



From the Margins to the Mainstream

*Lessons from the Clean Power Plan
for Alignment, Leadership,
and Environmental Justice*

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Welcome to THE CPP FORUM

t.e.j.a.s

Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services

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Executive Summary

The grassroots work for equity in the Clean Power Plan laid a critical foundation for aligning the environmental movement in an increasingly hostile political landscape.

On October 11-12, 2016 the Building Equity and Alignment for Impact Initiative (BEA), the Southwest Workers Union (SWU), and Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (TEJAS) hosted a Clean Power Plan Forum in Houston, Texas. For two days, grassroots, green NGO, and philanthropic leaders from over 100 organizations focused their discussions on building alignment to meet long-standing environmental justice demands that national climate policy reduce emissions in frontline communities. The forum featured EJ-led trainings and invited tough dialogues on equity, funding disparities, and environmental movement building.

Thinking beyond the Clean Power Plan (CPP), participants also agreed that sustaining principled cross-sector relationships and embracing the power of grassroots communities were key to winning equitable climate policy. One leader in philanthropy who attend the forum explained:

The impact that we're most hoping to support is the building of power at the community level, the building of political power where folks can influence collective decision-making...For us, the ultimate impact is not a campaign victory, it's not a policy victory—those are things that come from building power. So we want to start there: How do we support folks to build power in their communities for what they want to do?

The forum, which culminated more than two years of EJ-led CPP equity advocacy, ended with strong commitments to continue working towards alignment, and an appreciation for the space to share perspectives, debate ideas, and build relationships. For longtime environmental justice leaders, the convening was a striking contrast to the 2009-2010 Waxman-Markey period when cross-sector dialogues on national climate policy were unsuccessful.

Regrettably, the momentum of the Houston CPP Forum was shifted on March

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 HOUSTON CPP FORUM
PLENARY: LONG VIEWS ON
ALIGNMENT AND EQUITY

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28, 2017, when an Executive Order was signed by Donald Trump that effectively withdrew support for the Clean Power Plan. The nullification of the CPP, the withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, and leadership changes at the EPA certainly require new strategic conversations across the broader environmental movement. Yet, in *From the Margins to the Mainstream*, we argue that the challenges of the new political landscape should not overshadow the meaningful advancements towards equitable climate policy that were made during the CPP process. In fact, as the effort to develop equitable climate policy shifts to states and local scales, we contend that EJ-led efforts to address equity gaps in the CPP offer crucial lessons to consider.

Aimed at environmental funders, green NGO leaders, and EJ organizations working on climate policy, the purpose of *From the Margins to the Mainstream* is to document experiences of EJ-led equity advocacy that together convey a grassroots-led pathway to equitable climate policy. We also present this case study with the purpose of encouraging critical dialogues about the transformative support needed by frontline communities of leaders in other environmental sectors who share environmental justice values and feel the urgency to work together in a different way.

To assist with these critical dialogues on equity in climate policy, readers are provided: (1) a brief historical background of equity and federal climate policy, (2) an examination of the activities of EJ advocates during the CPP rule making process, and (3) a discussion of key factors that contributed to alignment efforts leading to the Houston CPP Forum. A timeline with key events in CPP equity advocacy is also included.

To understand the value of embracing EJ leadership in climate policy development, this case study documents the ways that a core group of EJ policy advocates worked together to ensure that equity was prioritized in the final Clean Power Plan that was released in August of 2015. Through interviews, secondary data, informal conversations, and a close reading of comments submitted to the EPA, we reveal the following:

- Based on long-standing demands of frontline communities, environmental justice policy advocates consistently called for EJ to be incorporated into climate policy and the CPP in a way that would protect EJ communities and guaranty specific benefits.
- The grassroots sector worked to promulgate concrete equity recommendations to the EPA such as an EJ analysis in state compliance plans, mandatory emissions reductions in EJ communities, and a robust community engagement process. Many of

these recommendations were visible in comments submitted by green NGOs to the EPA.

- The grassroots sector waged an impressive—albeit partially successful—effort to engage the EPA. EJ-led equity advocacy resulted in vast improvements to the CPP, and were recognized by green NGOs as significant accomplishments.
- Despite many challenges, including the lack of funding support, EJ leaders organized for better alignment with green NGOs, and utilized important relationships with networks and other supportive institutions.

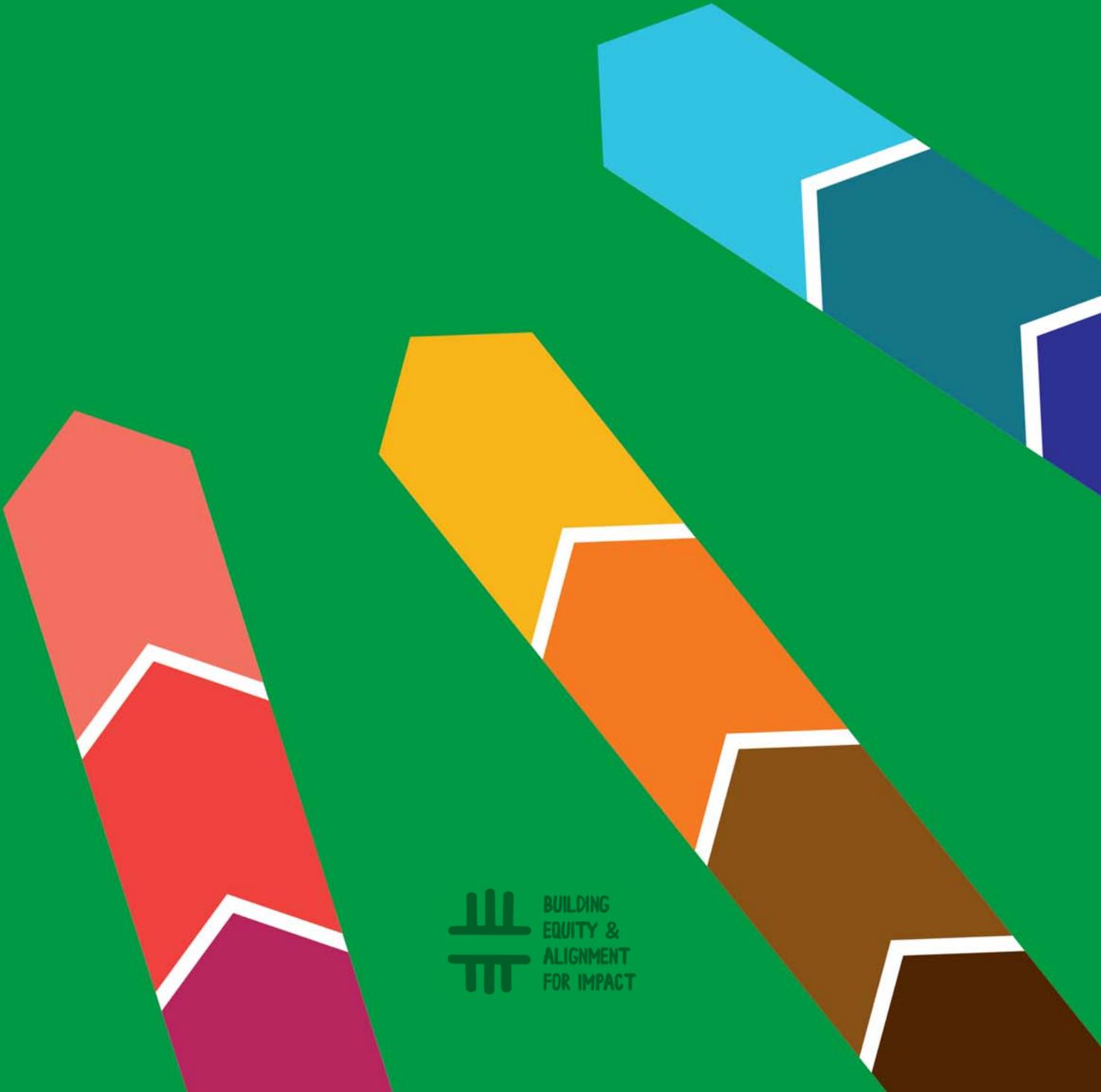
In addition to highlighting the important role played by policy advocates rooted in EJ communities, *From the Margins to the Mainstream* also identifies the key factors and activities that served as catalysts to improved alignment among EJ organizations and green NGOs. These key alignment factors include:

- Green NGOs Committing to Working Alongside EJ Leaders
- Strategically Building Grassroots-led Networks
- Activating Resources from Academic Institutions
- Building Capacity to Shape Policy in EJ Communities
- Engaging Funders and Investing Long Term
- Cross-Sector Strategy Meetings to Discuss Alignment, Action, and Equitable Climate Policy

Considering the Waxman-Markey period as a low point in movement building for equitable climate policy, this case study documents how the CPP process provided EJ leaders and green NGO colleagues with opportunities to discuss substantive protections for EJ communities as a fundamental priority in climate policy advocacy. Acknowledging that much work remains, we show that with key support, EJ leaders succeeded in utilizing the CPP rulemaking process to move equity from the margins towards the center of climate policy strategy discussions.

Through presenting these findings, *From the Margins to the Mainstream* aims to contribute to ongoing conversations about the current political terrain facing the environmental movement in the United States. Indeed, as climate-related disasters, extreme energy extraction, and ongoing industrial contamination threaten to impact low-income, Indigenous, and communities of color the most, environmental leaders in all sectors must find new ways to coordinate, heal, and work together. 🏡

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BUILDING
EQUITY &
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FOR IMPACT