

The Biden administration has a new strategy for getting federal funds to grassroots environmental groups



The Environmental Protection Agency named 11 “grantmakers” today, universities and nonprofit organizations that will be in charge of doling out \$600 million of federal funding to locally led environmental projects. It’s a new strategy aimed at making it easier for small grassroots groups – especially those burdened with the most pollution – to access funding.

Those groups will be able to apply for subgrants from the EPA’s grantmakers, who’ve been assigned to oversee funds for certain regions. The 11 grantmakers include some of the most prominent voices fighting a legacy of environmental racism and injustice in the US.

That includes the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA), made up of member organizations across the US – from Brooklyn’s oldest Latino community-based organization UPROSE to the

Environmental Transformation Movement of Flint, Michigan, to the Asian Pacific Environmental Network in California. For years, CJA has called on lawmakers and philanthropists, including the Bezos Earth Fund, to place more funding in the hands of community-based organizations representing the neighborhoods hit hardest by pollution and climate change.

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Texas Southern University, a historically Black university, is another notable grantmaker. It's home to the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice, founded by none other than the man often called the father of environmental justice: Robert Bullard. In 1990, he published a book called *Dumping in Dixie* about toxic waste sites located in Black communities across the US. The book traced the links between race, class, and environmental health.

Since then, there has been plenty of research showing how communities of color and low-income neighborhoods are disproportionately exposed to environmental risks. A 2019 study, for example, found that non-Hispanic white Americans have a "pollution advantage" in the US and live with roughly 17 percent less air pollution than they actually generate through their consumer habits. Black and Hispanic Americans, on the other hand, are exposed to about 60 percent more particulate pollution on average than is linked to their consumption.

"I want to personally thank the EPA and the Biden Harris administration for selecting Texas Southern University," Bullard said on an EPA press call. "We will see and oversee that these funds and these priorities will get the justice that's due in those communities that have a long history of somehow being left out when it comes to funding."

Vice President Kamala Harris said during the call with reporters that the grantmakers are expected to be able to review and approve grant applications faster than a federal agency can. "Not with all the bureaucracy, not in years, but in months. This means our investment will hit the streets more quickly," Harris said. "For a long time, we've heard from leaders in the environmental justice movement that a significant hurdle to funding their work is the federal grant-making process itself. Applications can take years to be approved, and in general, the process favors larger national organizations over smaller local organizations."

Each grantmaker will be able to design their own application process and will have between \$50 to \$100 million to give out in subgrants. The money could be awarded as early as next summer and can be used for clean-up projects, emergency preparedness, clean energy workforce development, health programs, and more. The grantmaking program was established in the Inflation Reduction Act, the US's biggest investment so far in climate action.

When *The Verge* asked how grantmakers were chosen, EPA administrator Michael Regan said in the press call that they each "demonstrated a very strong governance structure that creates accountability" and that the agency selected the 11 "knowing that they would be able to operationalize these resources in a way that the communities that need these resources the most would absolutely get them." The grantmakers will still be working with the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights to issue the subgrants.

CJA, for one, has not shied away from calling out the Biden administration for funding what it calls "false solutions." That includes billions of dollars funneled into new technologies to filter planet-heating carbon dioxide out of the air or capture the gas from smokestack emissions. CJA has favored investments in renewable energy that simultaneously fight climate change while eliminating other kinds of

pollution that come from oil, gas, and coal facilities. As a new grantmaker, it might be able to move the needle in that direction a bit more.

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/12/20/24008381/epa-grantmakers-harris-biden-administration-environmental-justice>