Centering Justice Manifesto for Environmental and Climate Justice Centers
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The New School, NYC

On January 17th to 19th, 2024, the Tishman Environment and Design Center at The New School University in New York City convened the Centering Justice Symposium to explore how centers for environmental and climate justice within higher education can better align with movements to advance just and effective partnerships. The event hosted over 100 attendees from across the country, with participants from more than twenty-five environmental justice (EJ) organizations, over thirty academic institutions, and more than a dozen representatives from philanthropy and the federal government, including speakers from the Environmental Protection Agency, the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and the Department of Transportation.

During the two-and-a-half days, a variety of discussions foregrounded EJ community voices to explore and codify the role that EJ and climate justice-focused university centers, and to an extent philanthropy and government, should play in advancing environmental justice—particularly in this pivotal moment of historic federal EJ and climate-focused investments. Conversations centered on common barriers, needed reforms, partnership and funding opportunities, best practices, and guiding principles. Participants called for a Manifesto to Center Justice, the core of which was synthesized into three salient areas for action:

1. **Establish just, equitable, transparent partnerships, based on reciprocity and trust.**
   Partnerships must respect community autonomy, leadership, and expertise, focus on partnerships built on demonstrable track records of working with EJ communities, and concentrate on areas of work that EJ groups identify as priorities ripe for collaboration.

2. **Ensure internal assessment and accountability systems within universities, while promoting alignment from philanthropy and federal agencies.** This commitment to systems change can include committing to existing EJ principles, ceasing harmful practices and accounting for past harms, tackling institutional barriers to EJ, and incentivizing trusted EJ scholarship and practice. Similarly, foundations and federal funders must embrace the principles of environmental justice, integrating related practices in eligibility, evaluation criteria and funding amounts.

3. **Explore formation of an ongoing community of practice with trusted university centers and EJ partners that models and supports academic-community partnerships.** This community of practice, a constellation of centers and partners, could promote community just, equitable, transparent partnerships and related accountability, including best practices for agreements and commitments and providing ongoing relevant technical assistance, research, and other support at the invitation and direction of EJ partners.
### Establishing just, equitable, transparent, and accountable resource sharing looks like:

- Sharing a substantial portion of funding with partners carrying out the work and for whom the funding is intended to benefit
- Reducing indirect rates for funding proposals that include community partners
- Stepping back when funding is best suited or targeted for community partners
- Obtaining consent from community organizations before including them in funding applications and avoiding pitting community groups against one another for funding
- Committing to community-owned and managed research frameworks which center the community as principal investigator, requiring the CBO be funded directly

### Ensuring internal assessment and accountability systems within universities looks like:

- Committing to existing environmental justice principles to guide and ground partnerships, research, and practice
- Assessing if current practices may exacerbate environmental racism, perpetrate false climate solutions, and further harm environmental justice communities
- Requiring upfront disclosure of any conflicts of interest relevant to the community
- Tackling institutional barriers to justice-centered partnerships, such as contracting, procurement, general counsel, or intellectual property rules
- Incentivizing scholar-activists, practitioners, and advocates doing EJ work
- Promoting accessible, non-technical outputs (i.e., public comments, policy briefs, technical assistance, etc.) and non-traditional roles (i.e., professors of practice)
- Creating educational opportunities for Black, Latinx, of Color, Indigenous, and low-income students, particularly from EJ communities, to learn from EJ partners

### Creating an ongoing community of practice that models partnerships looks like:

- Working as a community of practice of university centers and EJ partners that share best practices and promotes accountability for EJ partnerships
- Using a strategic position to advocate for EJ community-driven environmental and climate justice solutions
- Promoting approaches and practices (e.g. those in Manifesto) especially related to long-term commitments, technical assistance, and non-technical outputs
- Ensuring community agreements are in place before faculty, staff, students, and other affiliated individuals initiate research, projects, or funding proposals/applications
- Disseminating research related to communities or environmental or climate justice back to communities
- Requiring approval from community IRBs or community research review councils prior to initiating research projects about or “for” EJ communities
We, the undersigned, stand committed to this manifesto and urge academic institutions, environmental justice partners, researchers, and professionals working at the intersection of higher education, environmental, and climate justice to take up this call to action.

Signatories:

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**Melissa Miles**, Executive Director, New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance

**Dr. P. Qasimah Boston**, Founder, Board of Directors of the Tallahassee Food Network

**Dr. Manuel Pastor**, University of Southern California, Equity Research Institute

**Dr. Sacoby Wilson**, Center for Community Engagement, Environmental Justice, and Health

**Dr. Karletta Chief (Diné)**, Indigenous Resilience Center, University of Arizona

**Dr. Martha Matsuoka, Ph.D.**, Professor, Urban & Environmental Policy; Executive Director, Urban & Environmental Policy Institute

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