



## **BLACKS IN GREEN**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

April 13, 2023

Contact: Elza Ter-Arutyunov

(872) 316-0297

[elza@blacksingreen.org](mailto:elza@blacksingreen.org)

### **Biden-Harris Administration Selects Blacks in Green to Serve as New Technical Assistance Center with \$10M Grant to Advance Environmental Justice**

Blacks in Green and core partners make history in equitable funding and frontline leadership by and for underserved, rural, and tribal communities

**Chicago, IL** – Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a history-making selection of finalist Blacks in Green (BIG) with a strong community-based alliance to serve as one of 17 Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (EJ TCTAC), as part of a \$177M program. BIG will receive \$10 million in grant funding over five years to establish technical assistance centers across EPA's Region 5 territory, which includes 35 tribal lands, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The centers will provide technical assistance, training, and related support to communities and their partners with environmental justice concerns.

Partners in this innovative approach encourage frontline organizations everywhere to assume financial leadership of solutions being proposed for their communities – a simple, essential “flip the script” that properly positions them in ownership. BIG and partners worked in kinship, through a democratic process to advance this core principle of the new terms of engagement between frontline organizations and white allies, honoring our leadership as experts on the ground.

“From the frontline we do more than dream a life beyond the whole-system problem common to communities of color everywhere. Every day we rise and work to weave hard won, fragmented solutions into whole cloth. These solutions - unique and revolutionary in their approach and process - aim to “flip the script” of business as usual, and allow Black, Brown and Indigenous people to lead in all matters essential to thriving communities,” said Naomi Davis, founder and CEO of Blacks in Green and creator of the Sustainable Square Mile system. “With our application we swung for the fence, and the fence was system change.”

BIG will serve as lead in the Region 5 EJ TCTAC Alliance, a collaboration with the following frontline, community-based and community serving organizations, building this program together, to provide “front-door access” for people and communities across the region seeking environmental and energy justice solutions.

- Midwest Tribal Energy Resources Association (MTERA)
- Black Environmental Leaders Association (BEL)

- Environmental Health Watch (EHW)
- School of Public Health (SPH) - University of Illinois, Chicago
- Smart Energy Design Assistance Center (SEDAC) - University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Together these specialized partners provide coverage and access across the entire six-state-and-tribal geography of EPA Region 5 and are pivotal in doing the work to ensure the success of the technical assistance centers. This critical investment will guide participants toward environmental and energy justice resources through training on program development and administration, clean-energy workforce development, assistance in navigating federal grant applications and identifying alternative funding sources, and cultivation of Sustainable Square Mile systems in their communities.

“MTERA is honored to be a member of this collaborative, mission driven coalition led by Blacks in Green. EJ TCTAC is essential to supporting Executive Order 13985 and ensuring that underserved communities advance clean energy, environmental and sustainability initiatives. This coalition will help Tribes in the Midwest to build internal Tribal capacity and achieve Tribal sustainability and clean energy goals,” said Daniel Wiggins, Vice-Chairperson of MTERA, Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribe.

“EHW is so excited to collaborate with EPA, BIG and partners working together to elevate EJ concerns, provide support and solutions that will improve communities across the country,” said Kim Foreman, CEO of Environmental Health Watch. “I wholeheartedly believe that within the Region 5 team, we have the people, skills, and talent from grassroots to academia. We must engage and include those who are impacted, execute system change approaches, and then together, we can solve the problems we’re facing as EJ communities.”

“BEL Is honored to be among the Alliance chosen for this history-making partnership with BIG. We are ready to engage in the work to bring awareness and advocate for environmental and economic justice, along with the entire Region 5 team,” said SeMia Bray, Co-Director of the Black Environmental Leaders Association.

“The Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences (EOHS) and the ChicAgo Center for Health and EnvironmenT (CACHET) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) School of Public Health are committed to advancing environmental justice, especially in underserved communities in Chicago and across EPA Region 5,” said Serap Erdal, Associate Professor of the UIC School of Public Health. “We are looking forward to collaborating with the EPA, our partners and communities under the leadership of BIG and providing technical assistance to our Alliance members and stakeholders in this groundbreaking effort promoting equity and justice in our region.”

"The genius of the partners, guided by BIG's inspiring leadership, is to have fully expressed the spirit of the Justice40 Initiative from the know-how, perspective, and ethics of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. Justice40 is the White House initiative that 40% of the benefits of federal investments in areas such as climate and environment flow to communities that have experienced discrimination and disadvantage. Yet it should be the communities themselves that define what Justice40 ultimately means on the ground. This powerful proposal does just that, shining brilliantly as a beacon for community-serving organizations and tribal nations everywhere," said Dr. Kyle Whyte, a professor of environmental justice at the University of Michigan and member of the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council, who coordinated the dialogue and relationship-building that designed the innovative proposal.

We celebrate the strength of the Alliance and thank EPA for embracing this innovative approach. Congratulations to all of the finalists for helping to advance thriving communities for all Americans.

###

### **About Blacks in Green (BIG)**

Blacks in Green (BIG) is an environmental economic development non-profit that serves as a bridge and catalyst among communities and their stakeholders in the design and development of green, self-sustaining, mixed-income, walkable-villages within Black neighborhoods with its Sustainable Square Mile system – designed to ensure that every household can walk-to-work, walk-to-shop, walk-to-learn, walk-to-play, own the businesses and the land, and live the conservation lifestyle. Learn more on our website at [www.blacksingreen.org](http://www.blacksingreen.org).

### **About the Midwest Tribal Energy Resources Association**

A non-profit, intertribal organization comprised of Tribes in Region 5, the Midwest Tribal Energy Resources Association (MTERA) puts nearly a decade of experience into action, focused on material social, economic, and environmental improvements for Tribes. Learn more about MTERA at [www.mtera.org](http://www.mtera.org).

### **About Black Environmental Leaders Association**

Envisioning an equitable and sustainable future that shifts from debilitating practices to authentic circular leadership and engagement, BEL operates a network of environmental information, resources and data relevant to communities of color. BEL's value proposition is to Advocate, Incubate and Inform (AI<sup>2</sup>). Read more about BEL at [www.blackenvironmentalleaders.org](http://www.blackenvironmentalleaders.org).

### **About Environmental Health Watch**

Based in Cleveland, Ohio, the vision of EHW is to see a future where all children, families, and individuals live in healthy homes and sustainable communities. EHW's mission is to create healthy, regenerative communities by justly enriching environments and respecting the value of people and place. Read more about EHW at [www.ehw.org](http://www.ehw.org).

### **About The School of Public Health, University of Illinois, Chicago**

UIC's Division of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences (EOHS) in SPH works to educate and train individuals, communities, and organizations about the environment and its hazards. UIC's SPH implements and evaluates programs designed to protect and promote public health, health equity and environmental, energy and climate energy justice. Read more about UIC's School of Public Health at [www.publichealth.uic.edu](http://www.publichealth.uic.edu).

### **About the Smart Energy Design Assistance Center (SEDAC), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

SEDAC is an applied research program and technical assistance center within the University of Illinois with a mission to decrease the energy footprint of Illinois and beyond. Since 2004, SEDAC has educated, trained, and provided energy assessments for more than 2,700 facilities and 25,000 individuals. Read more about SEDAC at [www.smartenergy.illinois.edu](http://www.smartenergy.illinois.edu).