

Stimulating Environmental Justice:

How the States Can Use Federal Recovery Funds to Build a Just and Sustainable Economy

Note: This statement has been authored by a small working group¹ of community-based environmental justice leaders. We intend for this document to be used by the environmental justice movement and our supporters to influence the disbursement of unprecedented federal recovery funds in our respective states. This working group will also release a more detailed report on environmental justice and the green economy in May 2009. Please direct any comments or questions to Penn Loh at penn@ace-ej.org.

PLEASE SIGN ON TO THIS STATEMENT. To endorse this statement, please send an email to penn@ace-ej.org with your name, title, and affiliation, and whether you are endorsing as an individual or organization. This statement and a list of endorsers are also available at <http://ejstimulus.wordpress.com>.

Our Vision and Talking Points for a Just and Sustainable New Economy

Since the 1980s, the environmental justice movement has been at the forefront of crafting sustainable solutions to local and global environmental and economic challenges. Although we were often perceived as an oppositional movement, community-based environmental justice groups have been pursuing a vision of community self-determination, green economic alternatives, sustainable use and replenishment of natural resources, and harmony with Mother Earth.

We are now on the cusp of a great transition, as profound as that of the Industrial Revolution. Whether we emerge as a sustainable and healthy new world or fall into ecological collapse depends on the choices we make in this moment. President Obama has set a new tone for our democracy, based on making the right choices for our children and generations to come.

- **The unprecedented American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (“Stimulus” or ARRA) is a unique opportunity to promote change on a scale that has not been seen since the New Deal.** How we spend \$787 billion of our Federal funds may be the start of the greatest legacy our generation leaves to the future.
- **Stimulus spending decisions at the state and local level should be guided by and accountable to all communities,** particularly those that historically have been most impacted by environmental degradation, and especially those that have been marginalized in policy discussions.
- **If we are to avert calamitous climate change, we know we cannot continue “business as usual.”** We must end our addiction to nonrenewable fossil fuels and learn how to live in harmony with the natural systems that we depend on. This transformation will require deep restructuring, not just the adoption of green lifestyles by those who can afford it. It will require systems that do not depend on the exploitation of nature and people. It will require a shift from a throw-away consumer culture, in which certain peoples and lands are seen as expendable. It will require new ways of defining wealth and the American Dream that de-link our well-being from over-consumption of Earth’s resources.

¹ Working Group Members: Bill Gallegos (Communities for a Better Environment, Los Angeles), Denise Perry (Power U, Miami), Kalila Barnett and Penn Loh (Alternatives for Community & Environment, Roxbury Massachusetts), Diane Takvorian (Environmental Health Coalition, San Diego), Burt Lauderdale (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth), Peggy Shepard and Cecil Corbin-Mark (West Harlem Environmental Action), Donele Wilkins (Detroitters Working for Environmental Justice), Roger Kim (Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Oakland).

- **Stimulus funds must represent long term investments in the flourishing of our communities**, and in the productive future and life opportunities of many generations to come. Stimulus funds must incentivize the nation in minimizing consumption and reliance on fossil fuels, which are key sources of pollution and illness in communities of color and low income communities.
- **This great transition towards sustainability will be the ultimate test of our democracy.** These decisions will affect us all profoundly and reshape our relationship to Mother Earth and to one another. It will require all of us to raise our voices and participate fully to decide how we will move together into a new era.
- **Sustainability is fundamentally a matter of justice.** These decisions will determine who will have opportunities now and in future generations to access, share, and control new green wealth. Poor and marginalized communities need to benefit equally from Stimulus legislation.
- **Equitable sharing of this new “green wealth” must be part of any definition of sustainability.** A transition in which the majority of the world’s people remain in poverty and lack basic human needs is not stable, secure, or, in the long run, sustainable. As long as the costs of environmental degradation (so-called “externalities”) remain hidden and fall disproportionately on historically marginalized communities, existing profit models will allow for the continuance of “business as usual.”
- **As the “canaries in the coal mine” coming from “fence-line” communities, environmental justice communities have tremendous experience fighting unfair burdens and shaping sustainable and just alternatives.** Our grassroots struggles have been blazing the way towards a more sustainable, democratic, and just society. *We encourage our state and local governments to call on our expertise and use our local and regional work as valuable models on how to build a 21st century sustainable infrastructure and an economy that benefits us all.*

Recommendations for State and Local Stimulus Spending

Each state will be making choices about how to spend the federal stimulus. We believe that there are three key principles that should guide the Stimulus towards building sustainability and democracy. Under each principle, we set forth recommendations for implementation.

a. Enable full, meaningful participation of all communities in spending decisions.

Environmental justice groups have modeled processes that enable our communities to “speak for ourselves” and engage in democratic self-determination. The participation of those that have historically been adversely affected by the current unsustainable economy is critical to ensuring effective long-term solutions.

- **Actively solicit input** of lower income communities and communities of color on how funds might stimulate the overall wealth, well-being, and life opportunities of their neighborhoods. Fund the monitoring and evaluation of the Stimulus impact on environmentally and economically distressed communities.
- **Tap community expertise.** While state processes for administering ARRA funds will differ, each state has access to established coalitions and service organizations that can help solicit community input. In states such as California, Massachusetts, and New York, statewide

coalitions already exist that can help state leaders host community input sessions expediently and effectively.

- **Invest in the timely enforcement of ARRA's accountability and transparency provisions.** While several accountability guidelines exist within the ARRA, the states will be responsible for establishing and maintaining the systems to collect and publicly report data. The following data, only some of which is mandated by ARRA, is vital to ensuring equity:
 - Race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender of those benefiting from the Stimulus, including those receiving jobs, training, and other funds.
 - Number of jobs created and/or supported and the wages/benefits of those jobs.
 - Environmental benefits and impacts, and the geographic areas most directly affected.
 - List of private, public, and nonprofit entities receiving funding, as well as their Boards, and their executive staff.
- **Pilot new evaluation tools and indicators** to measure the impact of Stimulus spending in terms of human well-being, community cohesion, and sustained ecological integrity. Such tools would measure the impact of Stimulus spending on meeting basic human needs and sustaining local ecologies. Examples of alternative indices include the Genuine Progress Indicator and Index of Sustainable Human Welfare.

b. Invest only in truly sustainable infrastructure and economic development.

Environmental justice groups have promoted many policies that have raised environmental and health standards for all and have ensured that new development is truly green. We must be vigilant to ensure that new public investment builds the infrastructure for a new era of sustainability and does not perpetuate "business as usual" whereby benefits are reserved for the privileged few.

- **Fund processes that ensure enforcement of environmental, labor, health, safety, and non-discrimination regulations** in all Stimulus projects across all governmental, industrial, and agricultural sectors. While the ARRA contains guidelines to this effect, the states have the responsibility for overseeing their enforcement.
- **Invest in energy efficient, green, and affordable housing** for low and moderate income residents and families.
- **Phase out old polluting power sources (fossil fuels and nuclear) and rebuild our energy infrastructure clean and green:**
 - Meet energy demands in the following priority: 1) energy efficiency; 2) demand reduction; 3) renewable energy and distributed generation. This means that energy efficiency projects, especially in low income communities, take priority over new power plants.
 - Retrofit our buildings and homes to save energy, with a focus on reducing costs to lower income residents and locally owned businesses.
 - Prioritize development of local renewable energy infrastructure over building new transmission lines.

- Phase out old polluting power plants. Replace them with clean, locally distributed generation resources.
- Refuse to approve new conventional power plants in already impacted communities.
- Require that 33% of energy come from renewable resources by 2020.
- **Provide assistance and incentives to local and state governments to reduce carbon use and other environmental impacts** (through weatherization and energy retrofits of publicly owned buildings and schools, water conservation, community education, green building policies, etc.).
- **Direct transportation funds to public transit and alternative transportation infrastructures** (sidewalks, bike lanes) and away from highways and roads.
- **Prioritize transit investment to economically distressed communities** to increase access to economic opportunities and maintain affordability of fares.
- **Ensure the maintenance and sustainability of existing transit infrastructures** before expanding new transit lines.
- **Fund infrastructure projects that are consistent** with equitable development, regional equity, and smart growth principles.

c. Create shared green wealth.

Environmental justice groups are pioneering community-driven models for green development that also build wealth, opportunities, and assets within our communities. A portion of Stimulus appropriations for any approved project should include sufficient funds to monitor and publicly report project spending, ensuring that marginalized communities are benefiting equitably.

- **Prioritize investment in chronically economically distressed communities.**
- **Invest in programs that build community involvement** in neighborhood stabilization and revitalization projects, including developing anti-displacement and community engagement policies and ensuring that these projects result in local benefits for current residents.
- **Invest in and promote wealth creation and entrepreneurship** programs in communities of color and low income communities.
- **Ensure job standards, worker health and safety, living wages, and local hiring** for all work generated by recovery funds.
- **Protect the rights of workers in the new green economy to organize through labor unions and workers coalitions.**
- **Target hiring for jobs generated by the Stimulus** towards the chronically unemployed and underemployed (especially our youth ages 18-24). Ensure that such jobs have growth potential.
- **Provide a just transition** for workers in the fossil fuel industry and others who will be displaced as the economy becomes sustainable. This transition includes job training and targeted hiring.
- **Establish education and job training programs** to increase access to green jobs and careers by those who have been chronically under and unemployed. Prioritize institutions that already

have effective programs for engaging and supporting our disadvantaged communities. Enable these programs to serve as placement sources for jobs created by Stimulus funding.

- **Fund primary and secondary education** to prepare children to access the full range of future job opportunities in the green economy, from research and development, to construction, sustainable community development, and manufacturing.
- **Ensure contracting opportunities** for local women and minority owned businesses and community non-profit and Tribal organizations. At the same time, increase access for these entities to capital and technical assistance.
- **Establish incentives and assistance** for non-profits, municipalities, cooperatives, and small businesses, including financial planning services and capacity grants, to develop green energy and infrastructure projects that are on par with those of private sector corporations.

Conclusion: The Stimulus is just the *first mile marker* along a new path of sustainability and justice. Whether we can stay on track and move forward depends on many of us coming together in new ways, and uniting around a vision that is as green as it is equitable.

Here are some resources and links that may be helpful.

Green For All and PolicyLink report:

“Bringing Home the Green Recovery: A User’s Guide” (PDF)

An excellent primer explaining key leverage points and strategies available to advocates. Includes outlines for the many budget categories, agencies, and goals provided for in the Stimulus plan.

State sites for administering the Stimulus package, from Recovery.gov:

<http://www.recovery.gov/?q=content/state-recovery-page>

This subpage to Recovery.gov, the key destination site for the White House on the Stimulus package, links to a growing list of states’ Stimulus administration sites.

Progressive States Network resource page:

“Implementing the Recovery Plan”

<http://www.progressivestates.org/stimulus>

A comprehensive list, by issue area, of resources for state legislators and advocates.

Apollo Alliance report:

“American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 – Opportunities for Cities and States” (PDF)

Memorandum identifying several steps for local advocates seeking to become involved in state-based Stimulus processes.

New York Times Interactive Map and article:

“Stimulus Spurs Road Projects, Big and Small”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/04/us/04states.html?pagewanted=2&hp>

Describes general approaches to state-based appropriations processes, with a sidebar describing various states’ transportation spending plans.

Interactive Map from Center for American Progress:

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/02/compromise_map.html

Presents estimated block grant distributions by state, calculated by the Center for American Progress.

White House Report on Jobs Created:

American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan: Job Impact by Congressional District (PDF)

Provides district by district numbers on jobs to be created as a result of the Stimulus Plan.

Article from Stateline.org:

“Governors to Track Stimulus Money”

<http://www.stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=375439>

Describes governors’ panels to administer Stimulus funds. Includes a sampling of how some governors are preparing for their Stimulus package, ie:

- Kansas Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius’ task force made up of state Cabinet officials and legislative leaders has already met to discuss potential projects.
- Maine Gov. John Baldacci (D) has launched a Web site to track how funds are being used.
- Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon (D) appointed 26 people to a new “economic stimulus coordination council.”
- Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle (D) is looking for ideas for projects on www.recovery.wisconsin.gov.

Progressive States Network Podcast:

<http://progressivestates.org/stimulus>

Informative podcast of national advocates’ summaries of the Stimulus package. Identifies key opportunities for advocates concerned with lower income and vulnerable communities.

Center for Social Inclusion Talking Points:

“Economic and Housing Recovery for Everyone: Racial Equity and Prosperity”

<http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/>

Talking points, statistics, and source citations focused on economic justice, housing, and foreclosure issues related to the Stimulus package.

Applied Research Center Resource List:

Resources Page on the National Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act (PDF)

Lists helpful documents from organizations such as Green For All, PolicyLink, and others, relevant to advocates interested in framing their work through racial justice approaches.