



GOOD, BAD, BEZOS

AND

BEYOND

CLIMATE PHILANTHROPY
AND THE GRASSROOTS

20
24
REPORT



FROM THE AUTHOR

SPECIAL THANKS TO JACQUI PATTERSON, GLORIA WALTON, ANGELA MAHECHA, MIYA YOSHITANI AND HOLLY BAKER. Their experiences and stories are the foundation of this case study. The purpose of documenting this case study was not to get mired in the individual stories or organizational roles but rather to extrapolate the lessons of how philanthropy can move forward in a meaningful way. At the same time, the outcomes and learnings of this example would not have been possible without these grassroots leaders' vision and labor.

Thanks to Chris Landry for his support in developing the narrative and editing. Thanks to Samantha Harvey, members of the Regenerative Economies Organizing Collaborative (REO) and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) for their input and support in developing this case study. As our dear friends at Movement Generation say, "Transition is inevitable, justice is not." Thank you to all the grassroots leaders connected to this story who continue to organize and contest for transformative solutions.



--JENNIFER NEAR,
WRITER / AUTHOR

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IN EARLY 2020, GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT LEADERS

LIFTED UP GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT
VOICES IN AN UNPRECEDENTED
CALL-OUT AND RESPONSE TO

BILLIONAIRE PHILANTHROPY



THIS IS THEIR STORY



Photo: Edgar Franks / Familias Unidas / Community 2 Community Development



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IN EARLY 2020, JEFF BEZOS announced he would distribute \$10 billion in funding to address climate change issues by 2030 and move these funds through a new entity: the Bezos Earth Fund (BEF). While the news was greeted with appreciation in some circles, frontline leaders, aligned funders and others were apprehensive and concerned about the limited dollars going to climate justice and the growing influence of billionaire philanthropists on determining how to approach and fund climate change solutions.

While under-resourced grassroots organizations and communities on the frontlines of the struggle for climate, racial and economic justice are designing equity-centric systemic solutions to systemic problems, [billionaire philanthropists and the field of philanthropic capitalism](#) are doubling down on narrow approaches. These include dangerous technocratic and market-driven “fixes” that often hide and promote using language they’ve co-opted from social movements.

These profit-driven approaches of the ultra-rich fail to address the [root causes](#) of our

climate crisis, which include resource extraction from and reliance on the fossil fuel economy, exploitation of labor, and accumulated wealth. They perpetuate historical harm to frontline communities, continue to concentrate wealth and power, work within the current rules of the extractive system, and in fact, attempt to prop up a racialized capitalist economy that is simultaneously creating massive income inequality and exacerbating enormous threats to the viability of human life.

Shortly after the BEF announcement, the CJA and the [Regenerative Economies Organizing \(REO\) Collaborative](#) published an open letter calling on Jeff Bezos and the BEF to prioritize equity and frontline climate leadership and to steer funding to environmental justice (EJ) and climate justice (CJ) organizations on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

However, after the massive first round of grants still went overwhelmingly to traditional, very well-resourced big green groups, CJ movement leaders and allies set their sights [on the big green and funder intermediary recipients of BEF grants](#) and called on them to transfer a portion of their

BEF grants to frontline organizations. In 2021, CJ leaders and allies created the grassroots-led [Fund for Frontline Power](#) (F4FP) as a vehicle for receiving that funding and additional funding from other supporters. This resulted in \$141 million being moved into 4 grassroots-accountable intermediaries that represent upwards of 500 grantee partners. While this doubled U.S. climate philanthropy for equity via intermediary funds, it was still a paltry amount compared to the lump sum \$100 million grants that 5 already disproportionately resourced, predominantly white-led big green organizations each received.

Not only did this disparity underscore the [historic inequity](#) between the [mainstream environmental](#) and CJ movements, it topped off the already-overflowing coffers of several big green groups with climate approaches that have consistently been called out as narrow, top-down and downright harmful to frontline communities.

In contrast, the F4FP shifts decision-making and control back to communities. Hosted by [The Solutions Project](#) at the request of dozens of frontline groups and alliances, F4FP ensures that resources flow from major donors to community-based CJ groups and frontline-led climate solutions. In total, the F4FP has thus far raised \$6.395 million for grantmaking and operations from 14 contributors, of which 7 are also BEF grantees.



The Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) emerged in 2013 to lead with the voices of the most impacted communities, build power, and influence the movement of resources to frontline organizations. Recognizing that grassroots groups and alliances had to focus on self-directed transformative solutions, CJA also saw how grassroots leaders would need to contest for resources in new ways in order to reduce funding approaches that harm frontline communities. They would have to shift philanthropy toward effective, community-led solutions which are replicable, scalable, available now, and ready for an infusion of resources. From these discussions and the long history and connections to labor, Indigenous and environmental justice movements, the Just Transition principles were developed to guide the work of CJA and allies across the country.



GETTING THE FUNDING MODEL RIGHT

GOOD, BAD, BEZOS, AND BEYOND

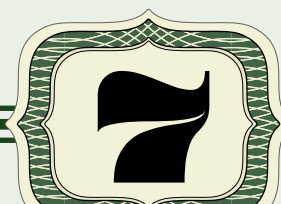
is a case study about the impact of billionaire climate philanthropy on grassroots organizations and the power of organizing to shift capital and resources to community-led solutions for EJ and CJ. It shares recommendations for how philanthropy must not just fund, but embody a [Just Transition](#) and how partners across the ecosystem can align to move more money to grassroots organizations.

We believe it is a story of how, in a time of multiple intersecting social and environmental crises, we must address the shared root causes through holistic, complex and regenerative approaches in order to very quickly create a more just and resilient world. As Ashindi Maxton, former Executive Director of Donors of Color Network, has said, “If scaling the Big Greens was going to get us there [to solving the climate crisis], we would have won already.”

The good news is we know how to do it. Grassroots social movements and communities on the frontlines of the struggle

for environmental/climate, racial and economic justice have been working for decades to advance systemic and transformative solutions. As low-income communities and communities of color who have borne disproportionate harm from the fossil fuel economy, they are well practiced – and best poised – to advocate for the kinds of [bold policies](#) and [innovative projects](#) that tackle the climate crisis in equitable, lasting, wholly beneficial and regenerative ways.

The expertise of impacted communities is precisely what billionaire philanthropists and all funders who claim to care about the future of the planet should be relying on in this moment. Investing in grassroots-directed CJ solutions is a clear and committed way of dismantling the systems that have not only wrecked the environment, but also allowed the power of unprincipled billionaires to go unchecked in the first place. Community-centered solutions are the best way to bring about a world in which well-being for all, not accumulated wealth for a few, is the highest measure of success.





**IF SCALING THE BIG GREENS
WAS GOING TO GET US THERE
[TO SOLVING THE CLIMATE
CRISIS], WE WOULD HAVE
WON ALREADY.**



A VISION FOR CHANGE



Photo on this page and the following: Climate Justice Alliance

FROM COMMUNITY-LED PLANS to address environmental health and equity challenges in California to returning for-estlands in Indonesia back to indigenous stewardship, grassroots organizations are among the most effective climate action leaders on the planet. Their solutions are simultaneously *mitigative*, by taking on the industries driving the climate crisis and offering real, replicable and community-scale alternatives that reduce or prevent carbon emissions and/or sequester carbon, as well as *adaptive*, by integrating production-consumption-waste cycles that are far less harmful ecologically and that contribute to communities' survivability.

But as effective as grassroots solutions are, they receive very little philanthropic support, as documented in numerous studies by the National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy and many others. For example, Indigenous resistance to fossil fuel projects has avoided greenhouse gas pollution equivalent to at least 25% of annual U.S. and Canadian emissions. Yet, Indigenous Peoples receive 0.03% of funding in the United States. Women's environmental initiatives receive less than 0.02% of funding. And only 1.3% of climate philanthropic giving in the United States goes to frontline communities. The Yale School of the Environment found that several mainstream

environmental organizations receive much more funding individually than do all the EJ organizations combined. “The Sierra Club, for example, received more than \$200 million in grants, almost five times what all the environmental justice organizations combined received,” writes the study’s co-author Dr. Dorceta Taylor.

The story of F4FP and BEF is an example of how philanthropy can reverse this trend, follow the lead and work with frontline organizations to shift resources for community-led solutions. While this is a case study focused on organizing in the United States, we recognize that frontline communities globally bear the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis and have been [similarly overlooked by philanthropy while leading climate solutions](#). The lessons and recommendations presented in this case study are also applicable to international grantmaking.

Imagine we woke up tomorrow and grassroots leaders across the country and around the world had the opportunity to steward \$10 billion. What are the north stars, maps and paths forward that prioritize a healthy planet and healthy beings and don’t repli-

cate systems of harm? What can philanthropy learn from frontline leaders’ visionary practices – and put into action? When the grassroots win, we all win. This means getting capital and resources to frontline communities that are stewarding the climate solutions we so desperately need.

We know the historic role of robust social movements in transforming society. We know how important it is to build them from the ground up by [investing in grassroots organizations](#) and networks. Powerful social movements are like the probiotics of a healthy democracy, creating on-the-ground alternatives to toxic ideologies and institutions. But just like probiotics need prebiotics as a food source to help them grow, [movements need strong grassroots organizations and infrastructure](#) to realize their full transformative potential.

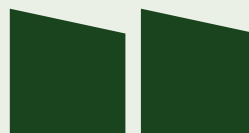
It is essential that we align with and resource the solutions, strategies and operations of groups that have already [been fighting for EJ for multiple decades](#). Aside from the obvious expertise frontline communities have on issues affecting their own bodies, families and environments, asking a billionaire to dismantle a system that made



billionaires possible is ludicrous. Frontline communities are essentially surviving in the “sacrifice zones” that make the accumulation of wealth and power possible. They exist at the expense of our “dig, burn, dump” economy, a system reliant on ever new manifestations of extraction and exploitation that stem from colonialism. This is why real solutions must come from those living in the crosshairs of environmental racism and the toxic, polluting industries that degrade human and environmental health, drive the climate crisis and pad investors’ pockets. Until that happens, true transformation will be unattainable; government subsidies will continue to benefit the fossil fuel industry and enrich corporations, investors and billionaires; and the public will continue to pay the price of increasingly extreme weather and growing income inequality.

Philanthropy deepens these inequities when it unduly funds large, predominantly and historically white-led environmental groups, which often reinforce the structural conditions that harm frontline communities. It also undermines its own environmental and climate justice program work when it benefits financially from the extractive economy through investment strategies. And now, a budding class of billionaires who have most benefited from the exploitation of labor and planetary resources are perpetuating the same harm and inequities through [billionaire philanthropy that greenwashes reputations made through extractive capitalism.](#)

Over the next decade, exorbitant resources – including billionaire philanthropy, generational wealth shifts, and federal funding – will flow toward climate mitigation and adaptation. We need measures in place to ensure frontline organizations have the absorptive capacity to integrate large-scale funding to expedite systemic change. Further, we need donors and funders to calibrate their role in the change process, orient as learners in relation to grassroots organizations and social movements, and utilize their voices and influence to organize their peers to do the same.



**THE SIERRA CLUB,
FOR EXAMPLE,
RECEIVED MORE
THAN \$200 MILLION
IN GRANTS, ALMOST
FIVE TIMES WHAT
ALL THE ENVIRON-
MENTAL JUSTICE
ORGANIZATIONS
COMBINED
RECEIVED.**





**WHAT CAN PHILANTHROPY
LEARN FROM FRONTLINE
LEADERS' VISIONARY
PRACTICES - AND PUT
INTO ACTION?**



CASE STUDY, PART I: BEZOS EARTH FUND AND THE PRE-CONDITIONS FOR GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

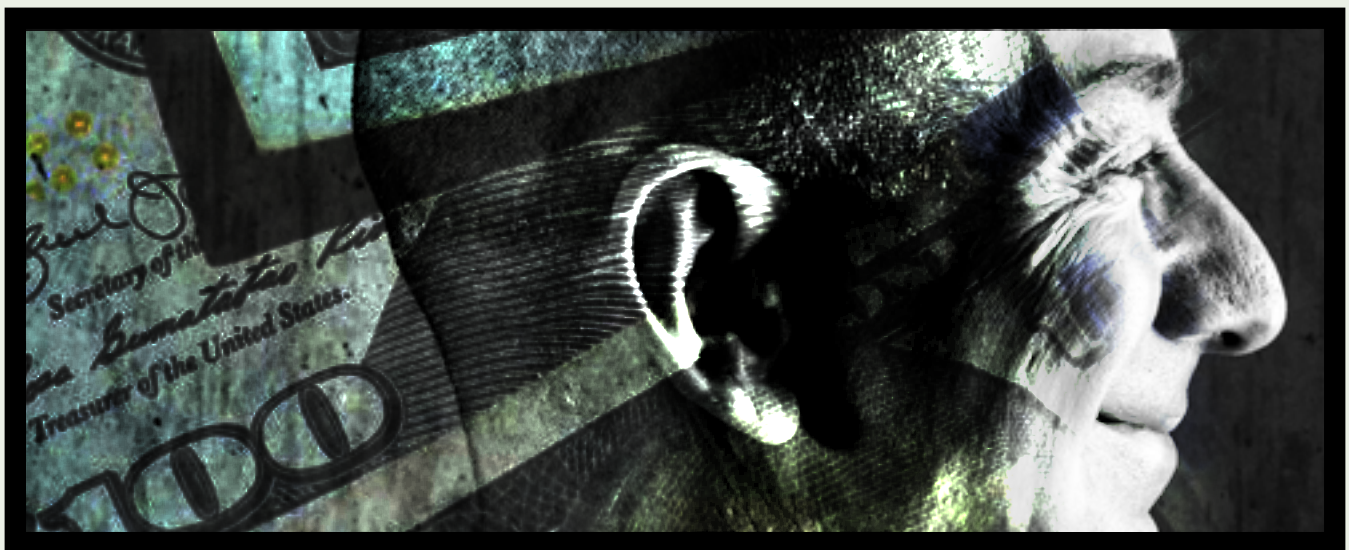


Photo: Daniel Berman

IN 2020, EVEN BEFORE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC UPENDED OUR LIVES in countless ways, Amazon workers around the country were [organizing and protesting in response to inhumane worker conditions](#) in Amazon factories and distribution centers while the corporation was under criticism for [paying lower tax rates than the average American](#).

On Feb. 17, 2020, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, then the [richest man in the world](#) and part of a new class of billion-

aire-CEOs-turned-philanthropists, drew attention away from his labor practices and Amazon worker organizing by announcing the launch of his newest project, BEF. The fund would commit \$10 billion in grants by 2030 – it has given \$2 billion as of early 2024 – with the goal of “reaching net-zero emissions and shifting to nature-positive development, while also focusing on reducing poverty and protecting the vulnerable.” In terms of climate funding and solutions being influenced by those with billionaire and corporate interests, BEF is set up to be

one of the largest and most disruptive projects to date. Therefore, grassroots leaders, alliances and funder organizers across the ecosystem quickly mobilized.

From the beginning, movement leaders [were concerned](#) about how BEF might exacerbate funding inequities between frontline communities and the “big greens.” This dynamic could further entrench a prioritization of top-down strategies and unproven market-based solutions, which grassroots communities have time and again experienced as harmful and reliant on further resource extraction and the exploitation of labor from BIPOC communities, all while accumulating wealth for billionaires. It could also exacerbate a scenario in which grassroots do not have a seat at the decision-making table – continuing a path that ends with the most privileged alone surviving and benefiting from climate crises.

Our current system of resource extraction, exploitation of labor and accumulated wealth have created both the conditions of the climate crisis as well as the underlying structural barriers to advancing just and transformative solutions. These structural inequities continue to deepen through a) [federal and state funding that often invests in short-sighted and overly-rigid solutions that don't address harms from environmental racism and the inequitable effects of climate change](#) and b) private philanthropy, which shares class and strategic interests with other wealthy donors and large envi-

ronmental organizations that often lack the connections and accountability to communities on the frontlines of climate change.

Within this context, grassroots leaders feared having more funding invested in [dangerous distractions and non-systemic solutions](#) that rely on top-down decision making, including cap and trade programs, carbon storage and taxes, and geoengineering. These “solutions” are not only misleading by not cutting emissions at their source, but they are also cost-prohibitive, lack accountability to frontline communities, and come with a whole suite of risks that are often brushed under the carpet. The reality is we don't have time to fall for risky, unproven approaches when we have so many real solutions that we already know can cool the planet and begin to correct our relationship with Earth's natural systems.



THE FUNDAMENTAL CONDITIONS WITH REGARDS TO CHALLENGING THE APPROACH OF BEF WERE BEYOND CHALLENGING FOR THE GRASSROOTS. THERE WAS:

- * little-to-no transparency from BEF;
- * urgency to influence the distribution of funds under a tight timeline;
- * availability of an enormous scale of resources that would have a significant impact; and
- * no clear relationships at BEF with, or accountability to, grassroots organizations and EJ/CJ communities.



Image: Bezos Earth Fund

These conditions meant that a truly positive and transformative outcome was unlikely. Given all the challenges, grassroots leaders recognized that their organizing efforts to influence BEF was at best a strategy rooted in harm reduction and an attempt to ensure that frontline organizations would be part of the funding strategy. The movement ecosystem moved into action as leaders across labor and CJ, along with aligned funders, planned a set of strategic interventions.





**THE DECISION TO FUND
ONLY INTERMEDIARIES
INSTEAD OF GRASS-
ROOTS ORGANIZA-
TIONS DIRECTLY
DEEPEND LONG-STAND-
ING INEQUITIES IN
FUNDING.**





CASE STUDY, PART II: THE GRASSROOTS INTERVENTION AND RESPONSE



Photo: Brooke Anderson/Survival Media Agency

SHORTLY AFTER THE EARTH FUND WAS ANNOUNCED, BEF consultants reached out to a small number of grassroots leaders and asked for consultation around who and what to fund in the field. These leaders, in turn, moved a collective strategy and negotiation to ensure Black, Indigenous, and People of Color–led organizations on the frontlines of labor and CJ issues would be resourced as part of the early set of awardees. Bezos and his team repeatedly expressed an interest in learning from these

grassroots leaders as BEF staff and leadership were new to the field of philanthropy and funding around climate change.

HOW DID GRASSROOTS LEADERS ADVISE BEZOS AND TEAM TO FUND THE FRONTLINES?

* **INVEST DIRECTLY** in the grassroots, particularly in BIPOC communities that have been most impacted by environmental racism and climate injustice.

* **FUND BOTTOM-UP** organizing strategies and intersectional solutions rooted in local communities that address structural issues.

* **ENGAGE** the Peoples Solutions Lens to mitigate against the instinct to fund non-systemic solutions that perpetuate practices of exploitation and extraction.

* **FUND** grassroots-centric intermediaries that provide flexible core support and include grassroots leadership in decision-making bodies and other methods for accountability.

* **FUND AT "SCALE"**, given the current data that demonstrates only 1.3% of climate philanthropic giving in the United States is going to frontline communities. This is an opportunity to redistribute this wealth to the communities that built it.

In addition to quiet, behind-the-scenes meetings, interventions, and co-organizing by grassroots leaders with the Bezos team, the ecosystem activated a number of additional strategies:

* **REACHING OUT** across their networks to promote hiring opportunities at BEF,

* **WRITING** articles and statements on the problematic practices of billionaire philanthropy, and

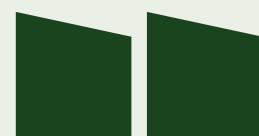
* **STRATEGIZING** a movement response to different possible scenarios in order to be ready in advance of the first round of grants.

This organizing led to a movement proposal for an amount comparable to what big greens had already received – a minimum \$100 million docket of funding by BEF – across multiple labor and CJ organizations. Still, this would have represented a modest level of investment into grassroots organizations in comparison to the big greens. Ultimately, BEF only agreed to fund intermediaries, though grassroots leaders and movement-accountable intermediaries had advocated for [funding both intermediaries](#) and grassroots EJ and CJ partners directly. This decision to fund only intermediaries instead of grassroots organizations directly deepened long-standing inequities in funding.

This organizing resulted in \$141 million being moved into frontline groups through intermediaries funding the grassroots, representing a doubling of U.S. climate philanthropy for equity via intermediary funds. But even this initial scale of resources paled in comparison to the big greens and other intermediaries who made up the bulk of the first round of grants, which totaled approximately \$750 million. Multiple grassroots organizations, via grassroots-accountable intermediaries, received \$141 million spread among them. In contrast, the big green organizations received \$100 million grants each, almost as much as grassroots groups received in total.



Photo: Brooke Anderson/Survival Media Agency



**WHAT DOES JUST
TRANSITION
COMPEL US
TO DO IN THIS
MOMENT?**



WHO RECEIVED BEZOS FUNDING?

BIG GREENS:

CLIMATE WORKS

\$50,000.000

DREAM CORPS GREEN FOR ALL

\$10,000.000

EDEN REFORESTATION PROJECTS

\$5,000.000

ENERGY FOUNDATION

\$30,000.000

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND

\$100,000.000

NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

\$100,000.000

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

\$100,000.000

ROCKY MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE

\$10,000.000

SALK INSTITUTE FOR BIOLOGICAL STUDIES

\$30,000.000

UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS

\$15,000.000

WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE

\$100,000.000

GRASSROOTS

(to be re-granted among
a pool of 500 grassroots
grantees):

THE CLIMATE & CLEAN ENERGY EQUITY FUND

\$43,000,000

THE HIVE FUND FOR CLIMATE & GENDER JUSTICE

\$43,000,000

NDN COLLECTIVE

\$12,000,000

THE SOLUTIONS PROJECT

\$43,000,000

WHILE THE OUTCOMES ARE MIXED, THERE ARE MANY ELEMENTS WORTH CELEBRATING:

* Grassroots leaders came together quickly to create a collective strategy, with a large number of people working in collaboration to achieve a complex set of goals.

* Leaders aligned around a common higher purpose due to the high stakes, a significant achievement when this level of cooperation is sometimes challenging for our movements to achieve.

* The ecosystem, from leaders to staff to communities, showed up. Everyone had a role, and multiple players moved with pragmatic grace.

* Leaders were inspired by, rooted in and accountable to the labor movement and Amazon workers, which became a foundational point of alignment for the ecosystem. Respecting the wishes of workers and seeking consultation from them to inform the strategy was critical.

* Frontline labor leaders gave frontline climate leaders their support to move forward and take the money if it was offered to them at a meaningful scale, and grassroots leaders agreed to include support for the demands of workers.

This alignment and willingness to contest for the resources of a billionaire like Bezos was testament to several years of learning and organizing around complex concepts. Namely, [if movement organizations were going to contest for “dirty money,” it needed to be used to mitigate the harm done to workers and the many structural harms of wealth and resource extraction at the expense of frontline communities.](#)

Ultimately, this harm reduction strategy achieved a level of success in moving a portion of overall resources, but it was unsuccessful in influencing the Bezos team to fund grassroots groups directly in the first round of grants, and BEF did not adopt the [basic practices of trust-based philanthropy.](#) Therefore, grassroots leaders began to organize a resource-sharing intervention with some of the big green BEF grantees, which was a strategy to redirect resources to fund frontline groups.





UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DRAWN

THIS NOTE IS LI
FOR ALL DEBTS, PUB

JULY 4, 1776.





CASE STUDY, PART III: A NEW MODEL: THE FUND FOR FRONTLINE POWER



Photo: Brooke Anderson/Survival Media Agency

THERE IS A LONG HISTORY WITHIN THE EJ/CJ MOVEMENT OF **NEGOTIATING RESOURCE SHARING WITH BIG GREENS**, given that high-net worth donors and larger funders have historically moved significant contributions into these structures while neglecting grassroots EJ/CJ organizations. In part due to this disparity, grassroots organizations have come together multiple times over the past several decades to create a new center of gravity within the climate movement. Through

processes that resulted in the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing, Principles of Environmental Justice, the Just Transition framework, CJA's Just Transition Principles, Indigenous Principles of Just Transition and more, CJ leaders have put ground-up power building front and center, building relationships and shifting cultures of practice bit by bit within the mainstream environmental sector and philanthropy. This is why, when BEF decided to fund intermediaries and continue to

fund well-resourced big greens, the grassroots organizing sector was prepared. With well-developed analyses and infrastructure, they created a new, movement-led funding vehicle and called on the funder intermediaries and big green recipients of BEF grants to transfer a portion of their funding into it.

This autonomous, grassroots-led-and-governed grantmaking structure was created in 2021, with the launch of the [F4FP](#), a collaborative vehicle of Climate Justice Alliance, The Solutions Project, and other climate justice leaders, with the goal of receiving portions of BEF funding as well as additional funding from other supporters. F4FP, which is held at The Solutions Project at the request of grassroots leaders, is demonstrating the visionary ways it wants to be mobilizing, distributing, sharing and governing resources through a wealth redistribution model that puts equity and justice at the center and provides the opportunity to move wealth back to the communities that built it.

The F4FP [is an experiment](#) in front-line-governed philanthropy that not only shifts dollars, but also shifts strategy-setting, decision-making and grantmaking processes in ways that disrupt status quo philanthropy. The F4FP's purpose is to move money to the grassroots organizing sector to support Just Transition/frontline-led climate solutions via a model through which grassroots leaders – not funders, big greens or CEOs – get to de-

cide which climate solutions are funded. The leaders who created the fund drew inspiration from other models and examples of community- and movement-governed grantmaking and regenerative lending vehicles in the ecosystem, including the [Environmental Justice Resourcing Collective](#), [Seed Commons](#) and CJA's [Our Power Loan Fund](#).

CJA and 12 other regional/national organizations selected 13 grassroots leaders to create a [cross-sector governance body](#) to steer the fund. It took approximately 10–12 months to move from the call to action to securing funding commitments and installing the governing body. It took another 16 months to design the grantmaking process; receive, review and score over 400 applications; and determine the first round of grants. Over this period, many discussions were held about the highest purpose of these resources in service of grassroots social movements.

THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS, THE GROUP HELD TWO QUESTIONS:

- 1.) What is the most visionary thing we can do with this money?
- 2.) What does just transition compel us to do in this moment?

The F4FP decided to focus on [community-based, equitable climate solutions](#) that facilitate resilience, strengthen local regenerative economies and build power on the



front lines of the climate crisis. In order to be eligible for grants, organizations must be majority BIPOC-led, primarily serve BIPOC communities and have an annual budget under \$1.5 million.

In total, the F4FP raised \$7.395 million for grantmaking and operations from 14 contributors, 7 of which are BEF grantees. Of the total amount raised, the F4FP governing body agreed to a \$4 million grantmaking budget for the first grant cycle. The F4FP received over 400 applications requesting more than \$60 million in support, highlighting the need for accountable grassroots funding felt across the field. Through solidarity philanthropy action, the F4FP was able to partner with the Environmental Justice Resourcing Collective at the Kataly Foundation to add another \$1 million, thereby granting a total of \$5 million to support 48 inaugural grantees.

The grantees span 22 states and Puerto Rico with work that focuses on air quality, water quality, food sovereignty, energy democracy, clean transit, environmental health, workers' rights, worker cooperatives, just recovery and more. More than 75% of the grantees have budgets under \$500,000. For context, the operating budget of the Environmental Defense Fund, one BEF grantee, was \$273 million in 2022, more than 500 times the budget of the majority of F4FP recipients.




Photo: Oliver Korahlihtz/@midkainija

HOW WERE RESOURCES REDISTRIBUTED TO F4FP?

**\$100,
000,000.00
(EACH) FOR FIVE BIG
GREEN GRANTEES**





**\$141,
000,000.00
FOR FIVE HUNDRED
GRASSROOTS
GRANTEES**



WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE FUND FOR FRONTLINE POWER?

MOVEMENT VEHICLE:

Movement vehicle: F4FP was envisioned as a movement-led response to a symbolic and controversial convergent moment of crisis, collapse, and transition where exorbitant wealth built from the extractive economy model (unsustainable, exploitative, bad for the earth, bad for workers) is moving to support climate solutions - while also continuing to benefit from the extractive economy and contributing to the climate, environmental, and economic crises. F4FP is a tool to divert funds from potential support of false promises to instead support frontline-led climate solutions.

A MODEL LIKE FUND FOR FRONTLINE POWER opens the opportunity for funders to make actionable their commitments to equity and justice – by moving resources and letting go of control and decision-making. Traditional philanthropy has little experience giving up power and allowing communities to self-govern; whereas the F4FP centers on trusting frontline leaders to develop keen strategies and make funding decisions that advance Just Transition. While the undertaking of educating philanthropy while implementing an initiative like

GRASSROOTS VEHICLE:

Fund for Frontline Power is fully grassroots governed. Grassroots leaders decide what climate solutions get funded, and move resources to the grassroots organizing sector via a solidarity philanthropy model

LEARNING VEHICLE:

Fund for Frontline Power provides the opportunity to build grassroots skills for collective governance of capital/resources.}

the F4FP is a heavy lift to ask of grassroots leaders, organizations, and the movement ecosystem, it is part of learning to trust in the vision, wisdom, and solutions of frontline communities – and that is an integral part of a Just Transition.

This is why organizing efforts to build the new and create the Fund for Frontline Power has been about something bigger than any one organization or individual leader. It's about aligning our work to our north star and justice for our communities.



THE IV PATHWAYS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PHILANTHROPY



Photo: Oliver Kombilitz/@midianinja

THE CREATION OF THE FUND FOR-FRONTLINE POWER SHOWS HOW GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING to shift philanthropic resources is about something bigger than any one organization or individual leader. It's about [aligning our work](#) to our north star: justice for our communities and real solutions – for all – to the climate crisis. The F4FP models how to trust front-line leaders to develop key strategies and make funding decisions that advance Just Transition. [Traditional philanthropy has](#)

[little experience giving up power and allowing communities to self-govern.](#) However, this model serves as an example and opportunity for funders to make their1 commitments to equity and justice actionable by moving resources and letting go of control and decision-making. Movement leaders want to continue to iterate models like the F4FP and build on this learning, hoping that funders will engage in this learning and follow the lead of what grassroots leaders are building.

For philanthropy to make a relevant impact in this political moment, it must shift power and resources and [move toward practices](#) that are more [democratic, just and trust-based](#). This includes resourcing movement partners to create community- and movement-governed structures while also directly resourcing these structures so that grassroots leaders can govern funds and drive them into transformative solutions at scale.

Fortunately, grassroots climate solutions are abundant and ready for scaled investment now. Alongside development of the F4FP, grassroots organizations and funder allies built out the [Four Pathways to Move Money to the Grassroots framework](#). Designed to remove all barriers to funding the grassroots, the framework provides 4 options for moving capital and other resources with speed and trust to grassroots organizing globally via movement-built and movement-aligned vehicles. We invite funders and donors to mobilize resources to and through these ‘bottom up’ pathways:

1. GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

– Unrestricted, multi-year funding sent directly to [authentic grassroots and base-building organizations](#) that are of, by, for and directly accountable to the most impacted communities is always preferred.

2. GRASSROOTS-LED ALLIANCES AND NETWORKS

– Alliances and networks created by grassroots organizations

integrate resource-sharing and accountability processes in order to achieve collective impact.

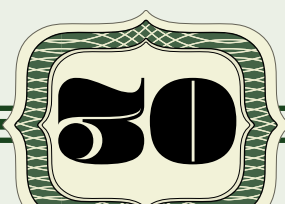
3. COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

– Non-extractive loan funds, community land trusts and worker-owned cooperatives are examples of community-controlled infrastructure that support the grassroots governance of capital and redistribution of wealth at the community level.

4. GRASSROOTS-CENTRIC FUNDER INTERMEDIARIES

– Intermediary funders that center grassroots communities are a critical part of movement infrastructure in the United States and around the globe. They fund grassroots groups with flexible core support and include grassroots leadership in decision-making bodies and other methods for accountability.

The climate crisis, funding inequities and power differentials between large environmental organizations and grassroots organizations and frontline communities are decades and centuries in the making. [Course correction will require a long-term response that centers justice and equity instead of quick fixes](#) or billionaire whims. It will require transforming the systems at the root of the crisis. This work compels supporting social movement ecosystems that advance communities and solutions commensurate with the scale of the challenge. The most innovative approach lies in trust-





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ing those who are working every day to address our many intersecting crises and following the lead of grassroots organizations and social movements as they help us to find our way through.



CONCLUSION

BEF AND ITS INEQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES HAS IN MANY WAYS destabilized the work of frontline organizations to advocate for solutions and funding that center on and resource the communities most impacted by the extractive economy. Based on the first round and giving to date, the majority of Bezos’ funding has gone to mostly white-led big green groups that are using billionaire and philanthropic wealth accumulated on the backs of workers and EJ communities to shape the climate agenda without input – let alone leadership – from the communities most affected by the climate crisis.

The CJ movement has been working to disrupt this power imbalance for decades, work that has now been largely undone

by one huge funder coming in and setting a path for other billionaires to follow. Funders are now moving resources out of grassroots-built and accountable organizations and movement infrastructure and into larger, more conventional organizations, including donor-created pooled funds. Big greens are utilizing additional power from billionaire philanthropy to advance solutions rooted in carbon fundamentalism rather than systemic change and are well-positioned to pull down significant federal funds, which will further leave BI-POC and impacted communities behind. And political leaders, the federal policy process and federal agencies are now following the patterns of billionaire philanthropy and big greens.

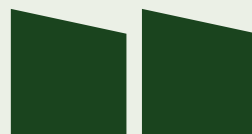
While it's hard to identify the chicken or the egg, top-down and market-based solutions are now being subsidized and promoted in federal policy, keeping the same systems and power structures in place. Grassroots partners are being used across the board as implementers of others' agendas rather than recognized and resources as the leaders and creators of strategy, solutions, and infrastructure development that contribute to this mainstream moment for climate equity and justice.

These sectoral parallels mean big greens, billionaires, and state and federal governments are piggy backing off each other's analyses and doubling down on failed approaches precisely at a time when we need more grassroots-led solutions than ever. This is a moment when it is critical to align as an ecosystem to address harms and build root-cause remedies in response to the climate crisis. It is also a moment to confront billionaire philanthropy and challenge tech-based solutions that will perpetuate and exacerbate the same social inequities and injustices.

Historically, institutional philanthropy has demonstrated a lack of innovation and accountability and failed to address the sector's complicity in economic concentration and wealth-hoarding. The current rules mean that people and the planet always lose. The philanthropic sector must change the rules and structures while working to mitigate the worst harms of the current system's

failures and decades of injustice to frontline communities.

Philanthropy must take this opportunity to radically shift. A deep, intentional investment in groups led by frontline directly affected communities will play a profound role in systemic change at the very moment when investments in grassroots, justice-centered solutions are more critical than ever.



PHILANTHROPY MUST TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO RADICALLY SHIFT.





RESOURCES

SIDEBARS:

- * Formation of CJA + Just Transition
- * HOW DID GRASSROOTS LEADERS ADVISE BEZOS AND TEAM TO FUND THE FRONTLINES (the demands from the grassroots for the Fund)
- * A history of - fighting Big Greens for \$
- * Who received Bezos funding
- * How were resources shared/redistributed to F4FP

RESOURCE LIST-

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iqMcHMfEJZXUaegQwi_TMLRy9vBU-hPFfILKyAGXCv0/edit?usp=sharing

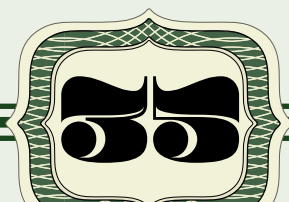
APPENDIX:

- * *CJA and other organizing creating F4FP + governance structure*
- * *{INSERT: HOW DID F4FP ELECT 13 MOVEMENT-LEADERS TO GOVERN THE FUND? VISUAL/INFOGRAPHIC Climate justice movement organizations nominated grassroots leaders to serve on the Fund for Frontline Power's governing body, which is fully vested with decision-making power. The governance body intentionally brings together experienced leaders with varied lived and movement experiences to comprise a robust team to lead all decision-making for the fund.*
- * *Who decides who those 13 leaders are?*
- * *CJA board are majority grassroots leaders and are elected by members*
- * *CJA Board identified 12 organizations to nominate individuals across a number of sectors and perspectives*
- * *Received 1-4 recs for each sector from the board then the board voted on the org to nominate the grassroots leaders*
- * *Organizations that nominated the leaders received orientation and shared criteria for nominating grassroots leaders to govern the fund*
- * *Then they nominated two leaders- priority leader and secondary }*
- * *List of F4FP grantees (waiting to post on website linked above and also put in appendix for print version)*



END NOTES

- ¹ Historian Mikkel Thorup defines philanthrocapitalism as the assumption that “capitalist mechanisms are superior to all others (especially the state) when it comes to not only creating economic, but also human progress, and that the market and market actors are or should be made the prime creators of the good society.”
- ² The narrative framework of CJA’s Four Year Strategy 2016-2020 was developed in partnership with Center for Story-based Strategy and elevates 6 meta-strategies: Fight the Bad, Change the Rules, Build the New, Change the Story, Build the Bigger We, and Move the Money.’
- ³ [Resources – Regenerative Economies Organizing \(REO\) Collaborative \(reocollaborative.org\)](https://reocollaborative.org)
- ⁴ Ceres Trust sunset in 2023.



FOR THE WORLD



"WHEN THE GRASSROOTS WINS, WE ALL WIN."