



Snapshots

Research Highlights from the Nonprofit Sector Research Fund

April, 2001
No. 16

Philanthropy and the Environmental Justice Movement

A Call to Build More Effective Partnerships

The environmental justice movement may be the most underfunded social movement in America, say researchers in a recent study supported by the Nonprofit Sector Research Fund. Study authors Daniel R. Faber and Deborah McCarthy both of Northeastern University, in Boston, MA, estimate that only two-tenths of one percent of all foundation grants are dedicated to the movement. This lack of support is unfortunate, the authors argue, since the environmental justice movement could play a critical role in building "a more broadly based, democratic, and effective ecology movement in the United States."

While traditional environmentalism tends to focus on single issues without addressing the social context of environmental problems, the environmental justice movement insists on addressing both. Organizations that work for environmental justice typically seek to give a voice to marginalized people who are facing social and ecological hardship. These organizations aim both to empower people most burdened by ecological destruction and to stop this destruction.

Faber and McCarthy say that the movement began in 1982, when North Carolina tried to dump 6,000 truckloads of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in a mostly African-American rural county. More than 500 people were jailed for protesting what they called environmental racism.

The movement has grown to include many community-based organizations as well as regional and national networks. For example, the Southwest Organizing Project (New Mexico) is a multi-racial, statewide grass-roots organization that addresses environmental contamination. The Farmworker Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (Florida) unites farmworker organizations to intervene in policy debates over regulation, sustainable agriculture, and occupational health and safety.

In their study, "Green of Another Color: Building Effective Partnerships Between Foundations and the Environmental Justice Movement," Faber and McCarthy document work currently being done by the environmental justice movement and argue that foundations should better support the movement.

For suggestions on how foundations can promote partnerships with the environmental justice movement, see the box on p. 2.

Linking Environmental Abuse, Economic Inequality, and Social Injustice

The environmental justice movement has achieved impressive results over the past twenty years, Faber and McCarthy say. "In low-income towns and communities of color throughout the country, hazardous

waste sites are now being cleaned up, brownfields are being redeveloped, incinerators are being shut down, parks and conservation areas are being established, local pollution threats are being eliminated, cleaner and more accessible means of public transportation are being adopted, and unique habitats and wild lands are being protected," the researchers say. "At the national level, the creation of the National Environmental Justice Advisory

*In This Issue:
Foundations and
Environmental
Justice.*

How Foundations Can Create Effective Partnerships with the Environmental Justice Movement

Promote Greater Foundation Support for the Environmental Justice Movement

- Increase funding for environmental justice organizations.
- Offer new support to local organizations, strategic regional networks, and national constituency-based networks engaged in community organizing around environmental justice issues.
- Use a variety of different funding strategies to ensure that adequate resources reach base-building groups:
 - Horizontally integrated funding strategies evenly disperse grants among key community organizations.
 - Vertically integrated funding strategies fund different kinds of organizations involved in research, legal and technical assistance, training, and policy advocacy.
 - Cluster funding strategies identify and fund organizations that share a common issue, location, constituency, industry focus, or links to other movements.
- Since some community-based environmental justice organizations are too small to have access to foundations, provide grants to intermediary organizations that can then re-grant funds to the organizations they know.

Adopt Exemplary Grantmaking Practices to Enhance Grantees' Capacity to Build Their Communities

- Provide general support grants to allow grantees greater flexibility in meeting organizational and community needs and to let grantees pursue a self-determined strategic vision.
- Adopt flexible criteria that honor the importance of base-building and community organizing (as well as advocacy, legal, and educational work) when selecting and evaluating grantees.
- Provide multi-year funding to environmental justice organizations to facilitate longer-term strategic planning and program implementation.

Promote Greater Diversity and More-Inclusive Practices Among Environmental Grantmakers

- Promote greater diversity on staff, board, and key committees within foundations and in grantee organizations.
- Court new grantees that serve diverse constituencies (like marginalized people of color and low-income communities).
- Recruit diverse populations for careers in philanthropy and the environmental movement.

Use Investing and Shareholder Action to Support Environmental Justice

- Use mission-related investing strategies to screen out investments that would otherwise support environmentally destructive and socially irresponsible business practices.
- Use mission-related shareholder action to promote social and environmental justice through company dialogue and the filing of shareholder resolutions.
- Promote greater diversity on staff, board, and key committees within foundations and in grantee organizations.
- Purchase supplies and services from socially and environmentally responsible organizations and businesses controlled by people of color, women, and other traditionally overlooked groups.

Adapted from "Green of Another Color: Building Effective Partnerships Between Foundations and the Environmental Justice Movement."

Council (NEJAC) and passage of Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, have significantly improved the performance of the EPA with regard to policy design, implementation, and enforcement at the Federal level."

Faber and McCarthy acknowledge the achievements of the traditional environmental movement: over the past 40 years, environmentalists have built a broad-based, powerful movement that has resulted in some important government policies for protecting human health and the environment. Yet the researchers call attention to the failure of the traditional environmental movement to make visible the connections among environmental abuse, poverty and economic inequality, racism, the lack of democracy, and the consolidation of corporate power.

This limited scope has resulted, the researchers argue, in poorly enforced, limited laws that seek to control pollution rather than prevent it; in environmental organizations built on a corporate model that inhibits broad-based citizen empowerment in favor of a dues-paying and petition-signing membership; and in a fragmented, single-issue environmentalism that cannot address fundamental social and institutional change.

The environmental justice movement, Faber and McCarthy suggest, offers enormous potential for re-inventing civic participation in environmentalism:

- bringing new constituencies into environmental activism, particularly oppressed peoples of color, the working poor, and others who bear the greatest ecological burdens
- deepening our understanding of ecological impacts, especially in relation to corporate power
- implementing new grassroots organizing and base-building strategies
- connecting grassroots environmental activism with national environmental organizations
- creating new pressure points for policy change
- building coalitions and coordinated strategies with other progressive social movements

- bringing more innovative and comprehensive approaches to environmental problem-solving

The environmental justice movement works toward a more just and ecologically sound society in which democracy and inclusiveness, social and economic justice, and sustainability and environmental protection all coexist, say the authors.

A Call for More Foundation Support of Environmental Justice

The researchers estimate that between 1996 and 1999, foundations provided only about \$42 million per year to the environmental justice movement. They note that a single traditional environmental organization, the National Wildlife Federation, had an income of \$82 million in 1998, about \$39 million more than all combined foundation grants to the environmental justice movement that year.

Faber and McCarthy also found that members of the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA) provided more than 80 percent of total foundation support for the movement between

1996 and 1999. Furthermore, just 12 foundations provided 20.5 percent of all foundation support for the movement during that time.

The researchers urge the foundation world to promote greater support for the movement, to adopt exemplary grantmaking practices in support of environmental justice, to promote inclusive practices among environmental grantmakers, and to use investing and shareholding actions to support the movement. (For more detailed suggestions, see "How Foundations Can Create Effective Partnerships" on p. 2.)

Readers may obtain "Green of Another Color: Building Effective Partnerships Between Foundations and the Environmental Justice Movement" by contacting The Aspen Institute's Publications Office at (410) 820-5338.

**"The potential of the environmental justice movement to grow and prosper is being constrained by the lack of philanthropic support."
Faber and McCarthy**



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

Nonprofit Sector Research Fund
The Aspen Institute
One Dupont Circle NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 736-5800
Fax: (202) 293-0525
E-mail: nsrf@aspeninstitute.org
Web site: www.nonprofitresearch.org

Snapshots Editor: Winnifred Levy
Text by Jean Grace, Associate, Spann
Publications Consulting, L.L.C., Pittsburgh, PA

The Nonprofit Sector Research Fund encourages readers to reprint information contained in Snapshots in their publications—please contact the Fund at (202) 736-5814 or email winnifred.levy@aspeninstitute.org for permission.

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE NONPROFIT SECTOR RESEARCH FUND

The Nonprofit Sector Research Fund awards research grants and organizes convenings to expand knowledge of the nonprofit sector and philanthropy, improve nonprofit practices, and inform public policy related to nonprofits.

Council

Virginia A. Hodgkinson, Co-Chair
Russy D. Sumariwalla, Co-Chair
Audrey R. Alvarado
Elizabeth T. Boris
Evelyn Brody
Peggy Clark
Stacey Daniels-Young
Pablo S. Eisenberg
Christopher J. Makins
Richard S. Steinberg
Julian Wolpert

Staff

Alan J. Abramson, Director
Cynthia H. Schuman, Associate Director
David Williams, Senior Program Coordinator
Winnifred Levy, Communications Manager
Scott Walsberger, Communications Coordinator
Rachel McCarthy, Program Assistant
Giulia Campanaro, Program Assistant
Delano Collins, Administrative Assistant

Funders

Carnegie Corporation of New York
The Ford Foundation
William Randolph Hearst Foundation
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
and others

Findings presented in this publication reflect the opinions of the researchers and not those of the Nonprofit Sector Research Fund, The Aspen Institute, or their funders.

Bulk Rate
Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 3
Queenstown, MD

The Aspen Institute
Nonprofit Sector Research Fund
One Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036