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EQUITY FUND



Accelerating Equitable Climate Policy: A Landscape Analysis

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About the Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund

Founded in 2016, the Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund (the Equity Fund) is building power to stop climate change and create an equitable clean energy future through a strategic multi-state initiative that is:

- Investing in the leadership and organizing of diverse communities, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and others bearing the brunt of climate change);
- Engaging voters in these communities through nonpartisan civic engagement campaigns; and
- Winning climate and clean energy policy solutions that reflect the priorities of communities and advance racial, economic, and environmental justice.



1. Introduction

Our country is facing a series of urgent and intertwined crises: the coronavirus pandemic and the related economic hardships, both of which are hitting low-income residents and people of color the hardest; centuries of structural racism and its impacts on BIPOC communities; and the growing climate catastrophe, which is already exacerbating the negative impacts of these challenges.

To address these complex conditions, we need locally rooted and sophisticated strategies connected to the realities of state and federal policy. If community-based organizations across the country are able to build networked infrastructure that supports long-term engagement in state policy, connects to federal opportunities, and aligns with their existing organizing capacities, the movement for climate justice, public health, and racial equity will be able to advance solutions that meet the needs of our most-impacted communities. This approach will also lay the foundation for long-lasting solutions that address both racial and economic justice and the climate crisis.

Momentum is growing, and the landscape is shifting very quickly on racial and economic justice, climate, and clean energy. Frontline communities are proving that they are an essential part of ensuring that the most equitable policies are created, championed, and passed. But support for these frontline groups is still nascent. To make the most of the opportunity before us, we must intentionally and significantly increase the resources and infrastructure to support the leadership of disproportionately impacted communities.

About This Report

This report distills the findings and analysis from a climate justice landscape assessment on gaps, capacity needs, and opportunities to strengthen state, local, and regional climate and clean energy equity policy. In partnership with Grassroots Policy Project and the Just Community Energy Transition Project, the Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund (known as the Equity Fund) conducted 32 interviews with leaders from national, regional, and grassroots organizations, as well as a literature review and gap analysis. Deeper state-level interviews focused on organizations that the Equity Fund already works with in Georgia, Florida, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, and Virginia. More details on the methodology and a full list of interviews can be found in Sections 6 and 9.

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2. The Movement's Moment

Across the interviews that make up the backbone of this report, conversations typically began with a discussion of the significant opportunities to advance climate priorities under the Biden-Harris administration. These opportunities pervade the federal landscape, from the massive climate investments integrated into the proposed American Jobs Plan and the Justice40 initiative, to various pieces of progressive policies being developed by or moving in Congress, statehouses, and city halls. Together, they reflect the coming together of elected officials and activists in prioritizing action on climate change with a society- and government-wide approach. In this section, we summarize some of the most significant current policy opportunities and movement formations.

Federal Infrastructure Proposals

In March of 2021, the Biden administration announced an ambitious effort called the [American Jobs Plan \(AJP\)](#), also referred to as “the infrastructure bill.” The original proposal was developed as a \$2 trillion economic recovery package, with an emphasis on addressing climate change through funding measures such as building green infrastructure. It also included a commitment of 100-percent carbon-free electricity by 2035, with high-quality labor standards across the board, as well as a major investment in the “caring economy.”

While many interviewees characterized the proposed AJP as “the moment we’ve been building toward,” Senate negotiations resulted in a significantly scaled-back, bipartisan [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#). The new bill, passed in the Senate with bipartisan support, would invest \$1 trillion in infrastructure. It contains a range of climate-related funding provisions, including investments in clean water and water infrastructure, public transit, renewable energy, and electric vehicle infrastructure build-out. However, the pared-back version does not have a clean energy standard, nor does it have any of the labor standards or care economy investments included in the original AJP.

As of mid-August 2021, the Biden administration and Democratic leaders in the House were committed to advancing, alongside the bipartisan bill, a more ambitious infrastructure spending effort akin to the original AJP proposal. However, with the slim Democratic balance of power in the Senate, the fate of both bills and what climate measures are ultimately included will undoubtedly fluctuate.

If an infrastructure bill with climate provisions does pass, there will be a significant amount of federal funding flowing into states, most likely in 2022, which, as one interviewee said, could politically be very beneficial if spent well or “potentially dangerous if it’s spent poorly.”

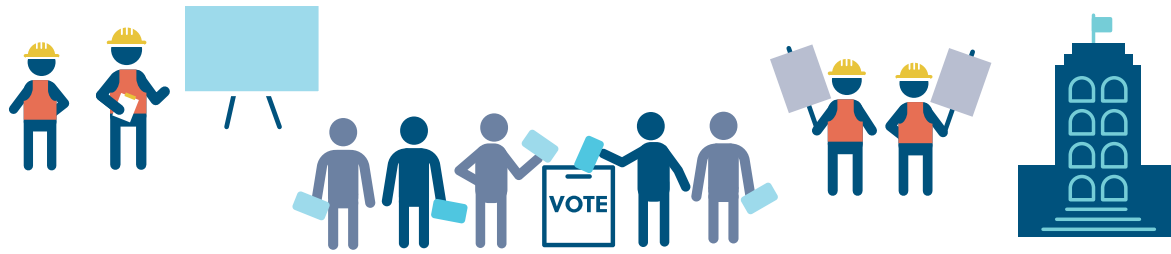
It is worth noting that while the AJP generated significant support and momentum from many national climate groups, it also contained certain policies that are problematic for the climate justice movement, such as the inclusion of nuclear energy, the incineration of biomass, and carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) in the 100-percent clean electricity standard. One interviewee explained that part of the Biden administration’s support for such energy sources is firmly rooted in the need for support from labor for this bill to move forward, as well as the president’s deep ties to the building trades unions. This observation highlights organized labor’s mixed positions on energy issues and influence: labor “endorsed [Biden] early, supported him through the lowest moments of his campaign, and have a ton of members in those industries.”

Justice40 Initiative

On his third day in office, President Biden signed an [Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#). Among other directives, this order establishes the Justice40 (J40) initiative, requiring 40 percent of the benefits of climate-related spending to serve “disadvantaged communities.” Modeled after New York’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and the “carveout” in California’s 2006 cap-and-trade climate policy, which allocated 35 percent of cap-and-trade revenues to “disproportionately impacted communities,” the intention of the historic initiative is to address the disproportionate

negative health and economic impacts on BIPOC communities. The J40 is promising; this kind of infusion of federal resources could contribute to Superfund site pollution clean-up, replacing lead water pipes and infrastructure, community economic revitalization and development, clean public transit, and more.

At the time of this writing, however, there is some concern about how the initiative is unfolding and will be actualized. A clear definition of “disadvantaged communities” must be in federal statute before benefits can be allocated through the budget reconciliation process; it is highly unlikely this will happen. Thus far, benefits have only been defined in terms of the financial allocations, but exactly which climate spending, which communities, and how these “benefits” will be measured has not been determined. Another concern raised was whether environmental and climate justice groups would be able to track and engage with the actual nuts and bolts of how the J40 investments would be allocated — just one specific example of where additional policymaking capacity and connectivity across federal, state, and local jurisdictions throughout the climate justice movement would be critical. A related concern touched on the issue of capacity building in communities and a need to uplift the places where labor and communities have collaborated well together. California’s Transformative Climate Communities was referred to as a potential blueprint for how the J40 might really reach the communities that stand to benefit most from these investments – and an opportunity to learn from the lessons of California’s experience with the program.



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Green New Deal and Related Formations

The Green New Deal (GND) hit the mainstream as a nonbinding congressional resolution introduced in 2019 by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. In recent months, the potential of this idea has taken multiple policy forms, some more concrete than others, and the various organizations, coalitions, and tables working on some element of a GND is complex and multifaceted. At the time of this writing, notable policy forms include the following:

United Frontline Table

The United Frontline Table (UFT) developed out of the 2019 Frontline Green New Deal + Climate and Regenerative Economy Summit hosted by Climate Justice Alliance, It Takes Roots, People’s Action, and East Michigan Environmental Action Council. This convening identified grassroots priorities within the national Green New Deal Network, and ultimately, these priorities were developed into a broader 14-plank platform to protect, repair, invest, and transform frontline communities and the economy, articulated in the [People’s Orientation to a Regenerative Economy](#) (PORE). Today, the UFT is comprised of 16 organizations, including both frontline environmental justice groups, grassroots coalitions, and intermediaries, that are collectively working to advance the PORE. Their efforts include coordinated engagement in the national Green New Deal Network and also encompass a more-expansive body of work to advance the broader vision of the PORE.

Green New Deal Network

A key player in these developments is the [Green New Deal Network](#) (GNDN) whose “mission is to create the conditions for passage of a series of national, state, and local policies that envision and actually win a just transition from reliance on fossil fuels to a sustainable economy.” We were told that if their vision is successful, the network would deliver “a decade of wins” adding up to “a true just transition over the next 10 years.” It is worth noting that neither the GND concept nor the GNDN emerged from the environmental and climate justice sectors. These forces have convened around the United Frontline Table to better unite grassroots power and provide grassroots leadership as GND proposals move forward.

The GNDN itself is currently engaged in the jobs and infrastructure fight, trying to win all that is possible in this opening based on the assessment that the AJP may be the only meaningful legislative opportunity for big climate wins during the Biden administration. On the other hand, and drawing from the GNDN’s broader *Transform, Heal, and Renew by Investing in a Vibrant Economy (THRIVE) Agenda*, the GNDN is also helping support the legislative champions of the [THRIVE Act](#). This policy would authorize investments of at least \$1 trillion per year for the next decade in economy-wide investments to take on injustice, pollution, and joblessness. We heard mixed opinions about whether the GNDN is considered widely inclusive or is meant to be the movement’s left flank. For example, multiple interviewees noted that the THRIVE Act was advanced in Congress as “a Big Tent tactic to bring more people on,” but we also heard different perspectives on the bill, from “great on principles, short on details,” to “going nowhere.” The GNDN will also be initiating a “50 State Strategy” to build out and support GND tables throughout the United States.

Green New Deal for Cities

Shifting national focus toward the state and local levels, the Green New Deal for Cities Act of 2021 is another GND policy introduced in April 2021 by Reps. Cori Bush and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, which would distribute \$1 trillion directly to cities, towns, and tribes over four years to enact ambitious climate justice initiatives. The policy was designed keeping in mind the need to bypass Republican obstructionism at the state and local levels.

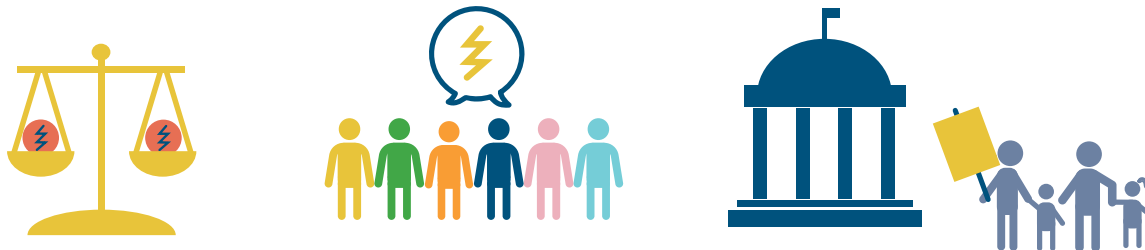
Red, Black, & Green New Deal

In May 2021, the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) launched the [Red, Black, & Green New Deal](#) (RBG New Deal), a nine-point Black national climate action plan advancing an approach to the GND concept that has a specific vision for Black people. This platform draws from grassroots organizing, primarily across the South, and is informed by a multi-month People’s Assembly process aiming to have draft legislation developed by end of 2021; meeting with policymakers around a legislative strategy by December 2021 is being eyed as a subsequent benchmark. The RBG New Deal is pushing back on the siloing of climate as a single issue and the historically white-centered nature of the mainstream climate movement. It instead seeks to advance an integrative approach to climate change and to advance local power and the capacity to set an agenda. Some of the groups working on this agenda also take up the invest/divest framework of the M4BL in the context not just of policing, but also as a framework for divesting from fossil fuels and investing in alternatives. This agenda is already pushing elements of the climate movement left, advancing positions that link reparations with climate justice and calling for an immediate end to the fossil fuel infrastructure build-out — a reflection of the extent to which the impacts of fossil fuel infrastructure, like pipelines and export terminals throughout the Southeast region and elsewhere, kill Black people.

Gulf South for a Green New Deal

Building from the grassroots up, the Gulf South for a Green New Deal (GS4GND) is a five-state regional initiative comprised of organizations that have been building relationships and powering up since Hurricane Katrina 15 years ago. With more than 200 organizations anchored by the Gulf South Center for Law and Policy (GSCLP), this formation supports three tables in each participating state around policy, action, and communications and is working toward legislation, action, and strategic communications.

Regional formations provide closer connection to impacted communities and may open opportunities for deeper and longer-term partnerships that can be supported by local or regional philanthropic partners.



Climate justice groups have been critical in shaping key aspects of the current national climate openings. For example, they have been essential in securing equity provisions in the American Jobs Plan; getting the Justice40 initiative off the ground; pushing for a more movement-building orientation for and from within the Green New Deal Network, while also helping shape more principled engagement throughout the Network; establishing “a distinct and parallel process” to the Green New Deal Network through the United Frontline Table to help identify Green New Deal policies aligned with frontline visions of climate justice and just transition; and maintaining clarity about the aspects of the THRIVE Act that are non-negotiable for climate justice groups through the fast-paced initial legislative advances.

However, on balance, the climate justice movement remains largely left out of major climate negotiations and is often deployed as a tactic by Green Groups,¹ rather than as driving the agenda. Key barriers — such as a lack of policy capacity matching that of the Green Groups, still-forming movement infrastructure, and other emerging considerations — persist in the advancement of a truly transformative and equitable climate agenda.

As a final note, many other formations, resolutions, pieces of legislation, and regulatory and executive actions have been introduced and will play a role in any final “package” passed by the federal government. For the sake of clarity, we focused on just a few in this section.

“Environmental justice and climate justice groups have been critical in shaping key aspects of the current national climate openings.”





¹ “Green Groups” refers to large, traditional, and predominantly white-led environmental and conservation groups in the United States. They are typically heavily staffed, well-funded nonprofit corporations, each with budgets in the tens of millions of dollars a year.



3. A Framework That Works — Growing Grassroots Power

To sustain momentum beyond a single moment, such as a presidential term, the climate movement needs to invest and commit to a framework that effectively and strategically grows grassroots power. This approach is particularly critical when thinking about policy wins. Our interviews revealed that policymaking alone, while essential, is only one part of the movement ecosystem. Broader “movement infrastructure” is key to enabling equitable policy wins and sustaining incremental victories, let alone transformative on-the-ground change.

From the interviews, we identified four key criteria of movement infrastructure that need to be bolstered in the movement for climate justice:

-  **Clear focus on base and power building**
-  **Space to align policy agendas**
-  **Mid- and long-term planning**
-  **Connective tissue across the movement**

What Is Movement Infrastructure?

For the purposes of this report, “movement infrastructure” refers to the systems, people, and resources in a movement ecosystem that support a set of relationships, shared practice, clear division of labor, leadership, and programs that are bigger than any single group, organization, or alliance. These types of coordinated, cross-organizational/cross-alliance resources are key to enabling movements to set a political agenda versus continually responding to a corporate-conservative agenda.



Clear Focus on Base and Power Building

There is a general lack of power across the climate movement, weakening the advances that are possible in this period. Building power is crucial, not only for achieving policy wins, but also for sustaining momentum to cascade into continued advances towards a broader, more transformative vision. In our interviews, it was clear that all groups have different understandings of the role, importance, and need for deeper power and base building. Some groups articulated a very limited understanding of what base and power building are; some groups said the climate movement lacked it entirely; and some groups said that the national climate work was too heavily focused on “the inside game.” All these responses point to the broader lack of a clear power-building strategy within the overall climate movement.

Trends revealed in our interviews include:

- » **Most Green Groups do not have a power- and/or base-building orientation.** They depend on using advocacy, lobbying, and an “inside game” model that remains unable to move key officials on even the existing policy opportunities. Those groups that are attempting to integrate more of an organizing model struggle to center equity.
- » **New formations that are trying to push the political envelope and intentionally combine advocacy with power building, such as the Green New Deal Network and the Red, Black, and Green New Deal, are still nascent.** Their strategies are just now in development, including efforts like the emerging 50-state strategy that can serve as a way to deepen this focus.
- » **Many climate justice groups, while clear on their long-term vision, are still developing an accompanying power-building strategy** and, due to lack of capacities, are operating at a smaller scale and thus not able to fully maximize existing national opportunities.

- » **For state tables supported by the Equity Fund, resources at the intersection of participatory policymaking and organizing are often limited.** They shared that resources for organizing exist to a point but are usually focused on electoral organizing and mobilizations.
- » **At times, state tables are drawn into federal policy fights that end up taking away dedicated staff time and focus on building statewide policy analysis and power.**
- » **State tables tend to lack key political relationships and legal capacity** to 1) influence state-level decision-making bodies and 2) shift how state and federal dollars are moved to implement policy solutions.

Furthermore, at the state level, interviewees identified both industry and status-quo environmental policy specialists as challenges to building power. The combination of lackluster environmental policies and industry opposition make it highly difficult to move forward with equitable policy solutions, particularly when grassroots organizations are funded for outreach and communications, but policy capacity is not resourced. It is common for Green Groups and other traditional environmental organizations to outnumber organizations focused on equitable policy at coalition tables where strategy is crafted. While industry is a challenge across the board, state interviewees in Georgia, Pennsylvania, Nevada, and New Mexico highlighted the heavy influence that the extractive energy system has on policymaking.

Overall, most discussions on national climate policy work did not touch on the broader issue of identifying a strategy to build more power to advance transformative climate solutions. Most of the advocacy work being done by traditional Green Groups right now is focused on the immediate openings, with some — but little — mention of 2022 mid-terms and 2030 emission benchmarks. Unlike grassroots organizations, Green Groups lack a clear power-building orientation. This difference in orientation is a significant limit to advancing transformative climate solutions and will hinder advancing a political and policy strategy in Congress.

Spaces to Align Policy Agendas

For state tables, it was clear there is not enough time or investment in spaces for comprehensive coordinated policy development, though the lack of alignment and coordinated platform development varied by region. A few reasons

were given to explain this shortcoming. First, some state tables struggle with having a coordinated platform, given the intersectional nature of their work and the newness of their efforts on climate and energy issues. Time is needed to integrate a climate justice and equity analysis within sectors such as immigration, housing, or education. Second, organizations in some states have only just started to collaborate with each other. Building trust and relationships during a pandemic has required more time and energy, though relationship building is widely understood as a strong prerequisite to any coordinated policy process. Thus, some states have made building internal alignment and self-governance processes a critical focus of their table work, but this prioritization slows progress on policy solutions. Other state formations are moving policy solution through more decentralized methods of convenings, but currently this strategy comes at the expense of developing a deeper, more fully aligned and coordinated policy platform.

At the national level, existing tables are currently focused on the American Jobs Plan, but may not have alignment around a key set of policy demands within the bill. Further, there is a lack of clear alignment on a broader set of policy opportunities. The “Five Tables” (U.S. Climate Action Network, Climate Action Campaign, BlueGreen Alliance, Green New Deal Network, and the Equitable & Just National Climate Platform) were referenced frequently by environmental groups as the most prominent place for sharing priorities at a national level; all are engaged on the AJP, and all are convened via Climate Action Campaign at Five Tables meetings. However, we also heard how few individuals and organizations sat at more than one of these tables, and there is no coordinated place for shared agendas to be developed and debated, particularly agendas based on equity. The only concrete alignment that has successfully emerged (to our knowledge and identified in interviews) across all five tables was a sign-on letter to the Biden administration demanding a \$4 trillion investment in climate. And this type of rudimentary alignment infrastructure does not exist for climate justice groups, although it may be starting to emerge with the United Frontline Table.

Mid- and Long-Term Planning

The lack of mid- and long-term planning is perhaps one of the most significant shortcomings from a movement-building perspective. Most of the state tables interviewed did not have a plan past 2023, though some organizations at various tables have a long-term eye towards the 2030 climate goals. Part of this challenge is that most state tables are made up of organizations that are not solely focused on climate and energy work. The broad suite of issues, sometimes under direct attack (e.g., immigration), means

that they are often forced to be in defense mode — needing to respond, react, and protect their communities — rather than being able to focus on long-term proactive solutions. Additionally, one-year grant cycles that only support responses to immediate opportunities do not allow for these groups to plan three to five years ahead.

Second, state-level interviewees identified that the funding community seldom supports or resources long-term planning and agendas. Funding is often annual or tied to short-term agendas that are already laid out, rather than general operating support to build policy solutions from the ground up, rooted in long-term change.

Lastly, state-level interviewees discussed how long-term planning must be rooted in the continued need to build trust together. Continued relationship building is required to move common agendas together before progress on long-term planning. Most state formations are in the early stages of building trust, just at the point of getting deeper in their relationships. They are hopeful that stronger relationships will set future long-term planning efforts up for success.

At the national level, few groups were genuinely thinking beyond this AJP “moment,” the 2022 midterm elections, and in a few cases, the 2030 climate emissions reductions benchmarks. While many groups have articulated, in great detail, the economy-wide structural reforms needed to stop catastrophic climate change, very few, if any, groups articulated even a preliminary strategy on how to translate these reforms into a mid-term agenda that can be advanced in the next five, 10, or 15 years, much less a multi-decade agenda for the societal transition that is needed. As a result, our interviews revealed that very few people are thinking about how to strategically take advantage of the opportunities before us to create space for the next set of big climate wins to advance in the next federal administration, in the next decade, or beyond. Those groups that are thinking about shifting the window of political opportunity have yet to fully articulate the mid-term goals that would be most strategic to align around in service of their long-term vision.

The absence of such discussion reveals that the climate movement lacks a clear sense of a broader agenda to guide the movement in making strategic advances and leveraging this particular moment of opportunity toward the kind of bold, comprehensive, and longer-term gains already articulated in documents like USCAN’s Equitable Climate Action Platform and the United Frontline Table’s People’s Orientation to a Regenerative Economy, among others. Without a shared mid-term agenda that creates connectivity to a shared long-term agenda of structural reforms, groups are left responding to the corporate-conservative agenda, rather than setting the agenda themselves.



Funding that supports flexible, long-term planning and agendas offers key resources to building policy solutions from the ground up, rooted in long-term change. Investing in long-term planning means that groups can set the agenda themselves, instead of responding to conservative attacks as they occur.



Connective Tissue Across the Movement

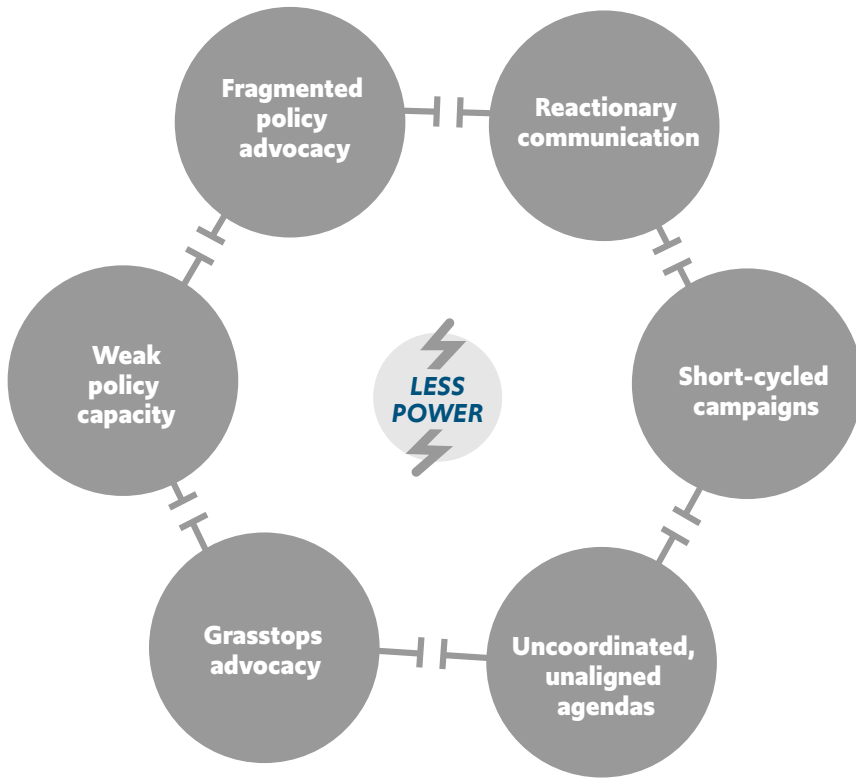
Several interviewees confirmed the current lack of and need for more people with relationships across tables and formations, across national and state levels, as well as formal and informal structures where alignment can be debated. State-level interviewees also underlined the value of connections across local and state lines in analysis and creation. In many cases, these types of connections underpin local and state regulatory shifts that are just as important as state legislative fights.

Interviews also revealed that while some advances have been made in building a more diverse set of organizations working on climate — most notably the engagement of Movement for Black Lives and the launch of the Red, Black, and Green New Deal — there is still much work to be done to build a broader, cross-sectoral constituency to move climate justice issues forward or even more effectively integrate climate justice priorities into other areas of work, such as housing and the care economy.

The opportunity to embed efforts to build policy capacity in a broader framework that integrates power building and movement infrastructure is now and ripe. As we’ve all too often learned, policy wins that are not accompanied by a power-building strategy usually do not translate into on-the-ground gains or advances for a movement overall (see **Figure 1**). Without a more-sophisticated division of labor, coordination (among organizations, as well as across local, state, and national levels), more-robust relationships across groups and coalitions, and more-robust spaces to navigate and negotiate political differences across climate groups, the climate movement will continue to lack the ability to successfully implement and defend the policy wins we aspire to — much less to be able to continue advancing the robust and transformative climate solutions that are needed over multiple decades.

FIGURE 1: Policy connected to organizing builds power

Policy and Organizing Are Disconnected



IMPACT — LESS POWER

- > Few and shortsighted legislative wins
- > Fragmented political power and little momentum
- > Short-lived change, if any

Policy and Organizing Are Connected



IMPACT — BUILDING POWER

- > Equitable policy wins
- > Growing political power and momentum
- > Sustained on-the-ground change



4. Connected to Community – Building Policymaking Capacity

For too long, policy capacity within climate justice groups has remained underfunded, nascent, and in the shadows of larger Green Groups, especially at the state and local levels. Our interviews confirmed that building policy capacity within climate justice groups is critical to advance equitable climate solutions, especially when framed within a power- and movement-building orientation. This approach highlights an intentional departure from the status quo of policy capacity building, where investments in building policy have been siloed and separate from movement building. Instead, investments in building policy should be sustained and long term, targeted to meet specific policy needs, and rooted in social justice movements to meaningfully elevate equitable climate policies and plans.

In short, where strong grassroots power allows us to extend beyond a single moment and sustain change, strong policy capacity — rooted in movement — allows us to strategize for environmental, economic, and social justice wins.

The analysis of our interviews, especially among state-level leaders, identified three major findings for policy capacity:

 **Lack of resources and relationships with policymakers**

 **Obstacles to centering and advancing equity**

 **Capacity and needs vary by state**



Given today's climate landscapes, there is an important opportunity to significantly increase investments in environmental justice and climate groups and expand their policymaking capacity. Interviewees identified an interest in creating ways to bring in and retain staff for policy work in the long term.



Lack of Resources and Relationships With Policymakers

Climate justice groups simply do not have enough resources yet and face greater capacity constraints around engaging in policymaking. A major challenge for state-level organizations is the ability to retain and pay for high-level policy support. Most of the organizations and tables are frontline and do not have significant budgets. Policy staff positions tend to be higher-paid positions and are not prioritized by organizations that can do more organizing with the resources. Unless a policy person is able to take less pay for deeper mission-aligned and values-driven work, the ability to hire and retain policy staff is limited. This is especially true when well-resourced environmental organizations and consulting groups can provide better pay but less justice-focused work. In addition, several state-level interviewees said that the efficacy of policy capacity may be limited without relationships with policymakers themselves.

At the national level, interviews confirmed that Green Groups continue to dominate policymaking, commanding the most financial resources as well as the most resources in terms of paid staff, “inside the Beltway” relationships, and in many cases, specific topical and technical expertise.

Green Groups have the capacity to cultivate and nurture relationships with specific policymakers in Washington, D.C., their offices, and their staff and to educate them on climate issues (from their perspective); they can advocate and lobby for specific policies; and they have the staff capacity to engage at both the federal and state levels, with a propensity to focus more on shaping and passing national policy and less on follow-through on policy implementation and enforcement over time.

Obstacles to Centering and Advancing Equity

The main obstacles climate justice groups face in advancing equitable climate policy development are the lack of in-house capacity and challenges with status-quo Green Groups.

Many of the states interviewed lack in-house policy capacity, so they must contract or consult with organizations or policy consultants throughout the year that are often disconnected from organizing. Furthermore, interviews confirmed a strong need for policy capacity that is directly connected to organizing and movement building. It was widely recognized that policy capacity needs to be rooted in broader movement considerations in order to effectively center equity and advance meaningful on-the-ground gains.

On a more technical level, some states identified a profound need for policy and analytical support that goes deep into the intersection of racial equity, environmental justice, and energy analysis. Multiple states elevated the deep role that the Equity Fund's Policy Accelerator provided at this intersection and would welcome this level of expertise on a daily basis.

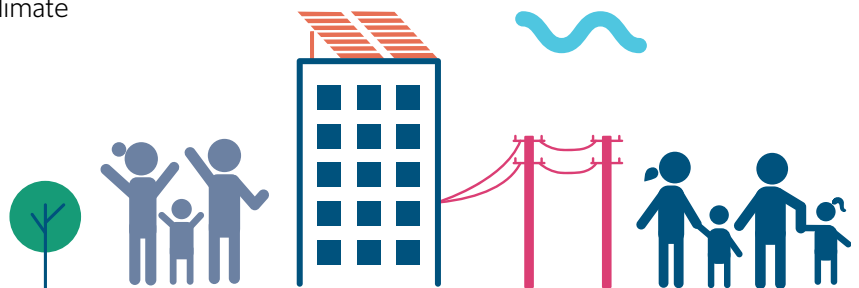
Second, dominant Green Groups have a track record of hindering equitable climate policy development. Multiple interviewees stated that traditional environmental organizations, which enjoy policy support and lobbying capacity, are the first to negotiate away equity for minimal carbon reductions. While Green Groups have recently adopted language around climate justice, equity, and inclusion, only a few of these organizations have begun to meaningfully center equity in their approach to climate solutions.

Capacity and Needs Vary by State

State-level interviews on current capacity reveal that while more policymaking capacity is needed on the whole, specific needs vary by state. For example, a few states have organizations that provide relatively strong policy capacity around building community-driven policy language and solutions. Virginia, Minnesota, and Florida have multiple organizations that can hold this role and would welcome additional support. States like Pennsylvania, Nevada, and New Mexico tend to rely on one organization for policy ideation and creation and can utilize more capacity support here. Policy advocacy at statehouses also varied by state. For example, Pennsylvania grantees have high capacity to engage in the state capitol, but lower capacity on energy and climate policy. Other organizations hire consultants to engage and “lobby” at the capitol, which leads to inconsistency over time.

Most states named in-house *legal capacity* as low, but they also mentioned that they do not necessarily need it. With only three states (Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New Mexico) identifying legal policy analysis as a need that exists within their organizations, most tables utilize legal aid or other legal consultants for support. All states named a need for *stronger policy communications*, specifically building capacity around turning policy language and ideas into tangible and understandable solutions to organize around.

This landscape assessment and the barriers we face today reveal that investing in policymaking capacity in climate justice groups is a key piece of this movement ecosystem puzzle. In addition, further program development, investments, and coordinated strategy rooted in a broader power and movement infrastructure framework are needed to match the urgency, ambition, and expansiveness of solutions the climate crisis demands.





Type of Policy Capacity Needs

The following six points summarize responses from state-level interviewees when asked what type of policy resource would be most beneficial over the next three years, loosely ranked from most to least beneficial. This list is illustrative of the breadth of support needed by these climate justice organizations as they deepen their climate policy capacity. It also gives philanthropic partners clear entry points for how to support community-based organizations to engage in climate policy.

Policy Need	Description
1. Policy Language and Communications	<p>Making policy tangible for their communities to understand the actual policy details and how they connect to their day-to-day lives</p> <p>Policy narrative strategy to better communicate policy to the broader community to run campaigns</p>
2. Policy Ideation and Strategy	<p>Research, framing, and drafting of policy language that is rooted in community ideas</p>
3. Policy and Equity Analysis	<p>Building skills to apply a racial equity analysis to energy and climate policies and articulating that analysis to organizations advancing climate policy that lacks equity</p>
4. In-House Legal Capacity	<p>Identifying legal interventions for state implementation and/or possible regulation</p>
5. Financial and Budget Policy	<p>Analysis of how to engage in revenue policy debates to drive investment in community efforts</p>
6. Policy Advocacy and Lobbying	<p>Lobbying, campaigns, relationship building</p>



5. Climate Equity Policy Fellowships

A focused effort is needed to resource and level up community organizations engaging in equity-centered local, regional, and state policy efforts. By doing so, we can bring more-grounded expertise to energy and climate policy, shift the focus to one that is intersectional, and create a groundswell of policy support and diversity of policy practitioners that will achieve the scale needed to win environmental, economic, and social justice.

The Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund proposes a Climate Equity Policy Fellowship program as a critical intervention to resource and level up community organizations engaged in equity-centered climate and clean energy efforts. It will be an investment in coordinated policy capacity and power-building support for frontline organizations to work on state policy in states within the Equity Fund's state portfolio. This investment includes welcoming a significant influx of frontline policy experts and connecting them with the leading experts on the frontline in national organizations, as well as lawyers, academics, researchers, and consultants, to provide expertise to community organizations through our existing program.

The objective of such fellowships would be to increase the public policy advocacy capacity of frontline communities significantly and intentionally through recruiting, training, and supporting the hiring of new policy practitioners. With particular attention to BIPOC candidates and those with a deep and tested commitment to equity, this strategy could effectively diversify the movement and deepen the bench of those ready to lead in the public policy sphere, now and for decades to come.

To substantiate the identified needs and concept for the fellowship, the Equity Fund engaged in a research and planning phase to assess the following:

- 1. The broader landscape of field gaps**
- 2. Organizational capacity, needs, and opportunities to connect and strengthen state, local, and regional climate and clean energy equity work**
- 3. If and how the potential formalization of a policy fellowship program would help address identified gaps and needs**

Overall, interviewees overwhelmingly supported the establishment of a Climate Equity Policy Fellowship program. Interviewees across all states said that a dedicated fellow who can provide grounded policy support for state (and local) policy would be extremely useful. Despite some inconsistencies, there was resounding approval for investment in policy capacity — particularly piloting a fellowship model. National-level interviewees were also unanimously enthusiastic about the idea, and further conversation underlined how significant movement infrastructure gaps could shape how any program is developed. From the national view, the need for more climate policy capacity exists pretty much across the board in most states.

In order to effectively root policy capacity within a larger power-building orientation and movement infrastructure, several key recommendations arose as a result of our interviews with network leaders and state and national organizations:

APPROACH

1. Pair the Climate Equity Policy Fellowship program with a strategy for long-term policy capacity support.

Almost all national- and state-level interviewees identified long-term investment as critical in this regard. Conversations revealed a series of capacity gaps, needs, and concerns about how the structure of a fellowship would be sustained over time. These include:

- a.** Consider how to move fellows into long-term policy positions that can be sustainably funded.
- b.** Create explicit accountability mechanisms in decision-making.
- c.** Ensure brain drain does not occur. Consider what explicit mechanisms should be created between state tables and the Equity Fund to ensure that there is not an extractive nature to the fellowship. For example, how can this program avoid exporting the policy expertise of the fellow, cultivated and supported by state frontline tables, to another organizational “home” lacking political alignment once the fellowship has ended.

- d. Plan for much-deeper investments in movement infrastructure to support state-level policy and state-to-federal policy coordinating capacity.

Most interviewees welcomed the idea of a fellow moving into a more-permanent role long term, while some interviewees strongly recommended it. Given the breadth of these more-complex considerations related to the gaps in state climate policy capacity, longer and deeper policy support in the form of full-time permanent staff may be able to both sustain this capacity over time and help to establish the type of role accountability many interviewees expressed as critical to this type of capacity. It would also allow the Equity Fund to make a strategic contribution to filling the gap in “movement infrastructure” that is so necessary.

2. Embed the policy fellowship within a broader power-building focus. All too often, policy advocacy is disconnected from a strategy to build the power necessary to win. Policy work that focuses solely on what is currently “winnable” within the existing balance of power can result in some wins, but it doesn’t lead to transformative advances toward a long-term vision. Put differently, such policy work fails to contribute to expanding what is politically possible and instead too often reflects a complacency within an existing status quo.

A policy fellowship offers a unique opportunity to craft an innovative program that bridges this critical gap by explicitly situating the fellowship in a broader framework of power-building (see **Figure 2**). While the specific ways this can be accomplished should be further explored in the design phase, some suggestions include:

- a. Provide training to fellows on strategy development and power building as an overarching frame.
- b. Work with host organizations to deepen their power-building strategies and articulation of how policy work fits into that strategy.

3. Consider more than one approach or a bespoke approach to the Climate Equity Policy Fellowship program, depending on the state needs and existing policy environments. For example, while the policy fellow concept was initially conceived of as an early career entry into climate justice and energy justice policy, some states wanted fellows with more experience and adeptness (e.g., knowing how to engage in the Florida legislature, some prior experience organizing, etc.). There might be a need to have two cohorts running — early career and more-seasoned fellows with deeply aligned values looking to engage and work with frontlines. In addition, a few state interviewees highlighted the need for the fellow to be able to engage in local policy, as well.

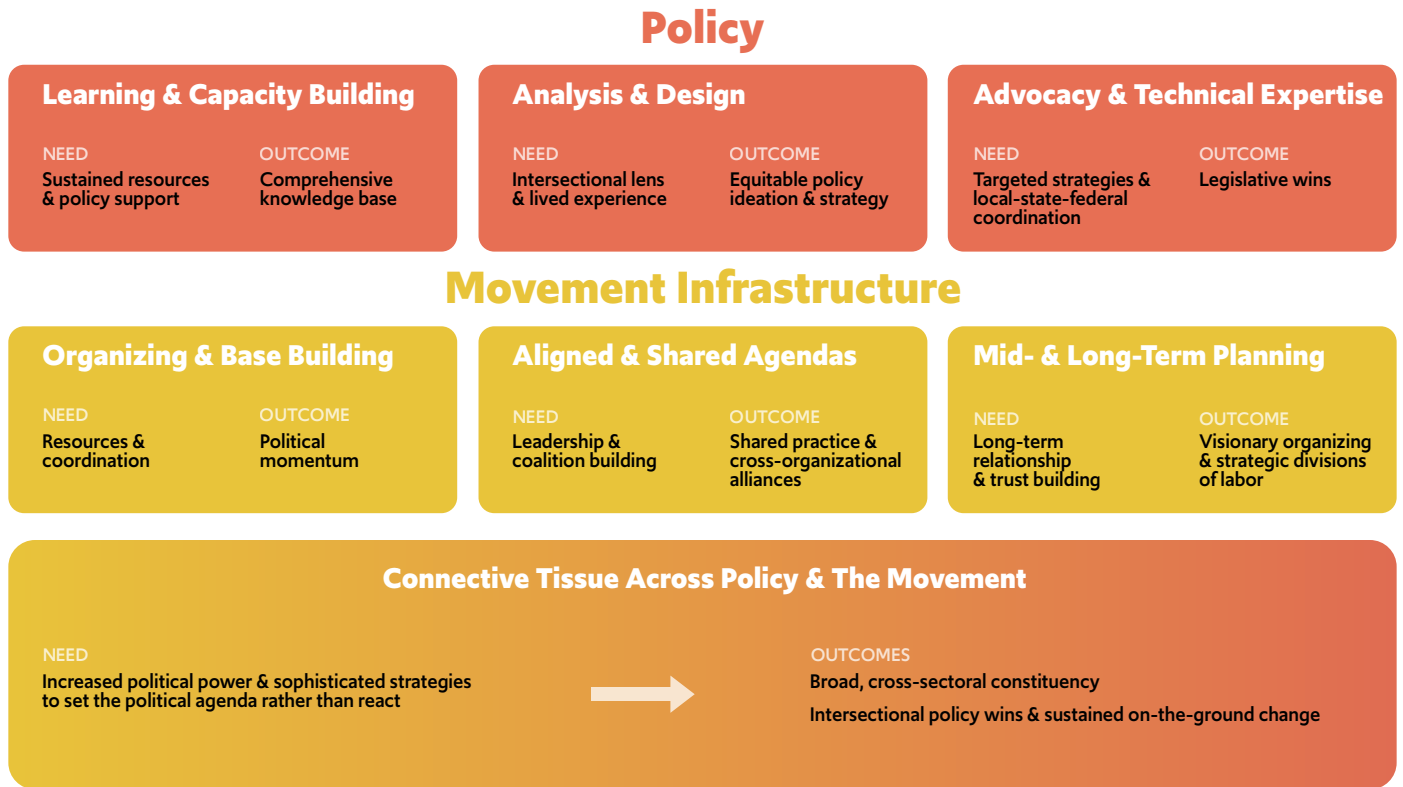
4. Coordinate with other existing formations or state capacity-building programs in development and explore the potential for synergies and increased coordination to avoid duplication. The Equity Fund is well positioned to “fill the gap” in terms of coordination with other similar initiatives. These include:

- a. The Green New Deal Network’s staffing at state tables, which will lead to an influx of resources into state-level climate policy.
- b. [The Environmental Justice Movement Fellowship](#) of the Tischman Environment and Design Center at The New School, which is making long-term investments in a broader range of capacity-building efforts within a cohort of environmental justice groups.
- c. The Energy Democracy and Justice Policy Federation, a joint project under development by Aiko Schaeffer, Denise Fairchild, and Subin Devar, which aims to build out policy capacity using a decentralized model that leverages the existing capacities of other intermediaries.
- d. The regional network of the Gulf South for a Green New Deal, with state tables that are potentially the most synergistic with the Equity Fund’s state-based strategy.
- e. The [Institute for Energy Justice Fellowship](#), which specifically focuses on preparing law students to make regulatory interventions.

Coordination across groups like these is another important element of climate movement infrastructure. Clear divisions of labor between groups and where contributions are additive and move in relation to one another open up capacities that are greater than the proverbial “sum of their parts.” Efforts should also be made to connect these positions across states and to create opportunities for cross-pollination, as well as to bolster coordination between national and state levels. This kind of relationship building and connections are a critical aspect of supporting and defending climate wins.

Figure 2: The Climate Equity Policy Fellowship has a unique opportunity to situate policy capacity building in a power building context

The Climate Equity Policy Fellowship can focus on building policy capacity (orange), while ensuring connections to movement infrastructure (yellow). This approach will ultimately strengthen the connective tissue across policy and the movement necessary to enable equitable, healthy, and empowered communities.



PROGRAMMATIC

1. Design the Climate Equity Policy Fellowship program with state-level partners and other network leaders to meet the needs of each policy environment.

For example, there are a range of needs with respect to:

- Policy skills:** Partners in some states are looking for legal background, while others need less legal analysis and more legislative advocacy and negotiation skills.
- Focus:** Partners in some states want a generalist who can respond and react to legislation and build with the community based on where community ideas go, while others are looking for more-technical specializations.
- Experience:** Partners in some states are okay with younger, less-established fellows to provide this role, while other states want more experience in the halls of state capitol buildings.

2. Uplift BIPOC and/or frontline community members with lived experience as priority criteria for the Climate Equity Policy Fellowship program.

Across the board, interviewees highlighted BIPOC and/or frontline community members as critical to supporting policy fellowships. They also stressed that fellows should have a deep understanding and analysis of race, class, and intersection with climate. Moreover, most state interviewees named experience over education as a critical value and qualification. They want someone who has lived experience and/or longer experience working in and with communities to be in this position to ensure that policy processes and work are rooted in people, communities, and organizing. States were relatively indifferent to educational degrees (law, MPA, etc.) as a qualification.

OPERATIONAL

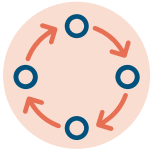
1. During project design phases, consider varying operational needs, timing considerations, geographic differences, and small organizational budgets. There was a lack of consensus on some program design elements of the fellowship, such as:

- a. Length:** Partners in some states articulated that two years is perfect timing, while other states preferred a three-year commitment.
- b. Management and Supervision:** This matter varies widely by state — some states have established coordinated tables, while others are more loosely engaged and the fellowship would be housed at one organization.
- c. Salary:** In some states, there are wide ranges across regions within the state. Furthermore, policy fellows making significantly more than state table coordinators was a concern. Program design should create scenarios for how salaries are determined and identify pathways that lift all workers' salaries, rather than replicate models of scarcity.
- d. Management of Fellows:** In some states, it is clear there is more-established table alignment and that a fellow could easily be accountable to the table and all its members. In other states, the level of alignment and coordination is still developing.
- e. Urgency:** National-level interviewees discussed the urgent need to increase such policy capacity to ensure effective and equitable implementation of climate and environmental justice policies that may pass in the coming months, including through the American Jobs Plan, the Justice40 initiative, and several of the regulatory opportunities.

- f. Variable State Legislatures:** Legislative processes are very inconsistent from state to state. For example, the Nevada legislative body meets once every two years and only for four months, while in Pennsylvania, the legislative body meets full time, year round. Accordingly, policy capacity needs differ in time and intensity. Program design regarding cohort learnings and meetings should consider legislative calendars.

Despite the lack of consensus in how a fellowship would look, states suggested that they trust (and are aligned with) the leadership of the Equity Fund's Policy Accelerator and are willing to go ahead with participatory design. Additionally, all state interviewees loved the "Cohort Model" concept to support mentorship and development, which was the most uniformly and unequivocally appreciated idea.

In conclusion, a Climate Equity Policy Fellowship program housed within the Equity Fund can make a valuable contribution to climate movement infrastructure if funding for climate policy experts in Equity Fund states is long term, if the program coordinates such capacity with other capacity-building programs, and if the policy capacity is situated within a broader strategic orientation to expand the climate movement's infrastructure and power-building orientation.



6. Report Methodology

This report is primarily informed by interviews with 32 individuals from national, regional, and grassroots organizations or networks and partner organizations that support climate justice and clean energy equity work across the United States (see the Acknowledgments for a full list of interviewees).

In the first half of 2021, Grassroots Policy Project (GPP) conducted 21 interviews with national climate leaders on behalf of the Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund. The purpose of these interviews was to scope out opportunities to better support frontline organizations in advancing climate and environmental justice policies from the state level. This undertaking included a need to understand the broader national climate landscape, and that assessment is included in this paper. In addition to understanding the

current climate “moment” in terms of challenges and opportunities nationally, we also asked about movement dynamics and interplay across the national and state levels, as well as about the kind of policy capacity that is needed at the state level.

At the same time, Anthony Giancatarino and Reem Rosenhaj from the Just Community Energy Transition (JCET) Project interviewed 11 state-level organizations or state table representatives from six states. The interviews assessed general policy needs and challenges and discussed the Equity Fund’s general policy fellowship concept.

Equity Fund Research & Engagement Strategist, Jillian Du, and Policy Accelerator Director, Parin Shah, synthesized the findings into this report.



7. Looking Ahead

Several other issue-based and broader movement considerations emerged as significant. Though not in the initial scope of this research, many of these issues are relevant to the future of the climate movement's success and warrant deeper exploration in the future.

Underserved Climate-Related Issues

Interviewees named several other climate-related issues that are moving or have potential to move, these are:

- » Disaster recovery and resilience
- » Petrochemical build-out and the need to pivot off fossil fuels, e.g., beyond pipeline fights, addressing the rest of the country's fossil fuel infrastructure
- » Water access and quality
- » Water scarcity
- » Flooding
- » Oceans and fisheries
- » Climate finance reform and pressure

State and Federal Coordination

One of the key themes that emerged from these interviews was the stark gap in capacity between the climate groups working at the national/federal levels and those working at the state and local levels.

We heard over and over that there are very few people working inside the Beltway who can put community priorities into national climate policies and, conversely, that very few climate tables and actors working at the state or local level are able to deeply engage in federal climate policymaking. The national formations do not have a clear and consistent way to support the capacity of state-level groups — or even stay in regular communication with them — much less a clear articulation of the importance of building capacity at the state level.

Related shortcomings include the lack of state- and local-level capacity to absorb and implement federal opportunities, such as an anticipated increase in state funding should the American Jobs Plan pass. The overall

movement also lacks effective state–federal partnerships or other vehicles for such coordination. Any pieces of federal legislation around which equity issues will be debated and play out will also require the capacity for considerable agency-based policy implementation, another capacity that climate justice groups lack.

One risk resulting from this coordination gap that could be particularly problematic for climate groups is the concern that any federal funding allocated to states through the AJP (or any other major federal climate initiative) might be ineffective. Interviewees flagged the challenge of ensuring that significant funding outlays from any climate legislation are spent equitably and effectively, which requires significant on-the-ground capacity to both shape implementation and absorb large-scale grants. Without this successful implementation, anti-climate action interests could create an opposition narrative of “climate radicals wasting money,” and/or it could lead to on-the-ground skepticism about the efficacy of federal climate funding. More than one interviewee invoked the failures of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which made big promises — including on green job creation — but fell short on delivering tangible, material benefits to those suffering from the economic crisis.

The Fight for Democratic Rights

Environmental and climate justice groups also need to consider several other factors shaping the current political conditions.

At the broadest level, the intertwined relationship between the re-galvanized fight to safeguard voting rights and expand democratic participation was flagged as either an opportunity or a constraint on what is possible in terms of advancing equitable policy related to climate, jobs, and justice. Indeed, the capacity to advance a progressive climate agenda is entirely woven into protecting and expanding democratic participation, without which Congress will never be able to move a bold agenda. And a bolder agenda requires more than transactional, one-year grant cycles. It needs multi-year commitments so that organizations can plan two, three, or even four election cycles ahead.

The Role of Organized Labor

Organized labor was consistently named as a constituency that holds more power than the climate movement and one of the most-critical forces for the climate sector to move and build with.

Several interesting opportunities to collaborate with labor were named, including through the previously mentioned Just Transition Task Force and around the significant jobs components within the AJP. One interviewee remarked on the meaningful progress that has been made in cross-sector relationships between labor and climate interests

over the last decade. In particular, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) was identified as the main labor voice active in progressive climate policymaking. On the other hand, another interviewee noted that labor is still more likely to remain neutral on climate policies, at best, rather than supporting them, and, at worst, to oppose them.

Continuing to build relationships with unions and finding ways to partner strategically with organized labor on climate issues is critical work that is still needed to build a broader set of social forces for advancing a climate agenda and to defend and implement wins.

8. Closing Thoughts

Four years of Trump, combined with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, national uprisings in defense of Black lives, and the worsening material conditions of the climate crisis have provoked a crisis of legitimacy for the current neoliberal governing paradigm. The Biden administration's efforts to strengthen or increase the role of the state and invest in the care economy are promising attempts to speak directly to the underlying ideological currents in flux during these crises. However, rather than stepping into this opening to boldly redefine the bounds of what is possible, the climate movement's center of gravity has remained stuck in the realm of what is politically viable.

It is time for a transformative shift. Instead of asking ourselves how we can move something today with the power we have, it is time to ask: **how can we build the power we need to win transformative structural reforms on climate change in the long run?**

While certainly not a new concept nor a silver bullet, the Climate Equity Policy Fellowship, nested within the Equity Fund's other programs, could accelerate this transformative shift for the climate field by: moving greater resources to and building greater capacity within community-based organizations to engage in climate and equity state policy work; building a deeper bench of both new and seasoned experts who are committed to advancing climate and equity policy and have the technical capacities to do so effectively; and supporting the advancement of intersectional climate policy at the state level.

We cannot afford to lose today's momentum for climate justice. Now is the moment to develop and sustain stronger climate and equity movement infrastructure across the nation.

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