installed 17 solar-powered streetlamps in Avalon Village, where the local utility had removed lights due to an outstanding debt with the city. These 17 streetlights also serve as Wi-Fi hotspots for residents who struggled to connect to the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>79</sup>

## LEGACY POLLUTION, WASTE, AND TOXINS

Environmental degradation from extractive and polluting heavy industries, such as oil refineries, chemical plants, factories, and waste sites, disproportionately impacts low-income communities and Communities of Color. The efforts to mitigate legacy pollution and waste are essential for reducing environmental harm and are also a critical way grassroots activists are fighting against climate change. They involve significant systems-level advocacy, public policy interventions, legal challenges, and local actions, such as reducing emissions from waste and transitioning away from toxin-intensive industrial processes.

Importantly, these initiatives also engage with younger generations who are inheriting an increasingly challenging environmental landscape. Grassroots Leader 6 shared an inspiring example: “We also have run for two years now a K–12 waste to art project. . . . We’ve been able to divert like 7,000 pounds of trash . . . and really great sculptures with almost all trash that students have created.” Additionally, Grassroots Leader 2 emphasized the importance of these initiatives in nurturing future leaders: “Using the youth leadership model is how the pipeline started for myself as an organizer.”

## COMMUNITIES FOR A BETTER ENVIRONMENT (CBE)

**Mission:** The mission of CBE is to build people’s power in California’s Communities of Color and low-income communities to achieve environmental health and justice by preventing and reducing pollution and building green, healthy, and sustainable communities and environments. CBE provides residents in heavily polluted urban communities in California with organizing skills, leadership training, and legal, scientific, and technical assistance to successfully confront threats to their health and well-being.

**Priority Issue Areas:** (1) Legacy pollution, waste, and toxins, (2) community development and planning, (3) economic equity, (4) energy transitions, and (5) social justice and human rights.

### Programs:

- ▶ [Legacy Pollution and Legal Advocacy](#): CBE attorneys enhance air quality across California by litigating cases, participating in the South Coast Air Quality Management District’s Air Quality Management Plan workgroup, and monitoring public agencies to ensure robust enforcement of the Clean Air Act.
- ▶ [Green Zones for Polluted Areas](#) is a project to designate California neighborhoods that face the cumulative impacts of environmental, social, political, and economic vulnerability as Green Zones, which would help them gain support to reduce local pollution and boost economic development.
- ▶ [United Residents of South East LA \(URSELA\)](#) is an adult community program for Southeast LA concerned residents who work on environmental issues affecting their communities, ranging from organizing support for environmental propositions during elections, fighting polluters, and working on health policy on a regional and statewide level.
- ▶ [Solar on Multi-Family Affordable Housing Program \(SOMAH\)](#) is a program that invests in solar energy systems at affordable housing properties throughout California.

### Reported Win:

CBE’s legal advocacy shut down the expansion of a Chevron refinery in an already burdened California neighborhood. CBE also helped pass a refinery flaring regulation, won settlements requiring California oil companies to clean up over 700 sites contaminated with the toxic gasoline additive MTBE, and avoided 1.7 million pounds of chemical emissions and fine soot particles by stopping a power plant from opening in Southeast LA.<sup>80</sup>



## Grassroots Strategies for Wins

Further analysis of survey responses and interviews identified seven broad strategies grassroots groups employ to secure victories for their communities. These strategies include (1) **Base Building and Power Building**, (2) **Forming Coalitions and Partnerships**, (3) **Influencing Policy, Legislation and Regulation**, (4) **Challenging Established Norms**, (5) **Community Education and Research**, (6) **Fostering Community Identity and Trust**, and (7) **Learning and Reflection**. Figure 8 illustrates these key strategies.

As with priority areas, every interview and survey participant reported a combination of strategies they employ across programs rather than singular approaches. As one interviewee explained,

- *“We were able to get a building emission ordinance passed, and that was a combination of policy, community building, and legal [advocacy]: being able to stay at the table to organize people, having the policy knowledge to push forth the guts of the ordinance, and then legally being able to go tit-for-tat with the city attorneys to discuss what is legal, what isn’t legal.”*

These multifaceted strategies underscore the diverse and integrated ways these groups drive climate action in their communities.

### Base Building and Power Building

For example, in EJ and CJ efforts, grassroots organizations prioritize building their member base and developing leadership as an essential strategy for achieving significant outcomes across different priority areas. All participants felt that community organizing was both

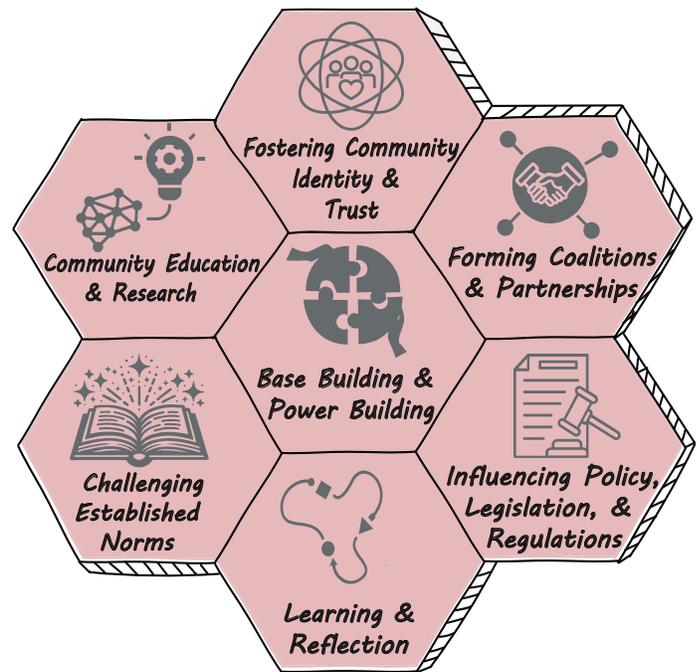


Figure 8: Top Strategies for Wins

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

a strategy and a goal independent of any particular priority issue or sector. As Grassroots Leader 7 said, “[Our] mission is basically organizing our community, which is majority Black and Brown.”

There are many types of informal and formal mobilizing vehicles by which organizations engage in collective action to address community concerns and foster a long-term commitment and involvement from their members in local decision-making processes.<sup>81</sup> Grassroots Leader 2 explained the tactics involved in changing the energy sector in their community: “So [we are] mobilizing ratepayers to go to a [utility] meeting, to go to an action, to send a postcard, to write a letter, to show up directly, to be on calls, to share their story, to come to an event that we have going on.”

Community organizing also increases power by assisting individuals in understanding the basis of their social or political problems and connecting them with others to take collective action.<sup>82</sup> By building social capital and promoting self-efficacy, member engagement can lead to new programs and activities extending beyond the organization's initial reach. Thus, this strategy ensures that diverse leadership is strategically positioned within a community to drive systemic change from the ground up.

### The Story of Our Garden Coordinator



She started out as a farmer in our first cohort, and during that time she went through a divorce. And so, she really needed community, and we were there for her, to support her and hold her and her kids. And because we were pouring into her, she really found a passion for growing food.

And before she joined our cohort, she had no experience in growing food, was raising her three sons, and was just like, 'Maybe I want to grow some food and learn that.' And she always described herself as a girly girl and never thought she would be into dirt like this. And now she's been running the program for about four years now and has helped expand the work.

We have supported her growth. She has started a business in cleaning products that's not using a lot of harsh chemicals and things like that. And so those kinds of stories are how we define success ... not only how the individuals transform, but how they're then turning around and putting what they've learned and how they've grown back into community. 

### Forming Coalitions and Partnerships

Building coalitions and alliances is another pivotal strategy for grassroots organizations in addressing the climate crisis. The strength of organizations is enhanced by the pooling of diverse resources and expertise and advances political action that can "impact existing laws, political systems and economic frameworks."<sup>83</sup> Grassroots Leader 4 also described the necessity of such efforts to build organizational capacity: "Using our resources and social capital to support community-led initiatives that center people, we help build and support community institutions rather than traditional ones."

One grassroots leader highlighted the power of such strategic partnerships: "So we formed this alliance starting in 2014. Now, [Front and Centered](#) is becoming a pretty powerful [coalition] because we have organizations that have a base, different bases of different ethnic, Indigenous peoples from different areas of the world that are involved in giving testimony, creating concepts for laws." Another interviewee echoed this view: "It's very difficult to fight alone. But once you say, 'I have members in eight different states, and we have policy experts and lawyers on the team,' you start looking like David walking with the slingshot." The transformation from local groups to significant political influencers underscores the efficacy of strategic coalitions and aligns with what Kathryn Howell and Barbara Brown Wilson call "radical collaborations" that transform the ways disadvantaged groups access and rebalance power in governance structures. This results in more innovative climate policy changes and emphasizes the transformative potential of coalitions in

changing systems of inequality.<sup>84</sup>

### *Influencing Policy, Legislation, and Regulations*

Survey respondents and interview participants identified influencing policy, legislation, and regulations at multiple levels as a key strategy to combat climate impacts. This approach transforms institutional structures to fundamentally advance EJ and CJ. It involves influencing public policies, allocating resources equitably, enforcing laws, and monitoring policy opposition.

Interview participants also discussed combining this strategy with other strategies, such as base building and power building, and forming coalitions to influence policymakers and government agencies. As Grassroots Leader 1 explained, “And it’s usually you have to do a combination of things to influence somebody or get them to change their behavior, especially an elected [official] who often is supposed to be accountable to us but is usually accountable to somebody else.”

Grassroots Leader 10 described the results of connecting constituents to policymakers to pass additional legislation to address heat-related hazards for outdoor workers: “So we were able to have two growers come out and talk to those Republican lawmakers in that committee. I think something else that helped is that one of those committee members also has a roofing company. And I think he understood [the hazards]. And I think once he voiced his support for the bill, it made it easier for the other ones to follow his lead.”

### *Challenging Established Norms*

Interview and survey participants strongly emphasized “challenging established norms” as a critical strategy in their work, which involves protests, disruptions, participatory democracy, storytelling, and shifting narratives in the dominant discourse around climate action. Challenging prevailing norms allows community members to critically engage with dominant systems by reflecting on who these systems benefit and harm, leading to more engagement in policy processes.<sup>85</sup> Deliberate framing around solutions or challenging existing practices is not isolated but interconnected with mobilizing structures and political opportunities, creating a complex, interactive communication process that fosters broader societal change.<sup>86</sup> This approach is crucial for long-term change, as it redefines possibilities and outcomes, even if it does not lead to immediate policy wins.

Grassroots Leader 10 explained why this strategy is essential for generating creative wins: “And if we can get them to understand that [issues are connected], I think those are the first steps we can take to actually changing the system. Because if enough people begin to realize that, then we can together challenge the system. So that’s why I say that some of our wins, we have to be more creative.” Further emphasizing the strategy’s effectiveness, Grassroots Leader 3 detailed how they challenge established practices and processes: “So what we did was constant, constant marches, direct action, tribunals, which we call participatory democracy. That is our democratic process.”

Grassroots Leader 7 explained the tactical advantage of these actions: “And

you may not win, but they know that it's someone that will disrupt processes, make it slower. Time is money. If we slow it down, it costs them money. If we slow it down enough, it may lose profitability." Thus, by effectively challenging dominant agendas, these strategies can slow harmful activities down, prompt stakeholders to reassess their practices, and explore more inclusive actions. In doing so, they contribute significantly to advancing more sustainable solutions that align with the broader goals of EJ and CJ.<sup>87</sup>

### *Community Education and Research*

Many participants viewed community education and research as another critical pathway to success. Employing various activities such as workshops, training sessions, and participatory research, several interviewees discussed how this strategy elevates awareness and builds social capacity so that community members understand the environmental issues affecting them in a way that leads to co-learning and collective action.<sup>88</sup> Grassroots Leader 9 provided one example: "And so, how are we bringing people into the fold? And again, looking at jobs and hiring as also a method of popular education."

Research is a vital component of this strategy. Several interviews discussed how collecting and analyzing data helps to understand the disproportionate impacts of environmental challenges like air pollution on public health in their communities, thereby informing other advocacy and educational initiatives. Grassroots Leader 2 detailed how ongoing research shapes their organization's efforts to mitigate toxic exposure: "As time progresses, there are more studies

on chemicals and their effects on the body, particularly cleaning chemicals. . . . [Our] work was based on ecology and health of the chemicals that domestic workers use within their work."

Furthermore, Grassroots Leader 10 discussed the dual benefits of training sessions on heat exposure that not only increase awareness of occupational health laws but also promote social justice and human rights: "So we do heat exposure and pesticide trainings, and just the number of people who take those, we take those as a measure of our success in reaching out to people and building education. . . . But the idea of those trainings is not just like, 'Okay, this is how you protect yourself. You wear a hat in case of heat and continue hydrating,' but also, it's know your rights. This is what the law says that you're supposed to get. And this is something that the law doesn't say you should get." Therefore, this strategy not only enhances individual knowledge and self-efficacy but also fosters environmental protection and policy change.

### *Fostering Community Identity and Trust*

Most interviewees indicated that fostering community identity and trust was a critical strategy in generating wins. This strategy strengthens community bonds by cultivating a shared sense of identity and mutual trust. Essential activities like community gatherings, cultural events, and dialogues play a crucial role in fostering solidarity and cohesion, which are pivotal for collective action and increasing community resilience.

As Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano describe, integrating sensemaking and

envisioning is an essential feature of social movements that integrate this strategy, which involves generating innovative visions for the future.<sup>89</sup>

Other scholars also describe how social movement organizations create social consensus by raising collective awareness that helps strengthen local identity.<sup>90</sup> From a grassroots perspective, several participants discussed the importance of adapting community visions to local contexts. For example, Grassroots Leader 1 noted the distinctiveness of developing community identity in neighborhoods across Los Angeles, California: “We’re really defining the community visions because the one in Oakland doesn’t look the same as Richmond.”

Moreover, many participants discussed the importance of incorporating culturally relevant and traditional practices into their programs as part of this strategy. Grassroots Leader 8 elaborated on the importance of fostering community identity through the multifunctional nature of community spaces: “And it’s not just a place to grow food, but it’s a community gathering area. It’s a healing space, and so it’s become like this, what we call a sanctuary of sorts, where we can grow foods that are important to our cultural ancestry. . . . It’s just a really expansive, multipurpose space that we consider ‘the commons.’”

Several participants argued that representation was another component of this strategy. As Grassroots Leader 3 stated, “If we don’t have any community leadership walking shoulder to shoulder with us towards that win, we pause.” This statement illustrates the strategy’s emphasis on hyper-local trust and accountability as well as the pivotal role of aligned

leadership at the community level. It also relates to the last critical strategy described next, learning and reflection.

### *Learning and Reflection*

The final strategy interview participants highlighted was learning and reflection. This continuous process involves assessing the effectiveness of programs and actions, learning from past successes and failures, and incorporating local perspectives and insights into future planning. Such a strategic approach is crucial for the growth and evolution of grassroots organizations, ensuring they remain responsive to changing circumstances and community feedback. Scholars commonly refer to this as “social learning.”<sup>91</sup> Howell and Wilson describe it as the process by which there is “the agreement of the purpose, criteria, and knowledge that leads to a shared understanding of what should happen, to the coproduction of knowledge, and towards an understanding of how the system might be transformed—is a critical piece of inclusive processes.”<sup>92</sup>

Participants detailed how this strategy involves extensive community engagement, such as listening sessions, focus groups, and facilitated conversations, to discern local needs and priorities. Grassroots Leader 8 shared their experience with a long-term project: “We had over 20 community listening sessions in the neighborhood where the cooperative is being built and other parts of the city. . . but it was all part of the strategic planning that happened over the course of 12 years. And so, we hired a bunch of consultants, talked to a bunch of grassroots organizations

and just people in the community about what they wanted to see, what it looked like, how do we get there, and so on.”

Grassroots Leader 1 described how reflective practices inform the broader organizational strategy and goals: “Did we actually shift deeper understanding in our base? Did our allies, did it create more solidarity . . . and then with our elected [officials], did we move the needle on where the dominant narrative was for the elected [officials] too?” As discussed in the following section, the learning and reflection strategy enhances adaptive capacity within a grassroots organization and contributes to cross-cutting scale. This strategy emphasizes how continuous learning is connected to organizational capacity and is intertwined with productive adaptability, leading to more significant progress.

## Understanding Grassroots Impact and Scale

As previously outlined, EJ and CJ organizations work across several priority issue areas and deploy a wide range of programs and strategies. The breadth of this work matches or even transcends that of much larger, better-resourced environmental organizations.

In addition to these insights, the findings on the impact and scale of grassroots climate action demonstrate that the impact of specific wins these groups achieve is often multi-sectoral and that the “scaling” of their work can be best understood as progress advanced across multiple scales, rather than a singular notion of scale (such as the traditional idea of replicating a

program or outcome across geographic domains). In this section, we describe the essential components of these findings.

### Multi-Sector Impact

Analyzing the wins grassroots leaders shared in interviews and survey responses, it is clear their reported achievements demonstrated impact rarely confined to a single-issue area or sector, reflecting instead multi-sector impact across issue areas. In our survey, respondents were asked to “share one significant win or success their organization has achieved (i.e., took the lead or played a significant role in) in the last couple of years.” Of the 40 respondents, 38 provided a broad range of success stories.

A compelling example of multi-sector impact comes from one organization that secured 17 acres of farmable land in their city for food production and to enhance food sovereignty. This initiative also provides a forum for youth educational opportunities and promotes local economic development by cultivating future growers within the community, demonstrating impact across food systems, economic equity, community development, and social justice.

An additional example of **multi-sector impact** can be seen in another CJA member organization’s role in establishing the first intertribal land trust in California, incorporated under tribal law, which received 135 acres of land back from the state for the protection of cultural resources, nature preservation, and watershed restoration. The organization provided pro bono legal support to the tribe, tracked and advised on the enabling legislation, and facilitated communication

with necessary state agencies.

Another organization transformed an empty lot into a public park. The organization engaged youth and other community members by inviting them to city council hearings to testify for the lot's transformation into green space. The local government voted unanimously to transform the lot into city park space in perpetuity. The organization now engages community members in the park's upkeep by providing stipends for watering trees in the area. The park is an important heat-mitigating asset in a primarily immigrant neighborhood in an extreme heat zone.

Among the 38 wins reported, 22 (58 percent) were related to public policy (proposed or passed law, public funding, or a government agency rule). Notably, 36 (95 percent) illustrated impact in two or more priority issue areas, and 29 (76 percent) reported that wins impacted state, regional, national, or international geographies.<sup>93</sup>

Figure 9 (next page) highlights additional multi-sector achievements reported, underscoring how a given win in climate justice can impact diverse areas of the political economy. As discussed in greater detail later, mapping this kind of achievement to a specific climate-related interest or indicator that a funder may choose to prioritize and for which they are geared to evaluate becomes a challenge.

### *Multi-Scalar Impact*

Using Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano's concepts of scaling out, up, and deep as our conceptual framework (see table 1), text analysis from interviews with CJA's member groups reveals clear examples

of multi-scalar impact among survey and interview participants. Grassroots leaders reported significant achievements using traditional definitions of scaling out, up, and deep while also expressing innovative applications across these dimensions.

As previously stated, scaling out in literature often entails affecting more individuals or groups. Grassroots Leader 3 reported their organization's growing reach: "We've got farm workers asking us and low-income immigrant workers, 'How can I be a part of your organization?' I mean, we reached the point of making it irresistible that it's going to grow really fast. . . ." This example illustrates the grassroots capacity to draw various constituencies to their programs swiftly.

Scaling up involves changing legal and regulatory frameworks. Many grassroots leaders reported winning significant legislative and regulatory victories. For instance, a survey respondent highlighted a significant legislative achievement at the state level: "[We] advocated for statewide legislation that enabled municipalities to launch public banks. . . ." Similarly, an interviewee detailed their role in shaping occupational health standards, which have broader implications for worker safety: "We were also part of the [The National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health] working group that provided guidelines for [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] to create a heat standard for outdoor workers, or not just outdoor workers, but for workers exposed to heat. And that passed." These examples also illustrate how grassroots initiatives effectively scale up their impact, extending their influence from specific groups or geographic areas to broader, systemic, institutionalized policy changes.

REPORTED WINS	FOOD SYSTEMS	ENERGY TRANSITIONS	COMMUNITY SERVICES	COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	ECONOMIC EQUITY	SOCIAL JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS	LEGACY POLLUTION, WASTE & TOXINS
<p><b>Centro por la Justicia</b> "started construction for a community developed resilience hub and healing center with an added solar micro grid, water catchment, and vegetable farm." The first phase included the creation of 15 garden beds, an irrigation system that runs off of rain water, and a greenhouse for vegetable cultivation. The second phase encompasses the creation of community meeting spaces for nonprofits and businesses aligned with the mission of the organization. This phase also contemplates the creation of a neighborhood micro grid. The project has engaged 80 members so far, and provides stipends for community members who participate in the project.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
<p><b>The Alliance for Appalachia's</b> "grassroots organizing efforts helped secure over \$11 billion for cleanup of abandoned [coal] mine lands." This funding was made possible through the advocacy for the RECLAIM Act, the passage of which led to the creation of the Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Program. The program has eliminated over 46,000 open mine portals, reclaimed over 1,000 miles of dangerous highwalls, restored water supplies to residents, created jobs and economic development opportunities, and protected 7.2 million people nationwide from AML hazards.</p>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<p><b>CRECE Urban Farms</b> successfully launched the first farmer-operated cooperative, "transform[ing] an empty lot into a 1/3 acre micro-farm that grows mixed culturally-relevant vegetables year-round, which are distributed through a Community Sustained Agriculture (CSA) program. " About 40% of production is distributed to families free of charge. The cooperative makes food accessible to low-income Mexican immigrant families in Santa Ana and offers a sliding scale pricing system as well as work exchanges. The micro-farm also serves as an educational space for hosting workshops and events.</p>	✓		✓	✓		✓	
<p><b>The Micronesia Climate Change Alliance</b>, in the aftermath of Typhoon Mawar in May 2023, led the recovery "with multiple, direct mutual aid support [efforts], organizing donations and distribution, and educating and distributing renewable energy sources." The Alliance created relief kits with items like solar charged power banks, first aid kits, solar lanterns and fans, mosquito repellent, hygiene essentials and more. Additionally, they provided community members who lost their homes with direct financial aid. Beyond material goods, the Alliance has also conducted wellness check-ins to ensure vulnerable members like the elderly and those with no access to transportation are safe.</p>			✓	✓	✓	✓	

Figure 9 (above): Examples of Reported Wins and Impact from Survey Respondents

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

Although understanding how to effectively implement scaling deep—or impacting cultural roots—is less developed in the literature, our respondents highly prioritized this type of scale. For example, as illustrated in figure 10, survey respondents ranked scaling deep as the most important in planning their organization’s strategies and goals. In contrast, respondents reported that funders were least likely to ask about this type of scale.<sup>94</sup> Grassroots Leader 6 also highlighted the importance of scaling deep: “We really want to shift people’s mindsets and shift people’s hearts and ideas about what it means to be from our homelands and what climate justice means. . . . That requires a lot of deep one-on-one conversations, setting people up on their own personal exploration journey and healing.”

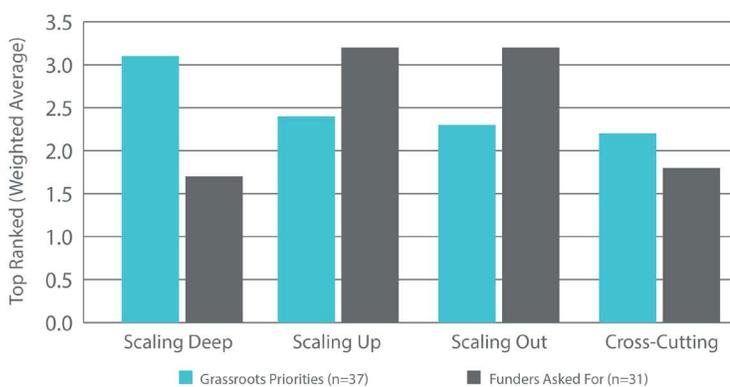
**Expanded definitions of scaling out, up, and deep.** Funders often emphasize climate solutions that can scale out and up rapidly, as respondents indicated in our survey, who reported scaling up and out as most were asked for by funders (see figure 10). However, grassroots initiatives frequently encounter substantial resistance from powerful entities, further complicating these traditional scaling

approaches. This resistance arises because conventional scaling concepts do not adequately address or account for opposition to the systemic change models that grassroots groups advocate for—models crucial for effectively tackling climate change.<sup>95</sup>

Despite these challenges, participants in our study have creatively expanded upon these traditional scaling concepts. They have adapted and evolved these concepts to better address the complexities of systems change, demonstrating a nuanced understanding and application of scale beyond simple replication or policy wins.

For example, some grassroots leaders rejected the traditional replication approach to scaling out, with one grassroots leader replying, when asked about scale, “I don’t know. I hate that sort of thing. I don’t want to create manuals for people so that they replicate my work. That feels like a franchise.” Instead, some respondents spoke to scaling out as “**shared targets**” where multiple groups align their focus on a common target. Grassroots Leader 3 explained, “Scale is, for us, it’s many autonomous groups all aligned moving together in a common strategic goal.”

Furthermore, our conversation with grassroots leaders highlighted a concept we dubbed the “**policy springboard**.” This concept reframes scaling up to include policy failures that can still serve as symbolic wins, paving the way for deeper engagement with policymakers and associated with the strategy of listening and learning.<sup>96</sup> Grassroots Leader 1 shared the importance of this impact, which can lead to a policy opening: “So, for instance, we may push a bill this year or next year, and that’s solely to learn something. . . .



**Figure 10 (above):** Types of Scale Grassroots Prioritize vs. What Funders Asked For (Q15 vs Q17)

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

So success might be, like, we won't win the policy, but maybe we could shift the whole terrain . . . by bringing up this completely un-winnable policy."

Grassroots leaders also spoke to scaling deep through a **"ladder of engagement"** where success occurs through the professional development of leaders within a member base who then spread the organization's cultural values, practices, and approaches. This concept is similar to the "ladder of participation" model first developed by Sherry R. Arnstein and then widely adopted in the field of local participatory planning.<sup>97</sup> Grassroots Leader 4 described this type of scaling deep: "So for us, we articulate success through the leaders that we've grown. I would say a lot of the young people that have come through our space which both have stayed and have gone to do other work, like being in different spaces in the city, and the government, in other organizations. . . ."

**Cross-cutting scale and grassroots innovation.** An interesting and surprising finding was how grassroots leaders discussed the unintended social impacts of strategies and wins that transcended a single dimension of scale. Moore, Riddel, and Vocisano characterize the benefits of these strategies as "cross-cutting," and they include outcomes that broaden the framing of social issues, increase access to alternative resources, and enable the forming of strategic partnerships.<sup>98</sup> Essentially, grassroots leaders described unexpected spillover effects from their wins that benefited other communities and groups in frontline communities.<sup>99</sup>

For example, some leaders discussed how local policy wins can inspire and build momentum for changes across

other communities and states, a concept we termed **"ripple effect."** This type of impact intersects with scaling up and scaling out and is referred to as a form of translocal diffusion of ideas, models, and policies.<sup>100</sup> Grassroots Leader 5 discussed how a local policy win could reshape what is possible in other places: "Because when you talk to policymakers, they're like New York and San Francisco, right? Those are leftist, neoliberal utopias, and they have a surplus in their budget. So, if you're going to convince cities with less revenue, then you have to have a [smaller] city like Newark do it, right? So, it kind of changes the thought of what's possible."

Interview respondents also discussed how responding to evolving macro conditions (i.e., policy shifts and political dynamics) and feedback loops (i.e., local community needs or feedback) leads to "community-driven adaptation," developing unique program models. This type of impact intersects scaling up and scaling deep. It is also linked to the concept of "productive agility," supported by a growing body of literature that connects the co-production of policy solutions with grassroots innovation and social transformation.<sup>101</sup>

Leah Temper et al. explains, "Movements put pressure from the outside, at the same time as they innovate and create alternatives from the inside, in a mutually reinforcing process where conflict fuels energy and creativity."<sup>102</sup> Understanding both the evolving political dynamics while also listening and learning from community feedback leads to adapting programs and services that are more dynamic and responsive. Grassroots Leader 5

described how this type of cross-cutting scale occurred after Trump was elected President of the United States in 2016.

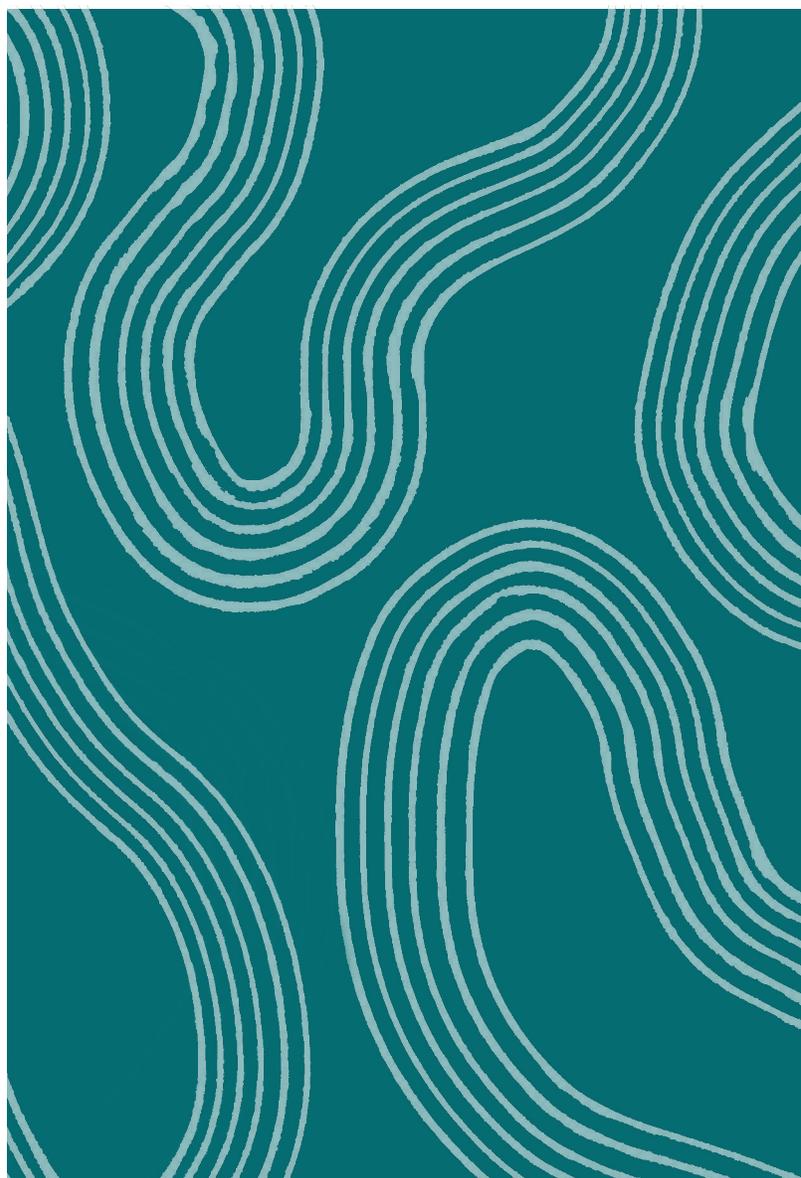
- *“When President Trump came into office, one of the things we were doing is responding to immigration raids, but [also] helping people with their power of attorney documents. And we were getting community members coming into the office that were about to be charged about \$2,000 for what’s a free document. All you need is a notary. Right. So, we got a bunch of people like to become notary publics. . . . We were helping people apply for passports and all these things.”*

Grassroots Leader 2 also described how they develop unique program models based on multiple context-specific social and political dynamics.

- *“And yeah, and we’ve done different things like offering bags of plants, so those cloth bags that you could grow plants in. So instead of a mutual aid this month, we’ll add a cloth bag so that folks to start growing their chilies at home, or we’ll do a voucher for utility debt, things like that that just kind of are needed at the moment. And the likelihood of people being able to come back but also engage in programs is a lot higher.”*

Lastly, grassroots leaders also spoke of the impact of numerous, strategically aligned local initiatives that, when taken together, can lead to broader societal transformations, which we termed **“common threads and values,”** a concept also related to “accumulation impact” and polycentrism, where independent CJ movement groups can collectively exert influence on environmental policy at dif-

ferent geographic levels of governance.<sup>103</sup> Grassroots Leader 1 explained how this scale intersects with scaling out and scaling deep: “Like, you think scale, you think [this] must be replication. But it’s not necessarily replication. It’s just finding common threads and applying those common threads and then adapting based on place.” Figure 11 expands on Moore, Riddel, and Vocisano’s original concepts to include these additional components of scale.<sup>104</sup>



# Grassroots Dimensions of Scale

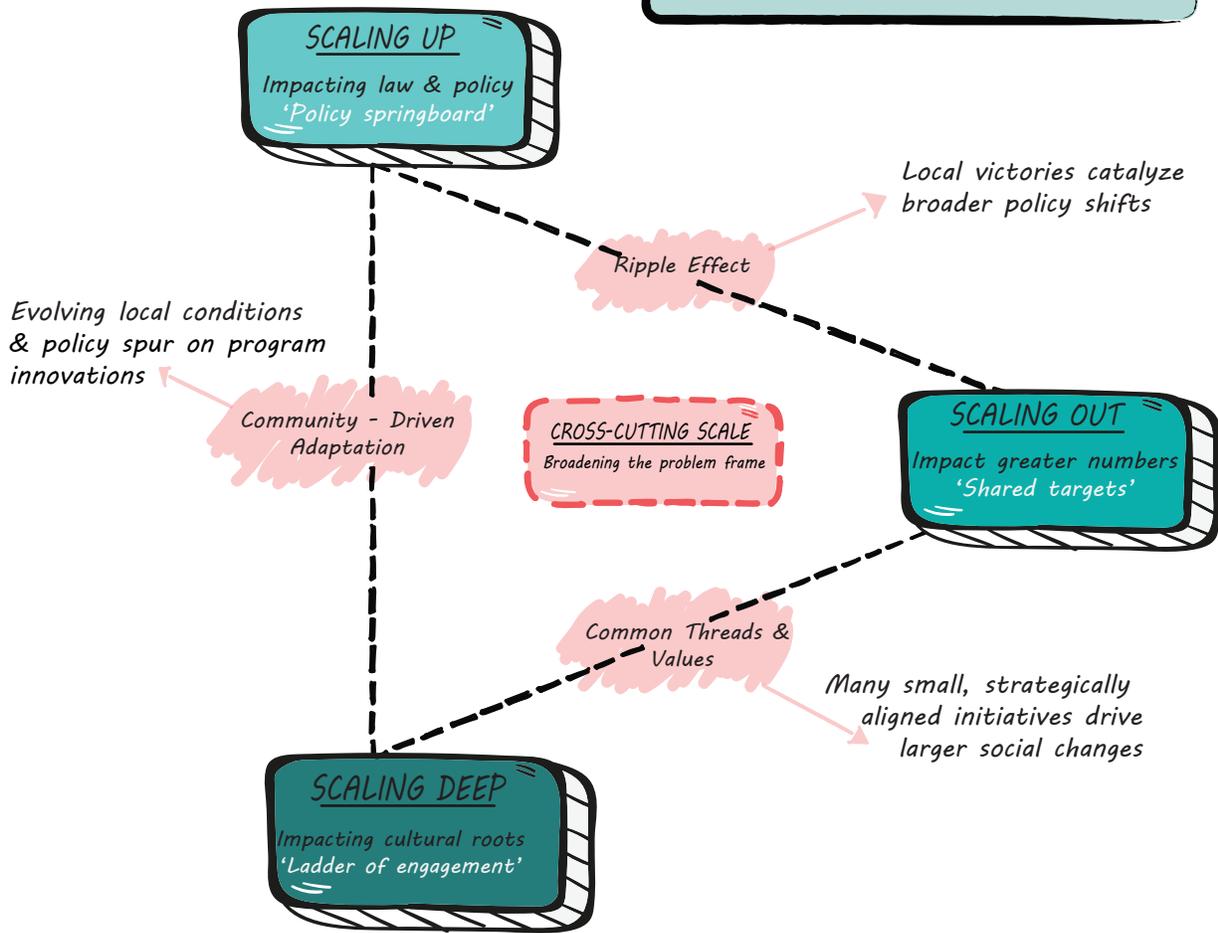


Figure 11: Grassroots Dimensions of Scale

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

**Note:** This model expands upon the three dimensions of scale defined in Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano, "Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep," by also incorporating grassroots perceptions of impact and scale from our findings.

## Measurement Practices and Challenges

### Common Metrics and Tracking Methods

Interview participants outlined diverse approaches for tracking progress and evaluating the success of grassroots initiatives. These methodologies span quantitative assessments:

- ▶ Monitoring growth in participation (e.g., “From 20 to 75 families in a program.”)
- ▶ Financial metrics (e.g., “Giving up to \$15,000 in loans [to new businesses].”)
- ▶ Cost savings (e.g., “\$180 million of taxpayer money from contributing to fossil fuels.”)
- ▶ Media coverage and public awareness (e.g., “We’re in some form of media almost every week.”)
- ▶ Distribution of mutual aid (e.g., “30 bags of produce that we provide . . . for low-income seniors.”)
- ▶ Program processes (e.g., “How [much] of our food is produced, distributed, retailed, and even recycled back into the earth.”)
- ▶ Energy efficiency and renewable energy units (e.g., “kilowatts of solar deployed.”)

Beyond conventional tools, these organizations use a blend of traditional and relational qualitative methods to gauge the effectiveness of their efforts, such as interviews, feedback surveys, and focus groups. Many participants mentioned surveys as often used to assess educational impacts and behavioral changes, as Grassroots Leader 10 expressed: “We were doing surveys on our

community members on how much they had learned from the community gardens and [if] their involvement changed their eating habits.” This structured feedback is complemented by informal feedback, which relies more on interpersonal relationships, as Grassroots Leader 8 explained: “So we ground our understanding of how impactful the work is based on the community’s response to what we’re doing. . . . A lot of that is just based on organic relationships, one-on-one conversations, even group conversations.”

Some initiatives, however, are not tracked due to their emergent nature, as Grassroots Leader 2 reported: “So we live right near downtown; we have a big population of unhoused residents who come through, and we give them granola bars or water, stuff like that. And that’s an emerging program that we just don’t even track.”

### Tracking and Evaluative Challenges

Despite the richness of these tracking methods, grassroots leaders face challenges with funders who often demand more quantifiable and immediate outcomes to demonstrate impact. As Grassroots Leader 2 noted: “We could deliver a petition of 20,000 people. But unless it has a specific policy shift change, it’s really hard to measure [progress] that way.” The demand for detailed, sometimes intrusive data collection adds another layer of complexity, as Grassroots Leader 4 described: “So they’re asking for household numbers; they’re asking for income, marital status, education status, just a lot of questions.” In addition, standard climate metrics such as greenhouse gas emissions can be challenging to track, and many respondents expressed wariness about

implementing “creative accounting.”

Furthermore, the pressure to align with funder-defined success metrics and adapt language to fit funding narratives does not always lead to additional climate funding. Grassroots Leader 8 articulated this challenge:

- *“If we apply for funds for general operating,*
- *saying that we’re doing climate justice*
- *work because we’re returning carbon*
- *to the soil, we’re mitigating flooding in*
- *urban areas through permeable surfaces*
- *of urban farms, we’re generating energy*
- *on the farms through solar panels and*
- *windmills, and not using fossil fuel sources,*
- *for some reason, it’s still not compelling*
- *[to funders]. . . . Maybe others are getting*
- *funded through those narratives, but it*
- *might be because we’re Black. . . . Those*
- *particular grants have been really low,*
- *and I really don’t know why, honestly.”*

Participants also highlighted a significant disconnect between the timelines and expectations funders set and the realities of systemic change efforts. Funders often favor specific projects that promise “glitzy wins,” prioritizing initiatives that offer immediate, newsworthy results. This preference aligns with previously articulated broader critiques of carbon-centrism and techno-utopianism in climate solutions, which tend to view climate change as a narrow technical issue rather than a multifaceted systems challenge. Unfortunately, such focus diminishes the visibility and support for long-term, less visible, or quantifiable efforts of grassroots organizations, such as sustained community engagement and deepening relationships.

Grassroots Leader 7 articulated another

poignant concern regarding the reporting of outcomes and wins: “I’m real careful because if your enemies could give you enough to make you feel you’re victorious, do you stop? Do you put a plaque up and say, ‘Look at this victory’? And capitalism, the nature of capitalism, doesn’t work like that. The financial market doesn’t work like that.” This reflection underscores the need for continuous effort and vigilance even after achieving what might be celebrated as a “victory,” highlighting the complexities of measuring progress within a capitalist framework where the political and economic dynamics are continuously evolving.

The challenges participants highlight expose a fundamental ideological divide between funders and grassroots organizations in defining the causes and consequences of climate change and assessing what constitutes effective climate action. The continued emphasis on limited, short-term outcomes forces grassroots groups to adopt these efficiency-focused tracking methods, often at the expense of documenting more transformative gains that take longer to materialize. Such limitations impede the ability of these groups to document the gradual and complex processes of systemic change, which are important but less tangible in the short term. As a result, essential activities that foster deep, holistic, and long-lasting community impact may be underreported or undervalued in evaluations, complicating ongoing efforts to secure funding and support for grassroots initiatives.

### *Innovative and Critical Measures*

In response to these challenges, grassroots organizations are innovatively redefining success and how it is measured and communicated, regardless

of how funders view the problem and the corresponding measures of impact. Interview participants emphasize the importance of qualitative data that demonstrates impact and scale.

For example, **storytelling** emerged as a powerful tool for capturing the transformative experiences of community members and communicating impact effectively to broad audiences, as Grassroots Leader 4 highlighted: “Success is not always going to be the metrics of collecting [member engagement data]; ‘This is how many people we serve each time.’ . . . But really some of those intangible things about the stories of young leaders who have been transformed by being in this space. . . . Just this transformation of their agency, their belief in themselves to be able to put forth and create programming, create impact, and just the relationships we build with our people.”

Some grassroots leaders also measure community power by tracking engagement with the opposition. For example, Grassroots Leader 5 mentioned fear from the opposition as an essential measure of success because it avoids future conflicts and conserves capacity, costs, and time. “A lot of fights we prevent because people don’t want to mess with us, and they come and talk to us. We’re able to work out community benefits agreements before any fight has to happen.” This benchmark indicates a potential opening for grassroots groups to move forward on other objectives and strategies.

Lastly, mental health and the overall well-being of staff were also mentioned as critical measures of success. Grassroots organizations often operate in emotionally charged environments, tackling complex social issues with limited resources. Several interview participants spoke

about tracking and managing staff stress as a critical measure of progress, ensuring a “fun and regenerative” organizational environment and getting feedback on whether projects are “draining or causing burnout.” Participants expressed lower stress levels as a sign of efficacy in an organization’s advocacy efforts.

Therefore, through a mix of measurable and narrative-based evaluation methods, grassroots organizations continue to push for a broader understanding of their impact that aligns more closely with their long-term community-centric CJ movement principles and goals. These measures present an opportunity for funders to align their grantmaking goals with EJ and CJ groups and advance investments in these evaluative methods, shifting their collective appreciation away from neoliberal values and logic to support grassroots efforts better.

“ Yeah, so we do a lot of storytelling, of course, to really communicate what climate justice is.

One of our first things was a cookbook, and because everybody needs to eat, we created a cookbook that really uplifts local ingredients. It was the first plant-based cookbook for the region. We’ve since sold like 2,000 copies of this cookbook, and we need to do another print because we’ve run out of our entire stock already from our last print.

And then at the beginning of COVID, we created a companion web series for the cookbook talking about food sovereignty, profiling farmers, and just uplifting the fact that we really need to be growing our own food. We live in islands where we import 90 percent of our food, and so it’s a dangerous situation.

*The Community Cookbook* ”

# CONCLUSION

This study has sought to contribute to a broader understanding of climate change solutions, informed by the work of EJ and CJ groups under CJA's unique membership and coalition structure. While these grassroots groups represent communities most impacted by the infrastructure and systems driving climate change, their vision, and activities for a just transition from the climate crisis have been underrepresented in climate policy circles and under-resourced by environmental funders.

Our research demonstrates how grassroots organizations are advancing a rich tapestry of work—tackling multiple issue areas and utilizing diverse strategies—to attain multi-sector and multi-scalar impact. Organizations draw on several broad strategies, often combined, to secure wins. These include base building and power building, forming coalitions and partnerships, influencing policy, challenging established norms, conducting community education and research, fostering community identity and trust, and learning and reflection. A throughline tying these strategies together is extensive and long-term community

engagement. Groups also highly value innovation and creativity to build capacity and transform interconnected structures.

An overarching finding from the examples of responses received in interviews and surveys is that what grassroots groups do is deeply relevant to addressing the causes and consequences of climate change, even when groups do not explicitly name climate as an issue area in their organizational profiles, programs, or initiatives. Most grassroots organizations focus on changing systems that have contributed to or exacerbated the climate crisis, either by transforming existing institutions or building alternative institutions to advance a just transition. Their impact on greenhouse gas emissions or proximate climate effects is thus often indirect and not the only target.

Figure 12 expands on an example described earlier to illustrate this point. The figure shows how one organizational initiative touches on multiple priority areas (food systems, economic equity, community development, and social justice and human rights) to advance several key elements of a just transition. Though none of these issue areas explicitly

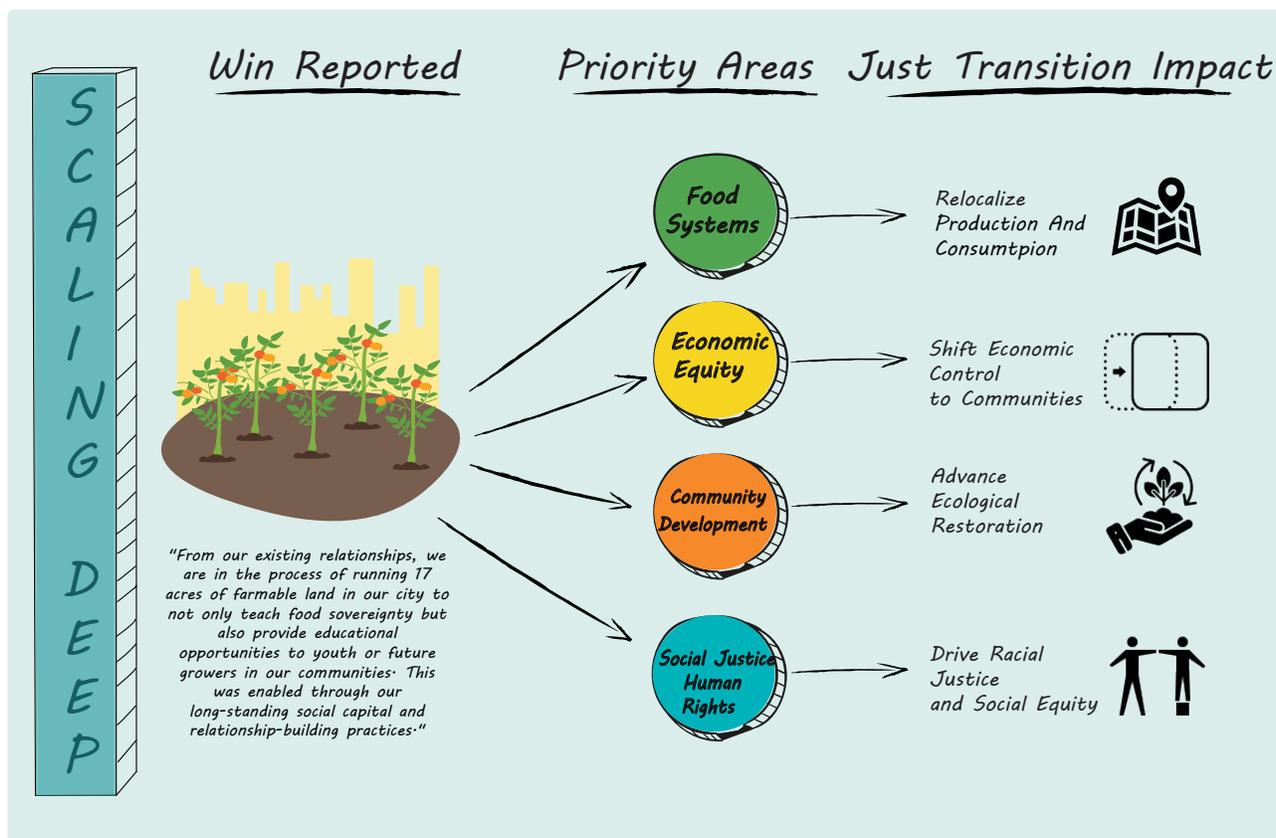


Figure 12 (above): Grassroots Example of Impact Toward a Just Transition

Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center

centers on climate change, the win marks progress toward a just transition by relocalizing production and consumption, shifting economic control to communities, driving racial justice and social equity, and advancing ecological restoration.

Audre Lorde famously said, “There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.” The climate crisis, caused by multiple systems, actors, and policies, is far from a single-issue struggle and necessitates changing multiple interconnected systems. The intersectional and integrated approaches of grassroots organizations’ priorities and program activities align with other studies on climate action and bolster Trott et al.’s assessment that CJ initiatives demonstrate “more

than one type of action goal, and more commonly focus on People and Power over Planet and Place.”<sup>105</sup>

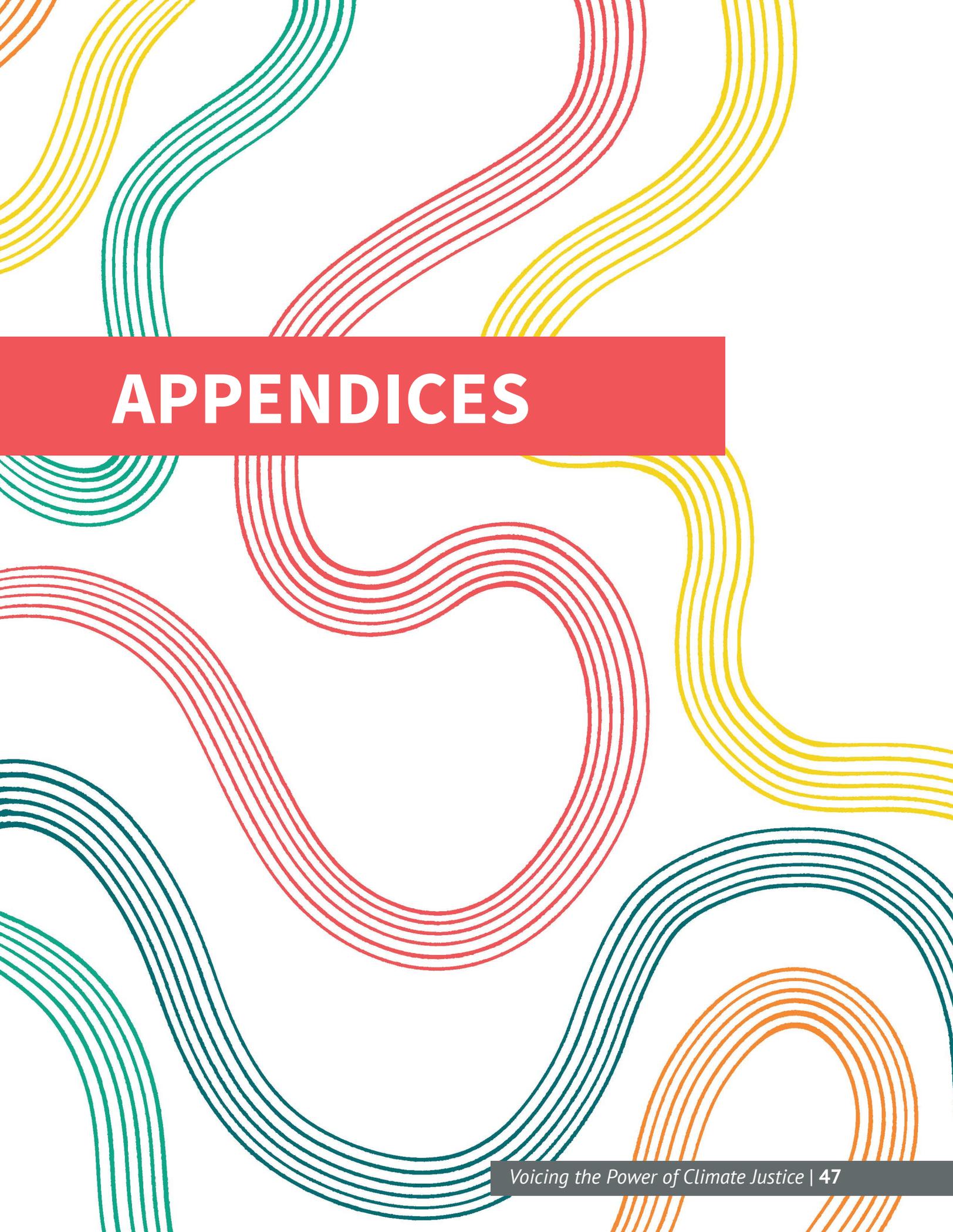
Our research also investigated the dimensions of the impact of EJ and CJ work, with the data pointing to a need for more nuanced and expanded concepts of scale. In this regard, the conventional notion of scaling up to achieve a law or policy win could include the impact that a failed proposal can have by serving as a “policy springboard”; the concept of scaling out to replicate a victory elsewhere could include the progress of multiple groups achieving alignment on “shared targets”; and the traditional understanding of scaling deep to affect cultural roots and mindsets could specifically envision the development of

leaders through a “ladder of engagement” who can take the organization’s values, practices, and approaches with them to different positions and places.

Grassroots groups also gave examples of how impacts cut across multiple scale dimensions. For instance, local victories can catalyze broader policy shifts, creating a “ripple effect” that scales both out and up. “Community-driven adaptation” in response to evolving macro conditions and community feedback can precipitate program innovations that scale deep locally but also scale up to law and policy as new program models draw policymaker buy-in. Finally, broader societal change can be effectuated by the “common threads and values” created through numerous, strategically aligned local initiatives scaling deep and scaling out.

Considering this complex tapestry of strategies, issues, impacts, and scale, it comes as little surprise that existing measurement practices are poorly suited to capturing the work of grassroots EJ and CJ organizations. We documented a key ideological divide between funders and grassroots groups about what success is or climate solutions are and how success should be measured, with funders often asking for narrow, quantitative metrics and outputs that are onerous to collect or for clear-cut policy wins that do not capture more nuanced progress. To capture the depth of engagement and change they seek, organizations have supplemented their tracking with additional, innovative methodologies, such as collecting narratives, tracking the opposition’s attitudes toward them, and assessing staff mental health and well-being. These tactics aim to redefine success and how it is assessed.

We are faced with the sobering fact that frontline communities often serve as the canary in the coal mine. They experience not only the earliest and most severe impacts of a changing climate but also those that occur when our societal institutions fail to afford fundamental rights. By prioritizing the voices and strategies of grassroots organizations from these communities, we can amplify innovative program models that are relevant to addressing climate change and revolutionary for our society. This approach requires funders to challenge internally established norms and processes and prioritize a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of what it means to achieve transformational change.<sup>106</sup> As we redefine traditional notions of scale, we must embrace the understanding that scale is an evolving social construct. Cameron and Hicks remind us that scale is “used to frame and order the world” and thus should be thought of as fluid and adaptable as we move to change our systems at the urgency needed to mitigate the effects of climate change.<sup>107</sup> Supporting grassroots solutions, thinking about climate change from multiple dimensions and priorities, and reframing impact and scale in new ways will propel the ambitious agenda of the EJ and CJ movements, ensuring that progress is as expansive and multifaceted as the communities these grassroots organizations aim to serve.



# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A: Glossary of Terms

## Agroecology

Agroecology is an integrative approach to agriculture that applies ecological principles to farming systems. It emphasizes using natural processes over synthetic inputs, promotes biodiversity, and incorporates traditional and local knowledge in food production. Agroecology is also part of the food justice movement.

## Base Building and Power Building

Base building and power building are central grassroots strategies for community organizing. They focus on increasing the active participation of community members and enhancing their capacity to engage in collective action. Base-building efforts involve growing the number of engaged individuals, while power-building activities aim to enhance a community's collective power to influence decision-making through leadership development, training, and mobilization.

## Big Greens

A common term used for large, often well-funded environmental organizations that operate on national and international levels. These organizations have significant power within the environmental sector and are criticized for prioritizing institutional goals over grassroots movements or overlooking the needs of marginalized communities.

## Carbon Markets

Systems where carbon emission allowances, credits, or offsets can be bought and sold to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These markets include cap-and-trade systems and voluntary carbon offsets. While designed to mitigate climate change, they often face criticism for allowing polluters to continue emitting and creating projects that may negatively impact local communities, particularly in the Global South.

## Challenging Established Norms

A grassroots strategy that questions and changes outdated, unjust, or harmful societal norms, values, and practices. This approach often includes public campaigns, advocacy, and grassroots actions to disrupt the status quo and foster new, more equitable, sustainable, and just standards. It is crucial for providing social, environmental, and economic justice.

## Climate Adaptation and Mitigation

Climate adaptation involves adjusting natural or human systems to minimize harm from climate change impacts, while climate mitigation focuses on reducing or preventing the emission of greenhouse gases. Together, these strategies aim to enhance resilience and reduce the vulnerability of communities and ecosystems to climate-related changes.

## Climate Justice

Climate justice (CJ) advocates for systemic changes that protect the rights and livelihoods of marginalized communities disproportionately affected by climate change through initiatives at the intersection of addressing environmental degradation, race, class, gender, and economic injustices. The CJ movement works toward creating sustainable social, environmental, and economic solutions that ensure fair access to resources and a healthy environment for frontline communities.

## Community Education and Research

A grassroots strategy that involves empowering community members through education on issues that directly impact them. This approach sometimes uses participatory research to inform community actions and decisions, mobilizing public opinion and enhancing engagement. It emphasizes the co-production of knowledge, where community insights are valued alongside academic research, fostering greater awareness and collective action.

## Energy Democracy

A policy concept that aims to shift control of energy resources from private, profit-driven entities to public or community ownership. It entails decentralizing energy production, ensuring that sustainable energy systems are governed and directly benefit the communities they serve while promoting social equity and environmental sustainability.

## Environmental Justice

A movement striving to realize the rights of all people, especially those marginalized or vulnerable, to live in a healthy environment free from discrimination. Environmental justice (EJ) emphasizes the need to address the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on Black, Brown, Indigenous, migrant, and low-income communities, and advocates for systemic changes to the global extractive economy that perpetuates these injustices.

## False Solutions

An umbrella term referring to policies and technologies offered to fight climate change that do not address or may even worsen its root causes. False solutions often come with other negative externalities, such as inequitable impacts or adverse environmental consequences.

## **False Solutions**

An umbrella term referring to policies and technologies offered to fight climate change that do not address or may even worsen its root causes. False solutions often come with other negative externalities, such as inequitable impacts or adverse environmental consequences.

## **Food Sovereignty**

The right of people to have access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and sustainably produced food. It emphasizes the importance of local food systems, controlled by the people who make, distribute, and consume food rather than by global markets or corporations. This concept is rooted in broader aims at food justice and the belief that food systems should be designed to meet the needs of communities, protect the environment, and ensure food security for all.

## **Forming Coalitions and Partnerships**

A grassroots strategy that involves bringing together diverse organizations, groups, and individuals to work toward shared goals. By forming coalitions, these entities can leverage their collective strengths, resources, and networks to achieve greater impact than they could individually. This collaborative approach is often used in advocacy, social movements, and community organizing to advance common causes and create systemic change.

## **Fostering Community Identity and Trust**

A grassroots strategy aimed at strengthening the bonds within a community by building a shared sense of connection and identity. This includes organizing community events, cultural activities, and dialogues that promote solidarity, mutual understanding, and collective action.

## **Frontline Communities**

Communities that are on the frontline of environmental and climate-related impacts, often including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and low-income populations. These communities are disproportionately affected by pollution, climate change, and environmental hazards and are often the first to experience the negative consequences of environmental degradation.

### **Grassroots organizations (also grassroots groups)**

Localized groups and community-based organizations rooted in their communities' needs and experiences. These groups are accountable to their members and focus on addressing social justice issues through collective action, advocacy, and organizing from the ground up. They are usually part of larger social movements of like-minded, autonomous, local groups working on similar issues across communities.

### **Grassroots Innovation**

A programmatic innovation or model derived by community-led initiatives and social movements that challenge existing social norms and policy solutions. Grassroots innovation (GRI) often emerges in response to local needs and limited resources, leading to unique, sustainable, inclusive, and equitable solutions that advance broader societal transformation.

### **Indigenous Sovereignty**

The inherent right of Indigenous Nations, Tribes, First Nations, and communities to govern themselves and manage their lands, resources, and cultural practices according to their traditional laws, customs, and knowledge systems. Indigenous sovereignty is recognized globally as essential for the preservation of Indigenous cultures, identities, and autonomy.

### **Indigenous Traditional Knowledge**

The cumulative body of knowledge, practices, beliefs, and cultural traditions developed by Indigenous Peoples over millennia. This knowledge is based on a deep understanding of local ecosystems and is used to manage natural resources, maintain ecological balance, and sustain livelihoods in harmony with the Earth. Indigenous Traditional Knowledge is increasingly recognized for its value in addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

### **Influencing Policy, Legislation and Regulation**

A grassroots strategy that involves shaping public policies, laws, and regulations to reflect the interests and protect the rights of marginalized communities. It involves advocacy, lobbying, and engagement with policymakers at various levels to promote the adoption of favorable policies that address social, environmental, and economic issues.

## **Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing**

A set of principles established in 1996 during a meeting in Jemez, New Mexico, which aims to guide democratic organizing across diverse cultural, political, and organizational backgrounds. The Jemez Principles emphasize inclusivity, bottom-up organizing, and the importance of building alliances among diverse groups to create a unified social and environmental justice movement.

## **Just Transition**

A set of principles and practices that push for a shift from an extractive, fossil fuel-based economy to a regenerative, equitable economy that prioritizes the well-being of people and the planet. For example, the Just Transition Framework focuses on protecting workers and communities during the transition to a sustainable economy, addressing past harms, and ensuring that new economic systems are built on equity, and sustainability principles.

## **Learning and Reflection**

A grassroots strategy that involves the continual process of evaluating the effectiveness of actions and strategies, learning from past experiences, and incorporating these insights into future planning. This continuous process is crucial for the growth and adaptability of organizations and movements, ensuring that they remain responsive to changing circumstances and improve their impact over time.

## **Neoliberal Environmentalism**

Private and public sector policies that prioritize market-based solutions, such as privatizing and commercializing natural resources. Neoliberal environmentalism often reduces government involvement in environmental protection, favoring market mechanisms and downplays efforts at systemic change that do not align with market-driven or technological principles and aims.

## **Zero-waste**

A system that aims to eliminate waste by reusing, recycling, or composting all materials, ensuring nothing goes to landfills or incinerators.



## APPENDIX B: Research Methods and Instruments

The study's methodology encompassed the following approaches and instruments:

- ▶ **Literature review:** Using The New School's online library of accessible literature databases, including EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, and JStor, the research team reviewed scholarly articles and organizational reports on CJ activities and impact, climate philanthropy and funding trends and processes, and evaluative approaches for grassroots activities and strategies.
- ▶ **Interviews:** An interview guide with questions was developed in collaboration with CJA. Interview requests were sent to 20 grassroots member groups, leading to 10 completed interviews with grassroots leaders. Nine grassroots respondents operate in the US. One of the grassroots interview participants works internationally. In addition, four interviews were conducted with four national climate funders based in the US.
- ▶ **Surveys:** An 18-item questionnaire, vetted by CJA, aimed to gather quantitative and qualitative insights into organizational priorities and perceptions of impact and scale, complementing interview data. The survey was administered online through Qualtrics. The survey was disseminated to 88 CJA member organizations. Forty responses were received at a 45 percent response rate.
- ▶ **Website Review and Data Scraping:** The research team employed web scraping techniques to build a database from the OPC CJA members with an array of energy and food-related CJ programs. The research team scanned OPC member websites, analyzing the language around climate justice impact, strategies, and priorities.

### Data Analysis

The research team combined thematic and content qualitative analysis to examine grassroots impact and scale. Initially, annotated memos were created for each interview, followed by coding the interview transcripts using MAXQDA software to identify themes and patterns. Open-ended survey responses and OPC member website content were similarly analyzed to categorize and interpret qualitative data.

Descriptive statistics were applied to analyze the data for the survey's closed questions. This included calculating central tendency measures (mean, median, mode) and variability (standard deviation, range) to provide an overview of the dataset. Weighted frequency distributions, percentages, and cross-tabulations helped normalize ranking data and highlight response patterns and trends. Graphical representations were also employed to visualize these trends.

# APPENDIX C: Evaluative Tools for Climate Funders and Grassroots Organizations

The following two tables, offered to climate funders and grassroots groups, illustrate ways to assess CJ programs and objectives. This compilation of benchmarks and measures is derived from data collected through interviews, surveys, and reviews of member group websites as part of our study.

The first table, “Reported Metrics that Reflect Successful Strategy Implementation,” presents an evaluative framework using the key strategies employed by grassroots organizations, including base building and power building, forming coalitions and partnerships, and influencing public policy, among others. It illustrates how grassroots groups effectively track progress through specific objectives, interim benchmarks, and quantitative and qualitative metrics, providing a robust means to assess the effectiveness of their strategies across priority areas and programs. The second table, “Reframed Evaluative Questions for the Scale of Climate Solutions,” offers sample evaluative questions based on the new concepts of scale previously described in the report.

**Table 1:** Reported Metrics that Reflect Successful Strategy Implementation

Strategy	Key Objective	Interim Benchmarks (Outcomes)	Common Metrics and Measures
<i>Base Building and Power Building</i>	Expand community engagement; enhance collective capacity for mobilization; empower communities in decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Convene community members for strategic campaigns</li> <li>◆ Increase member skills and employment opportunities</li> <li>◆ Enhance community autonomy in development</li> <li>◆ Develop leadership roles within the community</li> <li>◆ Empower youth participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Event attendance and registration</li> <li>▶ Skills and job placement reports</li> <li>▶ Workforce development workshop counts</li> <li>▶ Community participant feedback</li> <li>▶ Number of community members assuming leadership roles</li> </ul>
<i>Forming Coalitions and Partnerships</i>	Form strategic alliances among diverse groups and organizations to achieve common goals collaboratively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Develop partnerships over shared goals</li> <li>◆ Coordinate resource sharing among grassroots groups</li> <li>◆ Establish regular joint meetings for strategy alignment</li> <li>◆ Create shared resource pools for collaborative use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Reports on deepened relationships</li> <li>▶ Counts of alliances, strategic partnerships, and collaborative campaigns</li> <li>▶ Frequency and attendance of joint strategy meetings</li> <li>▶ Utilization rate of shared resources</li> </ul>

<i>Challenging Established Norms</i>	Drive societal change by redefining norms and values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Normalize CJ concepts in public discourse</li> <li>◆ Expand support for a CJ program or campaign</li> <li>◆ Increase transparency on false solutions</li> <li>◆ Influence shifts in funding toward local community concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Media engagement and features</li> <li>▶ Advocacy letters sent by community members</li> <li>▶ Mobilization counts at events</li> </ul>
<i>Forming Coalitions and Partnerships</i>	Form strategic alliances among diverse groups and organizations to achieve common goals collaboratively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Develop partnerships over shared goals</li> <li>◆ Coordinate resource sharing among grassroots groups</li> <li>◆ Establish regular joint meetings for strategy alignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Reports on deepened relationships</li> <li>▶ Counts of alliances, strategic partnerships, and collaborative campaigns</li> </ul>
<i>Community Education and Research</i>	Empower through education and research to inform and equip communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Collect overlooked demographic data</li> <li>◆ Increase community awareness and knowledge</li> <li>◆ Improve transparency of polluting entities</li> <li>◆ Implement participatory research projects with community members</li> <li>◆ Disseminate findings through community networks and local media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Education and workshops events and count</li> <li>▶ Publications on EJ topics</li> <li>▶ Community-led research partnerships</li> <li>▶ Number of participatory research projects initiated</li> <li>▶ Distribution metrics of research findings</li> </ul>
<i>Learning and Reflection</i>	Reflect on experiences to ensure growth and effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Build unity and safe, inclusive spaces</li> <li>◆ Foster advising and collaboration on projects</li> <li>◆ Implement cultural preservation projects</li> <li>◆ Enhance intergenerational dialogue within community events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Attendance at cultural and public events</li> <li>▶ Feedback and personal storytelling</li> <li>▶ Projects completed on cultural preservation</li> <li>▶ Attendance and feedback from intergenerational events</li> </ul>
<i>Fostering Community Identity and Trust</i>	Strengthen community bonds and trust through shared identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Build unity and safe, inclusive spaces</li> <li>◆ Foster advising and collaboration on projects</li> <li>◆ Implement cultural preservation projects</li> <li>◆ Enhance intergenerational dialogue within community events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Attendance at cultural and public events</li> <li>▶ Feedback and personal storytelling</li> <li>▶ Projects completed on cultural preservation</li> <li>▶ Attendance and feedback from intergenerational events</li> </ul>

**Table 2:** Reframed Evaluative Questions for the Scale of Climate Solutions

Type of Scale	Example Evaluative Questions
<p><i>Scaling Out</i> (Shared targets)</p>	<p>Describe a project or initiative where your organization collaborated with other groups to organize around a shared target. What was the shared target, and how did you align your efforts? What were you trying to change?</p>
<p><i>Scaling Up</i> (Policy springboard)</p>	<p>Can you provide an example of a time when your organization experienced a failure in policy or program? What were the key learnings and challenges, and how did your organization overcome them?</p>
<p><i>Scaling Deep</i> (Ladder of engagement)</p>	<p>Describe how your project engages with community members or provides opportunities for leadership development. How do you plan to sustain and further develop the leadership capacities that emerge from deeper engagement within your member base?</p>
<p><i>Cross-Cutting Scale</i> (Ripple effect)</p>	<p>Describe a project where local policy wins have inspired other groups within or outside your community. How will you document, promote, or share your successes with other communities?</p>
<p><i>Cross-Cutting Scale</i> (Community-driven adaptation)</p>	<p>Explain how your project adapts to changing community needs, policy shifts, and political dynamics. Can you provide an example of an innovative program model you have developed in response to these factors?</p>
<p><i>Cross-Cutting Scale</i> (Common threads and values)</p>	<p>Describe how your project identifies and leverages common values across local initiatives or with other groups in frontline communities.</p>



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Joan Roelofs, “How Foundations Exercise Power,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 74, no. 4 (2015): 664, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12112>; Seema Shah, *Centering Equity and Justice in Climate Philanthropy* (Candid, June 2022), 16.
- <sup>2</sup> Matthew C. Nisbet, “Climate Philanthropy and the Four Billion (Dollars, That Is),” *Issues in Science and Technology* 35, no. 2 (2022): 34.
- <sup>3</sup> Karen Charman, “False Starts and False Solutions: Current Approaches in Dealing with Climate Change,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 19, no. 3 (September 2008): 29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455750802348788>.
- <sup>4</sup> Investments in market-based climate solutions may reduce carbon emissions by some temporal and geographic scales, but they can also amplify false solutions that exacerbate long-standing environmental inequalities and lead to other environmental issues; Lucia Amorelli, Dylan Gibson, and Tamra Gilbertson, eds., *Hoodwinked in the Hothouse: Resist False Solutions to Climate Change*, 3rd ed. (Climatefalsesolutions.org, 2021), 5, [https://climatefalsesolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/HOODWINKED\\_ThirdEdition\\_On-Screen\\_version.pdf](https://climatefalsesolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/HOODWINKED_ThirdEdition_On-Screen_version.pdf).
- <sup>5</sup> Michele M. Betsill et al., “Philanthropic Foundations as Agents of Environmental Governance: A Research Agenda,” *Environmental Politics* 31, no. 4 (June 7, 2022): 684, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2021.1955494>; Edouard Morena, “The Climate Brokers: Philanthropy and the Shaping of a ‘US-Compatible’ International Climate Regime,” *International Politics* 58, no. 4 (August 2021): 543, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00249-1>.
- <sup>6</sup> Matthew C. Nisbet, “Strategic Philanthropy in the Post-Cap-and-Trade Years: Reviewing U.S. Climate and Energy Foundation Funding,” *WIREs Climate Change* 9, no. 4 (2018): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.524>.
- <sup>7</sup> Ana I. Baptista et al., “Environmental Justice and Philanthropy: Challenges and Opportunities for Alignment” (Tishman Environment and Design Center, 2020), 9, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d14dab43967cc000179f3d2/t/5e5e7781cccebf576948d365/1583249295033/EJ+and+Philanthropy+Alignment+MW+and+GS\\_3.3.20\\_final.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d14dab43967cc000179f3d2/t/5e5e7781cccebf576948d365/1583249295033/EJ+and+Philanthropy+Alignment+MW+and+GS_3.3.20_final.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup> J. Craig Jenkins et al., “Foundation Funding of the Environmental Movement,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 61, no. 13 (November 2017): 1654, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217744839>; Brian Tokar, “Introduction,” in *Climate Justice and Community Renewal: Resistance and Grassroots Solutions*, ed. Brian Tokar and Tamra Gilbertson (London: Routledge, 2020), 2, [https://www.social-ecology.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Tokar\\_Climate-Justice-Community-Renewal.pdf](https://www.social-ecology.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Tokar_Climate-Justice-Community-Renewal.pdf).
- <sup>9</sup> The distinction between EJ and CJ groups in this text reflects the self-identification and focus of these organizations. Historically, the EJ movement emerged primarily in response to local environmental hazards disproportionately affecting People of Color and low-income communities, focusing on issues like pollution and toxic waste. Over time, as the broader impacts of climate change became more apparent, a subset of the movement evolved to specifically address how global climate issues intersect with social justice, giving rise to what is now recognized as the CJ movement. Today, some groups identify exclusively with one or the other based on their specific missions and objectives, while others see their work as encompassing both EJ and CJ. See: David Schlosberg and Lisette B. Collins, “From Environmental to Climate Justice: Climate Change and the Discourse of Environmental Justice,” *WIREs Climate Change* 5, no. 3 (2014): 362, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.275>.
- <sup>10</sup> Dorceta Taylor and Molly Blondell, *Examining Disparities in Environmental Grantmaking: Where the Money Goes* (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Sustainability Initiative, March 2023), 6.

- <sup>11</sup> Baptista et al., “Environmental Justice and Philanthropy,” 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Betsill et al., “Philanthropic Foundations as Agents of Environmental Governance,” 698; Baptista et al., “Environmental Justice and Philanthropy,” 23.
- <sup>13</sup> Amorelli, Gibson, and Gilbertson, *Hoodwinked in the Hothouse*, 1; Dallas Goldtooth, Alberto Saldamando, and Kyle Gracey, *Indigenous Resistance against Carbon* (Indigenous Environmental Network and Oil Change International, 2021), 3, <https://www.ienearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Indigenous-Resistance-Against-Carbon-2021.pdf>.
- <sup>14</sup> Beth Gazley and Aseem Prakash, “Climate Change and the Voluntary Sector: An Introduction,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (August 1, 2023): 852, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640231172523>.
- <sup>15</sup> Lindley Mease and Solome Lemma, “Symptoms, Not Just Symptoms: Bringing a Justice Frame to Climate Philanthropy and Finance: Climate and Forests 2030,” *Climate & Forests 2030 Papers* (The Climate and Land Use Alliance, August 2021), 2, [https://www.climateandforests2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/JUSTICE\\_Bringing-a-Justice-Frame-to-Climate-Philanthropy-and-Finance\\_MeaseLemma.pdf](https://www.climateandforests2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/JUSTICE_Bringing-a-Justice-Frame-to-Climate-Philanthropy-and-Finance_MeaseLemma.pdf).
- <sup>16</sup> Farhana Sultana, “Critical Climate Justice,” *The Geographical Journal* 188, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 119, <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12417>.
- <sup>17</sup> Sultana, 119.
- <sup>18</sup> Mijin J. Cha et al., *A Roadmap to an Equitable Low-Carbon Future: Four Pillars for a Just Transition* (The Climate Equity Network, April 2019), 3.
- <sup>19</sup> Climate Justice Alliance, *Just Transition Principles* (Climate Justice Alliance, 2019), 1, [https://climatejusticealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/CJA\\_JustTransition\\_highres.pdf](https://climatejusticealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/CJA_JustTransition_highres.pdf).
- <sup>20</sup> First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, *The Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ)* (Ejnet.org, October 27, 1991), <https://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.pdf>.
- <sup>21</sup> Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, *Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing* (Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, December 1996), <https://www.ejnet.org/ej/jemez.pdf>.
- <sup>22</sup> Amorelli, Dylan Gibson, and Gilbertson, *Hoodwinked in the Hothouse*, 2; Simone Abram et al., “Just Transition: A Whole-Systems Approach to Decarbonisation,” *Climate Policy* 22, no. 8 (September 14, 2022): 1035, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2022.2108365>.
- <sup>23</sup> Leah Temper et al., “A Perspective on Radical Transformations to Sustainability: Resistances, Movements and Alternatives,” *Sustainability Science* 13, no. 3 (May 2018): 752, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0543-8>.
- <sup>24</sup> Ana Isabel Baptista et al., “Landscape Assessment of the US Environmental Justice Movement: Transformative Strategies for Climate Justice,” *Environmental Justice* 16, no. 2 (April 2023): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2021.0075>.
- <sup>25</sup> Carlie D. Trott et al., “People’s Action for Climate Justice: A Systematic Review,” *Local Environment* 28, no. 9 (September 2, 2023): 1142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2023.2187363>.
- <sup>26</sup> Trott et al., “People’s Action for Climate Justice,” 1139.

- <sup>27</sup> Anders Fremstad and Mark Paul, *Transcending Neoliberalism: How the Free-Market Myth Has Prevented Climate Action* (Roosevelt Institute, November 2019), 13, [https://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RI\\_Neoliberalism-and-the-Climate-Crisis-201911.pdf](https://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RI_Neoliberalism-and-the-Climate-Crisis-201911.pdf)
- <sup>28</sup> California Environmental Associates, *Soil to Sky: Climate Solutions That Work* (California Environmental Associates, 2019), 31, <https://reocollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/Soil-to-Sky.pdf>.
- <sup>29</sup> Goldtooth, Saldamando, and Gracey, *Indigenous Resistance against Carbon*, 12.
- <sup>30</sup> Sana Mohammad et al., *Environment Hamilton Internal Evaluation of Climate Justice Principles and Best Practices* (McMaster Research Shop for Environment Hamilton, April 2022), 6, <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/handle/11375/27758>.
- <sup>31</sup> John Ribeiro-Broomhead and Neil Tangri, *Zero Waste and Economic Recovery: The Job Creation Potential of Zero Waste Solutions* (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, February 11, 2021), 4, <https://doi.org/10.46556/GFWE6885>.
- <sup>32</sup> Melissa Edwards, Nina Burridge, and Hilary Yerbury, "Translating Public Policy: Enhancing the Applicability of Social Impact Techniques for Grassroots Community Groups," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 5, no. 2 (August 5, 2013): 30, <https://doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v5i2.3319>.
- <sup>33</sup> Julie Guthman, "Thinking inside the Neoliberal Box: The Micro-Politics of Agro-Food Philanthropy," *Geoforum* 39, no. 3 (May 2008): 144, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.09.001>; Behrooz Morvaridi, "Capitalist Philanthropy and Hegemonic Partnerships," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 7 (August 2012): 1191, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.691827>.
- <sup>34</sup> David Ciptet and J. Timmons Roberts, "Climate Change and the Transition to Neoliberal Environmental Governance," *Global Environmental Change* 46 (September 2017): 149, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2017.09.003>; Noel Castree, "Neoliberalism and the Biophysical Environment: A Synthesis and Evaluation of the Research," *Environment and Society* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2010.010102>.
- <sup>35</sup> Guthman, "Thinking inside the Neoliberal Box," 1244.
- <sup>36</sup> Roelofs, "How Foundations Exercise Power," 665.
- <sup>37</sup> Tamaki Onishi, "Venture Philanthropy and Practice Variations: The Interplay of Institutional Logics and Organizational Identities," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (April 1, 2019): 245, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764018819875>; Kenneth Saltman, "The Rise of Venture Philanthropy and the Ongoing Neoliberal Assault on Public Education: The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation," *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* 16 (November 11, 2009): 53.
- <sup>38</sup> Michele M. Betsill et al., "Philanthropic Foundations as Agents of Environmental Governance," 692; Intensive performance measurement may also drive false reporting to spur investments in false solutions. For example, in the agricultural sector, The Great Climate Robbery critically examined how corporations used misleading metrics to create an illusion of effective climate mitigation to maintain investment and support. The study exposed the lobbying strategies of fertilizer companies, which pushed aside advocates for agroecology (local food systems and small-scale farming), promoting profit-driven, technocratic approaches instead. See: Grain, *The Great Climate Robbery: How the Food System Drives Climate Change and What We Can Do about It* (Oxford, UK: New Internationalist, 2016), 35, <https://grain.org/en/article/5354-the-great-climate-robbery>.
- <sup>39</sup> Jyotsna Puri et al., "Good Will Hunting: Challenges of Theory-Based Impact Evaluations for Climate Investments in a Multilateral Setting," *World Development* 127 (March 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104784>.

- <sup>40</sup> Edwards, Burrige, and Yerbury, “Translating Public Policy,” 36.
- <sup>41</sup> Edwards, Burrige, and Yerbury, “Translating Public Policy,” 30.
- <sup>42</sup> Catherine Crystal Foster and Justine Louie, “Grassroots Action and Learning for Social Change: Evaluating Community Organizing” (Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2010), 7.
- <sup>43</sup> Shaphali Gupta, “Understanding the Feasibility and Value of Grassroots Innovation,” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 48, no. 5 (September 2020): 947–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00639-9>.
- <sup>44</sup> Jenny Cameron and Jarra Hicks, “Performative Research for a Climate Politics of Hope: Rethinking Geographic Scale, ‘Impact’ Scale, and Markets,” *Antipode* 46, no. 1 (2014): 57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12035>.
- <sup>45</sup> Cameron and Hicks, “Performative Research for a Climate Politics of Hope,” 62.
- <sup>46</sup> Lucie Middlemiss and Bradley D. Parrish, “Building Capacity for Low-Carbon Communities: The Role of Grassroots Initiatives,” *Energy Policy* 38, no. 12 (December 2010): 7566, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2009.07.003>.
- <sup>47</sup> Michele-Lee Moore, Darcy Riddell, and Dana Vocisano, “Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Strategies of Non-Profits in Advancing Systemic Social Innovation,” *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, no. 58 (2015): 76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jcorpciti.58.67>.
- <sup>48</sup> Lindley Mease, “Rethinking Scale in Climate Solutions,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, October 26, 2022, 2).
- <sup>49</sup> Mease, “Rethinking Scale in Climate Solutions,” 4.
- <sup>50</sup> For a full description of the methodology see Appendix B.
- <sup>51</sup> A complete list of CIA’s Our Power Communities Member Groups can be found here: <https://climatejusticealliance.org/workgroup/our-power/>.
- <sup>52</sup> The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the New School reviewed this study protocol and deemed the study to be exempt, indicating minimal risk to participants. Nonetheless, researchers employed anonymization techniques to safeguard participant identities and enhance the authenticity of their responses. In some examples, we identify respondents where they have given permission to be recognized for their contributions or their organization’s contributions to the research. See Appendix B for more detailed description of our research tools and methods.
- <sup>53</sup> Similarly, across the 48 OPC websites, only 42 percent of the organizations reviewed explicitly mentioned climate change on their homepage or mission statements.
- <sup>54</sup> Reed M. Kurtz, “Direct Action and the Climate Crisis: Interventions to Resist and Reorganize the Metabolic Relations of Capitalism,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 23, no. 2 (September 8, 2020): 261, <https://doi.org/10.5840/radphilrev2020813114>.
- <sup>55</sup> Trott et al., “People’s Action for Climate Justice,” 1145.
- <sup>56</sup> United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition* (United Nations, 2023), 38, <https://doi.org/10.18356/9789210024914>.
- <sup>57</sup> Trott et al., “People’s Action for Climate Justice,” 1145.

- <sup>58</sup> California Environmental Associates, “Soil to Sky,” 21; Grain, *The Great Climate Robbery*, 8–9.
- <sup>59</sup> California Environmental Associates, “Soil to Sky,” 22.
- <sup>60</sup> Martijn W.J. Noort et al., “Towards Sustainable Shifts to Healthy Diets and Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa with Climate-Resilient Crops in Bread-Type Products: A Food System Analysis,” *Foods* 11, no. 2 (January 6, 2022): 135, <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods11020135>.
- <sup>61</sup> Timothy Fraser and Pinar Temocin, “Grassroots vs. Greenhouse: The Role of Environmental Organizations in Reducing Carbon Emissions,” *Climatic Change* 169, no. 3–4 (December 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-03260-4>.
- <sup>62</sup> M. A. T. Alsheyab, “Recycling of Construction and Demolition Waste and Its Impact on Climate Change and Sustainable Development,” *International Journal of Environmental Science and Technology* 19, no. 3 (March 2022): 2136, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13762-021-03217-1>.
- <sup>63</sup> Raoul Minetti, Pierluigi Murro, and Valentina Peruzzi, “Not All Banks Are Equal: Cooperative Banking and Income Inequality,” *Economic Inquiry* 59, no. 1 (2021): 430, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecin.12932>.
- <sup>64</sup> Mumtaz Derya Tarhan, “Renewable Energy Cooperatives: A Review of Demonstrated Impacts and Limitations,” *The Journal of Entrepreneurial and Organizational Diversity* 4, no. 1 (August 13, 2015): 109.
- <sup>65</sup> Middlemiss and Parrish, “Building Capacity for Low-Carbon Communities,” 7566.
- <sup>66</sup> Cha et al., “A Roadmap to an Equitable Low-Carbon Future,” 11.
- <sup>67</sup> Pablo Del Río and Mercedes Burguillo, “An Empirical Analysis of the Impact of Renewable Energy Deployment on Local Sustainability,” *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 13, no. 6–7 (August 2009): 1324, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2008.08.001>; Middlemiss and Parrish, “Building Capacity for Low-Carbon Communities,” 7564.
- <sup>68</sup> Anna L. Berka and Emily Creamer, “Taking Stock of the Local Impacts of Community Owned Renewable Energy: A Review and Research Agenda,” *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 82, no. 3 (February 2018): 3410, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2017.10.050>.
- <sup>69</sup> Goldtooth, Saldamando, and Gracey, *Indigenous Resistance against Carbon*, 12.
- <sup>70</sup> Mariangela Veronesi, Line Algoed, and María E. Hernández Torrales, “Community-Led Development and Collective Land Tenure for Environmental Justice: The Case of the Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust, Puerto Rico,” *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development* 14, no. 1 (December 31, 2022): 390, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463138.2022.2096616>.
- <sup>71</sup> Alisen E. Downey et al., “Soil Carbon Sequestration in Urban Afforestation Sites in New York City,” *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 65 (November 2021): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2021.127342>; Muhammad Shafique, Xiaolong Xue, and Xiaowei Luo, “An Overview of Carbon Sequestration of Green Roofs in Urban Areas,” *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 47 (January 2020): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2019.126515>.
- <sup>72</sup> Sonja Klinsky and Anna Mavrogianni, “Climate Justice and the Built Environment,” *Buildings and Cities* 1, no. 1 (July 14, 2020): 417, <https://doi.org/10.5334/bc.65>.
- <sup>73</sup> California Environmental Associates, “Soil to Sky,” 26–27; Per Olsson, Carl Folke, and Thomas Hahn, “Social-Ecological Transformation for Ecosystem Management: The Development of Adaptive Co-Management of a Wetland Landscape in Southern Sweden,” *Ecology and Society* 9, no. 4 (2004): 16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26267691>.

- <sup>74</sup> Trott et al., “People’s Action for Climate Justice,” 1147.
- <sup>75</sup> Ana Bonell et al., “Grassroots and Youth-Led Climate Solutions from The Gambia,” *Frontiers in Public Health* 10 (April 7, 2022): 7, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.784915>.
- <sup>76</sup> Derived from the organization’s website: <https://www.detroitblackfarmer.com/>.
- <sup>77</sup> Derived from Kheprw’s website: <https://alkhemyki.org/about/>.
- <sup>78</sup> Derived from PUSH Buffalo’s website: <https://www.pushbuffalo.org/developments/sustainability-workforce-training-center/#:~:text=Connecting%20Climate%20Justice%20to%20Workforce%20Development.><sup>79</sup> Derived from the organization’s website: <https://soulardarity.org/today-show/>.
- <sup>80</sup> Derived from CBE’s website: <https://www.cbecal.org/about/victories/>.
- <sup>81</sup> Jeffrey Hou and Michael Rios, “Community-Driven Place Making: The Social Practice of Participatory Design in the Making of Union Point Park,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 57, no. 1 (September 2003): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1162/104648803322336557>.
- <sup>82</sup> Sarah Hansen, *Cultivating the Grassroots: A Winning Approach for Environment and Climate Funders* (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2012), 16.
- <sup>83</sup> Temper et al., “A Perspective on Radical Transformations to Sustainability,” 755.
- <sup>84</sup> Kathryn Howell and Barbara Brown Wilson, “Preserving Community through Radical Collaboration: Affordable Housing Preservation Networks in Chicago, Washington, DC, and Denver,” *Housing, Theory and Society* 36, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 321, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2018.1490812>.
- <sup>85</sup> Josephine M. Chambers et al., “Co-Productive Agility and Four Collaborative Pathways to Sustainability Transformations,” *Global Environmental Change* 72 (January 2022): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102422>.
- <sup>86</sup> Hou and Rios, “Community-Driven Place Making,” 21.
- <sup>87</sup> Chambers et al., “Co-Productive Agility and Four Collaborative Pathways,” 11.
- <sup>88</sup> Edwards, Burrigge, and Yerbury, “Translating Public Policy,” 38; Howell and Wilson, “Preserving Community through Radical Collaboration,” 321.
- <sup>89</sup> Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano, “Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep,” 54.
- <sup>90</sup> Temper et al., “A Perspective on Radical Transformations to Sustainability,” 757.
- <sup>91</sup> Temper et al., “A Perspective on Radical Transformations to Sustainability,” 761; Chambers et al., “Co-Productive Agility and Four Collaborative Pathways,” 3; Mark Stallworthy, “Environmental Justice Imperatives for an Era of Climate Change,” *Journal of Law and Society* 36, no. 1 (2009): 73; Nikravech Mariam et al., “Limiting Food Waste via Grassroots Initiatives as a Potential for Climate Change Mitigation: A Systematic Review,” *Environmental Research Letters* 15, no. 12 (December 1, 2020): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aba2fe>.
- <sup>92</sup> Howell and Wilson, “Preserving Community through Radical Collaboration,” 321.

<sup>93</sup> The categorization of reported wins into priority areas, public policy, and geographies of scale involved a two-step methodology combining keyword-based matching (e.g. words like “food security,” “nutrition,” and “agriculture” were mapped to Food Systems) with contextual analysis—wins were then reviewed to account for context and any nuances that keywords alone could miss. This helped capture cases where keywords did not fully represent the impact area.

<sup>94</sup> Survey respondents were asked “How much of the development of your organization’s strategies and goals is focused on the following types of scale for greater impact? To rank types of scale, enter a number from 1 (most important) to 4 (least important).” Then they were subsequently instructed, “Rank the types of scale funders have most referenced or discussed regarding your organization’s strategies, goals, or impact. To rank, enter a number from 1 (most referenced or discussed) to 4 (least referenced or discussed).” The responses to both questions were then compared to develop figure 10.

<sup>95</sup> Cameron and Hicks, “Performative Research for a Climate Politics of Hope,” 61.

<sup>96</sup> Chambers et al., “Co-Productive Agility and Four Collaborative Pathways,” 11; Lynsy Smithson-Stanley and Jack Zhou, *Blueprint for a Multiracial, Cross-Class Climate Movement: The Report on Coalitions*, (Climate Advocacy Lab, October 4, 2023), 32.

<sup>97</sup> Sherry R. Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 4 (July 1969): 216–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>.

<sup>98</sup> Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano, “Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep,” 76.

<sup>99</sup> Edwards, Burridge, and Yerbury, “Translating Public Policy,” 30.

<sup>100</sup> Derk Loorbach et al., “Transformative Innovation and Translocal Diffusion,” *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 35 (June 2020): 251–60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2020.01.009>.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Reeves, Mark Lemon, and Diana Cook, “Jump-Starting Transition? Catalysing Grassroots Action on Climate Change,” *Energy Efficiency* 7, no. 1 (February 2014): 120, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12053-013-9212-z>; Gupta, “Understanding the Feasibility,” 948; Middlemiss and Parrish, “Building Capacity for Low-Carbon Communities,” 7560; Chambers et al., “Co-Productive Agility and Four Collaborative Pathways,” 9.

<sup>102</sup> Temper et al., “A Perspective on Radical Transformations to Sustainability,” 761.

<sup>103</sup> Cameron and Hicks, “Performative Research for a Climate Politics of Hope,” 62; Fernando Tormos-Aponte and Gustavo A. García-López, “Polycentric Struggles: The Experience of the Global Climate Justice Movement,” *Environmental Policy and Governance* 28, no. 4 (July 2018): 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1815>.

<sup>104</sup> Moore, Riddell, and Vocisano, “Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep,” 75.

<sup>105</sup> Trott et al., “People’s Action for Climate Justice,” 1145.

<sup>106</sup> See Appendix C for ideas on how to approach evaluative processes that align better with grassroots strategies and concepts of scale.

<sup>107</sup> Cameron and Hicks, “Performative Research for a Climate Politics of Hope,” 58.