



Our Power Campaign: Communities United for a Just Transition

CJA is a new collaborative of nearly 40 community-based and movement support organizations uniting frontline communities to forge a just transition away from unsustainable energy to resilient local economies. CJA's members are rooted in Indigenous, African American, Latino, Asian Pacific Islander, and working-class white communities throughout the U.S. These communities are a key demographic in a growing movement for real solutions to the crises of climate, economy, and democracy. We apply the power of deep grassroots organizing, direct action, coalition building, civic engagement, policy advocacy, and strategic communications to win local, statewide, and national shifts.

CJA has recently launched **Our Power**, a national campaign to win real solutions to the climate crisis. The Our Power Campaign engages grassroots communities to transition the economy in ways that reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the source, restore equity, and put decision-making in the hands of communities. The campaign was launched in June 2013 in three pilot *Hot Spots*: Black Mesa, Arizona; Detroit, Michigan; and Richmond, California. Plans are to expand to 12 *Hot Spots* by the end of 2014. The *Hot Spots* are home to key grassroots groups that have successfully challenged the extreme energy economy driving climate change.

THE PROBLEM

The world is confronting three fundamentally interrelated crises of economy, ecology, and democracy. In the U.S. alone, over 100 million people comprise what the U.S. Census calls the poor and the "near poor," including many working people. Real wages have declined for most working people over the past four decades. Despite a recent measure of stability in the financial markets, economists across the political spectrum recognize that global capitalism is in a deep crisis. Meanwhile communities on the frontlines of climate disruption-- particularly Indigenous Peoples-- are bearing the brunt of its impacts from the destructive force of super-storms to the disappearance of precious resources like water.

THE SOLUTION

The scientific consensus is that the most industrialized nations must make deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in order to reverse the trend towards catastrophic climate disruption. ***In the U.S., this means we must cut carbon emissions at the source in a rapid ramp down over the coming decades.***

CJA believes that meeting this goal is possible—and that we can do it while addressing the economic crisis and creating meaningful work and livelihoods. This will require a transformation of our economy. But we can begin to implement real solutions today, while continuing to push for national leadership, especially in regions where entrenched "extreme energy" interests have exercised disproportionate influence as the crisis has continued to deepen.

In assessing the broader landscape of climate activism, it is critical to recognize that despite the failure of D.C. policy-led campaigns, there have been significant successes on the part of grassroots climate justice campaigns across the U.S. over the past decade.

Frontline communities, using grassroots, network-based, and actions-led strategies around the country have had considerable success fighting climate-polluting industries in recent years, with far less resources than the large environmental groups in D.C. These initiatives have prevented a massive amount of new industrial carbon emissions.

CJA's members are rooted in Indigenous, African American, Latino, Asian Pacific Islander, and working-class white communities throughout the U.S. Communities of color comprise more than 100 million people, often living near toxic, climate polluting energy infrastructure or other facilities. As racially oppressed and/or economically marginalized groups, they have histories of activism in various arenas, including grassroots organizing, leadership development, mass direct action, electoral work, cultural revival, and policy advocacy. Because they have suffered disproportionately from pollution, many of these communities have given rise to grassroots organizations with extensive experience in the environmental arena, forming the base of the environmental justice movement. These communities and organizations, which form the basis of CJA, are poised to provide crucial new leadership to the climate and environmental movements.

Communities of color are a rising force in the U.S. electoral landscape as well, as the 2012 elections clearly demonstrated. They poll consistently high in understanding climate change, and supporting progressive environmental policies. They have been crucial in electing pro-environment politicians and defeating anti-environmental initiatives. Therefore they are strategically central to achieving short and long-term climate and energy policy advances. Support for their environmental efforts is a question of global importance as the United States grapples with the mounting effects of climate change.

CJA is coalescing the power of these communities to reshape environmental policy, the economy, and democratic governance in the coming decades.

BACKGROUND

The Climate Justice Alliance emerged out of a 3-year process of grassroots groups from racial, environmental, and economic justice movements working to cohere our vision and strategy as a US-based movement for global climate justice. Participating organizations saw the need for the people most severely impacted by both the environmental and economic crises to lead efforts to confront and transform them. Milestones included:

- Convening an ecological justice assembly at the 2nd US Social Forum in Detroit (2010) attended by nearly 400 people representing over 118 organizations from every region of the country.
- Organizing movement delegations to the UN climate accord conferences (Copenhagen in 2009, Cancun in 2011, Durban in 2012), the climate summit in

Bolivia which produced the Cochabamba Protocol (2010), and the UN Rio+20 Earth Summit (2012).

Co-convened by Movement Generation: Justice and Ecology Project and Grassroots Global Justice Alliance since January 2012, CJA has been developing a unified campaign for a just transition—the Our Power Campaign. A [national convening](#) of 33 member organizations took place in September 2012 in Detroit, during which campaign goals were defined and the first local and regional campaigns identified. A Steering Committee and [Leadership Body](#) were established to coordinate the campaign.

In 2013, the **Our Power** campaign was launched in three pilot *Hot Spots*: **Detroit, Michigan; Richmond, California; and Black Mesa, Arizona**. The campaign will expand to up to a dozen *Hot Spots* by the end of 2014 and continue growth in 2015. Background on pilot *Hot Spots*:

- **Detroit**¹ has some of the country's worst polluters (a coal plant, an oil refinery, a waste incinerator), several Superfund sites, one of the nation's highest rates of asthma among children, and a state-imposed Emergency Financial Manager amidst a bankruptcy crisis. At the same time, after deindustrialization, Detroiters have put their own labor to work fostering urban agriculture, reclaiming abandoned homes, creating a Zero Waste Coalition with neighborhood recycling programs, cultivating vibrant media & cultural works that are largely youth-led, and more.
- **Richmond**² is a city with high rates of unemployment and home foreclosures. It is also home to a 3,000-acre Chevron oil refinery. In addition to its strong grassroots environmental justice organizations, Richmond has a Green Party Mayor, progressive city council, and ample opportunities for climate jobs ranging from renewable energy, weatherization and retrofits. The City Council recently voted in favor of a plan to declare eminent domain on underwater mortgages to keep residents in their homes.
- In **Arizona**³, the Black Mesa Water Coalition has launched a campaign to permanently shut down the Peabody Coal Mine and Navajo Generating Station, which has for decades polluted Navajo and Hopi lands and depleted its ancient aquifer. Through strong community organizing, it succeeded in shutting down the Mojave Generating Station. The Black Mesa Water Coalition has a well-researched Just Transition plan to replace coal-fired power plants with renewable energy sources, uplift the traditional economy, and build community food security by revitalizing local food production.

¹ The East Michigan Environmental Action Coalition anchors the Detroit Climate Justice Alliance.

² Asian-Pacific Environmental Network and Communities for a Better Environment anchor the Richmond *Hot Spot*.

³ The Black Mesa Water Project anchors the Black Mesa *Hot Spot*.

In order to multiply the force being built at the local and statewide levels through the *Hot Spots*, we regularly convene frontline communities to align our visions, frames, and strategies. In June 2013, CJA launched the Our Power Campaign in conjunction with an action camp on the Navajo/Dine Reservation in Black Mesa, Arizona. Hosted by Black Mesa Water Coalition, participants spent 4 days sharing stories, exchanging lessons, strategizing, and taking action together. The camp brought together coal-impacted communities as well as others on the frontlines of extreme energy. While about half of participants came from Black Mesa, others came from frontline communities across the U.S. — from Alaska to Appalachia and from Los Angeles to upstate New York.

OUTCOMES & STRATEGIES

CJA's Long Term Goals:

1. **End the Era of Extreme Energy.** What we are calling “extreme energy” includes fossil fuels, nuclear power, waste and biomass incineration, landfill gas, mega-hydro, and agrofuels. Such energy is defined by the extreme risk it poses to human and ecosystem health, community resilience, economic equity, and climate stability. Creating transition pathways away from extreme energy would reduce carbon emissions in line with what science says is necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change while preserving healthy local ecosystems and communities. Mitigation and adaptation must be carried out in tandem, and aligned to address the root causes of the problem.
2. **Implement a Just Transition to Local Living Economies** in which 10 million unionized and family-supporting jobs are created for unemployed and underemployed people, and workers formerly employed by extreme energy industries. The goal is to build a national “climate jobs” program in 5-10 years. Our re-localized economies will be ecologically grounded, produce community wellbeing, democratize decision-making, and promote local control of resources (including land, water, and food systems).

A Just Transition to Linked Local Living Economies

In order to move away from the destructive and extractive economy that relies on fossil fuels and false promises such as ‘waste to energy’, we need to replace it with local living economies. This requires a just transition to clean community energy, regional food systems, zero waste, public transportation, efficient and affordable housing, and ecosystem restoration in a way that fosters democracy and equity:

- **Clean Community Energy** – Developing solar, wind and micro-hydro capacity on a decentralized grid would serve to double the number of jobs maintained by combustion-based utilities today. Community-scale distributed energy programs for both residential and local economy needs, similar to what is being introduced in California, would serve to both drastically increase efficiency, reduce emissions and lower energy cost.

- **Regional Food Systems** – Strengthening local organic food production based on small-scale multi-crop farming will drastically reduce carbon emissions from pesticide and chemical fertilizer use. It will also reduce transport emissions and industrial-scale technologies required by export-based production. Such local “food sovereignty” could also create millions of jobs in the farming sector.
- **Zero Waste** – Building comprehensive recycling and composting programs that end the use of incinerators and landfills and achieve a national recycling rate of 75% would create 1.5 million new jobs, while reducing GHG emissions equivalent to taking half the cars off U.S. roads (515 million metric tons – eMtCO₂). Cities like San Francisco have proven this can be done, creating thousands of local union jobs.
- **Public Transportation** – Building clean public transportation infrastructure that is adaptive to local, non-combustion energy sources, and making it accessible to everyone, will create millions of new manufacturing, operations and maintenance jobs to meet community transportation and travel priorities.
- **Efficient, Affordable, and Durable Housing** – Making homes and industries more energy efficient and long-lasting through better design and the highest end use of finite resources would create many more skilled local trades in building, construction, and community maintenance.
- **Ecosystem Restoration and Stewardship** – Has the aim of restoring healthy natural, agricultural and aquatic ecosystems while developing the knowledge base needed to survive within local resource limits. Programs that employ millions to restore a century of environmental degradation will serve to rebuild the diminished carbon storage capacity of the earth, while saving trillions of dollars in future adaptation funding.

Our goal is to create and amplify living examples of how such pathways can put people to work transforming their communities, while reducing both cost and pollution burden for present and future generations. Using existing and new data, CJA research allies⁴ will provide an assessment of the potential jobs created and pollution reduced by transforming each of these economic sectors.

Building Community Resilience

Fostering a just transition will also build stronger, more equitable, more resilient communities and local economic infrastructure through:

- **Grassroots Economies** – The best way to ensure that local economies are built in the best interests of local communities is to create structures that workers and

⁴ The CJA Research Working Group is chaired by the Institute for Policy Studies Sustainable Energy and Economy Network. Members include Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, Center for Social Inclusion, Labor Network for Sustainability, Cornell Global Labor Institute, Global Justice Ecology Project, and Center for Earth Energy & Democracy. Movement Strategy Center is supporting documentation work.

local communities collectively control, and make democratic decisions on how to run them. From land trusts to cooperative grocery stores, to farmworkers transitioning from industrial agriculture to ecological farming on their own collective lands, to community-run recycling cooperatives, cooperatives and commons provide important models to meet community needs and strengthen community governance.

- **Rights to Land, Water, and Food Sovereignty** – A community's land, water, and food systems are among its most valuable natural resources. Collective access to and control over these resources can make a significant difference in developing regenerative local economies, based on principles of social and ecological justice. With a deepening climate crisis, community rights to land, water and food sovereignty are increasingly necessary to both adapt to climate impacts and mitigate the causes of climate change. From Indigenous Peoples' struggles to retain ancestral water rights, to the creation of local seed banks, to burgeoning urban and rural struggles for local land reform, winning resource rights is key to fostering a just transition.

Campaign Strategies

1. Fostering Just Transitions in 'Hot-Spot' Communities

The Our Power Campaign will be built out through targeted work in Our Power *Hot Spots* -- a racially and ethnically diverse mix of rural and urban communities on the frontlines of the extreme energy system driving climate change. Our Power *Hot Spots* will be anchored by grassroots organizations building local and regional, multi-sectoral coalitions that include labor, environmental, and other racial and economic justice groups. The *Hot Spots* will have strategies and tactics unique to their local context, but will implement a combination of leadership development, direct action, policy campaigns, electoral work, and strategic communications, around a unified just transition framework. Winning local and state policy that transfers investment to a Just Transition will provide the foundation for federal policy in the next 5-8 years.

→ 2014: Expand to up to 12 *Hot Spots*

2. Convene Our Power Gatherings

We will convene organizers and leaders from frontline communities who are fighting extreme energy projects to align our visions, frames, and strategies to foster a just transition away from extreme energy development. The character of each gathering will be defined by the local organizations, according to what is most useful to their just transition initiatives. Activities include story sharing, peer-exchange workshops, trainings, local actions, and strategy sessions.

→ 2014: Our Power Convenings in Detroit, MI and Richmond, CA.

3. Build out the national campaign – CJA is conducting strategic research to explore national strategy options for winning federal policy in the next 5-8 years. We will also build out our staffing and other infrastructure to carry out the campaign.

→ 2014: National Our Power Campaign Convergence. Expand staffing and campaign infrastructure.

4. Political Education & Leadership Development

CJA groups will carry out joint political education across the campaign membership to build community leadership around a shared analysis and framework for a Just Transition. This deep work with local leaders is a crucial step in amplifying their voice and power to expand the participation of communities of color in the *Our Power Hot Spots* as well as to change the climate debate at the national level.

→ 2014: Curriculum Development, Training for Trainers, Local Workshops and Community Assemblies.

5. Strategic Communications

In partnership with Center for Story-based Strategy, CJA will develop our communications systems and infrastructure in order to build *Our Power* to influence the climate debate.

→ 2014: Coordinated Narrative Strategy, Training of Member Organizations, Developing Spokespeople, and Targeted Media Work.

6. Research and Documentation

In partnership with research allies (see above), CJA will carry out research that supports the Just Transition campaigns of the *Hot Spots* as well as the national campaign. We will also document the models developing in the *Hot Spots*.

→ 2014: Report on Emissions Reductions and Jobs Created through Just Transition, Document of *Hot Spot* Strategies.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY & ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL FUNDERS

CJA is seeking partnerships with philanthropic institutions with a commitment to our shared vision: transforming the crises of economy, ecology, and democracy by fostering a just transition. Support is requested for the national campaign as well as the grassroots organizations building out the *Hot Spots* and developing critical leadership in communities of color. Funding can be designated for specific projects—such as research, communications, training, political education, and convenings—as well as general support. A projected budget for 2014 is attached.