

# The Environmental Justice Activist's Handbook

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# Executive Summary

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The bedrock of the environmental justice movement confronts and ultimately seeks to dismantle a stark reality: America’s most toxic, contaminated environments are predominantly home to disadvantaged people of color. This glaring systemic flaw, termed environmental racism, is one that environmental justice activists from marginalized communities of color have fought against for decades.<sup>1</sup>

That is why the Paul Douglas Institute, a student-run think tank committed to the idea that students can independently influence public policy, is dedicated to supporting the fight against environmental racism. Founded and based at the University of Chicago, we channel public policy interest on campus into solution-oriented research projects that allow students to make an impact on the legislative process. We have undertaken a project to examine a variety of case studies from across the country to identify five primary resources activists can use to advance their fight for justice. In our research, we have identified several underutilized topic areas that we believe are essential for furthering the cause of the Resilient Activist. Although not exhaustive, these areas encompass coalition building, leveraging representative offices, engaging with public hearing periods, accessing legal aid, and harnessing media coverage and attention.

Fighting for environmental justice is an uphill battle that requires a wide range of strategies and tactics from grassroots efforts to bureaucratically-initiated movements. This paper delves into the tactics that can be further implemented by the Resilient Activist as well as resources on how to send

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<sup>1</sup> Thejirika, Maudlyne. “What Is Environmental Racism?” *NRDC: Be a Force for the Future*, 24 May 2023, [www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism](http://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism).

compelling emails and how to craft a compelling advocacy story. We hope these resources can help the Resilient Activist in their fight for a cleaner, safer, and less toxic environment.

# Environmental Justice Background

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Environmental justice is a concept and movement that addresses and challenges the disproportionate burden of environmental pollution and degradation borne by disenfranchised communities, particularly indigenous peoples, Black and Latinx populations, and lower-income individuals. It is rooted in the fundamental belief that everyone, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or income, has the right to a clean and healthy environment, as well as equitable access to resources and meaningful involvement in the decision-making processes that shape the well-being of their communities. Unfortunately, this has rarely been the reality for people of color and those with low incomes, as environmental injustice is defined by recurring patterns of racism and systemic inequality that shape all aspects of American society from housing to education, to employment, and beyond.

For instance, affluent, predominantly white neighborhoods tend to benefit from greater investments in sound infrastructure, effective measures that hold polluters accountable or prevent them, and stricter enforcement of environmental regulations.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it is marginalized communities that routinely bear the brunt of decisions that force their neighborhoods to surrender to the construction of highways, storage of waste, concentration of industrial facilities, and exploitation or destruction of natural resources.<sup>3</sup> This puts vulnerable communities at a heightened risk of exposure to lead contamination, air pollution, hazardous waste, and extreme heat. In turn, these environmental exposures cause a range of harmful health outcomes, including cancer, asthma

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<sup>2</sup> Thejirika, Maudlyne. “What Is Environmental Racism?” *NRDC: Be a Force for the Future*, 24 May 2023, [www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism](http://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism).

<sup>3</sup> Newkirk II, Vann R. “Environmental Racism Is the New Jim Crow.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 5 June 2017, [www.theatlantic.com/video/index/529137/environmental-racism-is-the-new-jim-crow/](http://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/529137/environmental-racism-is-the-new-jim-crow/).

and other respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular disease, neurological disorders, and developmental disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

Low-income individuals and marginalized communities of color have long complained of being treated as dumping grounds by environmental polluters, but it wasn't until 1982, after a rural black community in Warren County, North Carolina mobilized against the siting of their neighborhood as a hazardous waste landfill, that these complaints began to garner national attention.<sup>5</sup> Despite their efforts, the waste site was eventually constructed anyway, but the Warren County protests and the gross neglect of the community's human rights sparked nationwide outrage and galvanized support for the cause across the country. This landmark incident is often considered the catalyst of the environmental justice movement in the United States. It prompted prominent civil rights leaders to join residents in marches and demonstrations, out of which emerged a study that found that 75 percent of hazardous waste sites in eight states were placed in low-income communities of color. The subsequent 1987 report, titled "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States" and coauthored by Chavis and Charles Lee for the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, revealed this pattern was widespread and consistent throughout the nation. Providing empirical evidence of the correlation between race, poverty, and the location of toxic waste facilities, the report marked a watershed moment in the origins of the environmental justice movement.<sup>6</sup>

The environmental justice movement in the United States is a multifaceted campaign that encompasses a host of diverse efforts, all united under the same aim that has propelled the

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<sup>4</sup> "Environmental Justice." *American Public Health Association*, <https://www.apha.org/Topics-and-Issues/Environmental-Health/Environmental-Justice>.

<sup>5</sup> Thejirika, Maudlyne. "What Is Environmental Racism?" *NRDC: Be a Force for the Future*, 24 May 2023, [www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism](http://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism).

<sup>6</sup> *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, Commission for Racial Justice, 1987, [www.nrc.gov/docs/ML1310/ML13109A339.pdf](http://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML1310/ML13109A339.pdf).

movement since its inception: rectifying the systemic inequalities that force historically exploited communities to suffer environmental burdens whilst simultaneously obstructed from accessing environmental benefits. These efforts can take the form of grassroots organizing, legal advocacy, policy reform, and community empowerment. Environmental justice activists also strive to address issues like access to clean air, water, and land, as well as the disproportionate impacts of climate change that often exacerbate existing environmental inequities so that all individuals can enjoy the right to live in healthy and sustainable environments. While progress has been made in raising awareness and securing policy victories since the 1980s, there has not been nearly enough change. There is still a desperate, ongoing need for collective action and advocacy to achieve environmental justice for all.

# The Importance of Crafting a Story

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To make the best use of the resources provided by this handbook, it is important to understand how to craft a compelling story to briefly, yet persuasively, share the main mission of the environmental justice movement. There are several important reasons to make sure that there is a cohesive story that one can rely upon, such as being a strong tool for advocacy work. When advocating, one will engage with all sorts of people from all walks of life. Due to the sheer volume of people who will likely be engaged in the process, quickly doing so is crucial. Advocating for environmental justice will necessitate sending a myriad of emails and letters with a relatively brief but compelling story and ask.

Here are some general tips:

- **Build in a call to action.** The call to action is a prompt or ask that encourages the reader to take action after reading the story. Having a call to action is important. Even if a story resonates with someone through the techniques above, there may be no way to translate their passion into action. Therefore, ensuring a strong call to action is important. And allow a venue by which readers can participate in advocacy. A call to action should be a short but firm ask at the end of the story. This can range from asking in an email for someone to sign a petition to asking a congressional representative for a face-to-face meeting. Furthermore, on digital platforms like social media, having calls to action can take the form of links. This form of a call to action can provide the opportunity to build coalitions (by linking to petitions) or disseminate information far more effectively by sharing the story amongst the



viewer's followers. Calls to action should never be long and will change dramatically depending on the audience. Thus, they must be rewritten every time the story is sent or used.

- **Implement Pathos, Logos, and Ethos.** There are three common strategies used when writing: Ethos, Logos, and Pthos. Each of these are important tools for crafting a compelling story.<sup>7</sup>

- Ethos is about utilizing the writer's credibility. As an activist, past experiences and work related to the issue advocated for lending authority to write the story.

Establishing this credibility can be done in a few ways. The first is using first-person pronouns, such as "we" or "us." By writing a story using these more personal pronouns, the audience will be better able to connect with the content and overall message. Deference, or signaling respect for other experts or activists in the field can also be useful. This can be done using descriptive words like "rigorously worked" or "decades of experience."

- Logos is the focus of the argument, which appeals to logical rationality. While this can include data, it can also include clear lines of reasoning through the story's argumentation. Signposting, like using "first" and "finally" can help organize arguments. Furthermore, the integration of conclusions and clear topic sentences is crucial for getting a message across.

- Pathos is likely the most important aspect of storytelling for advocacy. Pathos appeals to the reader through emotions. As the advocacy story is crafted, keeping in mind the desired emotions to elicit is important. Ask questions like "Does this story

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<sup>7</sup> "Pathos, Logos, and Ethos." *STLCC*, Saint Louis Community College, [stlcc.edu/student-support/academic-success-and-tutoring/writing-center/writing-resources/pathos-logos-and-ethos.aspx#:~:text=Pathos%2C%20or%20the%20appeal%20to,and%20stories%20that%20evoke%20emotion](https://stlcc.edu/student-support/academic-success-and-tutoring/writing-center/writing-resources/pathos-logos-and-ethos.aspx#:~:text=Pathos%2C%20or%20the%20appeal%20to,and%20stories%20that%20evoke%20emotion). Accessed 12 May 2024.

anger the audience into taking action” or “When someone reads this story, do they feel sympathy and a desire to help out” to gauge what is being accomplished by this storytelling. Furthermore, integrating the personal voice through stories that are grounded in one’s reality and experience, rather than discussing topics in generalities or depersonalizing lived events.

- **Outline the story and revise.**<sup>8</sup> Since the “story” of activism must be compelling to a wide audience, consult friends and family members to read the story and provide feedback. If only those within the movement edit the piece, there may be little means by which to figure out how the story is engaging other individuals. If, for example, someone feels bored or doesn’t understand why the story is being told, implementing more pathos into the account may be necessary. Or, if the story doesn’t flow, and claims do not seem backed by evidence, looking back at logos principles and rewriting the outline is crucial. While this story may be short (150 to 300 words), still adhering to general 3-act structures can be useful to draw the reader in. Beginning with an engaging hook, and finishing with the call to action will ensure readers are drawn into the story and actually take something out of it.

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<sup>8</sup> Varpio, Lara. “Using Rhetorical Appeals to Credibility, Logic, and Emotions to Increase Your Persuasiveness.” *Perspectives on Medical Education*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, June 2018, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6002292/#:~:text=He%20identified%20three%20appeals%20at,the%20meaning%20of%20their%20research](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6002292/#:~:text=He%20identified%20three%20appeals%20at,the%20meaning%20of%20their%20research).

# Coalition Building

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## Introduction

Building coalitions is crucial for environmental justice activists because it allows them to combine forces, amplify their messages, and work collaboratively with a variety of stakeholders, such as other environmental groups and donors. By uniting different stakeholders, they can mobilize a broader base of people and resources, which boosts their ability to push for fair and sustainable environmental policies. These coalitions serve as platforms for exchanging knowledge, strategies, and experiences, which enhances advocacy efforts and sparks innovative solutions to complex environmental issues. Furthermore, coalition building enables activists to tackle intersectional problems by earning support from other social justice groups that focus on how different communities disproportionately suffer from environmental crises. This section presents several strategies that the Resilient Activist can use to build and strengthen coalitions, thereby enhancing the impact of their organization. These include organizing campaigns and protests, maintaining consistent engagement with relevant communities, and partnering with research institutions.

## Discovered Useful Resources

These resources were compiled by researching the websites of prominent environmental justice organizations such as [the Climate Justice Alliance](#), which features their mission, programs, publications, and resources.<sup>9</sup> Online databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, or PubMed to search for academic articles, reports, and studies related to environmental justice issues were used as well. For example, the team drew on case studies like [the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance](#)

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<sup>9</sup> “Home Page.” *Climate Justice Alliance*, 24 Jan. 2024, [climatejusticealliance.org/](https://climatejusticealliance.org/).

[\(NYC-EJA\) Waterfront Justice Project](#) for this section.<sup>10</sup> Most importantly, as coalition building often makes use of social media such as Instagram and Facebook, browsing Instagram and Facebook pages of active environmental justice organizations such as [Greenpeace USA](#), where the majority of their publication efforts take place, was important.<sup>11</sup> In searching for relevant resources to the activism efforts of the Resilient Activist, PDI also recommends taking such a multi-pronged approach to learning the various resources different organizations employ to build coalitions.

### **Strategy 1: Campaigns and Protests**

Campaigns and protests are a useful way of gathering attention from local communities as well as donors with shared goals and interests. For example, the [Native People's Program in Alaska](#), through its Action and Advocacy Program carries out campaigns and organizes with communities on issues of environmental justice, climate justice, and gender justice,<sup>12</sup> which successfully built coalitions with indigenous groups and lobbied the local government. Another example is that [in the late 1970s](#), the North Carolina's government was deliberating where it could store 6,000 truckloads of soil laced with toxic polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs).<sup>13</sup> It decided on storing the polluted soil in the rural, low-income, and overwhelmingly Black, Warren County. This event quickly became the focus of national attention. Residents were furious that state officials had dismissed concerns over PCBs leaching into drinking water supplies. Many veterans of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement—often affiliated with Black churches—shared their sentiments and rallied in protests. Among them were Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. and Reverend Joseph Lowery, then of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Reverend Leon White of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial

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<sup>10</sup> "Waterfront Justice & Coastal Resilience." *New York City Environmental Justice Alliance*, 16 Oct. 2023, [nyc-eja.org/campaigns/waterfront-justice-project/](https://nyc-eja.org/campaigns/waterfront-justice-project/).

<sup>11</sup> "Greenpeace USA Facebook Page." *Facebook*, [www.facebook.com/greenpeaceusa](https://www.facebook.com/greenpeaceusa). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

<sup>12</sup> *Native Peoples Action*, [nativepeoplesaction.org/](https://nativepeoplesaction.org/). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Thejirika, Maudlyne. "What Is Environmental Racism?" *NRDC: Be a Force for the Future*, 24 May 2023, [www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism](https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism).

Justice. The dump trucks rolled into Warren County in mid-September 1982, headed for a newly constructed hazardous waste landfill in the small community of Afton. The same frustrated residents and their allies stopped the trucks by lying down on roads leading into the landfill. Six weeks of marches and nonviolent street protests followed, and more than 500 were arrested—the first arrests in U.S. history over the siting of a landfill. As such, successful coalition building among different activist groups could magnify the environmental injustice affecting various social groups and form a powerful voice that urges the authorities to take action. Protests play a vital role in raising awareness of environmental justice activism by capturing public attention, sparking dialogues by drawing attention from the media and the populace, and challenging the status quo.

## **Strategy 2: Consistent Engagement with Relevant Communities**

Another crucial component of coalition building for environmental justice organizations is consistent engagement with relevant communities, especially through social media.

A prime example of the use of social media to generate consistent engagement is [Greenpeace](#), which creates campaign-specific hashtags to unify supporters and amplify their message.<sup>14</sup> For example, during a campaign to ban single-use plastics, they used hashtags like #BreakFreeFromPlastic or #PlasticFreeFuture on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Greenpeace sought to build a coalition of individuals and organizations interested in tackling issues like plastic pollution by encouraging supporters to use these hashtags, which in turn propagates the campaign messages throughout the social media space.

In addition to posting strategies involving hashtags, activist organizations like the Resilient Activist could also tap into the enormous influence of social media influencers. For example, greenpeace

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<sup>14</sup> “Greenpeace International.” *Greenpeace*, [www.greenpeace.org/international/about/worldwide/](http://www.greenpeace.org/international/about/worldwide/). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

established the Key Influencers community, where it collaborates with influencers, other environmental organizations, and celebrities on social media to broaden its reach and engage new audiences. Another example is how Brazilian activist Amanda Costa uses her social media skills to highlight the connection between climate and racial justice. A young UN ambassador and one of Forbes Brazil's #Under30 in 2021, she aims to mobilize young people to build an inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable world while promoting climate justice and fighting against environmental racism. She established the Perifa Sustentável Institute (Sustainable Periphery Institute) and is a part of the Black Coalition for Rights, Global Shapers Community, and Climate Reality Project. By partnering with individuals or groups with large followings who share their values, Greenpeace can expand its coalition and gather more support for its petitions and campaigns. These initiatives centralize the publicity efforts, allowing the influencers to support and collaborate. Additionally, Greenpeace creates engaging content, including videos, infographics, and memes, to raise awareness about environmental issues and encourage people to take action. They often use emotional storytelling and visual imagery to evoke empathy and inspire viewers to sign petitions or participate in campaigns. By creating shareable content, Greenpeace increases the likelihood of its message reaching a wider audience and building a larger coalition of supporters.

In conclusion, through various channels in the social media—hashtag posting, collaboration with influencers, and effective content creation—organizations could propagate their messages throughout the Internet space and reach a wider audience, boosting the scale of coalition building.

### **Strategy 3: Collaborations with Research Institutions**

Another strategy to adopt is collaboration with research institutions that focus on environmental justice. For example, [NYC-EJA](#) is New York City's first citywide community resiliency campaign to

reduce potential toxic exposures and cumulative health impacts associated with climate change.<sup>15</sup>

They have spearheaded the Waterfront Justice Project which is a response to the significant research gap regarding the vulnerability of industrial waterfront neighborhoods to the potential impacts of climate change. Throughout the Waterfront Justice Project, NYC-EJA has both expanded its capacity to conduct research and built on partnerships with outside technical assistance providers. In one crucial component of the project, NYC-EJA partnered with technical assistance providers from Pratt Institute, who collaborated in the development of digital maps and spatial analysis to document industrial facilities that handle, store, and transport hazardous substances and toxic chemicals in the Significant Maritime and Industrial Areas (SMIAs). By doing so, they were able to identify which communities are especially relevant to abnormal weather. Pratt researchers helped to document preliminary findings on existing conditions to NYC-EJA members at annual retreats and in less formal semi-annual meetings. As such, organizations could partner with regional think tanks and research institutes to conduct research on environmental injustice and the best practices to ameliorate the status quo.

## Accessing Congressional Office Resources

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### Introduction

The struggle for environmental justice rarely paints the government as an ally. Usually, those in power are the ones who advocate for legislation that permits pipelines to cut through communities or poorly regulate pollution. Furthermore, government bureaucratic red tape feels ever-present, preventing activists from reaching their goals. However, caseworkers in congressional offices can

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<sup>15</sup> “Waterfront Justice & Coastal Resilience.” *New York City Environmental Justice Alliance*, 16 Oct. 2023, [nyc-eja.org/campaigns/waterfront-justice-project/](https://nyc-eja.org/campaigns/waterfront-justice-project/).

provide helpful, one-on-one aid to constituents within their districts. As some of us personally worked in congressional offices, we have included several strategies to make congressional outreach efforts more successful. Congressional staffers can help navigate federal agencies, access funding opportunities, and connect constituents with experts who can provide technical assistance. An important note is that this section of the handbook is only applicable within the confines of the United States, and may not apply in U.S. territories or reservations.

## Finding Offices

There will be several offices constituents can receive help from. These individuals, aside from local government officials (e.g. mayors) are state or federal representatives or senators.<sup>16</sup> To find one's representatives, senators, or other federal officials one can use this [Common Cause](#) website. Simply input one address to figure out who applicable representatives are.

Federal government senators represent an entire state. Therefore, constituents can reach out to one or both of them. Constituents will then have one U.S. representative from the House of Representatives they could request aid from. Americans also likely have one senator and one representative who are doing work for their state government. How much help individual constituents can get from these offices is dependent on the state. Some state senators work year-round while others are only in session or doing active work for a few months out of the year.<sup>17</sup> Activists can find out more about their state government from [Ballotpedia](#).

## Reaching Out

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<sup>16</sup> "How Congress Works." *Congressman Tim Walberg*, 22 Nov. 2023, [walberg.house.gov/about/how-congress-works#:~:text=How%20many%20people%20do%20congressmen,however%2C%20represent%20the%20entire%20state](https://walberg.house.gov/about/how-congress-works#:~:text=How%20many%20people%20do%20congressmen,however%2C%20represent%20the%20entire%20state).

<sup>17</sup> Silver, Johanna. "State Legislative Sessions: How They Impact Your Rights: ACLU." *American Civil Liberties Union*, 19 Mar. 2024, [www.aclu.org/news/civil-liberties/state-legislative-sessions-how-they-impact-your-rights](https://www.aclu.org/news/civil-liberties/state-legislative-sessions-how-they-impact-your-rights).



Sometimes, if the environmental justice issue is a state-based issue, federal offices may redirect a request back to a state office. But the general rule should be to contact everyone unless there is a specific reason not to. At this time, it is also necessary to caveat that some offices do not provide casework services.<sup>18</sup> However, it is likely not publicized, so reaching out to everyone becomes even more imperative.

Furthermore, US senators and representatives have two types of offices. One in the district they represent and one in Washington D.C. Constituents should reach out directly to offices within their state rather than D.C. offices, as D.C. offices tend to be far more busy. Second, it is difficult to decipher who can help. District offices are closer to their constituents and are more likely to comply with a request for aid. Finally, D.C. offices primarily respond to policy advocacy requests. If legislation-specific advocacy is the goal, requests will be sent to the D.C. office to essentially lobby the case. If the issue is, say, contaminated water flooding into a backyard, this is likely something a state-based representative can help with.

There are three primary means of contact. First, a letter. Most offices will at least open letters and, if they can, respond. If mail is one's chosen form of reaching out, make sure to include a detailed account of the issues faced. Including photos, along with a phone number and email address are required if a constituent wants the rest of their correspondence to travel faster than the U.S. Postal Service. The second option is an email. This will either be by sending an actual email through an email address on the website or an automated email form. Offices are inundated with hundreds if not thousands of emails a day. To make sure somebody sees the email, send one every week. The

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<sup>18</sup> John R. Johannes, "Explaining Congressional Casework Styles," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 27, August 1983, pp. 530-547.

third is a phone call. If someone chooses to call an office, there is a high likelihood that a call will go to voicemail. This means one should be prepared with two things: the ask and a voicemail script. Have a detailed but short version of the issue at hand, prepared to recite to a caseworker on the other line. If someone spends 5-10 minutes trying to explain their issue, it is unlikely that the other person on the line will be able to stay to listen to it. If there is not anyone on the other line, make sure to have a 30-60 second voicemail script prepared that includes the number to call back.

Building a coalition can be helpful in this regard. If movements can get other individuals and organizations to contact one or multiple offices with the same ask, it makes the representative more likely to respond as it is an important issue that deserves extra work from multiple people to draw attention to. Also, make sure to know what the ask is. This should be expressed through the “call to action” section of the advocacy story. If someone calls and has knowledge of what they want to get out of the interaction, they will likely get nothing back. Be prepared with a precise ask that should be able to be delivered in a few sentences.

## **Reaping Rewards**

Generally, if a government office is willing to help, a constituent ask will be taken on as casework. Members of Congress, by the power vested in them from the U.S. Constitution Can conduct a variety of work on behalf of constituents including requesting information and aid from other government agencies, urging “prompt consideration,” arranging interviews or appointments, calling for a new administrative response, and expressing judgments.<sup>19</sup> Casework is the general term used to describe these available services.

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<sup>19</sup> Eckman, Sarah J, and R. Eric Petersen. “Casework in Congressional Offices: Frequently Asked Questions.” *Congressional Research Service*, 25 Jan. 2021, [crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44696/4](https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44696/4).

Once someone in the office decides to take on the ask, they open a case in the office. They will take the constituent's information and check to make sure they live in the correct congressional district before continuing to help. Importantly, congressional casework must abide by the Privacy Act of 1974.<sup>20</sup> Thus, if someone is doing semi-confidential work with an office, they will sign a privacy agreement, and the issues and topics discussed cannot be shared with other government agencies or staff. This also means that a congressional office is not allowed to disseminate casework documents or correspondence.

After that, the process may look different depending on the issue. In some cases, caseworkers can reach out to their liaisons in other parts of the government. These liaisons work only with congressional offices, so if there is an issue with the EPA or a state organization, one will be able to get an answer or help needed faster than just reaching out to the organization as normal citizens. Caseworkers can sometimes help cut through bureaucratic tape; in other cases, congressional employees can complete policy and legal research. If what the movement needs is a meeting, congressional staffers will talk with their representative to schedule a face-to-face meeting to support the advocacy efforts of the Resilient Activist. The amount of aid one will receive is completely dependent on their specific situation and the office's capacity to help.<sup>21</sup>

## Helpful Tips

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<sup>20</sup> Eckman, Sarah J., and R. Eric Petersen. "Casework in a Congressional Office." *Congressional Research Service*, 13 Apr. 2023, [sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL33209.pdf](https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL33209.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> If you want to read more about what carrying out congressional casework is like from the office's end, the [Congressional Research Service](#) put together a document that can better help you understand the bureaucratic process.

- 1) Contacting federal congressional offices in the summer, especially during June or July, is ideal. Sending a compelling letter or calling to explain an issue is far more likely to reach a sympathetic person who will be able to internally amplify your call to action, as offices take on college interns which boost their capacity for casework intake. Constituents are also more likely to deal with a real person rather than being sent straight to voicemail. Furthermore, during a congressional recess in August, representatives return to their districts to do work. Therefore, if an issue is already on their radar, they are more likely to conduct meetings or visits with individuals who reached out while they are back in their district.
- 2) In a similar way, avoid reaching out during holidays or right before holidays. During these times, cases are likely dropped or put on hold, as staff members in most government offices take leaves during holiday recesses.
- 3) Be patient! Employees in offices are dealing with incredibly large case files. Reach out by sending emails, letters, and phone calls. Make sure to follow-up if a response has not been sent back. If employees see a request with included photos, detailed stories, and a lengthy case for why one needs more help, they are more likely to see it as a priority and respond to requests for help because of the effort displayed. Short emails can become lost in the blizzard of paperwork and requests for aid congressional staffers receive, while carefully logged and crafted responses do not.
- 4) If for some reason activists working on an issue are struggling to be heard, try going to a representative's town halls. Typically, few people attend, and many staffers are there. Even if one cannot ask your question there, chances are someone will be able to talk, and the face-to-face meeting will better the chances of having the case taken on.

# The Media

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## Introduction

In an era of rapid dissemination of information, social media has become a powerful tool to amplify the voices of the marginalized and garner public support. From the streets to social media platforms, grassroots environmental justice organizations are at the forefront of demanding accountability from those in power and preserving the communities of the marginalized. However, the effectiveness of their advocacy efforts often hinges on their ability to harness the immense influence of various media channels. By strategically leveraging digital platforms, as well as more traditional outlets such as news sources, these organizations can magnify their impact and spark meaningful change.

This section will delve into best practices for building and utilizing an organization's base of support, crafting compelling narratives, engaging with journalists, and utilizing multimedia tools to challenge large organizations, ultimately elevating the voices of those most affected by environmental injustices. Several case studies demonstrate two primary ways that successful organizations harness the power of platforms, one, through social media, and two, through attracting the attention of journalists. Both will be covered in the following subsections.

## Utilizing Social Media

### Using Lived Experiences

Most grassroots organizations understand the importance of using social media, but it is not always easy to understand how to apply these platforms to have the greatest reach. There are millions of creators, types of content, and content designs, but which ones are most effective? This is better understood when examining the primary audience of these platforms, which is largely [skewed](#)

[towards younger demographics](#). Research shows that among these younger audiences, authenticity is one of the most valued ideals. In a study done by the [Rockefeller Foundation and Hattaway Communications](#), storytelling culture and strategy are incredibly effective in creating this authenticity.<sup>22</sup> While statistics and data are undeniably powerful tools in the fight for environmental justice, it is the lived experiences of individuals and communities that resonate with audiences on digital platforms. These personal narratives are what capture social media users for a longer period of time, and compel them to act beyond a single like or comment.

Additionally, the stories of minority communities often are not well known or publicized, but social media provides the platform to amplify and share them, attracting attention to issues that the general public may not be aware of. For instance, Digital Smoke Signals, founded by the late Native American Journalist Myron Dewey, covered the [#NODAPL protests](#).<sup>23</sup> These protests were about the Dakota Access Pipeline, which would create greenhouse gas emissions that could potentially spill and contaminate tribal drinking water for the Standing Rock Sioux and other tribes. Using these firsthand experiences from the protests made their posts one of the most followed, and some of the videos had over 2.5 million views.

While reporting live from protests is one way to share the experiences of those committed to fighting for marginalized communities, some other stories and media can be used to impart these powerful messages. Organizations can encourage their members to share their lived experiences,

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<sup>22</sup>Hattaway, Doug, and Jay Geneske. "Digital Storytelling for Social Impact (SSIR)." *Stanford Social Innovation Review: Informing and Inspiring Leaders of Social Change*, [ssir.org/articles/entry/digital\\_storytelling\\_for\\_social\\_impact#](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/digital_storytelling_for_social_impact#). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Kavada, Anastasia, et al. "Tying up Goliath." *Transnational Institute*, 2023, [www.tni.org/en/article/tying-up-goliath](http://www.tni.org/en/article/tying-up-goliath).

such as the impacts of pollution on their health, the struggle for access to clean water, or the displacement caused by climate change. It could also be a story of inspiration that compelled them to join the organization. In each story, authenticity is the main goal, and genuine, unfiltered narratives highlight the raw experiences faced by individuals and communities.

These posts also require effective framing, which PDI identified to have [three different components](#): explaining the problem, offering a solution, and motivating participation. These should be in every post, and all in the context of dominant values of equality, cost-effectiveness, and personal responsibility. [Francesca Polleta](#), a professor of sociology at the University of California, Irvine, reiterates that in order “To mobilize participants, garner media coverage, enlist support, delegitimize antagonists, and persuade policymakers, movement groups must generate a persuasive message.”<sup>24</sup> The message of an organization needs to be framed in such a way that it is understandable and resonates with the general public, and this is often in the form of sharing the direct stories of individuals impacted by these issues.

### **Peer-to-Peer Advocacy**

Lived experiences are powerful catalysts for action, but these calls must also be accompanied by clear messaging on what a supporter can do in order to further the message of the organization. By providing tangible ways for audiences to make a difference, passive observers can be transformed into engaged advocates who are motivated to effect meaningful change. While these actions can

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<sup>24</sup> Roundtable on Population Health Improvement; Roundtable on the Promotion of Health Equity and the Elimination of Health Disparities; Board on Population Health and Public Health Practice; Institute of Medicine. Supporting a Movement for Health and Health Equity: Lessons from Social Movements: Workshop Summary. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2014 Dec 3. 2, Lessons from Social Movements. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK268722/>

include anything from signing a petition to donating or attending a rally, the most effective way is to [encourage peer-to-peer outreach](#).<sup>25</sup>

This newer strategy used by nonprofit organizations has proven particularly effective as it enables the use of younger audiences and has [lower barriers to participation](#).<sup>26</sup> Essentially, peer-to-peer outreach is an outreach approach that leverages the social connections of current supporters to promote causes within their own social networks. Organizations provide outreach starter kits to their followers, which include personal donation pages linked to the organization, curated posts, and other messages that users can repost or share with their friends, families, and followers. This ‘menu’ of pre-created actions streamlines the process for other people to get involved in sharing the message of the organization, so that it can have a more immediate and direct reach than posting into a void of millions of users, who may or may not see the message.

In an era of [skepticism towards traditional institutions](#) like government and mass media, individuals have been increasingly turning to their peers for recommendations and advice.<sup>27</sup> 66 percent of people are more likely to engage with a message if the person sharing it is “someone close to them” and the topic is one their “peer was passionate about.”<sup>28</sup> This endorsement from within one's social network carries weight because it is perceived as more genuine and grounded in the shared experiences and interests that bind particular people together. By providing outreach starter kits to

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<sup>25</sup> Miller, Bryan. "Community fundraising 2.0—the future of fundraising in a networked society?." *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 14.4 (2009): 365-370. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/nvsm.373>

<sup>26</sup> “A Guide to Activism in the Digital Age.” *Maryville University Online*, 25 Nov. 2019, [online.maryville.edu/blog/a-guide-to-social-media-activism/](https://online.maryville.edu/blog/a-guide-to-social-media-activism/).

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/08/31/americans-see-skepticism-of-news-media-as-healthy-say-public-trust-in-the-institution-can-improve/>

<sup>28</sup> Roche, Kelsey. *An Explorative Study of the Impact Peer Influence on Social Media Has on Donation Behaviour, Specifically towards Social Movement Non-Profit Organisations.*, National College of Ireland, Aug. 2021, [norma.ncirl.ie/](https://norma.ncirl.ie/).



followers of the organization, nonprofits can have a greater reach and impact because they are seen as [more credible](#) when individuals are sharing their messages, propagating their missions.<sup>29</sup>

### **Organizing Community Events**

The last and most effective way of attracting the attention of social media platforms is to organize community events. This strategy serves a dual purpose because large, successful events often also attract the attention of traditional news media sources. These events also have lower barriers to entry for other people to join in on the cause.

One of the most prominent cases of this strategy was in [Altgeld Gardens](#), a neighborhood in Chicago known to be one of the most heavily polluted and hazardous waste sites in the U.S.<sup>30</sup> This community consists of 90 percent black residents, 63 percent of whom live below the poverty line. This is one of the earliest instances of successful community-led advocacy for environmental justice. Organizing protests helped prevent waste management companies from dumping into nearby landfills, revoked permits for landfills and waste lagoons, and stopped more landfills and incinerators from opening. The #NODAPL protests are also a good example of this in that live coverage of their protests garnered the most attention towards the Native American Community for which they were advocating.

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<sup>29</sup> Chapman, Cassandra M., Barbara M. Masser, and Winnifred R. Louis. "The champion effect in peer-to-peer giving: Successful campaigns highlight fundraisers more than causes." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 48.3 (2019): 572-592.

<sup>30</sup> Hautzinger, Daniel. "The Chicago Woman Who Fought to Clean up the Southeast Side." *WTTW Chicago*, 24 Feb. 2020, interactive.wttw.com/playlist/2020/02/24/hazel-johnson.

There are a few key requirements for the success of large-scale events. First, they must be at a [convenient time and place](#) for people to participate.<sup>31</sup> If older and working adults are the audience, then it must be outside of work hours. In addition, optimum timing and central locations make it easier to gain the attention of reporters and media. Lastly, in order to share information about the event, there should be frequent media alerts. These alerts should outline: the title of the action/event, the location, the time, what reporters will potentially see, and contact information for organizers. Adding links to more information can also be helpful for potential audiences to interact and find out more about the event, its cause, and the organization staging it.

## **Attracting the Attention of News Media**

### **Structuring a Pitch**

With record-breaking temperatures and increasing natural disasters coming to the forefront of current news, grassroots organizations focusing on environmental justice have the unique position of having a mission related to the interests of news outlets. Thus, they are of greater interest to different news organizations. This makes it imperative for organizations to understand how to craft a pitch that these outlets will be compelled to share with their broader audiences.

There are [five key steps](#) to structuring these pitches for different journalists.<sup>32</sup> The first is to identify the target message and audience. Namely, what is the goal of the organization, and why does it want to share this particular message? For whom is this message intended? By determining these, it is easier to craft the language of the pitch and make it concise and easy for the outlet to pull

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<sup>31</sup> “Media Tips for Activist Groups.” *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, 25 Jan. 2018, [www.eff.org/electronic-frontier-alliance/media-tips](http://www.eff.org/electronic-frontier-alliance/media-tips).

<sup>32</sup> “Get Media Attention.” *Get Media Attention | Activist Handbook*, [activisthandbook.org/communication/news-media](http://activisthandbook.org/communication/news-media). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

information. The next step is to [identify appropriate media outlets](#) that will be likely to share the organization's message.<sup>33</sup> These will often be outlets more specific to the issue area and local organizations that are interested in local challenges and events. After determining the target outlets and their preferences, the organization can begin crafting the message. The message must contain facts, stories, and visuals to grab attention. While the message overall must be concise, it is important to include the most compelling information in the first paragraph, then use the following paragraphs to share any extra important information, followed by general information. Lastly, the pitch should contain a news peg, which relates the issue or message to a current event in the news. Journalists are interested in competing with each other for the most important and relevant information; by providing this connection, their job is made easier, so that it is in their interest to share the story pitched to them.

After the story has been selected to share by the journalists or outlets, organizations should then work to share these media appearances on other platforms such as social media. This adds credibility to the organization and helps the story reach the digital sphere. Maintaining relationships with different outlets will also help in the case that an organization wants to share future events and stories.

### **Aiming “Big”: Challenging Large Organizations**

The last potential strategy to attract the attention of news organizations is to challenge larger organizations. The fight for environmental justice often includes challenging plants and factories that belong to different corporations around the world. While some of these corporations are massive,

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<sup>33</sup> Crockett , Emily. *DOS and Don'ts: How to Get Journalists to Pay Attention to Your Cause or Organization*, ACM Strategies, 4 Feb. 2020, [www.acmstrategies.com/post/get-more-press-coverage](http://www.acmstrategies.com/post/get-more-press-coverage).

and the challenge that their size and influence pose is daunting, their influence also comes with a lot of attention and media coverage, which could help attract audiences to the issues that an organization is advocating for. Targeting the social media of large corporations can help climate activists get a wider reach for their messages and attract more mainstream interest to their cause.

One of the most prominent examples of this was in November 2020. Shell, a global energy and petrochemical giant, released [a social media poll](#) asking “What are you willing to do to reduce emissions?”<sup>34</sup> In response to that poll, environmental activists, politicians, ordinary users, and even high-profile individuals, such as youth activist Greta Thunberg and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14), posted ironic replies. They essentially used the poll to denounce Shell’s role in increasing emissions. Similarly, “green trolling” is becoming a more used strategy amongst environmentalists, where activists adopt a form of rebuttal normally associated with “social media trolls”, using humor to drown out disinformation on certain social media accounts, specifically those with large followings.

Another example of successful media attention for environmental justice was the case of Cancer Alley in Louisiana. [Cancer Alley is an 85-mile stretch](#) of the Mississippi River, home to over 150 oil refineries, plastic plants, and chemical facilities.<sup>35</sup> These complexes are surrounded by black and minority communities. Among these communities, the risk of cancer is 95 percent higher than in most of the country, caused by chemical smells, air pollution, and water pollution. In 2019, Formosa Plastics proposed the construction of a \$9.4 billion petrochemical plant, one of the largest in the

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<sup>34</sup> Kavada, Anastasia, et al. “Tying up Goliath.” *Transnational Institute*, 2023, [www.tni.org/en/article/tying-up-goliath](http://www.tni.org/en/article/tying-up-goliath).

<sup>35</sup> Layden, Samantha. “Land of the Free? Environmental Racism and Its Impact on Cancer Alley, Louisiana.” *Keele University*, [www.keele.ac.uk/extinction/controversy/canceralley/](http://www.keele.ac.uk/extinction/controversy/canceralley/). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

world. This would erase nearby wetlands that protect the communities from flooding, and emit more ethylene oxide, a carcinogenic compound, than any facility in the country. However, Sharon Lavigne, the founder of RISE St. James, a faith-based grassroots environmental justice group, began the rallying cry of [“Stop Formosa Plastics”](#) that was heard around the world.<sup>36</sup> She was not afraid to speak up against a massive organization, and this, amongst her many other challenges to organizations, gained the most public attention, garnering them the necessary support to shut down many other proposed and operating company projects as well.

Challenging a large organization can sometimes be difficult and costly, especially in the face of their influence, but when utilized correctly, it can be a key to the success of any environmental justice advocacy group, potentially gaining national attention for local problems that might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

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<sup>36</sup> Thejirika, Maudlyne. “What Is Environmental Racism?” *Be a Force for the Future*, 24 May 2023, [www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism](http://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-environmental-racism).

# Legal Resources

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## **Introduction**

Environmental advocacy happens at all stages of an organization's development cycle. However, most resources are targeted towards organizations with a more established movement, especially legal resources. Legal resources are an important tool in any environmental advocacy journey as they provide groups with a concrete path to legislative and enforceable change. Recognizing the need for legal resources for all kinds of organizations, PDI in partnership with the Resilient Activist set out to create a comprehensive map of the types of networks that organizations can tap into. To find these resources the team looked at legal resource websites as well as case studies of successful environmental advocacy networks.

In this section, there are resources that have been separated based on a movement's stage of development. Some resources are far more useful in the earlier stages of a movement, while others are better suited to more established movements. Anyone can look at these resources and easily choose the resources that are the most useful for them.

## **Section 1: Nascent Movements**

A movement fits into this category if it is brand new or small in size. Based on our North Omaha case study, at this stage of the movement, the most important components to determine are the movement's exact goals and demands. Based on these goals, the movement can build out a legal strategy and use it to start gaining traction and recognition. In that vein, these resources help research possible legal avenues, from litigation options to actual case content.

One resource is [the American Bar Association](#) (Civil Rights and Social Justice Environmental Committee). This resource seeks to achieve environmental justice (EJ) through advocacy, education, networking, and providing resources for the needs of EJ communities and practitioners. Their EJ wing works to fight climate change by promoting climate litigation and sustainable development. The EJ Committee promotes the availability of quality legal services to those with EJ issues.

#### Environmental Law Policy Institutes:

These organizations do not necessarily practice law, but do help with forming policy, researching environmental challenges, sharing best practices, and educating professionals and the public. Thus, they could be a useful first consultation when trying to determine the meat of your legal challenge as they can help answer questions like what has worked before, what strategies others have used, and who can I talk to next.

One possible option is the [Environmental Law Institute](#) (ELI). They played a pivotal role in shaping the fields of environmental law, policy, and management. They work to improve environmental protection law and governance worldwide by publishing non-partisan research. Among their many functions, ELI helps develop law and policy, educate professionals and the public, and provide objective data and analysis. Another example is the [Environmental Law and Policy Center](#). The center is an environmental legal advocacy organization situated in the Midwest. They protect the Great Lakes and defend the Midwest's wild and natural places by fighting for safe, clean water and healthy clean air for all. They combine effective public interest litigation with strategic policy advocacy, sound science, and economic analysis. ELPC produces strong results for the environment

in the courtrooms, boardrooms, and legislative hearing rooms across the pivotal Midwest states and in Washington D.C. For example, they, along with their partners, have helped establish 34.8K MW of solar energy capacity, closed 110+ coal plants, and 5400 Great Lake restoration projects across the Midwest.

### Government:

These resources are from the government and they are targeted at younger environmental movements. They are helpful in shedding light on government-established paths for legal challenges. They also contain useful information about organizing movements, which may be of service to a movement in its earlier stages. For example, the Department of Interior has webinars and programming directed towards EJ activists. In particular, these resources may be interesting:

- [EJ Training Resources](#)
- [Grassroots-building resources from the EPA](#)
- [Increasing awareness of federal grant opportunities](#)
- [Interagency Working Group on EJ](#)

Furthermore, [the Office of EJ](#) (OEJ) engages all Justice Department bureaus, components, and offices in the collective pursuit of EJ. The mission of OEJ is to protect overburdened and underserved communities from the harm caused by environmental crimes, pollution, and climate change. The Office's primary objectives are: to serve as the central hub to implement the DoJ's Comprehensive EJ Enforcement Strategy, build partnerships with community advocates, and



promote fair and equal treatment and the meaningful involvement of all people in the environmental decision-making process.

## **Section 2: Burgeoning Movements**

A movement fits into this category if it has already been established and has clear goals and demands in mind. It should have a team that is committed to dedicating a lot of their time to fighting for this cause. It may also have recognition within the local community that it is trying to serve. At this stage in the movement, the most useful thing that it needs is legal representation so that it can begin the process of litigation. These resources are aimed at providing legal representation at an affordable price point (at times free) when resources may be limited.

Resource Hubs might be helpful when a movement's leaders are first approaching a lawyer. These resources could help them understand if there is legal precedence to the case that they are presenting, or it could provide them with a list of cases that are similar in nature to theirs. One of the most helpful is the [Pence Law Library Guides](#). This is a compilation of legal resources that might be helpful as they are researching their legal case. These resources have past cases, tools that map the environmental condition of certain communities, law journals, and more. This can be a useful first stop while building a case.

### Legal Clinics:

Legal clinics typically conduct pro bono work by providing free legal services to clients. These legal clinics are based in a few places around the country, but they exist everywhere. Legal clinics can be

busy and difficult to get into, which is why conducting research on the viability of your case beforehand can be instrumental in receiving aid.

One Chicago-specific resource is the [Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights](#), which also serves as a good example of other clinics that do similar work. This organization works with communities of color by giving nonprofits and small businesses the necessary legal support for success. Depending on the urgency and complexity of the legal need, nonprofits and small businesses that are eligible for legal services may receive resources to support client self-learning and capacity-building, in-house legal advice, and representation. Their eligibility criteria are as follows: they need to have (or plan to apply for) 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), or 501(c)(6) status, advance racial equity or serve a low-income or otherwise underserved population in Illinois, and be unable to pay legal fees out of unrestricted, general operating funds.

#### Law Schools:

Law schools usually have an environmental/earth law-focused clinic. Descriptions of their clients indicate that they take on local, smaller-scale clients, or community members. Their range of services usually encompasses helping clients with legal filings, appearing in court, etc.

To get in touch with them, it may be helpful to use their contact pages, which we have linked below.

Major law schools across the country that have law clinics attached to them include [The University of Chicago Law Clinic](#), [New York University Earth Rights Advocacy Clinic](#), [Stanford Environmental Law Clinic](#), [Harvard Environmental Law and Policy Clinic](#), and the [Northwestern Environmental Legal Clinic](#).

### **Section 3: Established Movements**

A movement fits into this category if it is in its later stages. Perhaps it has received media attention, has a sizable and dedicated coalition of supporters, and/or a few legal successes. At this point in the movement, it is looking for a larger-scale legal challenge, perhaps in the line of a class action lawsuit. The resources listed below can help with this goal. However, it is important to keep in mind that these organizations are large and overburdened, hence, when approaching them, it is important to have a clear ask and evidence detailing the impact of the environmental issue. It may also be helpful to become involved in these organizations through their partnership programs. Not only can these programs deliver further legal resources, but they might also help raise an organization's visibility within these legal institutions.

Once these organizations decide to litigate a case, they will typically help with all of the necessary legal proceedings.

#### NAACP:

The NAACP has a specific branch dedicated to EJ, with a focus on Black communities. They are looking to take on cases that can: reduce harmful emissions (like GHG), advance energy efficiency and clean energy, and strengthen community resilience and livability.

They also have a partnership program that allows activists to tap into their broad pool of resources. In order to apply for this program, an [application](#) must be filled out. Keep in mind that a successful applicant will demonstrate what their organization brings to the table and what they are looking for through a partnership with the NAACP.

#### ACLU:

The ACLU generally files cases that affect the civil liberties or civil rights of large numbers of people. The basic questions that they consider when reviewing a potential case are: is this a significant civil liberties or civil rights issue? What effects will this case have on people in addition to our client? Do we have the necessary resources to take this case?

This [page](#) details the range of cases their Southern California office takes on.

#### Legal Defense Fund:

The Legal Defense Fund is a legal organization fighting for racial justice. They are focused on using the power of law to advance justice initiatives on behalf of Black people in America. Their work has intersected with EJ several times, and they can be a helpful resource. [Here](#) is how someone can get in touch with the organization and a [list](#) of environmental cases that they have handled in the past.

#### NRDC:

NRDC is an ideal partner organization for EJ efforts. They have a base of more than 3 million members and online activists and the expertise of over 700 scientists, lawyers, and other environmental specialists. They use these resources to confront the climate crisis, protect the planet's wildlife and wild places, and ensure the rights of all people to clean air, clean water, and healthy communities. Their contact information is [here](#).

#### We Act:

We Act is another organization specifically focused on EJ. Their stated mission is to build healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and/or low-income residents participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices. While

they are nationally recognized, they currently have 2 offices in New York and Washington D.C. They are also currently building their first EJ Center which is focused on providing a space for leadership and climate action. Activists can contact them [here](#).

#### Earthjustice Org:

Earthjustice is focused on helping litigate cases related to EJ and climate change. They have 200+ full-time lawyers who rank among the nation's foremost legal strategists for the environment. They represent their clients for free, and their clients range from widely recognized organizations to one-stoplight communities. All they are looking for is a movement at the frontlines of the fight for a healthy environment for all. Activists can submit their case to them [here](#). More information can be found on their [website](#).

#### Lawyers for Good Government:

[Lawyers for Good Government](#) is focused on providing legal resources and services to states, local governments, NGOs, and frontline communities to expedite the country's transition to a green economy and to directly address environmental racism. To meet their goals, they focus on cases that can expedite the shift to clean energy at the state and local level, help disadvantaged communities obtain federal funding for climate resilience, clean energy, and climate justice projects, or directly assist marginalized communities to secure access to clean, affordable drinking water. They work with partner organizations (like corporate legal departments and large law firms) to deliver pro bono legal services to organizations in need. Through this program, in 2023, they leveraged more than 51,000 hours and more than \$24 million worth of pro bono legal services from their pro bono partners.



# Public Hearings

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## Introduction

In a recent [public hearing](#) that took place on June 15, 2023, titled, “Impacts of Plastic Production and Disposal on Environmental Justice Communities,” Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) pulled out a reusable plastic pitcher and referred to the single-use plastic water bottle of his colleague.<sup>37</sup> He placed the items on the ledge in front of him to be displayed to the room and described how in the past these items were made of glass and the world faced the threat of pollution from shattered glass. He remembered picking up shards of glass as a boy scout after Oregon passed the nation’s first glass return bill, where the glass could be exchanged for money. He then described how these problems seemed “impossible to solve,” but the day laws went into effect, change was immediately made. This hearing was held by Senator Jeff Merkley, the chair of the Chemical Safety, Waste Management, Environmental Justice, and Regulatory Oversight Committee, a branch of the Environment and Public Works Senate subcommittee. His statement pulls together all the necessary components of an emotionally moving statement that makes an impact at a public hearing, but preparation for such a hearing can be challenging. The team has dedicated the following pages to serve as a guidebook on how to organize and prepare for a public hearing.

## How does a hearing get to the Senate floor?

Hearings are generally established at the local level. In Illinois, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has an Environmental Justice branch. The Illinois EPA admits requests for hearings that

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<sup>37</sup> “Sen. Merkley Chairs Hearing on the Environmental Justice Impacts of Plastic Production and Disposal.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 16 June 2023, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvyBjxGU3zQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvyBjxGU3zQ).

pertain to issues being faced by large communities and disproportionately affecting people. Their website states that “[t]he purpose of a public hearing is to receive oral comments from the public to be transcribed into a written record by a court reporter...Laws and regulations for certain permits require a public hearing to be offered to the public.”<sup>38</sup> The state also sends representatives to seek out such cases by surveying the affected areas.

### **Who is called to a public hearing?**

Depending on the level of government where the hearing takes place, the selection process for those called to a public hearing can vary wildly.<sup>39</sup> At the local level, public notices sent out require little vetting or bureaucratic barriers and could allow almost anyone to provide written or oral testimony.<sup>40</sup> At the federal level, however, while calls to the public are still required, it is more likely that individuals will be contacted to testify. Individuals called can include affected citizens, government officials, experts in the given field, and anyone who has a possible stake in the case.

### **How can the organization fighting for environmental justice make sure their voice gets heard?**

Before a public hearing, two crucial questions should be asked: who is the audience, and who is the opposition? Learning other stakeholder’s stories and attempting to humanize them before speaking to them. At a hearing, activists face questions that are challenging or even illogical.<sup>41</sup> With this in

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<sup>38</sup> “Environmental Justice (EJ) Policy.” *Illinois Environmental Protection Agency*, 2021, [epa.illinois.gov/topics/environmental-justice/ej-policy.html](http://epa.illinois.gov/topics/environmental-justice/ej-policy.html).

<sup>39</sup> *Public Hearings – Understanding the Rules for Participating*, Environmental Integrity Project, [www.environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Public-Hearings\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Public-Hearings_FINAL.pdf). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

<sup>40</sup> *Public Hearings – Understanding the Rules for Participating*, Environmental Integrity Project, [www.environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Public-Hearings\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Public-Hearings_FINAL.pdf). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

<sup>41</sup> *Basic Trial Techniques for Prosecutors*, American Prosecutors Research Institute, 2005, [ndaa.org/wp-content/uploads/basic\\_trial\\_techniques\\_05.pdf](http://ndaa.org/wp-content/uploads/basic_trial_techniques_05.pdf).



mind, the compiled list below describes what the PDI team believes are the five most crucial techniques to prepare for a hearing, accompanied by examples from the “Hearing on the Environmental Justice Impacts of Plastic Production and Disposal.”

## **The Five Key Techniques**

### **Technique One: Stick to the Advocacy Story**

Stick to the truth, even if the truth seems like it may hurt the case or argument. It is illegal to twist stories or lie during a public hearing; therefore, in order to preserve credibility, make sure to prepare facts and the story beforehand.<sup>42</sup> Both the witnesses and the opposition use this strategy during a hearing. In the “Hearing on the Environmental Justice Impacts of Plastic Production and Disposal,” Angelle Bradford (a Ph.D candidate and doctoral student at Tulane University) was repeatedly questioned whether she used plastic at home. She always responded yes, but followed up with a story about how she recycled and eliminated single-use plastics from her lifestyle. She stuck to the truth but also added aspects of her own story to the truth.

### **Technique Two: Personal Anecdotes**

As Senator Merkley did, personal anecdotes can be some of the most compelling aspects of a hearing because they allow the audience to empathize with the individual speaking. One of the most moving personal anecdotes was given by Sharon Lavigne, the Founder of Rise St. James. As a lifelong resident of St. James, Louisiana, she worked at the local high school which both she and her father attended. She introduces herself as “a mother of six and a grandmother of twelve.” She lives near the petrochemical plants and describes that the residents there cannot “drink the water, plant a

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<sup>42</sup> *Basic Trial Techniques for Prosecutors*, American Prosecutors Research Institute, 2005, [nda.org/wp-content/uploads/basic\\_trial\\_techniques\\_05.pdf](http://nda.org/wp-content/uploads/basic_trial_techniques_05.pdf).

garden, or breathe clean air.” She paints a picture in which the audience can imagine themselves, living with Ms. Lavigne, facing these everyday challenges that they take for granted.

### **Technique Three: Globally-Applicable Anecdotes**

Using anecdotes or stories that have a global presence is another technique that allows the audience to sympathize with the overall goal of the activist testifying. Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK), at approximately one hour and two minutes into the hearing, refers to the issue of plastics.<sup>43</sup> He draws on the stories of other groups, including those in Vietnam, and relates them back to his constituents and the Indigenous people in his state. He further draws on analogies relating the issue to those on the global stage. By doing so, he is able to show how universal and important the issue is.

Furthermore, globally-applicable anecdotes draw on the experiences of others.

### **Technique Four: Props and Images**

Incorporate images of what is described to be displayed behind the stand. Especially while using personal anecdotes, this helps to better paint the picture of the scene one is describing. Sharon Lavigne uses this tactic while giving her opening statement. Viewers are able to better imagine the scene she is describing. Furthermore, visual aides are crucial for audience engagement. For example, the Pictorial Superiority Effect describes the phenomenon where learners will remember an image more than just testimony.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, to make sure the goal of the advocacy is best broadcast to its audience, coming prepared with photos and visuals is crucial.

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<sup>43</sup> “Sen. Merkley Chairs Hearing on the Environmental Justice Impacts of Plastic Production and Disposal.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 16 June 2023, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvyBjxGU3zQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvyBjxGU3zQ).

<sup>44</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30895914/>

## Technique Five: Pinpointing A Person's Previous Statement

Receiving opposition to previous statements may feel intimidating or personally degrading. The key is to remember that those holding the hearing may be trying to elicit a reaction or specific response. Sticking to prepared statements and appealing to the opposition's personality can help combat this issue.<sup>45</sup> Minority leader, Senator Markwayne Mullin (R-OK), repeatedly called out Angelle Bradford's previous statements, questioning her hypocrisy claiming that she could not make statements about ending the use of single-use plastics until she herself stopped using them. She replied that she no longer used single-use plastics, and he responded by asking her what materials her glasses and water bottle were made of. Although the items were not single-use, he still used her as an example to show the prevalence of plastic in the world and how finding alternatives would be nearly impossible. Despite difficult questions, Bradford kept her calm and repeatedly responded with fact-checked statements.

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<sup>45</sup> *Basic Trial Techniques for Prosecutors*, American Prosecutors Research Institute, 2005, [ndaa.org/wp-content/uploads/basic\\_trial\\_techniques\\_05.pdf](http://ndaa.org/wp-content/uploads/basic_trial_techniques_05.pdf).

# Self-Care as Sustenance and Survival

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## Introduction

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” These are the words of acclaimed writer and civil rights activist Audre Lorde, written in her 1988 collection of essays titled “A Burst of Light.” As an act of commitment to a group of people, a time- and energy-consuming duty that requires constantly challenging systems of power and demanding change, activism can be an exhilarating and fulfilling vocation. But it can also demand a self-sacrificial drive for the cause. If one is to be a resilient activist, it is crucial to remember that resilience is a finite resource, and in order to sustain one’s movements, one must first sustain oneself.

The idea of carving out time for self-care while others are suffering may induce feelings of guilt and shame for an activist — this is “activist guilt,” and it is a common phenomenon among activists.<sup>46</sup> But it is important to remind oneself that self-care is not selfish, but rather a radical act of resistance: one that prioritizes an individual’s well-being so they can better fight for others and avoid obstacles like burnout and compassion fatigue. In a world where anywhere between 10-50 percent of social justice activists suffer burnout, nearly 90 percent quit activism after less than a decade of involvement,<sup>47</sup> and the stresses of activism frequently cause anxiety, depression, and chronic illness in activists.<sup>48</sup> The consequences of neglecting one’s needs as an activist have serious implications.

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<sup>46</sup> *Self-Care for Activists: 8 Practices for Young Adults*, Newport Institute, 16 Sept. 2020, [www.newportinstitute.com/resources/mental-health/self-care-activists/](http://www.newportinstitute.com/resources/mental-health/self-care-activists/).

<sup>47</sup> “Preventing Burnout.” *Effective Activist*, [effectiveactivist.com/movements/burnout/#\\_ftnref1](http://effectiveactivist.com/movements/burnout/#_ftnref1). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

<sup>48</sup> *Self-Care for Activists: 8 Practices for Young Adults*, Newport Institute, 16 Sept. 2020, [www.newportinstitute.com/resources/mental-health/self-care-activists/](http://www.newportinstitute.com/resources/mental-health/self-care-activists/).

Hence, self-care is the foundation of resilient activism: an activist has the right to be well, safe, and fulfilled too, and if they suffer, then their work suffers too.

Striking a balance between maintaining personal well-being and fueling resilient activism is easier said than done. Thus, in this chapter, the team proposes a series of self-care recommendations that will allow one to better engage in activist movements whilst honoring one's health, body, and mind. By analyzing news articles, blogs written by activists containing tips and advice based on their experiences, and journal articles and studies corroborating general trends and statistics. These recommendations include:

- taking care of one's body and mind,
- establishing and maintaining firm boundaries,
- disconnecting from social media and other triggering sources when needed,
- seeking support and understanding from communities, and
- making time for hobbies and leisure outside of activism.

Though this chapter delves into the aforementioned individual self-care practices, activism-oriented organizations should also invest in institutionalized collective care approaches, such as increasing access to psycho-social support, promoting physical health, encouraging a manageable workload, and fostering supportive work environments.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "Self-Care for Activists: Sustaining Your Most Valuable Resource." *New Tactics in Human Rights*, September 22, 2010, <https://www.newtactics.org/conversation/self-care-activists-sustaining-your-most-valuable-resource>.

## **Ensure proper care of the mind and body**

Actively taking care of oneself physically and mentally is a crucial tenet of self-care: the mind and body can only function at their best with proper food and nutrition, regular exercise, and sufficient sleep (7-9 hours recommended)<sup>50</sup> and rest. Eating balanced meals, staying hydrated, and prioritizing rest will boost one's overall well-being, and regular movement and exercise are shown to relieve stress, improve memory and sleep, and uplift mood.<sup>51</sup> Studies also show that mindfulness and meditation practices such as yoga and tai chi are very effective in relieving stress and preventing burnout, specifically for activists.<sup>52</sup>

While this may seem self-explanatory, the demanding nature of activist work and the immense time and energy commitment required to sustain movements can easily cause activists to neglect their health. Remember that proper nourishment of the mind and body are necessary in order to effectively fuel one's activism. Thus, when an activist prioritizes their well-being, they also nurture their ability to better contribute to their overall cause.

## **Set and maintain firm, healthy boundaries**

For activists, setting boundaries can be anxiety-inducing due to the deeply personal nature of their work and the urgency they feel for their cause. The intensity of this commitment can make it difficult to step back or say no to responsibilities with which one is not comfortable. However,

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<sup>50</sup> "How Sleep Works - How Much Sleep Is Enough?" *National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute*, March 24, 2022. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/sleep/how-much-sleep>.

<sup>51</sup> "Self-Care Tips for Student Activists, Advocates, and Allies." *Student Life*, University of Michigan, [caps.umich.edu/article/self-care-tips-student-activists-advocates-and](https://caps.umich.edu/article/self-care-tips-student-activists-advocates-and).

<sup>52</sup> Gorski, Paul C. "Relieving burnout and the "martyr syndrome" among social justice education activists: The implications and effects of mindfulness." *The Urban Review* 47 (2015): 696-716. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281478250\\_Relieving\\_Burnout\\_and\\_the\\_Martyr\\_Syndrome\\_Among\\_Social\\_Justice\\_Education\\_Activists\\_The\\_Implications\\_and\\_Effects\\_of\\_Mindfulness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281478250_Relieving_Burnout_and_the_Martyr_Syndrome_Among_Social_Justice_Education_Activists_The_Implications_and_Effects_of_Mindfulness)

establishing boundaries is essential for maintaining mental, emotional, and physical well-being. As an activist, one is entitled to protect their own well-being and must first look after themselves before they can tend to others' needs: this is not an act of selfishness, but also an investment in one's advocacy efforts. It is crucial for an activist to recognize when to stop and rest, and allow themselves to do so rather than forcefully pushing through. In setting clear limits on the time, energy, and emotional investment an activist chooses to commit to their responsibilities, they can better maintain their focus on the work that matters most to them in a healthy manner. Learn to say no: one must tell others what they will and will not participate in firmly, and stick to these standards. These boundaries do not have to be rigid, but frequently allowing them to be breached weakens their purpose and threatens one's well-being each time.<sup>53</sup>

### **Disconnect when overwhelmed**

When it comes to activism, social media is a crucial tool for spreading awareness, advocating for a cause, mobilizing support, and keeping oneself informed. But constant presence on and engagement with social media can quickly lead to exhaustion, cynicism, and disillusionment.<sup>54</sup> Be aware of the toll of perpetual engagement, and when overwhelmed, give oneself time to unplug and shut the noise out. Activists can try to set aside regular periods in one's routine where they completely disconnect by turning off notifications or even their phone entirely for a few hours. By embracing these

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<sup>53</sup> "Self-Love and Self-Care: A Guide for Activists." *Planned Parenthood Advocates of Iowa*, 11 Feb. 2022, [www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-advocates-iowa/blog/self-love-and-self-care-a-guide-for-activists-2](http://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-advocates-iowa/blog/self-love-and-self-care-a-guide-for-activists-2).

<sup>54</sup> *Self-Care for Activists: 8 Practices for Young Adults*, Newport Institute, 16 Sept. 2020, [www.newportinstitute.com/resources/mental-health/self-care-activists/](http://www.newportinstitute.com/resources/mental-health/self-care-activists/).

moments of quietude and respite, an activist can recharge their passion for their causes and contribute their activism more effectively.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, despite the impassioned feelings that activists carry for their movements, it is not productive to waste energy on provocative online debates. It is more productive for activists to avoid engaging in online discourse bait that needlessly increases. Allow for time off to rejuvenate and save energy for the causes one wants to fight for.

### **Seek love, support, and care from communities**

Amidst the intense focus of activist efforts, it is very common to experience tunnel vision and feel isolated as a result. But it is crucial to recognize that support networks exist and are critical for sustenance: whether it's family, friends, colleagues, or fellow members of a community, reaching out for love and care when one needs it is vital. When deep in the throes of organizing and campaigning, it is often these interpersonal relationships that empower an activist, providing the fuel needed for more impactful efforts. Remember that seeking solidarity and human connection bolsters both one's cause and one's well-being.

### **Engage in hobbies and leisure activities outside of activism**

Activists' work is critical, necessary, and, depending on the cause, often life-saving. As such, it is easy to become consumed by the efforts needed to propel a movement and neglect personal hobbies and leisure. However, maintaining a balance between activism and indulging in activities unrelated to

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<sup>55</sup> "Self-Love and Self-Care: A Guide for Activists." *Planned Parenthood Advocates of Iowa*, 11 Feb. 2022, [www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-advocates-iowa/blog/self-love-and-self-care-a-guide-for-activists-2](http://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-advocates-iowa/blog/self-love-and-self-care-a-guide-for-activists-2).



activism are essential. This does not have to entail bubble baths, face masks, and scented candles (although that may work perfectly for some!) — each individual’s approach to self-care varies. What matters is prioritizing activities that bring one inner peace, rest, and joy, free from the realm of activism.<sup>56</sup> Whether it's exploring new hobbies or rediscovering old passions, spending time with loved ones or binge-watching a sitcom, allocating time for personal leisure is vital for overall well-being. If one disguises more activist work as self-care, this only hurts them in the long run: an activist must give themselves the grace to step out of the activist role and embrace activities that genuinely nourish their soul.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> “Self-Care Tips for Student Activists, Advocates, and Allies.” *Student Life*, University of Michigan, [caps.umich.edu/article/self-care-tips-student-activists-advocates-and](https://caps.umich.edu/article/self-care-tips-student-activists-advocates-and). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

<sup>57</sup> “Self-Love and Self-Care: A Guide for Activists.” *Planned Parenthood Advocates of Iowa*, 11 Feb. 2022, [www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-advocates-iowa/blog/self-love-and-self-care-a-guide-for-activists-2](https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-advocates-iowa/blog/self-love-and-self-care-a-guide-for-activists-2).

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# Appendix

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As researchers assembled this handbook, they reviewed many environmental justice advocacy case studies. We believe closely reviewing the stories, facts, and history of past movements is crucial to understanding what makes a successful environmental justice movement that achieves its goals. Thus, we have put some of our more formalized notes and findings from case studies here. You too can conduct the same close case study analysis and ask “what happened” in order to better understand how your activism can be more effective. By picking a case study of your choice, you can study someone else’s movement, and perhaps learn something about your own movement in the process too. We also wanted to include some helpful readings that, while not referenced, we read and drew from to conduct our analysis and understand the best ways to assemble the handbook.

[An Analytical Review of Environmental Justice Research: What Do We Really Know? - William Bowen \(2014\)](#)

[A Case Study of Environmental Injustice: The Failure in Flint - Carla Campbell et al. \(2016\)](#)

[Environmental Health Literacy in Support of Social Action: An Environmental Justice Perspective - Brandi M. White et al. \(2014\)](#)

[Environmental Justice - Mohai et al. \(2009\)](#)

[Environmental Justice and Environmentalism - Edited by Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C Pezzullo \(2007\)](#)

[Three Types of Environmental Justice - Hanne Svardstad et al. \(2011\)](#)

## North Omaha Residents vs Omaha Public Power District (OPPD)

What: Retiring coal plants and enacting stricter emissions controls for coal plants operating in predominantly African American communities.

When: 1954–2014

Where: North Omaha

### Summary

“They’re not burning bras. They’re fighting dollar to dollar,” says attorney Jim Roth, who represented a group of hospitals on Beyond Coal’s side in the Oklahoma case. “They’ve become masters at bringing financial arguments to environmental questions.”<sup>58</sup>

North Omaha’s campaign against coal plants succeeded because of three main strategies. The first was building a strong community backing through community organizing. Specifically, community leaders helped residents educate themselves on the matter at hand by organizing meetings, and educational forums, and encouraging residents to show up in record numbers to OPPD board meetings.

Second, community leaders tapped into larger national movements through partnerships with national organizations. This allowed them to access a wider range of partnerships and media attention, as well as gain national attention. Some of these partner organizations included the Sierra Club - specifically partnering with their *Beyond Coal* campaign, the Malcolm X Foundation, and the NAACP.

Finally, the movement focussed on litigation and they were successful in the litigation of their case because of their focus on the economic benefits of reducing or entirely eliminating coal plants in their case. For this step, they enlisted the help of partner organizations, specifically the help of Sierra Club’s lawyers. Their central argument was that transitioning away from coal is the smarter and cheaper decision in the long run.

The Sierra Club’s *Beyond Coal* campaign is a masterclass in effective public organizing and litigation. We have included a summary of the strategies that the club employed to be one of the most successful environmental campaigns in recent history.

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<sup>58</sup> Wittman, Megan. “Coal Plants Make Nebraska a Net-Exporter of Premature Death.” *Sierra Club*, 28 Feb. 2023, [www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death](http://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death).



## Literature Review

- North Omaha has faced a variety of challenges related to unjust development policies throughout history.<sup>59</sup>
- In 1954, a coal plant was constructed at John J Pershing Drive and Florence Boulevard by Omaha Public Power District (OPPD). The location of this plant in the North Omaha neighborhood caused unjust environmental and health impacts, including frequent code-red air days and a growing asthma rate.
  - Coal plants pollute the air by releasing potent toxins
    - Carbon dioxide
    - Sulfur dioxide
    - Mercury<sup>60</sup>
- According to Toll from Coal, the North Omaha coal plant has caused an average of 18 deaths, 11 heart attacks, and 120 asthma attacks per year.
  - Not only did residents face inequity about the quality of the air they were breathing, but emergency room visits exacerbated wealth inequalities by putting undue financial burden on North Omaha families.<sup>61</sup>
- In 2013, the coal plant was ranked “the 16th worst environmental justice offender in the nation” by the NAACP, according to Grist.<sup>62</sup>
- Eventually, North Omaha residents began demanding accountability.
  - Community leaders organized meetings and educational forums
  - Residents showed up in record numbers to an OPPD board meeting to push for the coal plant to be retired.
  - The NAACP’s Omaha branch also spoke out in support of the organizers, voicing concerns about the coal plant and air pollution in the community.<sup>63</sup>
- In 2014, OPPD retired the three oldest coal-generating units and began retrofitting and updating the last two units with more emissions controls.
  - Graham Jordison, a Beyond Coal organizer in North Omaha, described the effort as “a powerful movement here in Omaha” — one that has created partnerships

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<sup>59</sup> Verdis Group. “LiveGreen: Environmental Justice in Omaha.” *Newsroom*, University of Nebraska Medical Center, 3 Sept. 2022, [www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/](http://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/).

<sup>60</sup> Verdis Group. “LiveGreen: Environmental Justice in Omaha.” *Newsroom*, University of Nebraska Medical Center, 3 Sept. 2022, [www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/](http://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/).

<sup>61</sup> Verdis Group. “LiveGreen: Environmental Justice in Omaha.” *Newsroom*, University of Nebraska Medical Center, 3 Sept. 2022, [www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/](http://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/).

<sup>62</sup> Verdis Group. “LiveGreen: Environmental Justice in Omaha.” *Newsroom*, University of Nebraska Medical Center, 3 Sept. 2022, [www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/](http://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/).

<sup>63</sup> Verdis Group. “LiveGreen: Environmental Justice in Omaha.” *Newsroom*, University of Nebraska Medical Center, 3 Sept. 2022, [www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/](http://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/).

between organizations like the Sierra Club and the Malcolm X Foundation, with the ultimate goal of securing a more equitable clean energy system across the state.<sup>64</sup>

- In “The Dirty Truth About Utility Climate Pledges, Version 2” report released by Sierra Club in October 2022, that exposes how most major electric utilities greenwash their climate action commitments. Greenwashing is the process by which organizations misconstrue or falsely report statements to make their movements and actions seem more environmentally friendly. 11NPPD received a failing ‘F’ grade and Omaha Public Power District (OPPD) received a ‘D’ grade.<sup>65</sup>
- Soot pollution from coal-burning power plants is responsible for 3,800 premature deaths annually. In 31 Nebraskans die annually due to coal plants. Additionally, the report found that Native Americans are exposed to 21% more soot, or PM2.5 pollution, caused by Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) than white Americans. Soot is the smallest type of particulate matter and of particulate matter types, poses the greatest risk to public health.<sup>66</sup>
- Polluted air has been linked to increased asthma rates, bronchitis, blood clots, heart attacks, lung cancer, diabetes, and numerous other adverse health impacts. These health impacts not only affect the quality of life for those who are directly exposed but can also lead to premature death.<sup>67</sup>
- In “The Dirty Truth About Utility Climate Pledges, Version 2” report released by Sierra Club in October 2022, that exposes how most major electric utilities greenwash their climate action commitments, NPPD received a failing ‘F’ grade and Omaha Public Power District (OPPD) received a ‘D’ grade.<sup>68</sup>
- The movement to shut down the coal plant gained momentum once the federal government under the Obama administration began advocating for stricter environmental regulations.<sup>69</sup>
- Beyond Coal is the most extensive, expensive and effective campaign in the Sierra Club’s 123-year history. The campaign helped retire more than one-third of America’s coal plants since its launch in 2010 using the power of public hearings.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Verdis Group. “LiveGreen: Environmental Justice in Omaha.” *Newsroom*, University of Nebraska Medical Center, 3 Sept. 2022, [www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/](http://www.unmc.edu/newsroom/2021/02/16/livegreen-environmental-justice-in-omaha/).

<sup>65</sup> Wittman, Megan. “Coal Plants Make Nebraska a Net-Exporter of Premature Death.” *Sierra Club*, 28 Feb. 2023, [www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death](http://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death).

<sup>66</sup> Wittman, Megan. “Coal Plants Make Nebraska a Net-Exporter of Premature Death.” *Sierra Club*, 28 Feb. 2023, [www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death](http://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death).

<sup>67</sup> Wittman, Megan. “Coal Plants Make Nebraska a Net-Exporter of Premature Death.” *Sierra Club*, 28 Feb. 2023, [www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death](http://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death).

<sup>68</sup> Wittman, Megan. “Coal Plants Make Nebraska a Net-Exporter of Premature Death.” *Sierra Club*, 28 Feb. 2023, [www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death](http://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2023/02/coal-plants-make-nebraska-net-exporter-premature-death).

<sup>69</sup> Sheppard, Kate. “Nebraska Utility Is Phasing out Some Coal Units, and It Won’t Cost That Much.” *Grist*, 22 June 2014, [grist.org/business-technology/nebraska-utility-is-phasing-out-some-coal-units-and-it-wont-cost-that-much/](http://grist.org/business-technology/nebraska-utility-is-phasing-out-some-coal-units-and-it-wont-cost-that-much/).

<sup>70</sup> Grunwald, Michael. *Inside the War on Coal*, Politico, 26 May 2015, [www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/05/inside-war-on-coal-000002](http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/05/inside-war-on-coal-000002).

- They also had access to a vast war chest donated by Michael Bloomberg, who, after seeing the success of previous programs, pledged an additional 500 million dollars in 2019 to “Finish the job on coal,” or shut down every last U.S. coal plant.<sup>71</sup>
- Sierra Club’s battle against coal has spanned beyond just North Omaha—its team of nearly 200 litigators and organizers have won battles in the Midwestern and Appalachian coal belts, in the reddest of red states, and in almost every state that burns coal.
  - Additionally, the cost of coal plants only increases when considering the costs of retrofitting coal plants—now mandatory by the Obama administration’s regulations—to reduce their pollution impact on their communities.
- The Sierra Club began organizing boot camps to teach lawyers and volunteers around the region how to block coal permits.<sup>72</sup>
- The movement found a constant set of reasons that we are successful in persuading judges to ban permits for new coal power plants:
  - Too much smog in a high-smog area
  - Too close to a national park
- “Economics was the most powerful weapon in the Sierra Club’s arsenal”<sup>73</sup>
  - They were able to highlight the exact cost for customers if utilities decided to retrofit coal plants to be compliant with new EPA regulations.
  - Specifically, they demonstrated how utilities were trying to get away with forcing customers to foot the entire bill of transitioning away from coal.
  - They also simultaneously demonstrated the cheaper cost of renewable-based energy like wind and solar to demonstrate to businesses and other stakeholders that transitioning away from coal was the only correct choice in the long term — both environmentally and politically.

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<sup>71</sup>“Michael R. Bloomberg Doubles down with Additional \$500m to Help End Fossil Fuels and Usher in a New Era of Clean Energy in the United States.” *Bloomberg Philanthropies*, 20 Sept. 2023, [www.bloomberg.org/press/michael-r-bloomberg-doubles-down-with-additional-500m-to-help-end-fossil-fuels-and-usher-in-a-new-era-of-clean-energy-in-the-united-states/](http://www.bloomberg.org/press/michael-r-bloomberg-doubles-down-with-additional-500m-to-help-end-fossil-fuels-and-usher-in-a-new-era-of-clean-energy-in-the-united-states/).

<sup>72</sup> Grunwald, Michael. *Inside the War on Coal*, Politico, 26 May 2015, [www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/05/inside-war-on-coal-000002](http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/05/inside-war-on-coal-000002).

<sup>73</sup> Grunwald, Michael. *Inside the War on Coal*, Politico, 26 May 2015, [www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/05/inside-war-on-coal-000002](http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/05/inside-war-on-coal-000002).

## Chicago's "Toxic Donut" and People for Community Recovery — Altgeld Gardens, Illinois

Altgeld Gardens is a small public housing community on the far south side of Chicago, Illinois. Built in 1945 as a home for Black war industry workers, veterans, and southern migrants, the complex currently houses over 8000 residents—90% of whom are Black, and 63% of whom are living below the poverty line—and it has long been one of the most heavily polluted and hazardous waste sites in the nation.<sup>74</sup> Surrounded by over 50 landfills, 382 industrial facilities, 250 leaking underground storage tanks, and numerous polluted waterways, the Southeast Side community effectively lives inside a “toxic donut” of contamination and toxic waste.<sup>75</sup> Toxicology studies conducted in Altgeld Gardens over the past 50 years have revealed dangerous levels of mercury, lead, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), heavy metals, and xylene.<sup>76</sup> The health issues plaguing the community as a result are extensive: they range from respiratory diseases such as asthma and bronchitis, to skin rashes, to lead poisoning, to constantly burning eyes, to alarmingly high cancer rates.<sup>77</sup>

When it comes to egregious cases of environmental injustice, Chicago's “Toxic Donut” is an archetypal study of the ways in which marginalized communities, lacking the economic and political resources to combat powerful state and corporate actors, suffer the disproportionate burden of the detrimental health effects.

At the same time, the “Toxic Donut” exemplifies the triumphs of resilient activism and community organizing, and what it can accomplish (even under socially constructed, discriminatory circumstances). Altgeld Gardens is one of the birthplaces of the environmental justice movement, primarily due to the work of Hazel Johnson, her children, and the community-based advocacy organization People from Community Recovery (PCR). Johnson is known as the “mother of environmental justice,” her advocacy lauded as one of the first to bring attention to the fact that environmental pollutants are historically concentrated in poor communities of color. Fed up of witnessing toxic pollutants and their consequent health hazards ravage her community, Hazel Johnson founded PCR in 1979 to advocate for environmental and tenant rights, and her community-driven grassroots campaign to fight industrial pollution yielded remarkable results. PCR has successfully:

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<sup>74</sup> Weiss-Randall, Debra N. *Utilizing Innovative Technologies to Address the Public Health Impact of Climate Change: Emerging Research and Opportunities*. IGI Global, 2017.

<sup>75</sup> “Chicago's Toxic Doughnut, USA.” *Environmental Justice Atlas*.  
<https://ejatlas.org/conflict/chicagos-toxic-doughnut-usa>.

<sup>76</sup> Cosier, Susan. “What a Guttled EPA Could Mean for Chicago's “Toxic Doughnut.” *NRDC: Be a Force for the Future*, April 17, 2017. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-guttled-epa-could-mean-chicagos-toxic-doughnut>.

<sup>77</sup> Holmström, Lisen. “The Mother of Environmental Justice.” *Q Magazine*, May 23, 2018.  
<https://q.sustainability.illinois.edu/hazel-johnson-and-the-toxic-doughnut/>.

- Held companies accountable to clean up toxic waste sites, such as by forcing Pullman Company railroad operators to properly dispose of sludge waste and the Chicago Housing Authority to remove PCB-contaminated soil from the community<sup>78</sup>
- Helped remove lead pipes and asbestos from complex flats (a campaign that former U.S. President Barack Obama participated in during his early years)<sup>79</sup>
- Educated and trained community members on their rights<sup>80</sup>
- Influenced President Clinton to sign the first executive order explicitly calling for federal organizations to incorporate environmental justice principles into their work<sup>81</sup>

Today, PCR, led by Hazel's daughter Cheryl Johnson, continues to fight the battle for environmental justice, testifying to the power of community organizing. The fight is not yet over, as Altgeld Gardens still deals with the fallout of decades of mounting pollution and environmental toxins. But PCR remains one of the most notable models and actors of successful community-led advocacy for environmental justice, and some techniques that make their advocacy so effective and has resulted in substantial change include:

- Mobilizing community members through consistently holding public campaigns, street protests and marches, and lobbying at local, state, and federal levels with specific demands for improvement
  - PCR's July 28, 1987 protest against the formation of a new landfill in Altgeld Gardens is among the organization's most historic campaigns; PCR demonstrators gathered and denied entry to 57 trucks containing hazardous waste for more than five hours, and despite seventeen arrests, their action stopped the landfill from opening and resulted in a moratorium on additional sites in the city.<sup>82</sup>
  - In 1985, PCR successfully lobbied the city to install clean water and sewer lines in Maryland Manor, which was a small development of elderly and low-income Black residents adjacent to Altgeld Gardens. Before their campaign, testing of the city's water system revealed that it was contaminated with cyanide, benzene, toluene, lead, sulfur, fecal coliform, and other compounds.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> "Rise up for Environmental Justice." *People for Community Recovery*. Accessed May 9, 2024. <https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/>.

<sup>79</sup> Cosier, Susan. "What a Gutted EPA Could Mean for Chicago's 'Toxic Doughnut.'" *NRDC: Be a Force for the Future*, April 17, 2017. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-gutted-epa-could-mean-chicagos-toxic-doughnut>.

<sup>80</sup> "Rise up for Environmental Justice." *People for Community Recovery*. Accessed May 9, 2024. <https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/>.

<sup>81</sup> Cosier, Susan. "What a Gutted EPA Could Mean for Chicago's 'Toxic Doughnut.'" *NRDC: Be a Force for the Future*, April 17, 2017. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-gutted-epa-could-mean-chicagos-toxic-doughnut>.

<sup>82</sup> "Rise up for Environmental Justice." *People for Community Recovery*. Accessed May 9, 2024. <https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/>.

<sup>83</sup> "Rise up for Environmental Justice." *People for Community Recovery*. Accessed May 9, 2024. <https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/>.

- Through similar protests and lobbying campaigns, PCR has prevented waste management companies from offloading into nearby landfills, gotten permits for landfills and waste lagoons revoked from polluting corporations, and prevented more landfills or incinerators from opening.<sup>84</sup>
- Each of the aforementioned instances was also key to attracting media attention to the movement; contacting the press and ensuring the increased visibility of mass mobilization events like protests helped accelerate PCR's progress.
- Conducting community workshops and trainings on environmental harm reduction; equipping locals with self-sustaining skills
  - PCR has programs that help low-income residents apply for federal energy assistance grants, provide job training for residents to become environmental remediation workers, train residents to clean up contaminants in their own homes and surrounding areas, and educate residents on the impact of environmental factors on personal and public health.<sup>85</sup>
  - The organization's website also currently has a link to a [community toolkit](#), containing resources to help residents pay bills, receive energy and water assistance, switch to solar power, advice on better health and safety measures, housing assistance, and more.
- Building coalitions and a network of support with local, national, and international NGOs
  - PCR's historic July 28, 1987 protest was largely successful due to the support of the coalition it helped establish just earlier that year; the large number of demonstrators came from the Citizens United to Reclaim the Environment (CURE), a coalition of five grassroots groups from Chicago's southeast side formed to confront Chicago's extensive history of environmental racism.<sup>86</sup>
- Judicial activism; pursuing legal justice with pro bono lawyers and firms
  - PCR is currently collaborating with the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC) and leading the effort of a group of environmental justice organizations to establish better zoning and land use policies in Chicago. The coalition has alleged environmental discrimination by the city of Chicago in enabling polluting corporations to shift away from affluent and predominantly white neighborhoods into predominantly Black and Hispanic neighborhoods in the South Side and is greatly supported by the pro bono legal help of ELPC.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Hautzinger, Daniel. "The Chicago Woman Who Fought to Clean up the Southeast Side." *WTTW Chicago*, February 24, 2020. <https://interactive.wttw.com/playlist/2020/02/24/hazel-johnson>.

<sup>85</sup> Hautzinger, Daniel. "The Chicago Woman Who Fought to Clean up the Southeast Side." *WTTW Chicago*, February 24, 2020. <https://interactive.wttw.com/playlist/2020/02/24/hazel-johnson>.

<sup>86</sup> "Rise up for Environmental Justice." *People for Community Recovery*. Accessed May 9, 2024. <https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/>.

<sup>87</sup> Schulte, Erin. "Chicago Looks to Overhaul Its Zoning and Land Use Policies to Address Environmental Discrimination." *Inside Climate News*, August 14, 2023.

- Conducting community-based participatory research on pollution and health trends in the community and compiling it into alternative reports/knowledge
  - The very catalyst for PCR's efforts began when Hazel Johnson conducted her own community health study in 1979 and showed a stark correlation between adverse health trends in Altgeld Gardens and the surrounding pollution of the region. PCR continues to regularly conduct surveys related to health and pollution in the community, and often partners with organizations like the Shriver Center on Poverty Law and the Abrams Environmental Law Clinic at UChicago to conduct and publish research on such trends.<sup>88</sup>

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<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/15082023/chicago-environmental-justice-zoning-policies-pollution-cumulative-impact/>.

<sup>88</sup> Chase, Brett. "Public Housing Residents Kept in Dark about Toxic Sites, Report Says." *Chicago Sun Times*, July 1, 2020. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2020/7/1/21310566/public-housing-cha-epa-shriver-hud>.



## Gary Advocates for Responsible Development and a Legacy of Pollution — Gary, Indiana

Of Gary's 68,000 residents, 78 percent are Black, and one in three residents lives in poverty.<sup>89</sup> The city's environmental justice failures are embroiled in a historical legacy of industrialization, racial discrimination, and systemic neglect. Founded in 1906 by U.S. Steel, the largest corporation in the world, Gary was intended to house the country's largest steel plant: Gary Works. As the Rust Belt city's labor demands grew, it increasingly attracted thousands of Black laborers seeking jobs during the Great Migrations. As a result, Gary rapidly experienced white flight and was left with a predominantly low-income Black population. Decades of manufacturing activity over the past century has transformed the city into a dumping ground for industrial waste and environmental toxins like lead and chromium.<sup>90</sup>

Today, Gary is one of the most polluted *and* neglected cities in the nation. It not only ranks in the highest percentiles of the U.S. for the exorbitant levels of toxic industrial emissions per square mile in the city, but also for heightened risk of cancer from emissions, respiratory hazards, exposure to soot, proximity to Superfunds (abandoned hazardous waste sites), and levels of wastewater discharge.<sup>91</sup> These sociomedical harms are primarily shouldered by the majority of low-income, unemployed Black residents of Gary, many of whom lack basic healthcare. One Gary resident commented on the city's reputation of criminality and drug use alongside its legacy of environmental degradation: "We used to be the murder capital of the US, but there is hardly anybody left to kill. We used to be the drug capital of the US, but for that you need money, and there aren't jobs or things to steal here."<sup>92</sup>

Hope exists in the form of Gary Advocates for Responsible Development (GARD), a group of environmental justice activists in the city that has consistently championed resistance efforts against corporations and state legislation that permit further pollution of Gary. Recently, the most notable complaint involves Maya Energy LLC's waste processing plant, proposed to be built in front of an elementary school in Gary. In 2023, GARD charged the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) with a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, accusing the state of

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<sup>89</sup> Weisbrod, Katelyn. "A Gary, Indiana Plant Would Make Jet Fuel from Trash and Plastic. Residents Are Pushing Back." *Inside Climate News*, December 13, 2022. <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/12122022/gary-indiana-plastic-jet-fuel/>.

<sup>90</sup> Mahoney, Adam. "Pollution Is Driving Today's Reverse Great Migration." *Capital B News*, November 8, 2023. <https://capitalbnews.org/midwest-migration-environment/>.

<sup>91</sup> Younes, Lylla. "The EPA Is Cracking Down on Steel Mill Pollution. in Gary, Indiana, It Might Not Be Enough." *Grist*, July 21, 2023. <https://grist.org/regulation/epa-crackdown-steel-mill-pollution-gary-indiana-lawsuits/>.

<sup>92</sup> Arnade, Chris. "White Flight Followed Factory Jobs out of Gary, Indiana. Black People Didn't Have a Choice." *The Guardian*, March 28, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/mar/28/poverty-racism-gary-indiana-factory-jobs>.



allowing industrial facilities like Maya Energy LLC in minority communities without considering their environmental harms.<sup>93</sup>

GARD has also challenged Fulcrum BioEnergy's proposed gasification plant in the city: while Fulcrum claims that the plant is meant to turn the area's trash into jet fuel and thus reduce landfill waste, GARD advocates recognize that the refinery would ultimately oversee a highly complicated, high-energy production process. In 2022, the group of activists challenged Fulcrum's air pollution permit from Indiana state regulators and filed a Civil Rights Act Complaint with the IDEM accusing the department of perpetuating a longstanding practice of race-based environmental discrimination in the city.<sup>94</sup> As of today, GARD continues to fight these legal battles in court with the support of all Gary residents.

As pollution accumulates in Gary, there continues to be an urgent need for comprehensive action to remediate these environmental harms and protect public health. The primary activist strategies used by GARD include:

- Community organizing and training on environmental justice knowledge and issues
- Developing relationships with legislators
- Coordinating advice and actions with other community-based environmental advocacy groups
- Enlisting legal help from nonprofits and pro-bono law firms

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<sup>93</sup> Thiele, Rebecca. "‘If Not Now, Then When?’ Gary Residents Seek Brighter, Cleaner Future through Biden’s EPA." *WFYI Public Media*, October 27, 2023. <https://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/if-not-now-then-when-gary-residents-seek-brighter-cleaner-future-through-bidens-epa>.

<sup>94</sup> Weisbrod, Katelyn. "A Gary, Indiana Plant Would Make Jet Fuel from Trash and Plastic. Residents Are Pushing Back." *Inside Climate News*, December 13, 2022. <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/12122022/gary-indiana-plastic-jet-fuel/>.

## PCB Pollution — St. Lawrence, Alaska

The Yupik and Inuit are two Alaska Native tribes that have suffered health problems due to rising levels of environmental pollutants, specifically polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in contaminated water. The high concentration of PCBs indicates an unmistakable correlation between the pollutants and the presence of the United States' formerly used defense sites (FUDs), found in the St. Lawrence Island area and throughout the entire state of Alaska.<sup>95</sup> Contaminated water poses a greater risk to native/indigenous communities as they have diets that are higher in local fish and marine mammals than individuals who are not Alaska Natives.<sup>96</sup> While the state government and grassroots initiatives like the Native People's Program have campaigned for change and support from the federal government, the federal government has largely ignored this issue.<sup>97</sup>

This case study focuses on the environmental justice disparities in Alaska Native communities. The Yupik and Inuit are two Alaska Native tribes that have suffered health problems due to rising levels of environmental pollutants, specifically polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The high concentration of PCBs indicates an unmistakable correlation between the pollutants and the presence of the United States' formerly used defense sites (FUDs), found in the St. Lawrence Island area and throughout the entire state of Alaska.<sup>98</sup>

The federal government has largely ignored this issue. The disregard for the health of Alaska Natives reflects the failure of the government to fulfill its obligations to environmental justice standards defined by the EPA, as well as its obligations to the Alaska Native population.<sup>99</sup> But actors are pushing for positive change in environmental justice for the native population too, such as the Native Movement, an Indigenous-led Alaska-based organization. Another grassroots organization, Native People's Action, also has a subdivision called Climate Justice Advocacy where they lobbied the local government to push for environmental justice for the Natives.<sup>100</sup> The Alaskan state

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<sup>95</sup> Kovacs, Elizabeth. *Environmental Justice Disparities in Alaska Native Communities*, Duquesne University, 23 Dec. 2019, [dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1113&context=duquark](https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1113&context=duquark).

<sup>96</sup> Sharp, Jonathan. "Opinion: Military Bases Threaten the Health of Alaska Native Communities by Causing Environmental Racism." *Juneau Empire*, 26 Sept. 2023, [www.juneauempire.com/opinion/opinion-military-bases-threaten-the-health-of-alaska-native-communities-by-causing-environmental-racism/](https://www.juneauempire.com/opinion/opinion-military-bases-threaten-the-health-of-alaska-native-communities-by-causing-environmental-racism/).

<sup>97</sup> "Federal Government Evades Responsibility for Cleaning up Alaska Native Lands." *Office of Governor Mike Dunleavy*, State of Alaska, 19 July 2023, [gov.alaska.gov/federal-government-evades-responsibility-for-cleaning-up-alaska-native-lands/](https://gov.alaska.gov/federal-government-evades-responsibility-for-cleaning-up-alaska-native-lands/).

<sup>98</sup> Kovacs, Elizabeth. *Environmental Justice Disparities in Alaska Native Communities*, Duquesne University, 23 Dec. 2019, [dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1113&context=duquark](https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1113&context=duquark).

<sup>99</sup> "Native Community Contamination: Contaminated Land Conveyances: The Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act, the Detrimental Impacts of Contamination on Native Communities and the Next Steps for Environmental Justice." *U.S. Department of the Interior*, 23 Aug. 2022, [www.doi.gov/ocl/native-community-contamination](https://www.doi.gov/ocl/native-community-contamination).

<sup>100</sup> "Our History." *People's Action*, 10 Nov. 2023, [peoplesaction.org/about-us/our-history/](https://peoplesaction.org/about-us/our-history/).

government has called the federal government (specifically the Department of Interior) to clean up contaminated land but the DOI refused.<sup>101</sup>

The main actors pushing for change are grassroots activists including those in the Native People's Program.<sup>102</sup> Through their Action and Advocacy Program, they carry out campaigns and organize with communities on issues of environmental justice, climate justice, and gender justice. Their Community Affiliate Program provides direct support to grassroots community initiatives through fiscal sponsorship, administrative support, and regranting (financial component). Their Community Education Program also provides training and facilitates a dialogue that deepens critical analysis toward building strong collaboration and more effective strategies. They successfully garnered support among the local indigenous communities for their cause and directed the local government to this issue. Nonetheless, because this issue is highly regionalized and the solution to this is costly, the federal government unfortunately put the issue on the back burner.

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<sup>101</sup> "Federal Government Evades Responsibility for Cleaning up Alaska Native Lands." *Office of Governor Mike Dunleavy*, State of Alaska, 19 July 2023, [gov.alaska.gov/federal-government-evades-responsibility-for-cleaning-up-alaska-native-lands/](https://gov.alaska.gov/federal-government-evades-responsibility-for-cleaning-up-alaska-native-lands/).

<sup>102</sup> "Our History." *People's Action*, 10 Nov. 2023, [peoplesaction.org/about-us/our-history/](https://peoplesaction.org/about-us/our-history/).