

# Climate Equity: From Crisis to Opportunity

## Building Power Through Partnership

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### Introduction

Even as scientists have long held a consensus on human-caused climate change, the responses of many governments and much of the private sector to accelerating climate change impacts and risks have been dangerously inadequate. A historically high-emitting wealthy country like the United States is especially culpable and a focal point for advocacy: Proposed U.S. emissions targets, let alone actual emissions reductions, fall well short of what is needed. Advocates and activists have increased concern about the climate crisis among a growing majority of Americans, yet translating that popular concern into federal—and even state—policy action has faced significant opposition from the fossil-fuel industry and others with financial incentives to maintain the status quo.

The 2017 hurricane season underscored the urgency of addressing climate change and its associated environmental, economic, and social crises. Southeast Texas faces as much as \$190 billion in damages, and Puerto Rico faces more than \$100 billion in damages from the hurricane season (an amount roughly equal to the island's entire annual Gross Domestic Product). But 2017 could very well be dwarfed by much larger impacts within the next several decades. At current rates of warming, for instance, hurricane damages in Miami-Dade County could reach \$3.5 trillion by 2050, and the Plains states are predicted to face a multi-decadal megadrought between now and 2050.<sup>1</sup>

Climate change fundamentally threatens our economy. Without aggressive action, health problems and other productivity decline caused by higher temperatures will reduce U.S. economic growth

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an estimated 36 percent by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> This does not even account for the accelerating costs of severe weather, rising sea levels, and other environmental impacts of climate change.

Although climate change affects us all, the impacts are not shared equally. For the poorest residents of the most vulnerable regions, climate change impacts—such as, severe weather damage, sea-level rise, and the effects of escalating heat such as draughts, wildfires, and concentrated “heat islands” concentrated in urban areas—exacerbate decades of over-exposure to fossil-fuel pollution from vehicles and power plants, and to other pollution or toxins from industry, waste management, aging water systems, and other sources. High rates of asthma, heart disease, and cancer are endemic in the most polluted communities, due largely to discriminatory policies and planning, with the effect—and often the intent—of ensuring that low-income communities of color bear much of the brunt of the fossil-fuel economy’s vast pollution and waste, while affluent white communities are generally spared. These pollution impacts compound socio-economic disadvantages borne of decades of public disinvestment, government-promoted segregation, inequitable economic development, and gentrification.

At least since Hurricane Katrina, severe weather in the South and elsewhere has put a spotlight on the regressive socio-economic distribution of climate change impacts. It has also shed light on how climate change and inequality are interconnected in the social structure of our economy, especially by race and class. These seemingly parallel crises mutually reinforce the oppression of people of color, as the most economically vulnerable communities suffer the most from climate change impacts on every level.

Yet the interconnectedness of climate change and inequality could also be the source of strength for popular resistance to this destructive status quo. If the social change sector can align climate and equity in terms of movement goals, public policy, and political strategy, we could create a new and wider path for rebuilding progressive power over the next decade. That power, in turn, can break the grip of corporate polluters and the long history of environmental racism at the center of climate change impacts today.

The conversations and relationship-building that will be necessary to achieve such a transformative result are already happening in many places, but there is much work to be done. In what follows, Dēmos outlines our approach to engaging across climate and equity issues and their respective fields. We hope this can be a useful starting point for the work of building partnerships, collaborations, and broader alignment in these critical times.

## Dēmos' Approach

Dēmos is known for developing policies and waging advocacy campaigns on racial and economic justice issues, as well as democracy issues, often in close collaboration with state and local partners. During the Obama years, as federal climate policy finally seemed to be getting real traction, Dēmos and others in the racial and economic justice field were increasingly hopeful that a new opportunity was emerging to forge a first-of-its-kind, politically potent alignment between climate and equity issues. This hope is what brought Dēmos into the work we are outlining here.

Dēmos recognizes that the climate crisis also presents an opportunity to address another major crisis in our society: rising inequality with deepening racial divides. The key to this opportunity is investment: Getting to zero emissions will require trillions of dollars in new investment to decarbonize key sectors of our economy, including the power sector, transportation, residential and commercial buildings, industry, and agriculture. The critical question for seizing the opportunity presented by climate change is *who will benefit from the new investment?*

Much is at stake from a standpoint of racial and economic justice. The fossil fuel economy has proven doubly harmful to low-income communities and especially communities of color. Environmental health impacts from extracting, producing, distributing, and combusting fossil fuels have disproportionately affected communities of color, with significant consequences for residents in terms of well-being, longevity, and economic opportunities. At the same time, the structure of fossil-fuel dependency has concentrated the economic benefits of energy generation and distribution in the hands of the few, and a whole battery of related discriminatory policies have made it virtually impossible for most people of color to reap fair benefits from the fossil-fuel driven economic growth that made America rich. While fossil-fuel companies have been able to buy greater access to politicians and other policymakers, the communities most impacted by the ills of fossil-fuel use have far less access to the halls of power.

In the long run, winning the climate change fight equitably means fundamentally remaking the rules of the system along at least 3 critical dimensions: regenerative energy infrastructure, inclusive democracy, and an equitable economy. Instead of an extractive energy system that's destroying the planet, we need policies, rules, and investment to fully develop a regenerative energy system, one that fuels the present equitably and sustainably while preserving a healthy environment for the

future. Instead of a plutocracy forged by money in politics and voter disenfranchisement, an inclusive democracy would equalize access to and influence on politicians and policymakers, so that the people most impacted by fossil-fuel emissions and climate events have equal footing with those who benefit from fossil-fuel pollution. An equitable economy not only protects the most affected communities from further harms, but also seeks to improve the living standards and well-being of those communities in ways that repair previous damage while creating new and better opportunities for the future.

## What is the Opportunity?

Existing research suggest that the most promising areas for achieving zero emissions are energy efficiency, renewable energy expansion, and vehicle electrification, including mass transit. Broadly defined, the combined energy, transportation, and efficiency service sectors comprise a valuable opportunity for new investment in our economy, for local economic growth, and for future job growth. For instance, researchers at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst estimate that if New York State fully committed to achieving its stated clean-energy standard of 50 percent renewable energy by 2030, the state's communities and residents would enjoy approximately \$31 billion in new investment annually between 2021 and 2030.<sup>3</sup> Expanding mass transit, according to one modelling experiment, is projected to increase economic growth in metropolitan areas by as much a \$1.8 billion annually, depending on the size of the area.<sup>4</sup> This does not even account for how public transit improvements offset the external public health costs of vehicular traffic, generating savings roughly equal to the cost of the improvements, according to one study of public transportation in Germany.<sup>5</sup> As for future jobs, by 2017 the energy efficiency sector alone supported 2.2 million jobs—10 times more jobs than oil/gas drilling and 30 times more than coal extraction. Such impressive job growth seems likely to continue, given that energy efficiency is in fact America's "largest energy resource," contributing more to our energy needs than any of our fossil-fuel sources.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the fundamental changes in energy, transportation, and other sectors needed to reach zero emissions in the country, in the Gulf South and other regions more exposed to extreme weather and other immediate climate change impacts, significant investments in equitable recovery and flood protection strategies are crucial for the most vulnerable communities, many of which are communities of

color. As Gulf Coast climate crisis survivors can attest, disparities in political power, particularly by race and income, consistently lead to unequal outcomes in the wake of environmental disasters. Advocates for the most vulnerable communities rightly insist that empowering these communities to engage effectively in the policy development and decision-making that typically determine recovery and adaptation strategies is essential for promoting equity. In the longer term, this empowerment can not only advance equitable recovery and adaptation to climate change, it can also intersect with and strengthen community strategies for inclusive economic development. Reforming zoning and land-use policies in ways that reduce, instead of reinforce, racial inequities in a region could be one such strategy. Another example could be using equitable flood-protection planning in hurricane-prone areas as an anchor for broader community resiliency strategies and infrastructure investment. Climate-vulnerable communities that are heavily dependent on fossil fuel-related jobs face the hardest challenge of all, requiring more comprehensive approaches that promote more sustainable and equitable models of economic development. The scale of such challenges should encourage, not deter, comprehensive action, or we run the risk of leaving millions of people in hundreds of communities even further behind in the battle against climate change.

The need for inclusive and equitable economic development in response to climate change is urgent, for two reasons. First, the chance to make this change is time-bound by accelerating climate risks. Second, getting to zero emissions would be a “general purpose” transformation in our economy, meaning that the combined clean economy investments will establish a fundamentally new foundation for the economy as a whole: an economy that is non-extractive, decarbonized, and sustainable within planetary boundaries as determined by science. The transformation we need, on the timeline we need, depends on rapid, large-scale, acceleration of clean energy investment, far beyond current investment levels.

As with other general purpose transformations, such as the information technology revolution, the federal highway system, or the national electrical power distribution system, the clean economy transition is a collective good and has to be driven primarily by new *public* investment. This contrasts with a market-centered model dependent on generating profits for owners, which would exclude too many people and places from access to the clean economy and thereby undermine emissions goals. Public investments of this kind do not go on forever but rather come in waves, as the larger political economy struggles to

reorganize itself in response to major social, technological, and, in this case, environmental challenges. This is why it is so urgent for equity advocates to get organized around climate policy wherever it is getting traction. When it comes to demanding the large-scale investments we need and determining where the money is invested and who benefits, officeholders in many states (and certainly nationally) will pay no real attention to equity unless we make them pay attention, whatever that may take.

### *Millions of New Jobs*

Getting to zero emissions economy-wide will create many new jobs, especially in high-population areas where emissions reductions should be a priority. The University of Massachusetts study cited above finds that the investments needed to put New York State on a pathway to zero emissions will support between 145,000 and 160,000 jobs each year over the first decade, while projected job losses in the state's fossil fuel-related industries are estimated to total about 13,400 overall. The new clean energy jobs in New York will pay on average between \$63,000 and \$114,000 per year.<sup>7</sup> A similar policy in Washington State is projected to support somewhere between 36,000 and 41,000 jobs annually over a decade (against job losses totaling about 5,400).<sup>8</sup> One study estimates that by 2030, implementing a suite of 9 energy-efficiency policies (led by residential retrofits) across the South will create approximately 520,000 jobs in the region.<sup>9</sup> Previous national research found that \$200 billion in annual clean energy investments will create 2.7 million net new jobs over a two-decade period.<sup>10</sup>

To seize the opportunities afforded us by the investments needed to reduce emissions and to protect against climate risks, Dēmos is enthusiastic about working with state-based partners to make the economic case for equitable climate policies. We recognize that policy approaches may vary from state to state, depending on regional and local factors. Job creation impacts, too, will vary by region. In all of this, we are primarily interested in exploring how policies and programs can target resources to ensure that people of color and other frontline communities will see a fair share of the economic benefits of the clean energy transition—both in terms of jobs and the quality of the infrastructure in their communities.

### *The Value of the Health Benefits Associated with Climate Policy Reform*

Many proponents of climate policy reform have appealed to a sense of inter-generational equity, but intra-generational equity is even more

urgent. Equitable climate policy must ensure immediate net benefits for people living in polluted communities. Other pollutants released during the burning of fossil fuels and chemical-intensive industrial activities (or co-pollutants), which generally affect local health more directly than greenhouse gas emissions, must be mitigated side-by-side with greenhouse gases. The opportunity to address climate change will be only partly realized without this dual approach.

These co-pollutants—particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, smog-causing nitrogen oxide, and other air toxins—have dramatic negative health impacts:

- The U.S. National Academy of Sciences has calculated that premature deaths attributed to co-pollutant emissions from fossil-fuel combustion impose a cost of \$120 billion/year in the United States.<sup>11</sup>
- A NextGen Climate study of Ohio and Pennsylvania found that in 2015 coal plant pollution alone caused 4,400 deaths and generated health care costs upward of \$38 billion.<sup>12</sup>
- A study of the health co-benefits of carbon emissions reductions in the European Union for the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency concluded that the improved health outcomes caused by a stringent climate policy would offset the policy's cost “even when the long-term benefits of avoided climate impacts are not taken into account.”<sup>13</sup>
- A meta-analysis of air quality co-benefits around the world every ton of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduced results in an average of \$49 in additional benefits, such as reduced health costs.<sup>14</sup>

On *efficiency* grounds, climate policy should seek to maximize social welfare benefits. Attending to opportunities for greater co-pollutant reductions would maximize a policy's potential health benefits—in terms of both health outcomes and health-care spending. In terms of *equity*, the policy should reduce disproportionate pollution in disadvantaged communities, which have been historically overburdened.

To illustrate the importance of taking differences in abatement benefits across emissions sources into consideration, consider the case of 2 facilities in California: a power plant located outside Bakersfield, and a petroleum refinery located in metropolitan Los Angeles. Each emits roughly 3 million tons per year (t/yr) of CO<sub>2</sub>. The power plant near Bakersfield emits about 50 t/yr of particulate matter and has fewer than 600 residents living in a 6-mile radius. The LA refinery emits about 350 t/yr of particulate matter and has about 800,000 residents living

within a 6-mile radius.<sup>15</sup> A policy that addresses co-pollutants would clearly provide many more health benefits and generate a significantly more equitable outcome.

## Dēmos' Theory of Climate Equity

In developing our climate equity research and campaigns for the coming 2 years, Dēmos is drawing upon the insights and learnings of partners and allies, the literature in the field, and our own policy experience, strategic orientation, and sense of mission. This has involved conducting landscape interviews with more than 30 leaders in the field, including environmental justice leaders. Dēmos staff have also participated regularly in the 100 Percent Network learning calls and in major activist forums for climate advocacy and climate equity, including the Building Equity and Alignment initiative and the New Economy Coalition. In addition, our deep involvement in the New York Renews coalition has afforded us a great example of cross-sectional collaboration and movement-building in an intensive live campaign.

In order to achieve climate equity, we need a people-led policy development process and political strategy. Who should lead, what solutions to fight for, where to fight, and how to win—these are the questions that Dēmos is considering as we determine our best contribution to the movement for climate equity as a national ally of frontline leadership. Yet we also recognize that it is no less important to be intentional about *how* we do our work. We believe that the “how” of the work flows together with everything else to make it possible for real, lasting change.

### *How Do We Do the Work?*

State and local politics, based on community organizing, is the critical battleground for winning progressive change on many issues, including at the national level. In this respect, we have developed extensive state-level experience that will inform our climate equity work. As a national group, we avoid top-down strategies and instead take an approach of supportive partnership in state and local fights. The template for this approach is Dēmos' *Inclusive Democracy Project* (IDP), which we launched in 2015 to support racial, economic, and gender justice organizations to play leadership roles in democracy reform efforts across

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the country. Representing communities that are deeply affected by the influence of money in politics and by voter suppression, Dēmos' IDP partners work to organize democracy-reform policy campaigns led by community members. The goals are to lift up people of color as critical agents in reforming our democracy and to wage grassroots fights for policy reforms that make our democracy more representative from a standpoint of racial, class, and gender equity. Currently, Dēmos has 24 partnerships in 12 regionally-diverse states (see Appendix A for the full list of our partners). The 2018 victory for public financing of elections in Washington, D.C.—won by a coalition led by people of color and supported by Dēmos in pivotal ways over 2 years—epitomizes the grassroots-empowerment approach of Dēmos' IDP work.

We support our partners in a variety of ways, including research and policy development, campaign support, litigation, peer-to-peer learning, and strategic communications. These are not transactional relationships on one issue or one campaign, but deeply-rooted and sustained relationships, spelled out in most cases by detailed memoranda of understanding. Dēmos also regrants or guides substantial resources to our partners, to enable them to participate effectively in building local and statewide movement infrastructure and campaigns.

Our climate equity partnerships will likely overlap with our IDP cohort in some geographies, while we will work to build new relationships in other places. Ideally, all of our climate equity partnerships will be forged in geographies and circumstances that promise significant opportunities for building new alignments and power at the intersection of climate and equity issues, even in some places where major political victories are out of reach in the near term.

Dēmos has been working in close, active partnership as a member of the New York Renews coalition, supporting in multiple ways its campaign for equitable statewide carbon pricing. We are also developing new partnerships in the very different political geographies of Texas and Florida, where we intend to invest in long-term relationships. Both of these climate-vulnerable states have massive potential for climate equity movement-building linked to strengthening the voting power of people of color and young people, and Dēmos is well-positioned to help our partners build new regional and statewide infrastructure for climate-action advocacy centered on racial justice and democratic empowerment.

To some extent, this movement-building can enhance the hurricane recovery and adaptation work that our partners in both states are already involved in. The key is to link and help empower grassroots, people of color-led organizations and constituencies by centering

climate goals in a larger fight for racial and economic justice. The core question, then, is how addressing climate change can empower communities and enable them to thrive. Thanks in part to our support, our partners can credibly answer that question by equipping the most impacted communities and previously excluded constituencies to lead and win on climate action. In addition to our current work in New York, Texas, and Florida, other potential geographies for engagement include the Northeast and the Midwest.

### *Who Should Lead*

Inequitable policies and investments in yesterday's technologies have long put communities of color directly in the line of impact. Transportation planning that disproportionately exposes low-income communities to heavy truck traffic drives up asthma and cardiovascular disease rates. Petrochemical corridors in the South and elsewhere produce exponentially higher cancer rates in nearby communities compared to national averages. Climate events uproot and displace communities already struggling with poverty and economic injustice. And fossil-fuel extraction and pipelines pollute Native lands and threaten Native livelihoods every day.<sup>16</sup>

Unsurprisingly, these communities have long led the fight on environmental and racial justice issues. Dēmos recognizes this historic and continuing legacy by advocating for a leadership approach that puts frontline communities at the center of climate policy development and advocacy. With these frontline communities in the lead, the process to achieve climate equity will model the outcomes we seek.

At the same time, winning on climate equity cannot depend only on the leadership of frontline communities. Victory will also depend on building wider and deeper connections between environmental justice groups, green, labor, and non-climate racial justice groups (with whom Dēmos is especially allied). The Building Equity and Alignment initiative and statewide coalitions like New York Renews and the Washington Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy are already modeling this approach. But much of the wider environmental sector lacks the intersectional movement infrastructure to engage a broad-based coalition fight on climate and equity alike.

### *What Solutions Should We Fight For*

Dēmos sees the ideal solutions to the climate crisis at the intersection of limiting fossil-fuel extraction and pollution to slow climate change

and reduce its impacts, *and* ramping up climate solutions that equitably distribute millions of good jobs of the future, stabilize our nation's long-term economic outlook, and stimulate equitable investments in the places that need investment the most.

We do not come to this effort promoting one-size-fits all policy solutions. Rather, our work is to support state and local leaders in developing their own platforms based on their own needs. Dēmos can be there to provide technical support on policy ideas, as well as research to build the case for the best ideas.

Our analysis also points to the necessity of structural reforms to our democracy, to provide substantial checks on the conversion of economic power into political influence. Reclaiming our democracy for all of us will be vital to winning climate equity solutions. This is why the significant untapped voting power of people of color in climate-vulnerable states like Texas and Florida is an important factor in Dēmos' climate equity work.

### *How to Win*

Dēmos has a unique range of competencies: coalition building, campaigning, policy development, policy and strategic research, legal strategies, and communications. As we work with our state and local partners, we look for opportunities to leverage these capacities in order to win. For our climate equity work, we expect to follow a similar model to our Inclusive Democracy Project, in which Dēmos demonstrates our commitment to creating deep relationships with state-based racial justice organizations in order to align around a strategic approach and build toward long-term goals. This approach has proven effective in our work with the New York Renews coalition.

Transitioning to a low-carbon economy means trillions of dollars in new investment and new savings from averted climate costs. In order to make the case for equitable climate action, we will prioritize the economic, health, and wealth benefits of targeting the most impacted communities. This puts us squarely on a positive footing in the fight to address climate change, which is important for developing the broader advocacy alignment we need to win the fight politically.

Most essential is the need to create real and sustainable power behind a common strategy for climate and equity goals. To build such power, the leadership, the decision-making, the narrative, and the resources all need to be rebalanced in support

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of grassroots empowerment led by those who are the most impacted by fossil-fuel pollution and climate change, especially people of color. Leveraging climate policy as a cross-sectoral issue presents an opportunity to build new political alignments that bring labor, environment, environmental justice, and racial justice partners together to alter the political landscape in ways that open opportunity for progressive movement-building and policy victories in the future.

## **How We Get to an Equitable Transition: Action into Policy in the States**

Wherever possible, policies that serve both emissions goals and equity goals should be favored over those that do not. When it comes to a tax on carbon emissions, for example, Dēmos supports a “revenue positive” approach emphasizing community investment. This contrasts with “revenue neutral” approaches that use carbon pricing revenue to pay for other tax cuts or for universal individual rebates. Most of the revenue should be used for community-centered investments that reduce emissions while creating jobs and improving health at the community level. This example should not be taken to suggest that Dēmos supports carbon pricing schemes (particularly cap-and-trade) uncritically; in most contexts we would only advocate for a tax on carbon emissions if equity-oriented state and local partners and allies have embraced the idea on their own. Environmental justice critiques of carbon pricing schemes, partly based on mounting empirical evidence of policy failures at multiple levels, are an essential counterweight to uncritical and untested assumptions about market-based mechanisms as a driver of lower emissions, let alone of equitable emissions reductions.

At the state level, there is significant regional variation in policy needs based on varying energy mixes and types of exposure to climate change. For example, while some coastal states have to deal with extreme and escalating Atlantic storm systems, others face more discrete climate challenges such as ocean acidification, which is threatening fisheries in New England and the Northwest. Many interior states may face severe weather and be threatened by drought and negative health impacts from extreme heat. Different states also have different starting points in their reliance on fossil fuels. States that are currently highly reliant on fossil fuels will, in some cases, be slower to adopt strong clean-energy standards compared to states like New York and Washington, which already enjoy a much smaller per capita fossil-fuel footprint.

Every state will need to have its own unique policy blueprint for how

it can contribute on climate change while also helping residents enjoy the benefits of a transition to clean energy and a low-emissions economy. Places already getting hit by massive climate impacts regularly, such as the Gulf Coast states, are likely to put more emphasis on hurricane recovery and climate change adaptation policies, while states less immediately exposed to the worst impacts, or that have lower emissions levels, may focus more on bold mitigation policies. Advocates and leaders in Plains states that rely heavily on fossil fuel extraction may focus on anti-extractive regulations as their first line of defense.

We do not attempt to propose a detailed policy outline in this short paper, but it may be useful to start the conversation with a basic breakdown of policy categories. More detailed explanations of some of the key policies in each of these categories can be found in Dēmos' two major 2018 policy books, *Everyone's Economy* (federal), and *Everyone's America* (states).<sup>17</sup>

- A. Keep it in the Ground:** Stop emissions at the beginning of the fossil-fuel cycle, before combustion and consumer end-uses.
- B. Accelerate an Equitable Clean Energy Transition:** Use regulation, pollution pricing, public investment, public incentives, litigation, and other strategies to rapidly and equitably transition to clean energy in the most significant emissions sectors. Regulate or otherwise effectively penalize co-pollutants alongside greenhouse gas emissions. Promote more democratic control and in some cases community ownership of the clean energy system.
- C. Recovery and Adaptation for the Most Vulnerable Communities:** Develop equity audits of relief spending and recovery and redevelopment policies. Reform existing policies and approaches to prioritize low-income communities for recovery assistance and future protections.

In all of these categories, policies should be developed from the “bottom up,” informed by and in some aspects led by community leaders in the most impacted communities. Community leadership, local knowledge, political transparency, and government accountability are some of the key procedural criteria for a just transition to a clean economy. Dēmos has considerable policy development capacity to support state and local partners in creating their own distinctive policy platforms.

We can also work with partners to produce research that helps them build a powerful case for the policies they are fighting for. Dēmos can focus on positive impacts like job creation, low-income energy savings, public health co-benefits, and community wealth-building. Estimating the social costs of inaction on climate change is important alongside the

positive story, but less salient for mobilizing action. Other research ideas include net-cost analyses of carbon tax proposals, where positive benefits are netted out of expected consumer costs, to provide a “true-cost” estimate of policy impacts. This type of analysis can help offset right-wing fear-mongering about economic “costs” of environmental policy. Energy efficiency audits to estimate untapped potential in the residential sector can help drive more resources in that direction.

## Conclusion

Dēmos’ approach to climate equity work is informed by our fundamental racial justice analysis, work in the economic justice and democratic empowerment landscape, and experience building deep partnerships with state-based organizations and national groups. Through our relationships, we have determined that our capacities to support intersectional movement-building across climate, economic justice, and democracy issues will complement the current field. We have found that our partners share our analysis: The urgent need to address climate change provides an opportunity to re-create our economy to be more inclusive as it becomes more innovative and responsible.

There are still challenges in getting people mobilized in support of climate action, even though a majority agree that human-made climate change is taking place. It remains too easy to despair in the face of the climate crisis: Climate events have certainly exacerbated racial inequality, and political inaction to date seems clearly tied to the economic influence of a fossil-fuel industry not afraid to donate big bucks to gain access to decision-makers.

So our animating question is: How can we help convert “climate change” into an issue that builds the power to ensure that climate action will be timely, equitable, and reparative? In particular, how can we help ensure that specific policies and programs will repair, nourish, and protect those communities that have borne the brunt of fossil-fuel pollution over time?

Connecting climate action to equity, jobs, health, and innovation is likely to be the best way to excite a majority of people to take action. But this doesn’t mean that winning on climate by centering the fight on equity is anything close to automatic. This is why Dēmos is committed to working with our partners and allies to ensure that the leadership of the climate equity movement be the people of color, young people, and frontline communities who are most impacted.

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Fighting climate change is important in its own right; however, availing our nation of the reparative opportunity for people of color and the country as a whole is righteous. The heavily extractive type of capitalism that took root in the United States was always unsustainable, and now it is threatening catastrophe in many forms. Because of racist policies and practices, people of color have borne the brunt of the extraction while enjoying few of the economic benefits. Climate equity is a big opportunity, in concert with other justice fights, to repair some of the damage and begin to set things right.

## Appendix A

States Represented	Partner Organizations
District of Columbia	Center for Working Families
Florida	Florida Rights Restoration Coalition National Domestic Workers Alliance New Florida Majority
Illinois	Reclaim Chicago
Maryland	Architects of Justice Maryland Working Families Party
Massachusetts	Community Labor United Massachusetts Community Action Network Neighbor 2 Neighbor Education Fund
Minnesota	Change Equals Opportunity Take Action Minnesota Voices for Racial Justice
Missouri	Missouri Jobs with Justice Organization for Black Struggle
New Jersey	New Jersey Working Families Party
New Mexico	OLÉ – Organizers in the Land of Enchantment SouthWest Organizing Project
New York	Community Voices Heard
Texas	Texas Organizing Project Education Fund (TOP) Workers Defense Project
Washington	SEIU6 Washington Community Action Network Washington Democracy Hub

## Endnotes

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- <sup>5</sup> Rafael Lalive, et. al., “Can Passenger Railways Curb Road-Traffic Externalities: Empirical Evidence,” VoxEU, March 15, 2013, <https://voxeu.org/article/can-passenger-railways-curb-road-traffic-externalities-empirical-evidence>.
- <sup>6</sup> Sheryl Carter, “Energy Efficiency: The Foundation of our Clean Energy Future,” Natural Resources Defense Council, May 30, 2017, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/energy-efficiency-foundation-our-clean-energy-future>.
- <sup>7</sup> Pollin, Clean Energy. It is important to estimate job creation on a “net” basis, accounting for job losses related to climate policies. Most states that embrace clean energy will be net winners on jobs, many by a very wide margin.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Pollin, et. al., A Green New Deal for Washington State, Political Economy Research Institute, December 2017. <https://www.peri.umass.edu/publication/item/1033-a-green-new-deal-for-washington-state>.
- <sup>9</sup> Marilyn A. Brown, et. al., Energy Efficiency in the South, Nicholas Institute, Duke University, April 12, 2010. <https://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/sites/default/files/publications/energy-efficiency-in-the-south-paper.pdf>.
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Pollin, et. al., Green Growth, Center for American Progress and Political Economy Research Institute, September 2014. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PERI.pdf>.



- <sup>11</sup> National Academy of Sciences, Hidden Costs of Energy: Unpriced Consequences of Energy Production and Use (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2009). <https://www.econ.umd.edu/sites/www.econ.umd.edu/files/pubs/Hidden%20Costs%20of%20Energy%20-%20Unpriced%20Consequences%20of%20Energy.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> NextGen Climate America, Our Air: The Health and Equity Impacts of Burning Coal and Natural Gas in Pennsylvania and Ohio, July 2016. <https://nextgenpolicy.org/blog/our-air/>.
- <sup>13</sup> M. Berke, et. al., “Sustainable Energy: Trade-Offs and Synergies Between Energy Security, Competitiveness, and Environment.” Technical report, Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (MNP), Bilthoven, 2006. <http://ruimteconferentie.nl/sites/default/files/cms/publicaties/500116001.pdf>.
- <sup>14</sup> G. F. Nemet, et. al., “Implications of Incorporating Air-Quality Co-Benefits into Climate Change Policymaking,” Environmental Research Letters, 5:1-9, 2010.
- <sup>15</sup> M. Pastor, et., al., “Risky Business: Cap-and-Trade, Public Health, and Environmental Justice,” in C. G. Boone and M. Fragkias, eds., Urbanization and Sustainability (Springer Netherlands: Dordrecht, 2013), 75–94.
- <sup>16</sup> As noted above, in parts of the South many communities rely, sometimes heavily, on fossil fuel-related jobs. The real and apparent tradeoffs between reducing pollution impacts and sustaining employment in these communities are undoubtedly challenging and should not be ignored. Ultimately, though, we also cannot ignore the fact that fossil-fuel dependent jobs and communities are not sustainable. This is where a strategy of harnessing climate policy as an engine for economic opportunity will meet its greatest test.
- <sup>17</sup> Available at <http://www.demos.org/publication/everyones-economy> and <http://www.demos.org/publication/everyones-america>.
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