

# Environmental Justice and Philanthropy: Challenges and Opportunities for Alignment

## OPPORTUNITIES

"I would love to see more foundations give space for the organizations on the ground to actually lead what that strategy of the foundation should be, potentially in partnership with the foundation." - Funder 9

Access the report at:

<https://bea4impact.org/work/landscape-assessment>

### Buidling Equity and Alignment for Impact

BEA-I brings together dynamic grassroots organizing groups, effective national green organizations, and innovators in philanthropy to advance the progress of the environmental movement towards a just transition and directly confront powerful polluters. <https://bea4impact.org/>

### Tishman Environment and Design Center

The Tishman Environment and Design Center integrates bold design, policy and social justice approaches to tackle the climate crisis and advance environmental justice.

<https://www.tishmancenter.org/>

In 2020, the BEA-I collaborated with the Tishman Environment and Design Center at The New School to conduct an assessment of the misalignment between the environmental justice (EJ) and philanthropic sectors in the Gulf South and Midwest regions.

Through interviews with foundation and environmental justice organization staff, the study found specific opportunities for better aligning funding and relationships over time. These opportunities represent both long-term and short-term actions and can be implemented across the sectors.

Since the inception of the BEA-I, efforts have been made to expand opportunities for EJ groups and funders to work together. The following events represent two instances when both sectors came together to achieve a shared understanding of an issue, devise aligned strategies and expand funding opportunities.

## Case Studies for Alignment

- **It Takes Roots Funder Briefing, Solidarity to Solutions (Sol2Sol) Week in 2018:**

Funder briefing hosted by *It Takes Roots* in response to the Global Climate Action Summit, highlighting Indigenous peoples' and frontline communities' solutions to interconnected crises, challenging market-based schemes.

- **Clean Power Plan Gathering Hosted by the BEA-I, Southwest Workers Union, and Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Series (TEJAS) in Houston, TX in 2016:**

A convening of grassroots, green NGO, and philanthropic leaders from over 100 organizations met to discuss building alignment to meet long-standing environmental justice demands in climate policies. For example, ensuring that national climate policies like the Clean Power Plan reduce emissions in frontline communities. The forum featured EJ-led trainings and invited tough dialogue on equity, funding disparities, and environmental movement building.



## Summary of Opportunities for Alignment by Sector



## CAPACITY BUILDING

### EJ ORGANIZATIONS

- Communicate and emphasize movement 'wins' to the general public and philanthropy throughout the year, not just during the granting process.
- Connect local work to broader policy goals or systemic change in the field.
- Leverage the communications' capacity of allies in larger organizations.
- Shift attention towards finding new funders or other philanthropic sectors that may be better aligned with social justice goals and direct action tactics of EJ organizations.

### FUNDERS

- Make field visits, host gatherings and participate in informal meetings with EJ organizations to build trust and understanding over time.
- Create "administrative hubs" with shared resources such as space, media, video and conferencing equipment, and technical experts.
- Offer larger, multi-year grants to organizations with smaller annual budgets to build their organizational and development capacity.
- Offer targeted grants to build the communications & development staff of EJ organizations.

## LEVERAGE THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES

### EJ ORGANIZATIONS

- Prioritize joining alliances, coalitions, or networks that serve as intermediaries and have commitments to opening up access to new sources of funding.
- Use intermediaries to help fill organizational and programmatic capacity needs.
- Develop shared accountability structures that ensure transparent and democratic decision-making processes of intermediaries.

### FUNDERS

- Assess the transparency, impact, and representativeness of intermediaries.
- Track and report funding from intermediaries directly to member EJ organizations.
- Leverage intermediaries to build relationships with local EJ organizations and direct more funding to EJ organizations through these groups.

## Summary of Opportunities for Alignment by Sector



## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND ACCESS

### EJ ORGANIZATIONS

- Invite funders to tour communities, highlight wins and deepen their understanding.
- Ask existing funders and intermediaries to make connections to new funders.
- Make multiple attempts for funding even if an application is declined.
- Participate in convenings where funders and EJ organizations can learn collaboratively, exchange ideas, share strategies, build shared visions, and align theories of change.

### FUNDERS

- Engage with EJ communities by committing to local site visits led by EJ organizations.
- Provide travel stipends and invitations to funder gatherings or convenings where funders and EJ organizations can build shared understanding of issues, tactics, and goals.
- Provide more opportunities for informal meetings between foundation and EJ staff.
- Broadly disseminate clear, transparent, and shared metrics for evaluating grant applications, explicitly defining EJ organization, grant goals, and theories of change.
- Provide feedback to EJ organizations, particularly first time applicants, on denied applications.

## RACISM & STRUCTURAL POWER

### FUNDERS

- Share and utilize clear definitions of equity and EJ that align with grassroots groups.
- Diversify staff, boards, and leadership and add staff with grassroots experience.
- Adopt participatory grant-making practices that include EJ representatives.
- Connect EJ groups to political power through legislative briefings and policy meetings.
- Commit to funding targets that deliver a larger percentage of environmental grant dollars to EJ organizations or other groups led by people of color.
- Support and grow “activist-funders” within philanthropy and convene affinity groups and share best practices around anti-racism.
- Adopt theories of change that are informed by and developed with frontline groups and examine these against funding strategies and outcomes.