

Environmental Justice and Philanthropy: Challenges and Opportunities for Alignment

FUNDING DISPARITY

Environmental Justice organizations in the Gulf South and Midwest regions received 1% of the total environmental grant dollars awarded by the philanthropic sector.

Access the report at:

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

Building 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/>



Tishman Environment and Design Center



Mertz Gilmore Foundation

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. The study also identified areas of opportunity to build greater alignment over time.

National Environmental Grant Making

This study found that between 2016 - 2017, 12 national environmental grant makers awarded \$1.34 billion to a variety of organizations. Of this, only 1.3% (\$18 million) was awarded to groups the research team identified as EJ organizations.

The Foundation Center is an organization that tracks grant giving in the philanthropic sector across the country. They categorize grant giving by activity. This study found that an estimated \$11 million of environmental grant dollars was awarded to activities categorized as "EJ activities." Of the funding allocated to "EJ activities", 91% (\$9,994,000), went to non-EJ organizations and the remaining 9% (\$930,000) went to EJ organizations.

Regional Environmental Grant Making

In 2016-2017, ten Midwest funders awarded approximately \$134 million in environmental grants. Of this, less than 1% (\$1 million) went to EJ organizations. In the Gulf South, six foundations awarded approximately \$12 million in environmental grants, with 1.3% (\$155,000) allocated to EJ organizations.

RECOMMENDATION

In order to better track equitable and inclusive funding, the philanthropic sector can adopt a shared definition of what constitutes an environmental justice organization, that is aligned with the definitions in use by the EJ sector. For example, the research team collaboratively developed the following definition of an EJ Organization to determine the allocation of environmental grants:

EJ Organization Definition

Organizational leadership is based in the community and the community has been defined with some geographic or identity based definitions. These organizations represent communities that are historically and systematically overburdened by pollution and climate change. The mission or values of the organizations are grounded in justice principles such as the Jemez Principles or Environmental Justice Principles (1991). These organizations are rooted in, accountable to, and representative of communities of color, low-income communities, and tribal and Indigenous groups who are most directly impacted by the issues being addressed. They are committed to building local power and leadership to influence the decisions that affect their communities.