

AT-A-GLANCE

Climate, Equity, and Justice

An Introduction for Philanthropists





Climate change is an existential threat to humanity—one that, if unchecked, poses great danger to our ways of life and the natural world. We have made some progress on slowing climate change, but to date, it is uneven and nowhere near what is necessary to achieve our vision of a healthy climate future.

Many of the root causes of the climate crisis are systemic and overlap with those that have given rise to other societal challenges: inequities based on gender, racial injustice, and colonization, to name a few. And, the challenges and devastation of climate change are not felt equally. Often, the people experiencing the greatest impacts of the climate crisis—such as more frequent and intense floods, fire, heat, and famine—have done the least to cause it and have been chronically under-invested in for decades.

Achieving lasting positive change for people and the planet requires understanding how we have arrived at this point, and taking advantage of the lessons the field of climate philanthropy is learning in the equity and justice space. Every step forward matters.

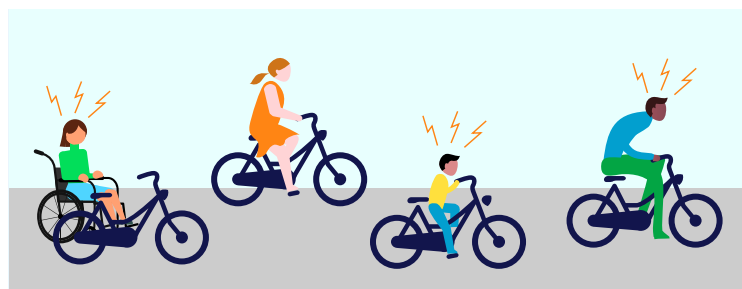
Understanding Equality, Equity, and Justice

Evidence demonstrates that when equity and justice are integrated, climate strategies are more rapidly adopted and implemented, people and communities thrive, and the positive impacts are durable and systemic. In short, addressing climate challenges in a manner that tackles fundamental inequities and the unjust systems themselves can be a force multiplier for good.

The most important thing is for philanthropists to recognize this and ensure that equity and justice are key considerations in their giving. While experts have different definitions for the terms equality, equity, and justice, for the purposes of this guide, they are defined as follows:

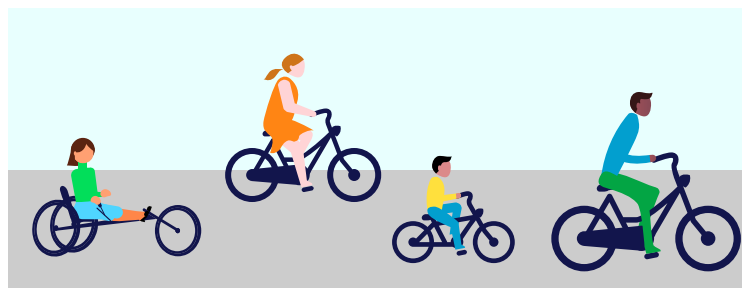
EQUALITY

Everyone is treated the same way regardless of need. In the illustration to the right, everyone has received the same size bicycle, regardless of physical ability or size. This means many people are unable to fully and effectively utilize the benefits of the bicycle provided.



EQUITY

Everyone has what they need. In the second illustration, everyone receives bicycles that acknowledge and address their specific needs—a modified bicycle for the person who uses a wheelchair, and bigger and smaller bicycles for taller and shorter individuals.



JUSTICE

This means fixing the system by removing the fundamental barriers that restrict equality and equity in the first place. A justice approach looks at the root issues and identifies solutions that strive to address interlocking challenges and impacts. Importantly, the “solution” (such as a policy) is the result of a community-driven process and not a predetermined outcome.



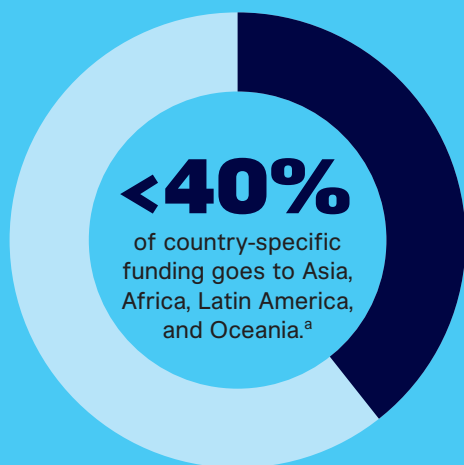
Source: Based on resources from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Better Bikeshare Partnership.

The State of Equity and Justice in Climate Philanthropy

Experts report that racial inequity has been built into philanthropic norms across all sectors, including climate. Historically, many strategies supported by climate philanthropy have been based on governmental, educational, or economic structures that reinforce existing power dynamics, which has resulted in the systemic exclusion of people of color, grassroots groups, and communities that are low-income or in the Global South. For example, almost two-thirds of 2022 foundation funding for specific regions was directed to the U.S. and Europe.

We know engaging more people in climate action and ensuring the benefits are widely distributed helps to build the popular support and momentum needed to dramatically accelerate progress toward our global climate goals. There is simply no time for only some hands on deck. Without being intentional about addressing issues of equity and justice—including how grants are made—climate philanthropy risks leaving immense amounts of power on the table. The visual below illustrates the inequitable distribution of philanthropic funding for climate solutions.

ACROSS THE GLOBE



3.75%
causes supporting climate justice^b

1%
indigenous people

<1%
women's initiatives^c

^a Does not reflect grants provided for global work, which may or may not include Global South countries.

^b Does not include Bezos Earth Fund's recent gifts to such groups, five grants totaling \$160 million over roughly three years, which substantially raised that level, but such grants remain a minor percentage of total climate philanthropy.

^c Source: greengrants.org/what-we-do/womens-environmental-action

IN THE UNITED STATES



50%

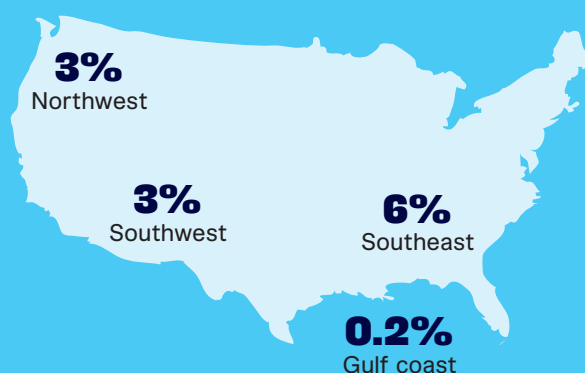
funding for climate issues went to 20 national organizations, most of which are led by white men



1.3-7%

of philanthropic funding went to Black-, Indigenous-, and people of color-led environmental justice organizations.

Regions get unequal climate and clean energy funding. The most inequitable areas are:



EXAMPLE: A Model for Ambitious Climate Policy

The successful passage of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act in Illinois, one of the most comprehensive climate laws in the U.S., puts the state on a path to 100 percent carbon-free energy by 2045. This is a model of how ambitious climate policy can be achieved. The coalition of advocates, funded by philanthropy, was led by grassroots groups, religious groups, utility rate-payer groups, and civil rights groups representing a diverse array of communities of color, young and old people, and organizations working across a range of issues from criminal justice to consumer and labor rights. This coalition joined environmental groups in pushing the policy over the finish line and accelerating implementation even faster than expected.



Photo courtesy of Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition

Lessons Learned from Philanthropy about Equity and Justice

Gleaned from philanthropists and foundation officers, these accumulated insights illustrate how incorporating equity and justice considerations can help maximize impact and chart a course forward.

1. **Race matters in tackling the climate crisis.** Success depends on bringing an intentional, explicit, and sustained focus to addressing racial disparities across the problems that philanthropy is trying to solve. This includes recognizing the significance of race in how philanthropists identify leaders and find solutions.
2. **Acknowledging the legacy of colonialism can help accelerate climate progress.** Centuries of resource extraction from the Global South—and the consequential accumulated wealth in the Global North—create the context that should inform how philanthropists give today. Repairing generations of past injustices involves not just investing in these communities, but engaging them to decide where the funding flows.
3. **Technocratic solutions alone are not enough—and should be complemented**



Photo by Joel Redman / If Not Us Then Who

by strategies that address wider societal issues. While efforts that focus on the technical aspects of the climate crisis are critical, they risk being a narrow strategy that does not consider other factors essential to effecting systemic transformation. A holistic, people-oriented approach that includes funding grassroots movements and building power from the ground up can help thoughtful technical solutions achieve their full potential.








4. **Focusing on equity and justice does not slow progress—it makes climate solutions more impactful.** When equity and justice are integrated, climate strategies are actually more rapidly adopted and implemented because affected communities have been involved in their creation, leading to more durable and systemic impact.
5. **The climate crisis requires pursuing adaptation and mitigation strategies simultaneously.** We have run out of time to take a sequential approach to tackling climate change as many communities are already experiencing climate devastation. When communities have the power to adapt as needed, they can consider overlapping drivers and impacts of the crisis, and put forward

solutions that strengthen planetary, social, and economic resilience and wellbeing.

6. **The consequences of climate change that cannot be adapted to—loss and damage—must be addressed.** Millions of people are already facing the consequences of higher temperatures, rising seas, fiercer storms, and unpredictable rainfall, demonstrating that loss and damage are inevitable despite best efforts. This issue requires urgent attention; philanthropy can help by supporting measures such as extending humanitarian assistance, rebuilding critical infrastructure, and providing migration and relocation resources.
7. **Transformative change requires grassroots movements, but they are drastically underfunded.** This is due in part to misconceptions that these efforts are small and fragmented, and therefore not high-impact or scalable. To the contrary, grassroots movements are sophisticated efforts that secure significant impacts, often at scale through global networks and coalitions. Movements build power; effect durable, politically resilient change; and amplify the voices of marginalized communities to influence decision-makers.

How Change Happens: A Roadmap for the Future

Funders can help drive systems change by supporting key activities that integrate equity and justice across sectors and geographies. Many of these “levers” are interconnected and can be mutually reinforcing, so using them in combination is a particularly effective strategy. Examples include:

Levers for Change	Examples of How Philanthropy Can Integrate Equity and Justice
 Advocate for Policy Change	<p>Fund organizations that are working to ensure policy prioritizes a just transition for people who are a part of our current fossil-fuel driven economy.</p>
 Influence Financial Flows	<p>Ensure Global South countries are prepared to access financing by helping them build capacity to advocate for, absorb, and deploy funds toward initiatives and programs.</p>
 Use Strategic Communications to Reach Broader Audiences	<p>Fund communications efforts and media outlets led by people of color who will authentically center the voices of climate-impacted communities and encourage engagement.</p>
 Employ Legal Strategies	<p>Enable frontline groups and their lawyers to bring lawsuits addressing corporate accountability and protecting frontline communities, and to defend protesters fighting expansion of oil and gas and other emitting industries.</p>
 Build Coalitions and Movements	<p>Resource grassroots movements at scale and for the long term with flexible funds, prioritizing organizations led by women, people of color, and those affected by discrimination with an eye toward growing political power.</p>
 Undertake Research and Analysis	<p>Fund research into health, economic, and other potential impacts of new climate policies and technologies.</p>
 Support Capacity Strengthening	<p>Invest in universities, think tanks, and other entities in the Global South that will generate critical in-country analysis to undergird evidence-based policies and empower a wide range of stakeholders.</p>



EXAMPLE: Young Women Champion Sustainable Agriculture

In Sub-Saharan Africa, increasingly extreme weather threatens the livelihoods of farming communities. Women are disproportionately affected due to their dual roles in producing food and managing household responsibilities—and, they are less likely than men to benefit from agricultural training, resources, or advisory services, resulting in a 20 to 30 percent productivity gap between genders.

In 2013, the Campaign for Female Education launched an initiative to train young women from farming communities across the region to become champions of sustainable agriculture. These young women have improved the productivity, sustainability, and profitability of their own small holdings and encouraged wide adoption of practical, affordable, and locally relevant climate-smart techniques. They have reached more than 8,500 individuals in rural Africa—mostly women and young people—through demo-farms, community meetings, and mentoring.

Insights from the Field

These key principles, insights, and tools—shared by peer philanthropists, experts, and especially, those on the frontlines—are helpful for donors to keep in mind as they develop strategies to get started on their own climate philanthropy journeys.

1. **Diversify your spaces and broaden your conversations.** Philanthropists tend to fund people known to them and their networks. Build genuine relationships with those who are different—notably people of color; those from different socio-economic backgrounds; and those from outside the U.S, the Global South.
2. **Trust those on the frontlines of climate change and environmental harm to contribute solutions and paths forward.** Expand who is considered a “climate expert.” Have confidence in those who have experienced the negative impacts of climate change to be leaders in tackling the crisis—and resource them at scale.
3. **Expand how “impact” is defined and measured.** While tons of emissions avoided or reduced are critical data and essential measures of progress, they do not tell the full climate story, nor can the impact of certain activities such as grassroots movements be easily measured in this way. Funders can support efforts to improve measurement of broader, people-centric interventions and engage grantees on feasible progress indicators.

4. **Acknowledge that money is power.** Therefore supporting grassroots, Black-led, Indigenous-led, people of color-led, women-led, and Global South-led organizations is essential for transformational impact. Without all hands on deck, even the most well-intentioned climate solutions risk failure and leave power, innovation, and opportunities on the table.
5. **Minimize the administrative burden for grantees, and support equity-based funding intermediaries and networks that can help.** Collaborative giving platforms offer an expedient way for funders to join together for maximum impact. They have extensive expertise and longstanding relationships with grassroots groups and can help funders move capital efficiently and effectively.
6. **Bolster self-determination by providing long-term, flexible core operating support.** By investing in the long-term capacity and skills of grassroots movements and diverse leaders and by providing flexible support, philanthropy enables these groups to build, scale, and pivot their work as needed.
7. **Consider how participatory grantmaking can redistribute power in philanthropy.** Participatory grantmaking flips the power dynamic between philanthropists and grantees. Local leaders help determine where resources go, in line with community needs. Including those with lived experience in the grantmaking process will inform better strategies and result in more impactful grants.
8. **Act quickly and concretely toward a more equitable and just future, while embracing a learning mindset.** We can move forward while reflecting and learning, addressing mistakes, acknowledging our biases, and letting go of assumptions while working toward a better future. The important thing is to start now.



Evaluating Solutions and Strategies

To help differentiate solutions rooted in equity and justice from those that may not be, these questions should be asked of all organizations being considered for funding.

Who tells the story?

Is it frontline communities and/or grassroots groups?

Who makes the decisions?

Is it those who are most impacted?

Who benefits, and how?

Does this solution perpetuate the status quo?

Will it benefit frontline communities?

What else will this impact?

Will this solution inadvertently create more burden?

Could this solution help multi-solve across injustices?

How will this build or shift power?

Does this solution shift the landscape of political, economic, and cultural power?

Source: "The People's Solution Lens for a Green New Deal," Climate Justice Alliance

Additional Resources

This At-a-Glance guide is based on Climate Lead's December 2022 report *Climate, Equity, and Justice: A Guide for Philanthropists*. Sources referenced in this version include:

Environmental Funders: The Problem Isn't Just Diversity. It's Access to Money (Inside Philanthropy, April 6, 2021)

Why fund intermediaries? (CLIMA Fund, March 2020)

Giving for Climate Change and Clean Energy (Inside Philanthropy, 2021)

Funding trends 2021: Climate change mitigation philanthropy (ClimateWorks Foundation, October 2021)

Funding trends 2022: Climate change mitigation philanthropy (ClimateWorks Foundation, October 2022)

Illinois Shows Us What the Road to Clean Energy Should Look Like (NRDC, December 2021)

Systems, Not Just Symptoms: Bringing a Justice Frame to Climate Philanthropy and Finance Climate and Forests 2030 (Climate and Land Use Alliance, August 2021)

Influence for good: How highly resourced individuals could work towards positive systemic change (Ashoka et al, May 2022)

Selected Reading Recommendations

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

Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table (The Bridgespan Group, May 2020)

Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking (Grantcraft/Foundation Center, 2018)

Soil to Sky: Climate Solutions that Work (CLIMA Fund, Winter 2019)

Cultivating the Grassroots: A Winning Approach for Environment and Climate Funders (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy)

In-depth Q&A: What is 'climate justice'? (Carbon Brief, October 2021)

Beyond 2%: From climate philanthropy to climate justice philanthropy (EDGE Funders Alliance, May 2022)



ABOUT CLIMATE LEAD

Climate Lead empowers philanthropic leaders everywhere to take immediate and far-reaching climate action. By serving as an impartial and trusted guide, Climate Lead equips new climate philanthropists with the information and insights they need to drive transformative solutions. We cut through the complexity by curating roadmaps, in partnership with a diverse network of experts, to help philanthropists make a bold impact on climate from day one.

Because Climate Lead is fully funded by leading philanthropies, we offer our services free of charge, prioritizing donors' interests and climate impact above all.

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For more information, contact:

Robynn Steffen, Executive Vice President
Climate Lead
robynn.steffen@climatelead.org