



Community-Led Climate Justice & BIPOC Leadership

A Guide to Fostering Partnerships that Uplift Local Expertise and Equity

Energy Justice Alliance (EJA): A BIPOC coalition of environmental organizations and individuals establishing an inclusive climate justice movement that is rooted in racial, economic, and environmental justice. Convened by the Energy Justice Law and Policy Center.

www.ejipc.org/eja

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1. What is Community-Led Climate Justice?

Climate justice centers the voices and experiences of communities most affected by environmental challenges. This approach recognizes that effective solutions must address both environmental and social equity concerns.



Centering Local Voices

Communities most affected by climate impacts often live in under-resourced or historically marginalized neighborhoods. Their firsthand experiences bring valuable insights for designing solutions that work for everyone.

Emphasizing Equity and Inclusion

Climate and environmental initiatives should address broader social factors—such as housing, income, and racial equity—to be truly effective and just.

Encouraging Collaboration and Openness

Transparent communication and shared decision-making ensure that each project reflects diverse community perspectives. This aligns with guidelines like the Jemez Principles and the 1991 Principles of Environmental Justice.

2. Why BIPOC Leadership is Key

Lived Expertise

BIPOC leaders bring critical knowledge about local environmental concerns—whether it's air quality, flood risks, or industrial zoning—that may not be visible from the outside.

Locally Rooted Innovation

BIPOC-led programs often blend cultural know-how, economic development, and community-building in ways that generate more holistic outcomes.

Bridging Funding Gaps

Although BIPOC-led initiatives frequently show strong results, they receive a relatively small share of climate philanthropy—highlighting opportunities for more inclusive support in towns and cities nationwide.

3. Partnering with Larger Environmental Organizations



Traditionally Top-Down Approaches

Some well-resourced groups, both local and national, have historically focused on broad environmental goals without fully engaging communities most affected.

Evolving Priorities

Many large organizations now recognize the value of social justice and local partnerships. Continued dialogue helps ensure meaningful, balanced collaboration for all involved.

4. Common Challenges

Unintentional Overlap

Outside organizations may initiate climate projects without consulting local leaders, causing duplicate efforts or confusion within communities.

Limited Access to Funding and Networks

While funders increasingly seek to support equitable approaches, smaller community-led groups often struggle to secure grants and visibility.

Missed Opportunities for Genuine Partnership

When local stakeholders aren't invited to participate early, programs may not fully address community-specific needs or honor existing expertise.

5. BIPOC Professionals in Environmental Movement

Despite holding advanced degrees (in STEM fields, law, policy, etc.), BIPOC professionals frequently encounter:

Marginalization & Tokenism

- Underrepresentation at senior levels in environmental NGOs and philanthropic boards
- Instances where their expertise is questioned or overlooked compared to white counterparts



Cultural & Institutional Barriers

- Organizational cultures historically shaped by white leadership can leave BIPOC professionals feeling isolated, despite strong credentials
- Implicit biases can affect hiring, promotion, and who is invited to key decision-making spaces

Leadership Tensions

- BIPOC environmental lawyers, scientists, and other professionals often balance a deep commitment to community empowerment with organizational pressures for top-down "expert-driven" solutions
- This may create friction if an organization is slow to embrace equity-based approaches or shared leadership models

6. "Movement Professionals" vs. Traditional "Experts"

To address systemic injustices, many BIPOC professionals embrace movement-focused frameworks that:

Center Community Power

Rather than consulting from a distance, movement professionals co-create solutions alongside frontline communities, recognizing local knowledge as equally vital to scientific or legal expertise.

Link Technical Expertise with Organizing

Movement lawyers use their skills in partnership with grassroots advocates, building collective power rather than pursuing narrow courtroom victories. Movement scientists prioritize participatory research, ensuring residents and community groups define research goals, data gathering, and policy advocacy.

Redefine "Expertise"

Moving from a solely credential-based approach to a co-creative model, where community members are integral participants and co-leaders in knowledge production and decision-making.



7. Recommendations

Proactive Consultation

- Invite BIPOC-led groups and other local advocates into discussions at the earliest planning stages
- Conduct listening sessions or workshops to gather input on local priorities

Flexible, Long-Term Support

- Advocate for funding models that provide multi-year, broad-based support
- Prioritize BIPOC-led and community-driven programs

Shared Decision-Making

- Create clear processes for incorporating local perspectives
- Establish community advisory boards
- Ensure program decisions reflect genuine collaboration

Open Communication

- Publicly share project goals, progress, and funding details
- Maintain regular check-ins with neighborhood stakeholders

Value Movement Approaches

- Recognize and support BIPOC movement lawyers and scientists
- Create pathways for leadership and influence

8. Next Steps & Resources

Learn More

Please see our Citations & Further Reading for key documents, principles, and data.

Stay Involved



- Local Officials & Big Green Groups: Sponsor inclusive, equity-focused workshops
- Community Members: Reach out to BIPOC-led organizations early in planning

Connect with EJA

Visit www.ejipc.org/eja or contact the Energy Justice Alliance directly:
info@WestchesterJustice.org

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Citations & Further Reading

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Additional Resources:

- Energy Justice Alliance (EJA): www.ejpc.org/eja
- National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy: www.ncrp.org