

# IMPROVING CLIMATE SPENDING & COLLABORATION EFFICIENCY FOR JUSTICE40

## INSIGHTS FROM THE BIPOC CLIMATE JUSTICE DIALOGUE

### INTRODUCTION

*Climate justice seeks to address the disproportionately high climate risks found among low-income and diverse communities of color with a focus on social, economic, and environmental justice; equity; fair treatment; and involvement in climate policy design and implementation for frontline and impacted communities.*

This policy brief highlights themes, recommendations, and challenges that resonated throughout a BIPOC Climate Justice Dialogue organized by the HBCU Green Fund's BIPOC Climate Scholars Project, Land Peace Foundation, and U.S. ACE Framework Initiative. The Dialogue was conceived as an opportunity to assemble scholars and experts from communities of color that have been instrumental in centering justice and equity as essential to effective climate policy. The conversation was inspired by the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to a "whole of government" approach to climate change along with an emphasis on justice and equity.

The Dialogue brought BIPOC scholars and leaders together with government policy officials to discuss climate action, Justice40, and issues of climate empowerment. Participants from 47 states and territories (Puerto Rico and Guam) engaged in deep discussions, elevating a just transition and culturally responsive climate action as major themes and priorities for national climate action. An ACE Strategic Planning Framework for the United States (ACE Framework) was presented and discussed as a foundation for coordination across agencies and communities.

### THE NEED FOR A NEW GOVERNANCE

*Climate change is demanding a different kind of governance. One with shared power, one that is leaderful, one that sees communities as partners at the table and not passive recipients of good intentions or people that have to be managed.*

**Elizabeth Yeampierre, J.D., Director UPROSE**

BIPOC climate experts center justice and equity as primary goals or optimal drivers for just climate solutions. The focus on justice underscores the need to remedy past inequities created by an extractive energy economy that causes disproportionate impacts, vulnerability, and disinvestment. The issues

### Brief Key Points

Addressing climate change demands a different kind of governance. The Justice40 commitment can be transformative by incorporating BIPOC leadership and investing in disadvantaged communities. However, the current federal infrastructure and processes are insufficient and ineffective for implementing Justice40. To achieve Justice40 goals, the U.S. Federal Government must:

1. Allocate at least 40% of investments, not benefits, in all climate action directly to BIPOC-led projects and communities.
2. Establish effective interagency coordination and government processes that incorporate the guidance and participation of BIPOC leadership.
3. Collaboratively create a system of transparency and accountability for requesting, awarding and reporting of financial flows and resources under the Justice40 Initiative.
4. Meaningfully engage Environmental Justice (EJ) communities in the design of performance metrics for the Environmental Justice Scorecard and the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool.

As part of this dialogue, the ACE Framework was presented as a crucial holistic guide to build capacity, momentum, and the culture of climate action needed for a just transition. It can provide the connective tissue to improve interagency coordination, accountability, and BIPOC engagement and partnership with all relevant levels of government.

that affect BIPOC communities are extremely complex and require horizontal integration of federal agencies and department efforts. Effective climate action requires that stakeholders in affected regions coordinate their responses to climate by prioritizing shared infrastructure and resources. Regulatory frameworks should interact with each other to genuinely address climate complexities. It is vital, in addressing climate change, that there is an integration of climate policies, strategies, and guidelines to balance the complex risks and impacts of our time.

*Some people live in safe places. They do what they know how to do, which has never given us the holistic solutions that we need. Meanwhile, our BIPOC communities live in anxiety spaces of economic, climate, and educational stress. There is a space in between, held by the learning community, where change happens from the bottom up and action is driven by communities of color.*

**Denise Fairchild, PhD, Emerald Cities**

Most U.S. federal agencies have committed to addressing environmental justice issues as part of their involvement in the White House Environmental Justice Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice, created in 1994. Current federal organizational structure and processes are insufficient and ineffective for the level of action that the climate crisis requires. These federal efforts need better planning, coordination, and reporting. The intersectionality of climate impacts requires working partnerships between federal governments, states, and BIPOC communities, many of which are already implementing meaningful mitigation and adaptation measures.

*We need to move from optics to action and localize the efforts of those who are most ready, most capable, and most impacted by the issues that need to be changed because they have the motivation to do so, and we need to talk realistically about what is stopping us. To really create holistic ways of moving forward, we have to address the discrepancy that often comes with the green colonization of climate solutions because we can't have a solution based in the capitalist mindset if we truly want to benefit life.*

*Sherri Mitchell, J.D., Land Peace Foundation*

BIPOC communities have won in battling climate change through direct action against fossil fuels, attracting clean energy investments into underserved communities, training a green workforce, and shaping just environmental policies. To enable a just climate transition, we must harness the social capital and significant contributions across BIPOC communities in climate solutions by implementing their lived experiences. This new sensibility can only be accomplished with direct and intentional engagement. It is imperative to have BIPOC communities included in the decision-making processes to incorporate knowledge about local actions and disrupt environmental harm, disparities, and racial violence. Recent research by the Donors of Color Network revealed that only a paltry 1.3% of broad climate philanthropy flows to BIPOC-led climate entities that serve their communities. The future must be led by the communities with the most at stake.

### HOW TO OPERATIONALIZE JUSTICE40

Justice40 makes the promise of redirecting 40% of the overall benefits of relevant federal investments to disadvantaged communities. This is transformative, but it is not enough. Justice40 provides an opening to really make a substantive change and foster justice within BIPOC communities. This work needs to be bold and grounded in principles of participatory and

shared decision-making processes, transparency and accountability, and coherent coordination across government agencies and with community collaborators.

### Article 12 of the Paris Agreement, known as Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), urges countries to increase public participation, understanding, and capacity to be part of climate decision-making and innovation.

The *ACE Framework* is a crucial holistic guide to build capacity, momentum, and the culture of climate action needed for a just transition. In the absence of existing federal infrastructure or methodology to fully deploy Justice40, the *ACE Framework* can be developed and implemented as a national strategic plan—in collaboration with BIPOC leaders—for rethinking interagency and community-partnership work. Ahead of the deadline for the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the National Climate Advisor to publish joint recommendations for achieving Justice40 goals, climate justice leaders and scholars identified **key recommendations** to frame the advancement of just climate action:

#### I. ALLOCATE AT LEAST 40% OF INVESTMENTS, NOT BENEFITS, IN ALL CLIMATE ACTION DIRECTLY TO BIPOC-LED PROJECTS & COMMUNITIES.

In order to have scale in the climate fight, resources need to be funneled into community efforts that enable climate policies to be uptaken, implemented, and optimized on the ground. More importantly, all climate policies must be designed through a Justice40 lens to ensure intersectionality and eliminate narrowing environmental justice.

- **Redirect 40% of all climate action investments directly into BIPOC and disadvantaged communities.** Ensure that the redirected financial flows are coming from upfront investments and not the benefits of those actions. Benefits are often privately owned and defined externally. "Benefits" do not necessarily flow directly to the community in ways that support change and the work already happening at the local level.
- **Engage BIPOC leadership and community representatives** in identifying and prioritizing infrastructure opportunities to ensure that the 40% of investments are flowing directly into BIPOC-led projects and communities.

- **Act with a sense of urgency to strengthen and scale up BIPOC-led organizations and community-based projects.** Success for Justice40 will require increased capacity and structural readiness. Resources must be deployed now in preparation for expanded investment.
- **Promote the 40% mark as the base and not the ceiling.** To address the legacy of extraction that has harmed BIPOC communities and harness the innovations and skills in these communities, 40% of investments is not enough. As such, the administration should promote agencies to take this goal as the base for directing federal investment flows into disadvantaged communities. Higher levels of investment will help to ensure that long-term equity is achieved.

## II. ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE INTERAGENCY COORDINATION & GOVERNMENT PROCESSES THAT INCORPORATE THE GUIDANCE AND PARTICIPATION OF BIPOC LEADERSHIP.

To ensure a government-wide and society-wide approach, all parts of the system need to be in alignment.

- **Address unequal access to federal funding.** Federal agencies need to expand their current programs to ensure access, prioritization, and participation of BIPOC and disadvantaged communities. Program design and funding allocation processes must be collaboratively redesigned with BIPOC leadership, recognizing the strong track record of success in implementing programs at the local level. Grantmaking, federal loan programs, technical assistance, finance, and procurement need to lower the barriers of application and reporting processes, cost-share requirements, and eligibility criteria.
- **Strengthen interagency coordination.** Coordination among agencies has always been a challenge. The federal government needs to build the operational infrastructure to function in a more collaborative manner and facilitate coordination across governmental agencies and at all levels, (federal, state, tribal, and local). With this, the EJ Interagency Working Group must provide frequent communication and ongoing participation with State, local, and Tribal officials; unions; environmental justice organizations; community groups; and other climate justice actors.

- **Investment restructuring should be guided by BIPOC leadership.** In partnership with BIPOC communities, the Council on Environmental Quality should assess lessons learned about previous barriers and inappropriately allocated resources and shift policies to remedy these inequities where needed. Investment guidance to program staff must outline a process for ensuring that BIPOC-led organizations have right-of-first-refusal on Justice40 investment funds.

## III. COLLABORATIVELY CREATE A SYSTEM OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR REQUESTING, AWARDING, AND REPORTING FINANCIAL FLOWS AND RESOURCES UNDER THE JUSTICE40 INITIATIVE.

There are ongoing federal programs and efforts that can inform the Justice40 Initiative. To leverage these prior efforts and ensure that there is real and significant progress, regular audits will be required.

- **Create agency-level advisory groups for monitoring and accountability.** All federal agencies should have program-level advisory groups that fund BIPOC leaders to guide their efforts. These advisory groups should provide publicly available feedback on how agencies have integrated recommendations from BIPOC leaders on the frontlines.
- **Launch an iterative public reporting and auditing process.** Process audits can foster trust and ensure that progress is made in the Justice40 agenda with adequate BIPOC participation and leadership. This process would need clear criteria and guidance for oversight. This guidance must promote access to information with frequent updates to BIPOC scholars and advocates about progress made on the relevant program investment funds and the communities the funds are flowing into. This process must track federal investments and locations where they are distributed including by their zip codes.

## IV. MEANINGFULLY ENGAGE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (EJ) COMMUNITIES IN THE DESIGN OF PERFORMANCE METRICS FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE SCORECARD AND THE CLIMATE AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE SCREENING TOOL.

Diversity must be at the forefront of agencies' efforts to achieve structural equity. To achieve the 40% goal, federal agencies should foster and support a diverse

workforce. Diversity provides a variety of perspectives and values crucial to counter institutional biases and ensure the incorporation of other ways of knowing and being that are not reflected within dominant science—a single way of knowing that keeps us in lockstep with past systems of harm.

- **Co-design Environmental Justice Scorecard Performance Metrics.** To facilitate accountability and ensure the OMN, CEQ, and agency leaders are on track, indicators must be developed in partnership with BIPOC leadership. Indicator development must employ diverse methodologies for assessing low-income BIPOC community needs and expectations. These indicators should be derived from local development priorities and requirements. These indicators should cover a broad range of benefits or harms to BIPOC and disadvantaged communities. An EJ Scorecard should also assess the involvement of trusted community members and measure the level of community participation.
- **Engage communities to develop criteria for the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool.** This tool should be based on a fair definition of “EJ community” that is developed and adopted through consultation with EJ leaders. The Screening tool should help identify financial needs and critical gaps in BIPOC communities. Therefore, the EPA and CEQ should ensure a co-designed, iterative, and transparent process to develop this tool with BIPOC scholars and leaders.

## THE POWER OF THIS MOMENT

The disproportionate impacts of climate change are complex and intersectional, and span political boundaries. The year 2020 shined a light on the deeply embedded racism in US society. Structural racism and injustice pervade every single system of our society. BIPOC communities bear the brunt of the pandemic, law enforcement violence, environmental harm, and energy system racism. Yet, in the midst of hardship and despair, BIPOC communities have been innovators and leaders in the fight against climate change.

The past year was marked by death and struggle brought on by the twin pandemics, COVID19 and racial injustice, [and yet] this is our moment. This is a once-in-a-century chance to build wealth in black and brown communities, create a career ladder and entrepreneur acceleration. We can't and we won't go back.

Shalanda Baker, LL.M, Deputy Director, Energy Justice DOE

The climate crisis is the result of a legacy of colonialism, extraction, and slavery. The fights against climate change and racial injustice are intertwined. Thus, solving racial disparities is crucial to finding just solutions to the climate crisis. The cultural and economic status quo are systems built on genocide and enslavement and have brought disparities and harms to BIPOC communities. Climate justice necessitates addressing exploitation in environmental, economic, and cultural practices. It requires the acknowledgement and dismantling of historical and present-day exploitation practices and power monopolies.

We need to look at things in a holistic way and approach it in a collaborative manner where everybody's at the table under this notion of fairness and equity. We are happy and elated that the Biden-Harris administration appears to be taking this direction and we're—as BIPOC scholars—available and ready to assist them so we'll be successful.

Richard Schulerbrand Gragg III, PhD, Florida A&M University

Climate justice work is helping to revitalize, address historic disinvestments, and provide resources for BIPOC communities that are leading and framing real climate policies to foster healthier, safe, and sustainable communities. As Shalanda Baker says, social equality measures could have saved 15% of the lives lost to COVID-19 pandemic. Creating social safety nets and acting on climate justice saves lives. Our nation is at a turning point, this is our moment to create change; a change that ensures the end of sacrifice zones, provides equal access to resiliency, lifts communities out of poverty through access to quality jobs, builds wealth in BIPOC communities, and recognizes BIPOC leadership and entrepreneurship for the energy transition.

*We are stronger together!*

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