



Cultivating the Grassroots: A Winning Approach for Environment and Climate Funders

by Sarah Hansen

The pace of social change is increasing rapidly in the United States and around the globe but unfortunately the environment and climate movement has failed thus far to keep up with movements for justice and equality.

Existing environmental regulations have been diminished and new initiatives have been attacked and stymied. From 2000-2009, grantmakers provided \$10 billion for environment and climate work, funding primarily topdown strategies; yet, we have not seen a significant policy win since the 1980s. Our funding strategy is misaligned with the great perils our planet and environment face.

This report contends that environment and climate funders can be more effective and secure more environmental wins by investing heavily in grassroots communities that are

disproportionately impacted by environment and climate harms. By engaging meaningfully at the grassroots level, grantmakers have the opportunity not just to support efforts that are especially strong but to use their work at the local level to build political pressure and mobilize for national change. Grassroots organizing is especially powerful where economic, social, political and environmental harms overlap to keep certain communities at the margins. By acknowledging the coming demographic shift in the United States and investing in lower-income and other underserved communities, environment and climate funders can increase their impact and build a movement that is more aligned with the future of our country.

The report includes case studies that illustrate the impact of funding grassroots groups that are organizing for environmental change, and provides concrete suggestions for how environment and climate funders can engage with this vast potential constituency.

This is the fourth in a series of reports that invites grantmakers focused on specific issues to reconsider their funding strategies to generate the greatest impact. A report for [education](#), [health](#) and [arts and culture](#) are also available.

- Full Report ([PDF](#) | [Order hard copy](#))
- [Executive Summary](#)
- [Media Kit](#)
- [Press Release](#)
- [Advisory Committee](#)

what some philanthropy leaders are saying about the report

“From toxic chemicals to dirty energy, contemporary environmental challenges are broadly distributed and deeply embedded in our society. An effective defense must be equally distributed and embedded. This NCRP report underscores how far communities living amidst environmental health hazards have stretched modest investments to protect their families and the places where they live, work and play. It provides pragmatic guidance for philanthropy to better equip affected communities to raise awareness, strengthen policy initiatives and mobilize majority support for stronger environmental protection.”

—Kathy Sessions, Director, Health and Environmental Funders Network (HEFN)

“We're not going to make big changes in climate as long as climate is seen solely as an environmental issue”

—Ed Miller, Environment Program Manager, The Joyce Foundation

some related news articles

[Reignite Environmental Movement from the Grassroots Up, Report Urges](#)
Nonprofit Quarterly

[Environmental Grant Makers Favor Large Nonprofits, Study Finds](#)
Chronicle of Philanthropy

[Time for Environmental Funders to Stop Neglecting the Grassroots](#)
Grist ☐☐☐

[Why the Environmental Movement Is Not Winning](#)
AlterNet ☐

[Report: In Environment, Biggest Groups Get Biggest Bucks](#)

Public News Service Washington □

[<< Back to High Impact Strategies for Philanthropy](#)