

# The Power to Win

**Black, Latiné, and Working Class Community  
Organizing on the Climate Crisis**



**March 2023**



**POPULAR  
DEMOCRACY  
IN ACTION**

# The Power to Win

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### Acknowledgements

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The Covanta Energy Incineration Plant in Doral, Florida. The banner says, “Clean Air Now” in Spanish.  
(Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)

# Introduction

After decades of warnings from scientists and activists, the climate crisis is no longer a prognosis of what is to come, it is the definitive reality of our world. In the last 50 years, global carbon emissions have risen by 90%, and this past April marked the highest recorded levels of CO2 in human history.<sup>1</sup> Our use of fossil fuels is costing us our lives. Each year, we are experiencing the rapidly increasing effects of this industry-caused crisis: intense droughts and heatwaves, stronger and more frequent hurricanes, increased flooding from rising seas, blazing wildfires, and more.

*“To better take care of the workers, they should send us home early when it is very hot. Contractors don’t want to lose money. When our farmworker ally Sebastian died last year, I felt how that could happen. When I worked in the summer I wanted to vomit and I was very dizzy because of the heat and we worked so many hours. We need stronger laws and rules to send us home and support us from being forced to work in the heat so no more farmworkers die.”*

—Dora, Member, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste



While corporations and the wealthy are responsible for the continued production of the carbon emissions that drive climate change, Black, Indigenous, Latiné, low-income communities, and the global south—the people who have the lowest carbon footprint—are the most impacted by the devastating impacts of the climate crisis.<sup>2</sup> Black people, in particular, are 75% more likely than white people to reside near incinerators, coal power stations, or in low-lying areas at risk of flooding.<sup>3</sup> Because of historic environmental racism, disinvestment, poor infrastructure, and lack of resources, these communities are far less equipped to prepare for and recover from climate disasters, placing them at far greater risk of the multitude of traumas that climate disasters unleash.

Accordingly, these communities are also on the frontlines of the very work needed to transform the crisis. As the largest network of grassroots organizations in the US, the Center for Popular

Democracy (CPD) and our 48 affiliates play a vital role in building the power necessary to tackle the climate crisis. CPD's affiliate organizations are based in the very Black, Latiné, and low-income communities that are most disproportionately

impacted by the climate crisis. For nearly a decade, the community organizations of the CPD network have fought for and won significant change at the federal, state, and local levels—all while being significantly under-resourced for this work.

The next few years are a critical chapter in human

history. It is not an overstatement to say that whether we transform the climate crisis over the coming years will determine whether vast numbers of people—indeed vast amounts of life on earth itself—will have a future. Grassroots community organizations in the US arguably play the most critical role—building the scaled multi-racial, multi-generational, multi-class movement that is necessary to deliver the interventions that will truly change the future we will all live in to.

***“The working class and marginalized are most vulnerable to climate change and solutions often fail to address these vulnerabilities; we need climate action that creates a society and economy that systemically cares for everybody, not just the wealthy.”***

—Michael Weiss, Vermont Environmental Justice Organizer, Rights & Democracy Project



Signs saying “Break Free from Fossil Fuels,” and “Keep It In the Ground” at Fight for our Future: Rally for Climate, Care, Jobs & Justice in Washington D.C. on April 23, 2022. (Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)



# Our Solution

**The fossil fuel industry has spent decades misleading the public and wielding unchecked power and influence over our democracy and global economic structures.**<sup>4</sup> In order to directly address the climate crisis, we must build an unstoppable movement to challenge this power. We must build the people power necessary to disrupt and end the era of fossil fuel influence and usher in a new era in which the climate crisis is addressed at scale.

**While marginalized communities have historically been left behind by the environmental movement, in the last decade there have been huge strides in ensuring that Black, Latiné, Indigenous, immigrant and poor/working class people are not only brought into the movement, but are centered—but there's still a long way to go.** This effort has been in large part led by CPD affiliates, allied partner organizations and networks that have been working to develop on the ground, community-led solutions, organizations that have been building resiliency and winning transformative policies for years.

**Organizing the climate crisis' most disproportionately impacted communities is the missing ingredient to build power required to address the climate crisis.** What is missing in the global effort to remedy the crisis is not technology, policy, or economics, although all of these still have a role to play. What is fundamentally missing is the political will to act. The question of transforming the climate crisis is fundamentally a question of people power. Building this power means organizing at scale in the communities most impacted by the crisis.

Key to understanding the climate crisis is understanding that racial capitalism is the cause of it. To address the climate crisis is really just to address a symptom of racial capitalism—an analysis that has profound repercussions for the vision, theory of change, and strategies which must guide our organizing. Because the system of racial capitalism is the cause of the climate crisis, the climate movement's greatest resource are the people who have been most disproportionately impacted by it. In order to meet the climate crisis and transform our society, **we must scale up grassroots organizing.**

Since 2014, CPD and our affiliates have worked to fill a gap in the climate justice movement by leading in national coalition spaces such as the Green New Deal Network, significantly expanding policy, technical assistance, and organizing support directly to grassroots organizing affiliates in key states across the country and providing opportunities for leadership development with affiliate members, staff and movement activists. From 2014–2016, CPD leveraged \$2.5 million into the field and seeded the first climate organizing among groups and coalitions in New York, Pennsylvania, and Florida—New York Communities for Change, Make the Road PA, One PA, CASA, the PA statewide climate table, and Florida Rising—**organizations that are now leading some of the strongest climate justice organizing in the country.** CPD played an important role in the People's Climate March, served as a founding coordinating member of the Green New Deal Network, and helped launch the Democracy Alliance's climate fund.





Take Action Minnesota is leading efforts at the intersection of worker and climate justice demanding Amazon commit to worker safety, pay raises, and paying their fair share in a just transition for Minnesota. On December 8th, 2022 they mobilized hundreds of workers and supporters outside of the Amazon Shakopee HQ. (Photography: Destiny Roberts of Raww Files Media)



**"What was special about this rally was introducing an additional line of corporate campaigning around the climate crisis," TakeAction Senior Climate Organizer Jesse Meisenhelter said.**

**"Amazon is in a moment where it's expanding across our state, and it's becoming a larger and larger decision maker—not just in what the quality of work looks like in Minnesota but also quality of life. And with that expansion comes responsibility to take meaningful action."**





# CPD Affiliate Network Campaign Highlights

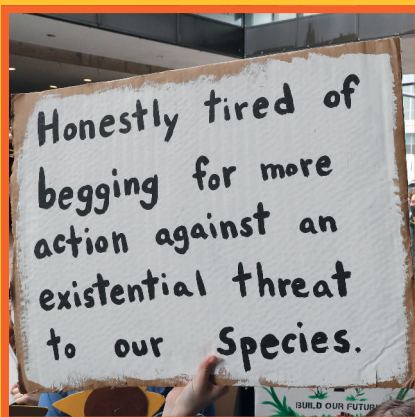
The highlights below represent just a small fraction of the impactful climate work happening across the network. A large and growing number of affiliates are joining the fight. Organizations are listed in alphabetical order.

## **Alaskans Take a Stand (AK)**

Alaskans Take a Stand organized a Save the Arctic + Defend the Sacred Rally and has engaged in deep community engagement around the impacts of climate on frontline communities in Alaska.

## **Center for Coalfield Justice (PA)**

CCJ continues monitoring the Tunnel Ridge Mine in western Washington County, working with residents one-on-one to make sure they know how to protect themselves against the hazards and environmental impacts of the mine.



## **CASA (VA)**

CASA VA member leaders won a member-powered campaign at the intersection of transit and climate justice winning LED street lights along Route 7, a notoriously dangerous and high risk corridor used by thousands of immigrant and working class residents in the area that had been the scene for numerous fatalities and injuries in the past few years.

## **CASA (MD)**

CASA MD member leaders won local legislation that requires new construction to use all-electric energy equipment. This bill makes Montgomery County, Maryland the first county in Maryland to pass such a measure and is a major step in efforts to achieve carbon neutrality in the county by 2035. CASA is now working with the city council to introduce a permanent rent stabilization bill to ensure that costs do not get handed down to low-income and immigrant communities.

## **Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina (MN)**

COPAL, with allies, are advancing legislation to add significant protections from air pollution for low income and BIPOC communities. Their overall goal is to shift power from polluting corporations to our communities, and build a powerful environmental justice movement across Minnesota.



### **Maine People's Alliance (ME)**

MPA won LD 1656 which ensures that all affordable housing has great energy efficiency standards in the state of Maine.

Educated and mobilized hundreds of Mainers around the importance of the climate investments in the President's Build Back Better package, and trained spokespeople (especially youth) to talk about the urgency of federal climate action (see for example this and this).

Supported the campaign to replace Central Maine Power with a consumer-owned utility, by supporting the bill in the legislature and educating MPA members about the effort to collect thousands of signatures to qualify the issue for a ballot initiative (after a Governor's veto in spring 2021).

### **Make the Road Pennsylvania (PA)**

MRPA and allies won the Whole Homes Repair Act, a significant legislative victory that allocated \$125 million dollars for low-income homeowners or small landlords with affordable units to weatherize and repair their homes while keeping them affordable. Each homeowner can receive up to \$50,000 towards repairs.

### **Make the Road New Jersey (NJ)**

MRNJ built a community/labor/environmental justice alliance that stopped Amazon from building a secret massive air hub in the Newark Airport through direct action, public pressure and community organizing.

### **Make the Road Nevada (NV)**

MRNV identified the need to legalize street vendors in order to address the lack of worker protections they get while working outside. MRNV member State Senator Fabian Doñate agreed to introduce this legislation in the 2023 NV Legislative Session.

### **Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OH)**

OOC piloted a climate canvassing campaign in Reynoldsburg, OH, a predominantly Black community east of Columbus focused on getting out the vote with Black voters around local issues of flooding and lack of infrastructure in their community. OOC canvassers & volunteers had 1304 conversations with voters and knocked on 17,858 doors.



### **Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (OR)**

PCUN and allies campaigned and won, in May 2022, for Oregon OSHA to adopt the most progressive and protective heat and smoke standards in the country.

In August 2022, PCUN launched the Wildfire Preparation & Rapid Response Campaign.

Maine People's Alliance and allies led a ballot initiative to place a proposal replacing Central Maine Power with a consumer-owned utility on the 2023 referendum by taking action to collect thousands of signatures and grassroots education of the community after their Governor vetoed a similar proposal in spring 2021. (Photography: Beacon, Maine People's Alliance)

### **Rights & Democracy (NH)**

RAD NH leaders coordinated with allies in the NH Renew Coalition to launch a campaign to oppose the NH Utility Rate Hikes and to pressure the state to transition to sustainable and renewable energy. They hosted a state-wide town hall and have been working with members to build out a short and long-term strategy.

### **SPACeS in Action (DC)**

SPACeS member leaders led the development of a local Green New Deal Housing bill.

### **Rights & Democracy (VT)**

RAD VT leaders are Working with VT Department of Transportation & Department of Environmental Conservation in the development of equity toolkit for community engagement. They also launched a steering committee of frontline Environmental Justice communities to develop a VT EJ Network launching in 2023.

### **Step Up Louisiana (LA)**

We successfully organized a Community Schools Conference in partnership with the Louisiana Association of Educators, 100 Black Men of Baton Rouge, and Together Baton Rouge. We are developing a diverse coalition of stakeholders who can help advance our efforts to establishing holistic public education in Baton Rouge.

We were successful in hosting a community block party for Climate Justice and had community members tell their story on being impacted by environmental injustice. There were powerful moments in identifying the intersectionality of race and class in our member's stories that connected to the environmentally impacted areas of greater Baton Rouge.



A climate organizer hangs a sign saying "Climate Care Jobs Justice" on a door at the Chicago Climate Summit in April 2022. (Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)



# The Strategy

Since the era of industrialization our world has relied on fossil fuels – an extractive, deceptive, and violent industry responsible for vast suffering and whose very business model depends on the death and destruction of people and planet.<sup>5</sup> CPD and its affiliates envision and are creating a world where people—and not profits—are at the center; a world powered by unlimited renewable energy and communities of abundance and prosperity especially for those suffering at the intersection of multiple crises and a deep history of racialized disparity. We believe that achieving this world requires building incontestable people power, clear-eyed political analysis, and a strong strategic foundation that gives us a real path towards victory and not only a liveable earth, but a thriving one.

## Our affiliates emphasize three key principles for climate justice organizing.

Organizing must be:

- 1) community-led and focus on issues that have tangible impacts for Black, Indigenous, Latiné, and low-income people,
- 2) rooted in a framework that challenges racial capitalism, and
- 3) intersect with other issues impacting frontline communities.



Protesters hold banners at the Fight for our Future: Rally for Climate, Care, Jobs & Justice in Washington D.C. on April 23, 2022. (Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)

# Key Principle for Climate Justice Organizing #1

Organizing must be Black, Latiné, Indigenous, and low-income **community-led** and have tangible impacts for these communities. Campaigns led by grassroots leaders (a) ensure that the needs of those most impacted shape the demands; (b) elevate voices that have historically been ignored by the climate and environmental movements; and (c) build power in the very communities most required to tackle the ongoing systemic reform needed to address the climate crisis and win climate justice.



Among organizations within the CPD network, **New York Communities for Change (NYCC)** has one of the longest running and most successful climate justice programs. Their winning strategy provides material help to their community members, especially on the issues that matter most to them: housing and jobs. Working in broad-based coalitions—with other community-based organizations and also mainstream environmental organizations—is also an important strategy. NYCC argues that working in coalitions allows them to move significant people power, which is powerful leverage for moving elected officials.

For example, NYCC led a coalition effort that successfully won a law in New York City mandating energy efficiency in the City's largest buildings (of over 25,000 square feet, which are only 2% of the properties but emit about 30% of the City's carbon emissions). Passed in 2019, Local Law 97 will reduce emissions from covered buildings by 80% by 2050 in the largest city in the US.<sup>6</sup> NYCC will also work to ensure that the law will also create jobs that are not only green,<sup>7</sup> but also good, unionized construction jobs as buildings get retrofitted to meet the new standards.

*"Funders should know that we need to base-build. That's how things get done. We need more members, and we need to keep the members happy, which means we need to act on their behalf on many things [bread and butter issues that have a material impact on their lives]."*

—Jose Gonzalez, Climate Campaigner, New York Communities for Change

## Key Principle for Climate Justice Organizing #2

**Climate change is a symptom of racial capitalism.** Corporate greed remains unchecked, as fossil fuel corporations hurt workers, dodge taxes, and seek profit at the expense of life on earth itself.<sup>8</sup> The climate crisis, and the conditions of those harmed by it, is a product of an inequitable economic and social system, and, therefore, campaigns must include an underlying framework that challenges the fossil fuel industry while creating green, good paying job infrastructure with worker protections and occupational health and safety.



**Make the Road Nevada** advocates for workers most exposed to climate change through their initiative, “Eros Project.” They offer support services for street vendors, many of whom are from working class and immigrant communities.<sup>9</sup> Street vendors are constantly exposed to low air quality and extreme heat, and often have no shade. Many do not even have air conditioning at home. Some of the areas they work in, known as “heat islands,”<sup>10</sup> are 15 to 20 degrees hotter than other areas. MRNV assembled care packages that included solar shirts, beverages, sunscreen, sunglasses and other items to help prevent vendors from experiencing health issues, such as heat sickness.<sup>11</sup>

As an important step towards protecting these vulnerable workers, MRNV is currently working to pass a bill to lower the barriers for street vendors to receive vending licenses. Claiming they are unlicensed, local authorities and agencies constantly harass these vendors, and destroy their products and treat them inhumanely. MRNV is gathering testimonials from vendors and working with allies to pass state legislation that would help lower permit costs and provide a clear path for vendors to get licenses. They hope to learn best practices from other organizations that have successfully passed legislation in New York and California that provides a path to legalization for vendors, with strong language that protects them from the effects of climate change.

***“Street vendors, most of whom are people of color and many of whom are undocumented, face unique risks to their health because of our poor air quality and rising temperatures. We have to take action now to ensure they receive the same protections as other workers so they can live the healthy, prosperous lives all Nevadans deserve.”***

—Jose Rivera, Environmental Justice Organizer, Make the Road Nevada





Workers Defense Project members and allies rally outside of the Department of Labor after filing claims with the Wage & Hour Division and OSHA regarding labor abuses at the Tesla Gigafactory in Austin, TX. (Photographer: Inner Carbajal, Workers Defense Project)



Over the past 20 years,  
**Workers Defense**

**Project (WDP)** has advocated for workers rights in Texas, which has some of the worst workers' rights and safety protections and outcomes in the US.<sup>12</sup>

WDP connects climate justice to worker justice as working people bear the brunt of climate change, often working in terrible weather conditions while rebuilding communities in the aftermath of dangerous storms.

As heat waves rise to record levels, they successfully passed local ordinances mandating rest breaks for construction workers in Austin and Dallas, defeated a state senate bill that would have rolled back local worker protections across the state,<sup>13</sup> and are now pushing for federal legislation to mandate rest breaks.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, WDP blew the whistle on how corporations such as Tesla have built their industries on the exploitation of workers.

***"At the end of the day, we know that corporations and the owners of projects have the power to ensure better standards on construction sites. [They're] all workers on the site, regardless of what contractor or subcontractor they work for."***

—Virginia Badillo, Workers Defense Project member leader & Workers Defense Project Action Fund board member

Despite Tesla claiming that its electric cars are a social good because they will speed up the transition to sustainable energy and zero-emissions,<sup>15</sup> the reality for workers building its Austin Gigafactory is very different. In 2022, WDP

filed complaints with the federal Department of Labor, alleging that workers faced wage theft and received falsified Occupational Safety and Health Administration certificates for safety training that would allow employees to recognize when other

workers were having heat stroke, how to use safety equipment, and what rights they had.<sup>16</sup> Workers described dangerous conditions, feeling forced to work with little safety equipment, live wiring, and no lights.<sup>17</sup> WDP's work emphasizes the need for a green future that recognizes the dignity and rights of workers. This organizing is key to help ensure that the climate solutions that are advanced do not simply treat the symptom to a problem without addressing the underlying root causes.

# Key Principle for Climate Justice Organizing #3

Climate justice is a **deeply intersectional issue**. Research has long shown that low-income communities and communities of color are the hardest hit by both the causes and impacts of climate change.<sup>18</sup> The CPD network's climate justice work not only addresses racial and economic justice but also housing, health, education, transportation and other infrastructure, immigration, reproductive and gender justices, and sovereignty and treaty rights for indigenous nations.



Organizing in Virginia, Georgia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the DC area, **CASA's** climate justice work centers deep member training and leadership development in Latiné communities, approaching climate justice not as a standalone issue but as part of housing, health, and job opportunities. For example, in Maryland, gas explosions have shaken communities in Montgomery County. CASA organizers successfully campaigned for county-level legislation that mandates all-electric infrastructure in new building constructions and redevelopments by 2026 that would cut fossil fuel emissions, reduce the risk of devastating fires and gas leaks, and

reduce the energy burden on Black and Latine communities.<sup>19</sup> In addition, in response to car accidents that seriously impacted a predominantly Latiné community in Fairfax County, Virginia, CASA supported the "Safe Streets" pilot campaign, which works toward transit equity and creating adequate street lighting, sidewalks, speed limits, and safer bus stops. Their efforts have led legislators to invest in climate-friendly public transportation to prevent accidents. CASA plans to scale up these successful local campaigns in other areas.

***"If we provide community members with enough information to take action on the issues, we will continue to win what we have been winning... What can we do as a community to get together to move forward and overcome challenges?"***

— Eduardo Zelaya, Director of Organizing, CASA



Protestors hold signs at a Transit Justice is Environmental Justice rally in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on April 23, 2022. (Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)





## The Center for Coalfield Justice (CCJ)

organizes rural, coalfield communities in Washington and Greene counties in southwestern Pennsylvania around four issues: coal, fracking/ petrochemical, economic justice, and democracy. These are poorly resourced communities with few good paying jobs outside of extractive industries and who are also suffering from environmental disasters and poisoning from coal mining and natural gas production. Companies like EQT are rarely held accountable, even after an alleged “frack-out” in southwestern Greene County left residents without clean drinking water for months.<sup>20</sup> In 2022, CCJ connected residents with independent water testing and provided water directly to households.<sup>21</sup>

While the state legislature is largely hostile to climate justice legislation, local townships and small governments can also make rules on coal, oil, and gas. CCJ helps impacted community members develop campaigns to reform local zoning processes. From 2019 to 2020, CCJ challenged a well pad that Cecil Township permitted near residences. A well pad is an area with equipment an oil or natural gas company uses for drilling or production of oil or natural gas. CCJ hosted public workshops and educated residents on what the Board of Supervisors had the power to do.<sup>22</sup> They empowered residents with the knowledge and tools to speak out against the well pad. While the township approved the well pad,<sup>23</sup> members realized that they could influence rule changes on a local level.

*“To fight the climate crisis, all the other issues that CPD affiliates work on are addressing [the crisis]. We’re not going to stop the climate crisis unless we stop racial capitalism through our housing work, our economic work, our education work ... as long as organizations are approaching their work as a systems level problem, we will get further.”*

— Veronica Coptis,  
Executive Director,  
Center for Coalfield  
Justice



The team at CCJ mobilized to help hundreds of residents in New Freeport, Greene County file complaints and test their water after a fracking pollution event occurred in the community. Due to an ongoing investigation and the fact that people were without water for days they organized a water drive in support of the residents. (Photography: Center for Coalfield Justice)



**Florida Rising** works with community organizations to address natural disasters compounded by corporate greed. Florida faces hurricanes that are increasing in power and frequency; in a six week period in 2022 alone, Hurricanes Ian and Nicole leveled many communities.<sup>24</sup> Rising sea levels exacerbate the crisis through increased storm surge and flooding.<sup>25</sup> To address the aftermath of hurricanes, Florida Rising established a successful resource hub for disaster response that trained “resilience captains” to quickly distribute supplies and mutual aid money to the community.

***“When there’s a call to action at [for example] a county commission meeting, we are able to move large amounts of people. In a lot of cases, Florida Rising serves as a convener of coalitions and can build critical mass and alignment around demands.”***

—Ivanna Gonzalez, Director of Campaigns, Florida Rising

Community members see their utility and insurance bills increase dramatically after natural disasters. Ivanna Gonzalez, Director of Campaigns at Florida Rising, leads campaigns to call out corporations that profit off people’s pain. Florida Rising’s work helped reporters expose Florida Power and Light (FPL) for rampant alleged corruption, including “bribery, fraud, fake candidate schemes and campaign-

finance violations.”<sup>26</sup> FPL is America’s largest electric utility,<sup>27</sup> and also one of the largest political spenders on campaign contributions and lobbying.<sup>28</sup> In 2022, Florida Rising won a campaign fighting a net metering bill that would have made solar power more expensive for homeowners in the state.<sup>29</sup> Records showed that Florida Power and Light authored the bill.<sup>30</sup> After a public outcry against the company, which was also fueled by unhappiness over the company’s dramatically high power bills, Governor Ron DeSantis vetoed the bill.<sup>31</sup>



Florida Rising member holds a sign saying “Stop Pollution” at the Justice On Every Block’s Earth Day Action on April 23, 2022. The back of her shirt states, “Doral Stinks.” (Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)



# About CPD and our Affiliates

**The CPD network** comprises 48 affiliated people's organizations across 200 cities and 33 states, plus Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.—the largest network of community-based grassroots organizations in the country. CPD's work is rooted in communities of color, working class communities, immigrant communities, and the LGBTQIA+ community. 70% of CPD affiliates are led by people of color and 70% are led by women. The CPD network works to understand the root causes of the challenges that we confront, build consensus around transformative solutions, and drive the scaled deep organizing required to achieve change.

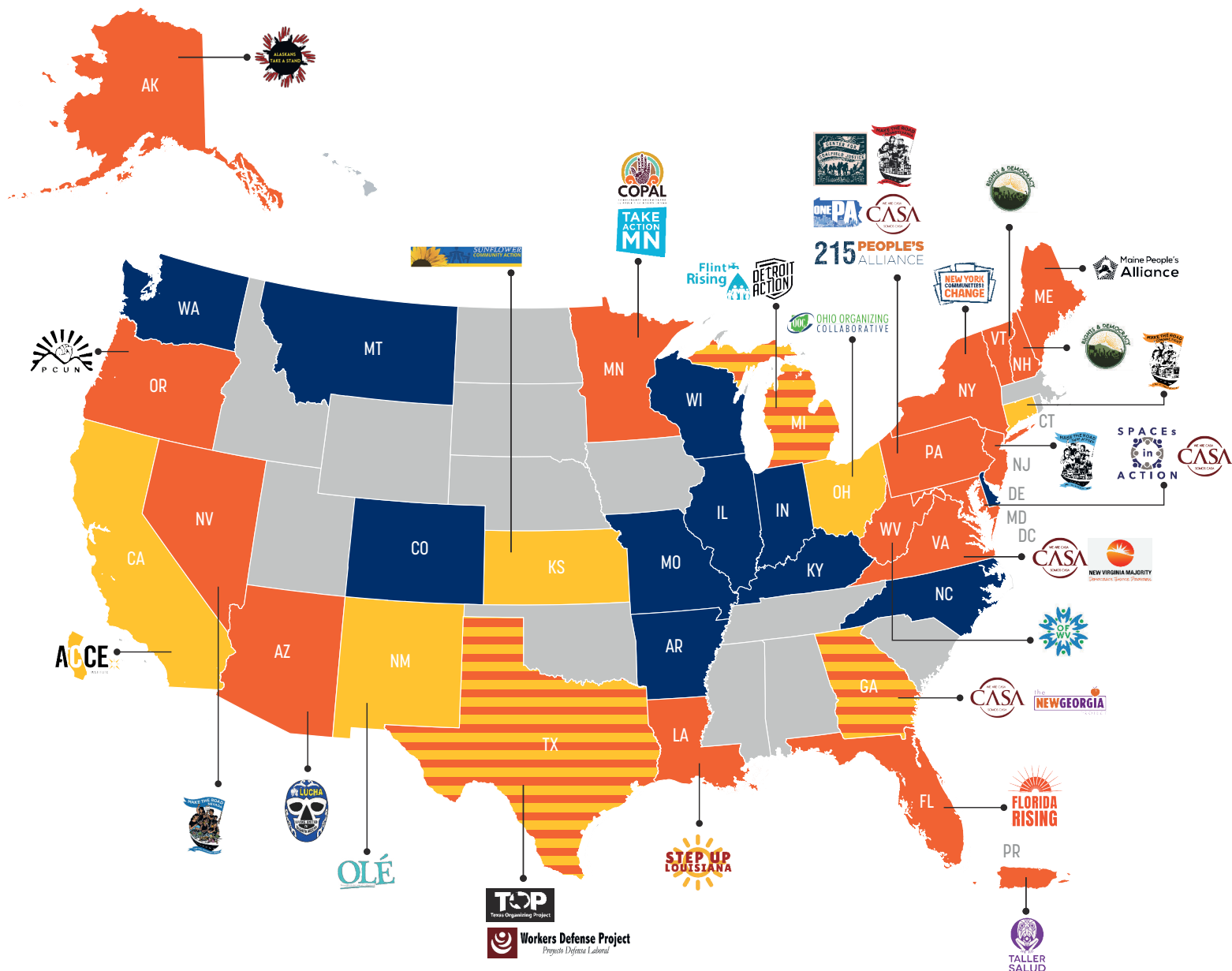
Among our affiliates, well over half are running active climate justice campaigns or actively planning climate organizing. Other affiliates are eager to launch new climate justice campaigns and integrate them centrally to their work, but need the resources to do so. Our affiliates work on issues across the spectrum of the climate and environmental justice movements—the fossil fuel extraction and production, worker justice and green jobs, response to extreme weather and climate disasters, transit, utilities, housing, and more. Many affiliates are also targeting bad corporate and financial backers of the fossil fuel industry.

Many affiliates, notably New York Communities for Change, Center for Coalfield Justice, CASA, and Florida Rising, have long-established climate justice programs with significant wins. For example, NYCC helped pass a local law, Intro. 2317. The first of its kind for a cold weather city, this landmark bill phases out the combustion of fossil fuels in new buildings and accelerates the construction of all-electric buildings.<sup>32</sup> Many affiliates, such as Workers Defense Project in Texas, are currently building climate justice programs. All see coalition work and collaboration as integral to their organizing models and many have spearheaded or are members of coalitions that have moved major victories. For example, Florida Rising is the regional convener for the Climate Justice Alliance, and a co-convenor of the Florida Green New Deal network table alongside Central Florida Jobs for Justice.

Members of CASA and Make the Road Pennsylvania hold signs advocating for the Whole Home Repairs Act. The bill successfully passed in 2022.  
(Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)



# CPD Network Climate Organizing



- Active climate justice campaigns
- Actively planning climate justice campaigns
- Additional states with CPD affiliates/potential climate justice work





In Washington, DC, **SPACES in Action (SIA)** takes a holistic approach to climate justice by connecting it with childcare, health, and economic justice and building a base of Black and Latiné leaders through storytelling.<sup>33</sup> Many community members find an onramp into climate organizing by recognizing the disparate health impacts that environmental racism causes for their children.

In 2022, with an eye towards the way climate justice impacts the health and wellbeing of the community, SIA and their partners helped to win local legislation that creates a perinatal mental health task force, which will study and produce policy recommendations to improve birth and pregnancy supports needed for people in DC, with an emphasis on Black, Latiné, and immigrant community members.<sup>34</sup> They worked with councilmembers to make sure the legislation is inclusive of different experiences, including suggesting that the task force be renamed from “maternal” to “perinatal” so that it will cover the periods both before and after birth as well as trans and nonbinary community members. They added additional at-risk categories, such as people in the foster care system, people on public assistance, and people in the juvenile justice system. SIA also helped ensure that impacted community members would be on the task force. The task force will publish a comprehensive report on perinatal mental health by Fall 2023. SIA continues to work on increasing access to quality affordable childcare and health care services for families impacted by environmental stressors, including health impacts caused by climate change.

*“How does your home environment impact your mental state? What kind of support do you have? What do you need to thrive?”*

—LaDon Love, Executive Director, SPACES in Action

Leaders of SPACES in Action hold signs that say “Babies say Build Back Better,” “#Worth Fighting For,” “Momnibus = Doulas. Healthy Births + Babies,” “Expand Medicaid: Vision, Hearing + Dental,” “Healthcare for All!” and “#Build Back Better.” (Photography: SPACES in Action)





Alaska is on the front lines of the climate crisis due to historic and ongoing colonialism and environmental racism. Indigenous communities in Alaska

are most likely to be affected by climate disasters.<sup>35</sup> **Alaskans Take a Stand (ATAS)**

works in coalition with indigenous communities and climate organizations to lay a path to shift away from fossil fuel, timber, and forestry

economies in Alaska to a “regenerative economy”: an economy that would use Alaska Native values and generational knowledge to create “long-term, meaningful jobs that sustain our communities, lands, waters, and high quality ways of life.”<sup>36</sup>

Food sovereignty and security that recognizes and honors Indigenous land management practices are a key strategy to building a regenerative economy.<sup>37</sup>

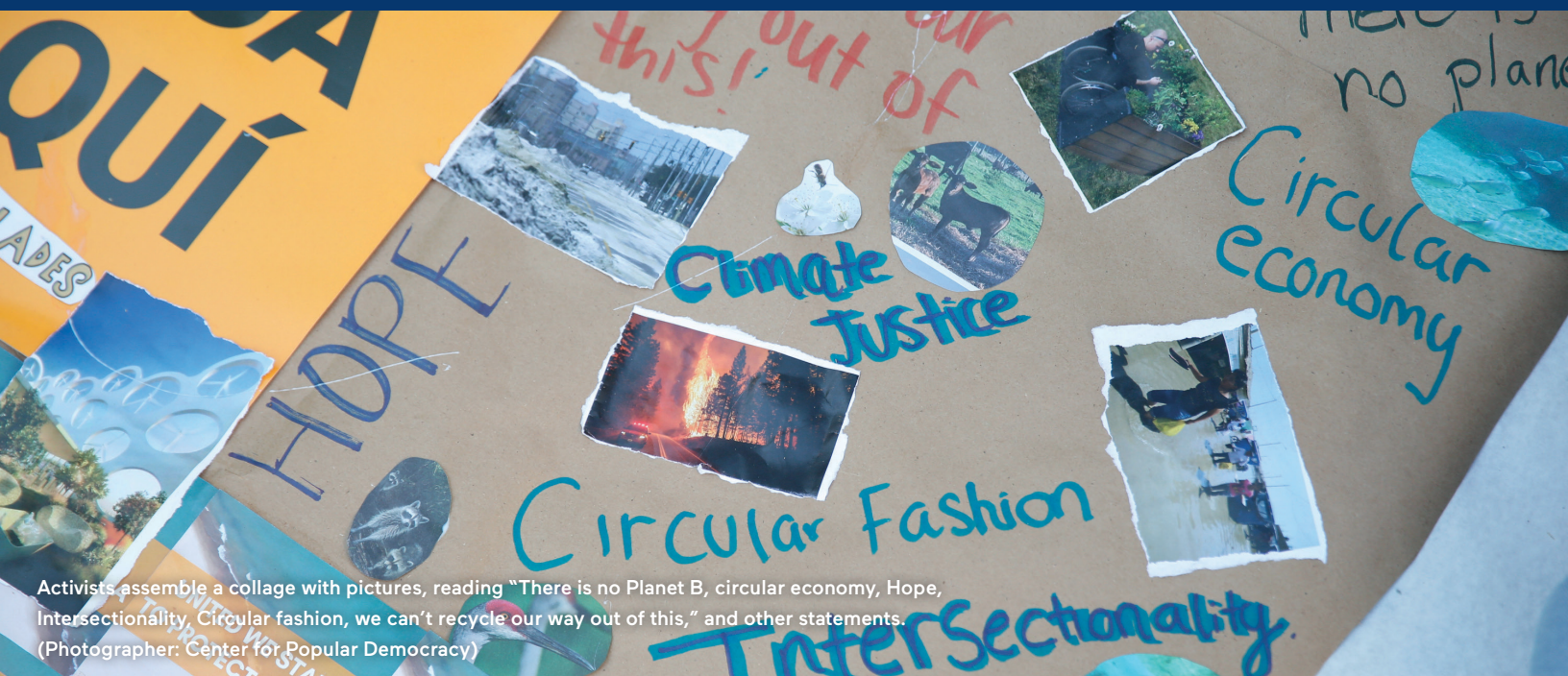
Currently, Alaska imports 95% of their food, rather than developing in-state food production.<sup>38</sup> Natural disasters or supply chain disruptions mean that

communities would be left with only three to five days worth of food.<sup>39</sup> ATAS works with coalition partners on Stickleback Farm in Anchorage<sup>40</sup> and Rebarcheck Farm in Palmer<sup>41</sup> to strengthen local food systems and educate others on traditional ecological

*“As we grow our own food and increase our own sustainability, that helps decouple from fossil fuel dependency... we grow the sweetest vegetables in the world. There is food distribution and land stewardship and management that have worked for years. [We ask] how do we create the best things possible?”*

— Meda DeWitt, Executive Director, Alaskans Take a Stand

knowledge. Together with their coalition partners, ATAS centers village corporations, village landholders, and other Native stakeholders with expertise in food distribution and land stewardship to regenerate Alaska and move from fossil fuel dependency.<sup>42</sup>



Activists assemble a collage with pictures, reading “There is no Planet B, circular economy, Hope, Intersectionality, Circular fashion, we can’t recycle our way out of this,” and other statements. (Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)



*“From a historical context, this work has been white-led for so long, and if we are trying to make a critical shift here and be intentional about Black and brown led organizing, that is something that should be cared for with great intention and there is a lot of space that has to be had for healing. Because you have people who have impacted loved ones dying on them and literally watching loved ones wither away because of the impact of this. There is a lot of emotional labor on the people leading this work.”*

—Maria Harmon, Co-Director, Step Up Louisiana



Louisiana is threatened by historic and ongoing racial segregation and environmental racism while facing threatening storms.<sup>43</sup> Black communities in Louisiana have experienced significant disruptions and environmental harms because of the fossil fuel industry and climate disasters for decades.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, for many in these communities, fossil fuel jobs are also the best jobs available.

**Step Up Louisiana** organizes within many of these communities in southeast Louisiana and emphasizes the need to bring in Black and Latiné people into the climate justice movement through intentional organizing that recognizes the complex realities their communities face (such as being economically reliant on the fossil fuel industry while that same industry is both killing the earth and their communities), meets the needs of those communities, addresses the specific histories and ongoing realities of White supremacy and systemic racism in Louisiana, and builds ladders of movement leadership within those communities.

In addition, for a number of years, Step Up Louisiana has worked on campaigns at the intersection of climate justice and education. In New Orleans, nearly 20 years ago, Hurricane Katrina both devastated the city and was used to largely dismantle the public school system and replace it with charter schools. The state also gives the fossil fuel industry enormous tax breaks, which is revenue that would have gone in part to the public school system. Step Up Louisiana is fighting to end these tax breaks. They are also fighting to pass resolutions through local school boards and institute a state-wide law to establish a sustainable community school model with a culturally relevant curriculum and a Green STEM Technology curriculum.

# What the CPD Network Needs in Order to Scale Our Movement

Today, in the US, there are already a stunning number of people ready to take bold action on the climate crisis. An estimated **150 million adults are already alarmed or concerned about the climate crisis**.<sup>45</sup> And, powerfully, this number is growing very rapidly—the number of people alarmed about the climate crisis, for example, nearly doubled in just the last five years according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication (YPCCC).<sup>46</sup>

- Of those alarmed, an estimated **42.6 million adults** definitely or probably would support an organization engaging in non-violent civil disobedience on the climate crisis—an enormous potential base of activists.<sup>47</sup>
- An estimated **8.5 million** people would definitely and another **15.4 million** people would probably personally engage in non-violent civil disobedience on the climate crisis if asked by someone they liked and respected.<sup>48</sup>

Very importantly (and unsurprisingly to CPD and affiliates), Black people, Latiné people, and millennial and younger adults are actually the most likely to both support organizations engaging on the climate crisis and to personally take bold action.

- **1 in 5 Black adults and 1 in 6 Latiné adults** definitely or probably would personally engage in non-violent civil disobedience on the climate crisis.<sup>49</sup>
- **1 in 5 millennial and younger adult Americans** aged 18–40 definitely or probably would personally engage in non-violent civil disobedience on the climate crisis and an overwhelming 81% of younger Americans aged 18–34 publicly accept and are worried about the climate crisis.<sup>50</sup>

Despite this enormous potential power, however, the vast majority of these people have never been engaged by the climate movement. Many, many people are very ready to act—they’ve just, astonishingly, never been asked to. According to a 2017 YPCCC survey, for example, while 77% of Spanish-language Latiné people are either alarmed or concerned about the climate crisis, **nearly 3 in 4 of those who are alarmed** (72%) have never been contacted by an organization working to address the crisis.<sup>52</sup>





Protestors hold signs at a Transit Justice is Environmental Justice rally in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on April 23, 2022.  
(Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)

Taken together, these numbers, viewed through the lens of Erica Chenoweth’s research that active and sustained engagement from **3.5% of the population** can produce mass change, provide the answer for transforming the climate crisis.<sup>51</sup> If we are to transform the climate crisis we must urgently organize at scale—and in particular, we must organize the people who are most disproportionately impacted by it.

Organizing is the very work that the CPD network does and these are the very constituencies that CPD and affiliates organize. Given the dire urgency of the climate crisis, the large-scale expansion of this climate organizing in the CPD network is vital and provides an unparalleled opportunity to build the powerful multiracial, multigenerational movement that is required to transform the crisis. This is about power and since ultimately, power is a game of numbers, base-building is at the center of the work of CPD and affiliates. In order to build an uncontested climate movement, the CPD network centers base-building in the crisis’ disproportionately impacted communities as our highest priority strategy and tactic—one that needs to be reflected in how funding to address the climate crisis is spent.

*“Many people we canvassed shared that they had no idea that the flooding they’ve experienced was connected to climate change, and also didn’t know they could get their elected officials to do anything about it.”*

—Amy Halsted, Co-director,  
Maine People’s Alliance



To bring this vision to life, critical gaps in resourcing for the CPD network must be met.

### For CPD affiliates, these include:

- Direct base-building capacities including scaled canvassing teams and the organizational management and operations capacities required to grow and support such work.
- Staff solely dedicated to work on climate including climate campaigners, organizers, trainers, and communications and digital staff. As multi-issue organizations, affiliates are often forced to double up the responsibilities of staff, yet the work of successful deep organizing requires dedicated staff that can anchor and drive success. Staffing up on roles dedicated to climate organizing is vital.
- Flexible support to fund campaigns that intersect with bread and butter issues of affiliate members and are not on face value 'climate-first' campaigns. We know and understand that for many everyday people talking about emissions reduction will not bring them into the movement as fast as talking to people about housing insecurity, immigration, health, worker justice, or transit issues.



Protestors march on Fifth Avenue during the March for Science NYC on April 23, 2022. (Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)



While the majority of funding for organizing work must support local on-the-ground efforts, national networks play an indispensable role. As a capacity builder, CPD works alongside affiliates to offer vital movement infrastructure to scale our collective organizing. Through rigorous and deep coaching and training with affiliates, we work collectively with the field, analyze and uplift trends, and then move with a clear mandate to meet the important political and social moments that we face as a movement. For CPD, critical resourcing gaps include:

- Resources to support innovative tactics to scale our base-building work, including online to offline organizing and scaled relational programs to expand the network's reach.
- Organizing coaches and trainers to provide dedicated climate Black, Latiné, and working class base-building support for affiliates, work that includes scaled organizer and member leader training and development, deep affiliate organizing program development support, cultivation of cross-affiliate learning and shared power-building spaces, the engagement and development of grassroots activists, and in-depth in-person regional organizing blitzes to train organizers and member leaders across affiliates and mobilize base for key campaign moments.
- Climate campaigners, research, and policy staffing to develop and support a wide variety of vital local, state, federal, and corporate campaign support for affiliates, supports that include strategic research, campaign planning and development, local and national coalition building, development of integral movement partnerships, and policy analysis and development.
- Communications, data, and digital staffing to drive strong cohesive communications strategies across the network and allies, advance programs to scale the development of grassroots spokespeople, access and utilize powerful data sets for grassroots organizing, significantly grow earned media, and execute comprehensive digital strategies to build base, expand story telling, and cultivate online communities of action.
- Peer learning spaces and national convenings of climate organizers and member leaders to develop and align on long-term climate power planning, build and move strategic shared campaigning, advance shared base-building, and skill sharing across organizing groups.

# Conclusion

The window is rapidly closing on whether we will be able to avoid the most apocalyptic outcomes of the climate crisis—and so, CPD and affiliates have an ever more crucial role to play. Since 2014, CPD and affiliates have served as an anchor in the climate movement, moving activists, leaders, organizers, and everyday people into powerful organizing campaigns that have won concrete climate gains and are achieving long-term change. It is time to bring that work to the next level.

To win, we must:

- **Organize and build people power.** We strengthen climate justice organizing by scaling support for base-building and popular education that drives community awareness and builds engagement. Funding to support scaled membership recruitment, trainings, grassroots leadership development, and mobilization are vital. CPD and affiliates recruit activists and move them into powerful campaigns and actions.
- **Use people power to engage civically and secure massive investments from government at all levels.** The CPD network facilitates multi-level coordination, cultivating aligned strategy and coordination across strategic geographies to build powerful campaigns that win climate victories on the local, state, and federal levels.
- **Hold the fossil fuel industry and their supporters accountable for their role in the crisis.** The CPD network pressures corporate targets to change their ways. We advocate for legislation that taxes corporations their fair share and makes them pay for damages they have caused. We work towards ending the fossil fuel industry and securing a just transition to a clean energy economy.

Through expanding organizing in the communities most impacted by the climate crisis, CPD and affiliates can propel the change that we all so desperately need. Transforming the climate crisis is about building power. People are ready to act. The organizing know-how exists. The only thing missing is the capacity to scale the work. The moment is here and the time is now.





Florida Rising leaders protest outside of the Covanta Energy Incineration Plant during the Justice On Every Block's Earth Day Action on April 23, 2022.  
(Photographer: Center for Popular Democracy)



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