

Environmental Justice and Philanthropy:

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT

In 2020, the BEA collaborated with the Tishman Environment and Design Center at the New School to conduct a landscape assessment on the misalignment between the EJ and philanthropic sectors and to find areas of opportunity to build greater alignment over time. As part of this study, researchers conducted extensive in-depth interviews with leaders from both fields. Funders and EJ organizations pointed to specific examples and opportunities. This table summarizes those ideas shared during interviews. The table is divided by sector with the acknowledgment that many opportunities need to be collaboratively addressed.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORGANIZATIONS

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING & ACCESS:

- Invite funders to visit and tour local communities to highlight wins, deepen funder understanding of priority issues, strategies and needs.
- Engage trusted philanthropies to help make connections with foundations where conflict or tension or mistrust may exist
- Ask existing funders or intermediaries to broker informal meetings, one on one conversations, or convenings with new funders
- Make multiple attempts for funding even if an application for a grant is declined, attempt to learn the rationale for decision, and Re-apply
- Participate in funder briefings or convenings where funders and EJ organizations can exchange ideas, share strategies, build shared visions, and align theories of change
- Create spaces for learning collaboratively to help build lasting, trusting relationships

CAPACITY BUILDING:

- Clearly define organizational needs internally so that external communications to funders and in grant applications are explicit; verify that organizational goals match the foundation's goals
- Communicate and emphasize movement 'wins' to the general public and specifically to philanthropy throughout the year, not just during the granting process
- Connect local work to broader policy goals or systemic change work in the field
- Emphasize the networked, collaborative, and long-term initiatives that contribute to multiple environmental and social justice goals
- Provide staff training on communication skills across different media and platforms
- Pool resources with other EJ organizations or leverage the communications' capacity of allies in larger organizations to spread messaging to funders and the public
- Shift attention towards finding new environmental funders (i.e. individual donors, giving circles, pooled funds, etc.) or other philanthropic sectors (i.e. civil/immigrant rights, reproductive justice, criminal justice reform, human rights, etc.) that are better aligned with social justice goals and direct action tactics of EJ organizations
- Identify foundations with newly formed, explicit commitments to racial equity, social justice, or grassroots organizing to build partnerships with
- Build relationships with "activist-funders" already within philanthropy

LEVERAGE THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES:

- Prioritize joining alliances, coalitions, or networks that serve as intermediaries and have commitments to opening up access to new, larger sources of funding
- Ask intermediaries to make direct connections between EJ staff and well aligned funder staff
- Request that intermediaries help fill the organizational and programmatic capacity needs of EJ organizations (i.e. communications tools, development skills, etc.)
- Work together to develop shared accountability structures that ensure transparent and democratic decision-making processes of intermediaries

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUNDERS

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND ACCESS:

- Engage directly with the EJ communities by committing to a number of local site visits each year led by EJ organizations
- Provide travel stipends and invitations to funder gatherings or special convenings where funders and EJ organizations can build shared understanding of issues, tactics, and goals
- Provide more opportunities for informal, informational meetings between foundation staff and EJ staff
- Broadly disseminate clear, transparent, and shared metrics for evaluating grant applications, explicitly defining EJ, EJ organizations, environmental grant goals, and theories of change
- Provide feedback to EJ organizations, particularly first time applicants, on applications that were denied and also throughout the grant process
- Provide “Get to Know You” introductory grants that are simple to receive and report on
- Make applications simple and reduce the reporting burden overall

CAPACITY BUILDING:

- Prioritize general operating support grants including funding for non-programmatic activities like strategic planning and leadership development
- Help identify, secure, and connect EJ groups to technical and administrative capacity such as a shared development consultant, fiscal agents, or technical training for EJ staff
- Create “administrative hubs” with shared resources such as space, media, video and conferencing equipment, and technical experts
- Offer larger, multi-year grants to organizations with smaller annual budgets to build their organizational and development capacity
- Help identify pooled resources or technical support from funders or other institutional partners that can work collaboratively with EJ orgs
- Offer targeted grants to build the communications & development staff of EJ organizations

RACISM & STRUCTURAL POWER:

- Require all board members and staff undergo racial equity training
- Diversify staff, boards, and leadership in philanthropy, including adding staff with experience working in the grassroots sector
- Adopt participatory grant-making practices like the formation of granting circles that include EJ organizational representatives that are empowered to shape the strategies, metrics, and funding priorities for pooled funds that can go directly to EJ organizations
- Help connect EJ groups to political power through legislative briefings, policy meetings, and informational sessions
- Commit to funding targets that deliver a larger percentage of environmental grant dollars to EJ organizations or those groups that are led by people of color and are working primarily in EJ communities
- Support and grow “activist-funders” within philanthropy - convening affinity groups and sharing best practices around anti-racism
- Convene with EJ organizations, intermediaries and related social movement actors to explore shared understandings of racial equity and social justice
- Include EJ organizations in the development of philanthropic strategies before they are deployed; include EJ groups in grant making decisions
- Share, disseminate, and utilize clear definitions of equity and EJ that align with grassroots groups; share these definitions with boards and leadership as a learning tool
- Adopt evaluation metrics that can value and account for long-term, systemic change
- Adopt explicit theories of change that are directly informed by and developed with frontline groups and examine these against funding strategies and outcomes over time

LEVERAGING THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES:

- Create a set of standards to assess the transparency, impact, and representativeness of intermediaries; track funding from intermediaries directly to member EJ organizations
- Leverage intermediaries to build relationships with local EJ organizations and develop relationships with members of intermediaries for more direct funding to EJ organizations