



New England Grassroots Environment Fund:

A Model of Participatory Grantmaking,
a Participatory Organization,
and the Essential Nature of Belonging

By Christine Robinson

“In a real sense, all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.,
*Letter from Birmingham Jail: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from
 Birmingham Jail and the Struggle That Changed a Nation*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine Robinson is a seasoned thought leader with expertise in nonprofit and public sector systems, generative networks and systems across the US and in building on-ramps to policy and systems change for justice. She is a recognized strategist known for her work in equity, vision articulation, program development, and design. She also has extensive experience in program evaluation, the formation of collaborative ventures, and the launching of local, statewide, regional, and national initiatives on significant social justice issues.

Robinson served as a consultant to the Obama Administration's White House Office of Asian American and Pacific Islanders, crafting a municipal strategy. Her areas of expertise include economic security and asset strategies, health disparities, human development, education disparities, two-generation strategies, policy alignment, equity and inclusion, and place-based endeavors.

Robinson has served as a senior program staff member and consultant to some of the nation's leading foundations, including the Ford Foundation (co-architect of the six-year initiative to close the racial wealth gap), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (coordinating consultant for the national childhood obesity initiative), the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, the Moriah Fund, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Robinson was appointed Director of the Division of School Age and Adolescent Health for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and was intimately involved in establishing the statewide network of school-based health centers and the first violence prevention coalitions in the US. She facilitated the creation of the first multicultural HIV/AIDS coalition in the US and the first K-12 HIV/AIDS curriculum, which Tom Brokaw reported on because of how innovative the curriculum was.

She designed a significant disability initiative and brought an abiding commitment to co-creation, inclusion, the inherent dignity of all people, and recognition of historically marginalized communities' numerous intersectional realities. Robinson was educated at Vassar College, Brandeis University, and the University of Pennsylvania and is trained as a developmental and community psychologist. She was the 2017-18 Christopher Peterson Memorial Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania in applied psychology. She is a Fellow at the University of New Hampshire's Carsey School of Public Policy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND TO THE PROCESS EVALUATION

This participatory grantmaking process evaluation was conducted with the support of the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation is supporting a cohort of grantees to explore participatory grantmaking models and how they engage a broad range of stakeholders in the interest of equity. The New England Grassroots Environment Fund received a generous grant from the Ford Foundation to

- continue to refine the Fund’s learning and evolution of grantmaking/ program innovations through thorough assessment and feedback tools developed with a consultant;
- examine, document, and share learning insights from the developmental process as evidence of the value, myriad benefits, and core need of participatory grantmaking; and
- work directly with funders, whether individual donors or larger foundations, to incorporate participatory grantmaking that prioritizes traditionally marginalized and underrepresented voices.

Overview

This report is the result of a nine-month process, recounting the work of the New England Grassroots Environment Fund; data was collected from March 2020 through December 2020. This document aims to chronicle the Fund’s work and to outline the organization’s structure, theory, approach, and implementation modalities. The majority of the data gathering for this report consisted of a deep dive with the Grassroots Fund’s leadership and staff in examination and reflection to codify, document, clarify, solidify, and more deeply recognize the power and potential of numerous functions of participatory grantmaking and the resulting participatory philanthropic organization and network that had emerged. Future aspirations are also outlined throughout the text; the document discusses the roots of grassroots environmental justice work, participatory work with an equity lens, philanthropic strategy, and movement-building.

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund (hereafter the Fund or the Grassroots Fund will be used interchangeably) is a philanthropic organization that is dedicated to co-creating healthy and sustainable communities throughout the New England region. The Fund aims to achieve its goals by offering grants to grassroots organizations, particularly those from historically marginalized groups, who do work in the field of environmental justice through a process of **participatory grantmaking**. The Fund currently works with approximately 3,100 grassroots grantee partners.

The central elements of the Fund’s current work are outlined here:

- Participatory process

- Assessment of the mitigating impacts and wellbeing effects from multiple and cumulative exposures through creating a culture of evidence; to this end, the Fund is
 1. beginning to develop a system for internal data collection on the region and specific areas, and it is starting to prioritize how data is used;
 2. planning a participatory evaluation process with grassroots partners to include those directly affected in the formation of questions of interest and ways to collect information involving scoping, data-gathering, alternatives, analysis, mitigation, and monitoring;
 3. conceptualizing a stakeholder mapping process to outline numerous partners and means of collaboration to move various environmental justice issues forward across New England; and
 4. building the framework for a healthy ecosystem: the work integrates campaigns for ecological justice on behalf of traditionally historically marginalized communities’ environmental sustainability and amelioration.

Values, Vision, and Mission

The Fund’s stated objectives are as follows:

- Increase civic engagement, volunteerism, and the number of emerging leaders engaged in initiatives that forward environmental and social justice, particularly those that prioritize creating and maintaining healthy, just, safe, and environmentally sustainable communities.
- Increase the incorporation of equity and justice values as fundamental considerations in the economic, environmental, health, and resilience goals and functions of the grassroots, nonprofit, and funding community.
- Increase participation and understanding to develop a more inclusive environmental movement that speaks to the need to support intersectional solutions to broaden awareness and address environmental challenges for the Grassroots Fund network of collaborators, including grantee partners, applicants, planning committee members, grant reviewers, nonprofit colleagues, and funders.
- Increase the impact and volume of financial support to grassroots environmental and social justice projects and movements in New England by fostering a culture of risk-taking and constant growth.
- Increase networks of grassroots activists across New England committed to building a just and equitable society, sharing their knowledge, and working toward collective action and community problem-solving.

PARTICIPATORY PHILANTHROPY AND PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING

Traditional philanthropic models are characterized by a top-down model of decision-making that eschews feedback loops and frequently fails to foster a sense of community and belonging among participants in the process. Institutional philanthropy is historically structured in a way that creates a power imbalance through which a privileged few determine resource allocation (grant dollars).

Participatory philanthropy is a philanthropic model envisioned to address these issues with the traditional model by ceding more decision-making power to grantee partners, grassroots networks, and community members. **This can only be done when their perspectives and lived experiences are honored as expertise.** The measure of whether this model has been effectively implemented is **not merely levels of equity and inclusion** (although these are key factors): it is **whether power has been effectively shifted to those who are most harmed by environmental degradation, economic injustice, and the climate crisis.** This is the crucial outcome that is the be-all and end-all of a participatory organization with the thematic focus of environmental justice.

Aspects of a Participatory Philanthropic Organization

- Regularly inviting **input and active participation from community stakeholders who are directly affected by present challenges.**
- Adding new functions that strengthen the Fund's capacity to **engage those directly affected more effectively.**
- Developing recruitment and hiring practices that ascertain **potential employees' commitment to authentic community participation and network building** in all organization elements and engaging grantee partners and grant proposal readers for organizational roles.
- Ensuring that the Fund's board committees include community stakeholders and non-grantmakers.
- Facilitating board discussion on the benefits of inclusion, authentic perspectives, community participation, and decision-making.
- Integrating an **ongoing feedback loop** of grantee partners and community participation in all the institution's activities.
- Redesigning program staff's role **to serve as partners alongside grantee partners.**
- Initiating field-wide discussions that engage community voice in issues, approach, grantee partners' participation in grantmaking processes, proper resource allocation, and emerging work to define grantee outcomes.
- **Prioritizing transparency** as an institutional value and practice **by consistently making information and data about funded projects publicly available.**

At the heart of the Fund's intention to fully adopt a participatory model of philanthropy is **participatory grantmaking.** Grantmaking processes are traditionally relatively limited and transactional. Typically, they include preparation of proposal guidelines by funders, preparation of proposals by prospective grantees, a funder-

led proposal review process (sometimes with outside expert or academic input), and a final decision on who is funded and to what extent. The participatory model of grantmaking, in contrast, works to include grantee partners, community members and leaders, and voices from historically marginalized groups in decision-making in a **reciprocal** process where the grantmaking organization and funders can learn, share their power, and promote **aligned field-building.**

The grantmaking process developed by the Grassroots Fund entails numerous steps:

1. An intricate review process that is presently open to any community member.
2. The engagement of the communities directly affected by disparities in the grant review process.
3. The provision of small grants to emerging grassroots groups.
4. The building of relationships with others in related geographic areas, issue areas, or cultural communities.
5. The facilitation of participation in a number of learning venues (RootSkills, Communities of Practice, and Catalyst Convenings).

This evaluation's most crucial finding is the far-reaching impact of a participatory lens that has informed and continues to inform the organizational structure, staffing, evaluation, grantmaking, technical assistance, and community partnerships. In addition, the work of grantee partners is significant and merits further amplification and understanding. The work entails dialogue and reflection on how equity was incorporated into strategy development, funding priorities, and funding mechanisms.

PROCESS EVALUATION

The Fund's approach to process is nuanced, layered, complex, and evidence-informed. For this reason, a detailed investigation of the Fund's processes was necessary, and the results of this investigation are presented in the Process Map (see below).

Methodology: Intersectionality and Equity

The process evaluation was conducted with a comprehensive framework of equity and intersectional belonging. Equity is the promotion of just and fair belonging throughout society and creates the conditions in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach his, her, or their full potential. Intersectionality is the recognition of how numerous axes of oppression can affect individuals and groups: it calls us to pay attention to the complex and varied intersections of identities that make up the fabric of society.

Intersectional belonging goes a step further than mere inclusion: you

are invited to participate in co-creating the thing you belong to actively. Active engagement, respect, seeking the story, and working to develop gateways to ecological justice is a powerful combination. The issues of philanthropy, participatory engagement, intersectional identity, belonging, equity, and environmental justice are too rarely connected.

With this in mind, the process evaluation examined

- Comprehensive change: building an equity focus into all endeavors of the Fund through internal operations.
- Organizational culture and external values as exemplified by the process and grantmaking.
- Reflection on principles of equity in policies, practices, procedures, and people.
- Ways in which the Grassroots Fund addresses systems change and power dynamics by removing the systemic barriers that create inequities.
- Grantee partner selection with a focus on systems changes, advocacy, community organizing, public education, civic engagement, and power-building among grantee partners to co-create the systems that affect them and environmental justice.
- The participatory grantmaking model.
- Ways the Fund intentionally engaged specific populations on environmental justice issues, including marginalized populations who have been historically excluded from the environmental justice movement.
- How diversity and inclusion were reflected in the staff, board, proposal readers, volunteers, consultants, and grantee partners.

Guide to the Process Map

The Process Map expresses the Fund's various processes and structures in the form of a flow chart that depicts the sequence of activities, constituent elements, and decision points. It is organized into five interconnected streams: Approach, Governance, Commons, Enablers, and Change, which are defined here:

- Approach stream: Defines the organizational approach; prioritizes nonprofit capacity, equity, information management, and organizational effectiveness.
- Governance stream: Establishes the structures and processes for managing the framework through development, implementation, evaluation, and sustainability; provides ongoing oversight.
- Commons stream: Develops the necessary support for effective information sharing, resources, and management of internal information and data; serves as a resource and passing gear for effective information management and sharing promising practices for organizational capacity.
- Enablers stream: Establishes an overview of the mechanisms, people, and processes used in the design and delivery of the developing framework;

highlights all people and venues that enable the changes required to adopt the framework.

- Change stream: Establishes an overview of the change process mechanisms foundational to adopting the entire ecosystem's framework, resulting in achieving ultimate goals.

The Process Map outlines **connections**; it is effective connections that foster a sense of belonging and purpose, key factors in the functioning of a participatory organization. The mapping out of these connections is a key finding of this report, and it is incumbent on the Fund that it works to strengthen these connections in a way that is **inclusive, equitable, and reciprocal**. **(The complete Process Map can be found on pages-25-26 of this report)**

Conclusions of the Process Evaluation in Summary

- ◇ The Fund considers ways to amplify grantee partners' voices and work more intentionally to build grassroots groups and a vital generative movement and network as part of a broader social justice ecosystem. The focus to date has been internal, on the process. It has emphasized mechanics and proposal review, with a limited focus on many of the more significant environmental justice issues that are highlighted in the mission statement.
- ◇ Funders have admiration for the Fund and its leadership. They are regarded as highly knowledgeable and innovative, and they provide vital information to the field. Many funders who are more traditional in their views find the Fund helpful in translating both food systems and racial justice issues. They are seen as informed on mutual aid groups' needs, given their proximity to those most directly affected. There is a recognition that traditional environmental groups need grassroots engagement to be most effective. Grassroots groups, organizers, and youth leaders can help build the field and funders' knowledge. There is a need for the grassroots voice and perspective. The Fund has an excellent opportunity to be at the heart of grounding an integrated approach weaving grassroots lived experience, organizing, civic engagement, and building pathways to equity, sustainability, and justice. Effective change strategies, movement-building, and leadership development will amplify a diversity of perspectives and help move the region toward a more equitable future.
- ◇ The Fund seeks to realize its potential as a leader by more strategically engaging and convening grassroots partners, stimulating broad-based dialogues and collaboration around complex issues, as well as educating funders and the traditional ecological movement and leaders about powerful grassroots insights, innovation, and strategic approaches. The Fund has the potential to **significantly amplify the voices of grantee partners** and deepen the understanding of their interconnected endeavors.
- ◇ The Grassroots Fund is beginning to address issues of racism and othering in a forthright manner while deepening insights on equity and

undergoing self-examination. Those working in organizations that do not explicitly address environmental justice and/or serve predominantly white communities are frequently dismissive, exclusive, and often offensive; **the perspectives and lived experiences of grantee partners from historically marginalized communities must be placed front and center in the Fund's work.**

- ◇ The Grassroots Fund must continue to build bridges in instances of lack of understanding, harmful language, and unfortunate tone-deafness to empathy about the role of oppression, othering, and the false perception that racism does not impact environmental work. This work has to start with a continued commitment to engage in the co-creation of accountable models, to build its own internal capacities to be more aligned with this shift, and to utilize its convening capacity to strengthen communication in communities and across long-standing divides of race, culture, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geography.
- ◇ **There is a significant opportunity for the Grassroots Fund and grantee partners to leverage numerous relationships with other social justice activists in New England. Other environmental justice movements, policy leaders, and foundation funders can learn about the insights gleaned from the process and innovations of communities most affected by environmental injustices and make these needs a priority.**
- ◇ The Fund continues to innovate and experiment with approaches beyond funding, such as emergent technical assistance and capacity-building work that promises to strengthen grantee leadership. Through RootSkills, Catalyst Convenings, and the emerging virtual Communities of Practice, **the Fund must continue to build its capacity to share information, help ground collective dialogue, prompt power-sharing, and strategize to advance the environmental justice movement, without necessarily becoming the spokesperson for campaigns.**
- ◇ The Fund has developed an intricate internal process and includes more grantee partners as grant proposal readers who offer depth, breadth, and gravitas in environmental justice. The Fund sees value in providing ongoing education to volunteers, **but efficiencies in working more intentionally with grantee partners, and building on the knowledge and insight of those who have received grant support, must be developed.** The real promise of the model is the engagement of those directly affected in grantmaking decisions and building capacity, providing technical assistance, developing strategies and tactics to ground the field. This is the future work of the Fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION

As has been shown above, the Fund's staff and board have taken admirable steps and continue to work on the process of educating themselves on issues of

intersectionality, equity, and social justice and how they are relevant to the Fund's work, and they are to be praised for the depth of their reflection on the Fund's internal processes. After a year of internal investigation and evaluation, it is now time for the Fund to take these lessons forward and implement them to further its mission of promoting environment justice across the New England region.

Moving to Environmental Justice

- Develop liaisons and connections to numerous fields that are aligned and relevant approaches to address the challenges of traditionally marginalized communities. These fields include, but are not limited to, public health, health disparities, ecological justice, civic engagement, democratic practice, community development, and movement-building.
- Support increased public education on pollution prevention strategies and the alignment of environmental iniquities with numerous health and wellbeing disparities.
- Facilitate matrixed cross-disciplinary, geographic, and cultural coordination to ensure environmental justice.
- Provide intentional outreach and engagement, and foster belonging, education, and communication.
- Co-design policy pathways and trajectories.
- Attend to matters of scale: leverage collaboration and cohort-building to empower grassroots groups to tackle issues beyond the merely local.
- Organize grassroots grantee partners into cohorts in order to catalyze deeper understanding, creativity, and shared purpose and to bring promising partnerships to light and scale.
- Amplify unheard voices through a blending of stories, videos, data collection, and other means of documentation.

Generative Network Formation

- Build an intentional internal learning process and capacity for internal evaluation, research, and documentation capacity.
- Develop an intentional, collaborative food justice model for the region.
- Develop an intentional stakeholder and power-mapping analysis identifying priorities for outreach and relationship-building.
- Instigate a comprehensive cross-program evaluation of the Fund's current programs.
- Expand ways to act as a convener, facilitator, and coalition-builder.
- Define a strategic direction that is inclusive and deliberate.

- Refine an influence strategy focused on messaging, narrative change, and building synergy across domains, including early warning systems and promising leverage points.
- Chronicle the stories of grassroots leaders, movement builders, and emerging groups to highlight how the grassroots work is building the field.
- Reconsider the structure of all formal application processes in order to shift staff focus to the work of grassroots groups.
- Consider aligning the grant proposal reader process to be more reflective of grassroots groups, community members, and those who are directly affected, thereby being more intentional in bringing authentic voices to the fore and building on the expertise of the grassroots, consistent with Fund investments.

OVERVIEW OF DOCUMENT

This process evaluation highlights a participatory grantmaking process and an emerging participatory organizational model that facilitates community engagement, elements of intersectional belonging, environmental justice, and inclusive philanthropy. These subject areas have rarely been connected. The complexity and intentionality required to develop a simultaneously matrixed model are evident in the Process Map for this document, found on page 21. The challenge of addressing human estrangement from healthy ecosystems and human disconnection from resources is a challenge the New England Grassroots Environment Fund recognizes. The power of traditional Eurocentric norms in an increasingly diverse New England and the formal organizational paradigms that continue to define community reality are askew. Philanthropy is misaligned with the reality of many burgeoning communities of color who have lived for decades at the margins, grassroots groups, and New England movements for environmental justice. These emerging community partners struggle to access resources. Building community cohesion is a challenge that must be faced across a complex terrain of many perspectives, considering the need to speak to policies, governments, and the profound challenges in many ecosystems where diverse and traditionally marginalized populations reside. This wicked problem is the conundrum this document works to untangle.

Environmental justice must grow with a framework of collective access, meaning a framework in which everyone can participate in the movement and live in a world where they can thrive. This dynamic is at the heart of a participatory organization.

This process evaluation served to provide the information and build insight into the elements, procedures, and resulting impact of the Fund through December 2020. The Fund did not have the internal expertise to conduct this type of evaluative research. As a result, the Fund initiated an RFP process and hired strategic advisor and consultant Christine Robinson to conduct this evaluation¹.

This report is the result of a nine-month process, recounting the work of the New England Grassroots Environment Fund; data was collected from March 2020 through December 2020. This document aims to chronicle the Fund's work and to outline the organization's structure, theory, approach, and implementation modalities. The majority of the data-gathering for this report consisted of a deep dive with the Grassroots Fund's leadership and staff in examination and reflection to codify, document, clarify, solidify, and more deeply recognize the power and potential of numerous functions of participatory grantmaking and the resulting participatory philanthropic organization and network that had emerged. Future aspirations are also outlined throughout the text; the document discusses the roots of grassroots environmental justice work, participatory work with an equity lens, philanthropic

¹ Robinson's brief biography can be found on page 2.

strategy, and movement-building. Several vignettes highlight pivotal elements of the work, such as food systems, youth leadership, generative networks, equity evaluation, and field-building. This multidisciplinary assessment and analysis builds upon the perspectives of numerous domains and fields.²

‘In a real sense, all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the inter-related structure of reality.’ Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail: Martin Luther King Jr.’s Letter from Birmingham Jail and the Struggle That Changed a Nation.³

Participatory grantmaking is about **inclusion and reciprocity**. It is only one element of a philanthropic participatory organization. A participatory model of grantmaking and aligned organizational structure bolsters equity and inclusion and can lay the groundwork for a more effective process that addresses root causes by building intentional connections to the lived experiences of those most directly affected. Top-down philanthropic approaches are viewed by many as exclusive and arbitrary.

The development of a participatory organization is the striking benefit of participatory grantmaking. It has changed the way the New England Grassroots Environment Fund works, and over time is anticipated to make a difference in outcomes for its grantee partners. The participatory framework is aligned with an equity lens: the Fund aspires to be more inclusive of grassroots partners to achieve that end. Grantmaking, engagement, constituent voices, and field-building are all aligned. The participatory process has re-formed the organization, and the Fund is beginning to explore how this paradigm shift has strengthened the work of grantee partners. The participatory model has built the Fund’s visibility, with the potential to yield substantial results over time through successive grant periods for grassroots groups and communities.

Over time, aligned field-building may result in cumulative exponential impact in the aligned fields and ultimately moving the needle on the social challenges that philanthropy wrestles with. Authenticity, community engagement, deliberative democracy, and community organizing may be central to bolstering this promising philanthropic practice. These are elements the Fund has discussed but not fully embraced. The Fund is beginning an internal learning process to collect needed data to understand the implications of this paradigm shift more clearly. In a time of complexity, uncertainty, volatility, and ambiguity, the foundation of co-creation is becoming an essential element of all of the organization’s work; the Fund is pivoting to accommodate a new way of collecting data and working with grantee partners.

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund works across New England and

² Environmental Justice Studies, Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism, Ethnic Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Political Ecology, Community Psychology, Positive Psychology, Environmental Psychology, and Ecological Feminism.

³ King Jr, M. L. (1964). Letter from Birmingham jail. Liberating faith: Religious voices for justice, peace, & ecological wisdom, 177-187.

received a generous grant from the Ford Foundation to

- **continue to refine the Fund’s learning and evolution of grantmaking/ program innovations through thorough assessment and feedback tools developed with a consultant;**
- **examine, document, and share learning insights from the developmental process as evidence of the value, myriad benefits, and core need of participatory grantmaking; and**
- **work directly with funders, whether individual donors or larger foundations, to incorporate participatory grantmaking that prioritizes traditionally marginalized and underrepresented voices.**⁴

The Grassroots Fund supports grassroots groups in New England focused on environmental justice, local action, advocacy and organizing, and information sharing between grassroots groups, grasstops nonprofit colleagues, and funding partners. As a nimble, values-based grassroots funder, the Fund has been testing, deepening, and continually improving its participatory grantmaking processes since its inception,⁵ serving a six-state region.⁶ This evaluation was conducted to clarify the evolving participatory process, establish more comprehensive systems for tracking and sharing information with grassroots partners, and document the broader philanthropic community process. This monograph describes the process evaluation and outlines the power, urgency, and potential of reciprocity, belonging, and a participatory approach.⁷

This participatory grantmaking process evaluation was conducted with the support of the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation supports a cohort of grantees to explore participatory grantmaking models and how they engage a broad range of stakeholders in the interest of equity.

A Note on Context

This report was written in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemics, like all disasters, strain family, community, and societal resources. COVID-19 has proven particularly dangerous for many grantee partners who are from traditionally marginalized populations. These include groups with underlying severe medical conditions, people in high-exposure jobs, and those without sick leave,

⁴ As Kimberlé Crenshaw (2017) articulated, intersectionality is a framework in which multiple identities are simultaneously acknowledged, representing our intersecting identities. In this monograph, traditionally and historically marginalized populations include all communities of color, LGBTQ, individuals with (dis)abilities, immigrants, refugees, undocumented aliens in the U.S., Muslims and other religious minorities, incarcerated populations, people who have been in the foster care system, and those who are English language learners. The terms “traditionally marginalized” and “historically marginalized” are used interchangeably to acknowledge intersectional inclusion. Some communities feel excluded by the increasingly popular usage of BIPOC, a term that does not reflect the full range of their identities.

⁵ The definition of participatory is broad in philanthropy. Nonstaff/board are participating in process (even if not inclusively), and that has been the case since inception.

⁶ The six states are Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

⁷ King Jr., M. L. (1964). Letter from Birmingham jail. Liberating faith: Religious voices for justice, peace, & ecological wisdom, 177-187.

health insurance, savings, secure housing, affordable childcare, social support, or other kinds of safety nets. All these categories are groups in which Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander⁸ people, people with disabilities, immigrants, undocumented people, and those who have a history of incarceration and/or foster care are overrepresented.

This report was also written in the context of an upsurge in protests and activism surrounding racial injustice in the United States. As the needs of traditionally marginalized groups grow more urgent, more significant financial resources are needed. The Greek roots of the word philanthropy mean love for humanity. This message is worth keeping in mind as we weather the storms ahead and practice old and new ways of showing up for and sharing resources with our literal and figurative neighbors. Supporting historically marginalized communities and following their leadership are crucial strategies for our beleaguered country as we all try to practice solidarity and resistance at this challenging time. The Grassroots Fund is one of many organizations that are planting the seeds of hope. The Fund is working to ensure that a refined participatory model is informed by multiple races, ethnicities, abilities, gender identities, and geographic contexts. For Black people, the pain and trauma around the murder of another Black person are not new. However, the potential that systems, policies, and organizations might recognize the profound disparities and work in collaboration brings a sense of hope. Organizations seek to build structural capacity and build generative networks in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, an indication of collective resilience.

Considerations on the unique challenges presented to the Fund by the COVID-19 pandemic are shown below (see COVID Rapid Response, pg. 59).

THE PARTICIPATORY MODEL: ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

WICKED PROBLEMS ARE TOO COMPLEX FOR EXPERTS OR INSTITUTIONS TO SOLVE ALONE.

The challenges faced by any organization that attempts to tackle the issue of environmental justice, along with the attendant concerns of racial injustice, disability injustice, and others, can appear insurmountable. They are what we call wicked problems. What is a wicked problem? It is best to think of them in contrast to other sorts of problems. A mathematical problem may be difficult to solve. Still, the steps to achieve that answer can frequently be known in advance, and while the answer may not be immediately forthcoming, it is nonetheless clear what a response should look like.

On the other hand, wicked problems arise from the entanglement of complex and diverse forces that cross the boundaries of politics, economics, ecology, race, and many other fields. These problems cannot be framed in a straightforward way that

⁸ Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities are trying to disaggregate from the umbrella term “Asian-American” in order to bring focus on the different challenges that many NHPI people face.

captures their nuances; they have many possible solutions, solutions that may vary widely in scope and framing and cannot be tested in advance; they are not amenable to single-minded approaches. Wicked problems, therefore, require community-wide commitment and engagement. Environmental justice issues are too complex to employ only one solution from one group of experts or institutions.

A sense of dismay is felt in New England and across the US concerning cataclysmic government decisions on budgets, land use, climate justice, regulation, environmental protection, health, education, housing, and numerous other issues directly affecting ecological justice. The ill effects most intimately impact the grassroots groups living and working in communities. Bringing many perspectives to the decision-making process (a hallmark of participatory grantmaking) helps decrease potential backlash and provides an opportunity for connections. This methodology gives people a chance to partner with public sector leaders and various stakeholders, partnerships that can be catalytic, productive, reciprocal, respectful, and mutually beneficial.

Xavier Briggs, Ph.D., astutely notes that achieving sustained impact requires the simultaneous and synergistic engagement of all elements along a trajectory—the grassroots and grasstops (influential, academic, or recognized experts, those with formal authority, etc.)—and offering opportunities for everyone to get involved in problem-solving and action.⁹ This community- and place-based strategy and outreach model (seeding of bottom-up grassroots partners, germinating efforts, and learning from the process) is an aspiration of the Grassroots Fund’s work.

The Fund aspires to work to identify and plant emerging models, build synergy with community partners on common interest issues, facilitate connections, and integrate learning. This co-creation model infuses power-sharing into the mix from the start.

Participatory philanthropy includes numerous organizational conventions that foster growth, development, creativity, and generativity for grantee partners to move far beyond merely transactional grantmaking to address the challenges at hand and fulfill the sector’s visions. This approach contrasts with traditional philanthropy models characterized by a top-down model of decision-making that eschews feedback loops and frequently fails to foster a sense of community and belonging among participants in the process. Institutional philanthropy is historically—and intentionally—structured to create a power imbalance through which a privileged few determine resource allocation (grant dollars). The thesis of the theory behind the Fund’s distribution is that grassroots organizers—especially those from low-income communities of color that are most harmed by environmental degradation, economic injustice, and the climate crisis—are systemically excluded from crafting and implementing strategies and solutions. Thereby, their efforts are less

⁹ Gibson, C. (2017). Participatory grantmaking: Has its time come. Ford Foundation, Oct. https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/3599/participatory_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf. Accessed January 21, 2021.

sustainable, less effective, and less relevant. They are not likely to receive resources, yet grassroots organizers offer critically important expertise and insight on problems, promising practices, and meaningful strategies based on their own lived experiences. As such, the traditional philanthropy model has serious weaknesses when it comes to the wicked problem of environmental justice. By expansively bringing new voices into the conversation and extending decision-making processes beyond the boardroom and senior program staff's confines, the participatory model of philanthropy is better poised to address these wicked problems.

The expansive perch of participatory philanthropy includes a wide range of institutional and individual activities, such as incorporating grantee partner feedback into grant guidelines and strategy development on themes, tactics, and methodology and boosting their participation in data collection, analysis, formulating definitions, sense-making, field-building, and movement-building. The grantmaking trajectory runs from inception, through the application process, to participatory grantmaking, grant implementation, work in the field, work with community partners and residents, and field-building (see Appendices B and C).

The core of the approach is building a culture of mattering, a culture where grantee partners, staff, and community residents feel that they have a meaningful impact. They add value and are valued: this is the nexus of a participatory endeavor.

Constructing a participatory grantmaking process within a participatory organization is an important step that assists in developing a generative network. This is the Fund's aspiration. This pathway is a passing gear to the possible future of a healthy ecosystem for all.

This report will outline

1. The history of the Fund.
2. The intricacies of the present participatory process.
3. The aspirations and possibilities of a generative organization.
4. The promise of a generative network for grantee partners and traditionally marginalized populations.
5. Next steps and recommendations.

The aspects of the importance of a comprehensive participatory organization highlight the participatory grantmaking process's value when taken to scale, an aspiration of the Fund. The Process Map outlines the care and detail of an organization that aspires to attain a level of co-creation and generativity and develop a strategy to move the needle.

ABOUT THE NEW ENGLAND GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENT FUND

Founded in 1996 by the Northeastern regional philanthropic community, the New England Grassroots Environment Fund (hereafter "the Grassroots Fund") is dedicated to co-creating healthy and sustainable communities throughout New England. Focusing on historically marginalized groups, the Grassroots Fund co-creates with individuals, groups, and organizations working across a broad range of environmental and social justice issues.¹⁰ The work of the Grassroots Fund is centered on building a Just Transition. The Fund provides resources and supports unifying and place-based principles, processes, practices, and commitments to building economic and political power for grassroots groups in New England. A goal is a shift from an extractive to a regenerative economy, approaching production and consumption cycles holistically and waste-free.

The thematic focus of the Fund's grantmaking is the field of **environmental justice**. Environmental justice is defined as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income¹¹, concerning the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including any racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies.¹²

By identifying, prioritizing, and accessing the specific tools, resources, and connections needed to challenge existing systems, the Grassroots Fund is co-envisioning possible sustainable measures to address the complex problems affecting rural, suburban, and urban New England and the health and wellbeing of the people who live there. The Fund supports changemakers who face systemic and structural barriers to obtaining traditional funding.

With the introduction of its guiding values in 2016, the Grassroots Fund has been co-creating a comprehensive, participatory decision-making process with frontline organizers, nonprofit colleagues, and funding partners. The core value underlying the approach is **honoring lived experience as expertise**.¹³ Multiple elements of the Grassroots Fund's organizational infrastructure are built on critical components of building local connective synergy, recognizing and deploying local assets, building capacity for long-term leadership, weaving a fabric using solid relationships and knowledge, and strengthening community trust. This social justice model uses an inclusive approach aligned with an interest in expanding economic equality, human rights, intersectional equity, civil rights, farmworkers rights, and other priorities. The

¹⁰ Why we do what we do | New England Grassroots Environment Fund. <https://grassrootsfund.org/why>

¹¹ Bullard, R. D., & Johnson, G. S. (2000). Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555-578.

¹² Bullard, R. D., & Johnson, G. S. (2000). Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555-578.

¹³ New England Grassroots Environment Fund Inc. <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/03-0364677> Accessed: January 17, 2021.

Fund's direction was influenced by Maine Initiatives, the Haymarket People's Fund, and the New Economy Coalition.

The intention is to create a philanthropic organization that is contemporary and sensitive to current environmental and social justice concerns. Now, as one of the most well-regarded environment participatory funders in the region, the Grassroots Fund is working to center ecological justice across all its programs. The aspiration is to move resources and shift power to traditionally marginalized communities that have been and continue to be disproportionately exposed to and negatively impacted by hazardous pollution and industrial practices and other harmful environmental consequences.¹⁴ This is an ambitious vision, and the work is progressing, though it is not yet fully attained.

The Grassroots Fund is developing an organizational infrastructure to generate and ground bold, ambitious, and equitable environmental justice work; this is outlined in detail in the Process Map (see pg. 22). The Grassroots Fund convenes leaders from numerous sectors across the six New England states to share their insights and respond to pressing environmental health and justice challenges in the region. More than 3,100 grassroots groups have been supported, generating many new ideas, connections, and partnerships, and expediting an on-ramp to environmental health and justice. The Fund is now working to develop a means to learn from these experts on the ground. This is the emerging network of grassroots voices.

The Fund is committed to

- Move resources,
- Shift power,
- Change systems, and
- Remain flexible.

Mission/Vision:

The Grassroots Fund's mission is to energize and nurture long-term civic engagement in local initiatives that create and maintain healthy, just, safe, and environmentally sustainable communities.¹⁵ By supporting local action and connecting and sharing practices and trends between grassroots groups, nonprofit colleagues, and funding partners, co-creation and collaboration grow. The Fund is returning to the environmental movement's roots—addressing the need to support intersectional solutions to address environmental challenges. When communities have agency, they are more likely to resist injustice and create lasting environmental change.

The central elements of the New England Environmental Grassroots Fund are briefly

¹⁴ New England Grassroots Environment Fund Inc. <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/03-0364677> Accessed: January 17, 2021.

¹⁵ New England Grassroots Environment Fund Inc. <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/03-0364677> Accessed: January 17, 2021.

outlined.

- Participatory process
- Assessment of the mitigating impacts and wellbeing effects from multiple and cumulative exposures (see Appendix F) through creating a culture of evidence; to this end, the Fund is
 1. Beginning to develop a system for internal data collection on the region and specific areas, and it is starting to prioritize how data is used.
 2. Planning a participatory evaluation process with grassroots partners to include those directly affected in the formation of questions of interest and ways to collect information involving scoping, data-gathering, alternatives, analysis, mitigation, and monitoring.
 3. Conceptualizing a stakeholder mapping process to outline numerous partners and means of collaboration to move various environmental justice issues forward across New England.
 4. Building the framework for a healthy ecosystem: the work integrates campaigns for ecological justice on behalf of traditionally historically marginalized communities' environmental sustainability and amelioration.

The Fund's work is increasingly based on economic justice principles that synthesize anti-racism and is developing ecological sustainability, as outlined in the Guiding Principles below (see **Approach**, pg. 38).

The objectives of the Grassroots Fund are to

- Increase civic engagement, volunteerism, and the number of emerging leaders engaged in initiatives that forward environmental and social justice, particularly those that prioritize creating and maintaining healthy, just, safe, and environmentally sustainable communities.
- Increase the incorporation of equity and justice values as fundamental considerations in the economic, environmental, health, and resilience goals and functions of the grassroots, nonprofit, and funding community.
- Increase participation and understanding to develop a more inclusive environmental movement that speaks to the need to support intersectional solutions to broaden awareness and address environmental challenges for the Grassroots Fund network of collaborators, including grantee partners, applicants, planning committee members, grant reviewers, nonprofit colleagues, and funders.
- Increase the impact and volume of financial support to grassroots environmental and social justice projects and movements in New England by fostering a culture of risk-taking and constant growth.
- Increase networks of grassroots activists across New England committed to building a just and equitable society, sharing their knowledge, and working toward collective action and community problem-solving.

Some of the most exciting work is being planned and emerging. The Fund is working

to ensure that those who are most impacted by decisions are central in developing funding priorities and strategies, determining review criteria, reviewing proposals, and ultimately making those decisions. Additionally, the Fund is beginning to revise its evaluation and reporting processes to align in meaningful ways and deepen learning to benefit from these insights broadly. The Fund has developed extensive, elaborate procedures for the Fund's staff alongside community representatives to serve in the proposal review process in the interest of assuring that grants go to efforts that would not meet traditional criteria (see Appendix C: Grassroots Fund Participatory Grantmaking Process Detail). These methods are intended to bring authentic voices into the process and to seed work that might otherwise be overlooked while supporting equitable grassroots action and grounding the work of inclusion. The Fund is working to build policies and processes to include all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, or income level, in the grant review process.

Notably, the Grassroots Fund is creating a process to engage communities in ongoing ventures to determine and map their sustainability. This bold vision is dynamic and practical, and it includes a means for activist organizations at the grassroots level to learn and, over time, see an impact at the local and state levels. Local grantee partners authentically pursuing their communities' residents' interests, to whom they are accountable, is the heart of justice philanthropy. As a result of this process, it is envisioned that, over time, historically marginalized communities across New England will be free from environmental hazards, enjoy a healthy natural environment, find employment through environmentally and socially sustainable enterprises, and move toward wellbeing as outlined in Appendix C.

The Fund is considering various leadership and capacity-building venues to co-create and establish fundamental organizational capacities with grantee partners (e.g., leadership and governance, strategic planning and evaluation, fundraising and financial management, base-building, advocacy, and communications). Simultaneously, the Grassroots Fund contemplates a stakeholder and power analysis that strengthens its equity lens and grounds potential movement-building. A participatory evaluation process is also being explored to build grantee partners' capacity and provide in-depth insight on ongoing work, tactics, and successes. This process evaluation revealed the need to take a broader view of the Grassroots Fund's strategic direction, process, pathways, and promise. This evaluation also served to substantially deepen the Fund's understanding of equity, the history of environmental justice in the US, and the salience of grassroots partners. As a result, the Grassroots Fund adjusted its planning process to look intentionally at its strategy and incorporate an environmental equity and racial justice lens. The organization is presently considering its strategic direction and options to more intentionally include grantee partners' perspectives as it begins to recognize the importance of their work.

Finances

With grantmaking of nearly \$1 million in 2020, the New England Environmental Grassroots Fund has become an engine with great potential. As a small funder with limited staff (six full-time, two part-time), the Fund has distributed an average of \$700,000 in grants each year for the past four years. The Fund projects \$1.4

million in grants in 2021. Notably, grantmaking is increasing as the participatory decision-making process is more firmly established. The Fund honors the time and perspective of community leaders, compensating them for their time and expertise. It has paid \$40,000 for honoraria to grantmaking and planning committee members and \$60,000 for indirect costs to maximize the accessibility of trainings/convenings. The Fund has budgeted \$100,000 for such expenses in 2021 as more community members become more deeply engaged.¹⁶ According to the Grassroots Fund's latest annual report figures (2019), \$41,000 was given to participants in the form of scholarships, expense reimbursements, childcare, and language interpretation.¹⁷

A PROCESS EVALUATION: EXPLANATION OF THE PROCESS AND RATIONALE

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS EVALUATION

The process evaluation was conducted as the Grassroots Fund realized that long-lasting action to create an anti-racist organization, inclusive systems, and constituent power requires intentionality, leadership gravitas and perspective, data, numerous points of alignment, and deep internal know-how. Strategic vision, aligned goals and objectives, staff capacity, a culture of evidence,¹⁸ attention to capacity-building, aligned technical assistance, and an equity lens are also required. Therefore, as an organization genuinely interested in racial equity, the Grassroots Fund is engaging in a matrixed and complex set of endeavors. The Process Map outlines numerous organizational elements and was developed as part of this process evaluation to diagram the Fund's various features and action models. The approach that the Fund takes is nuanced, layered, complex, and evidence-informed. The Process Map provides a 360-degree perspective of the Fund itself and the environment in which it operates. The consultant reviewed vital organizational documents and spoke with the Fund's staff, board, and selected stakeholders to develop this document and the Process Map. The Process Map itself is a working or iterative document that is being completed as the work evolves.

Overall, stakeholders and the community at large hold positive impressions of the Grassroots Fund. The Fund has undergone significant changes in the past five years and continues to evolve. Funders, grantee partners, and community leaders want its work to continue, deepen, expand, and build a more intentional collaborative approach focusing on learning more about grantee partners' work and results. The Fund is on the precipice of grounding its commitment to multifaceted equity frames, racial justice, movement-building, power-sharing, internal evaluation processes, and support for collaborative endeavors across systems to fulfill its potential in the current environment.

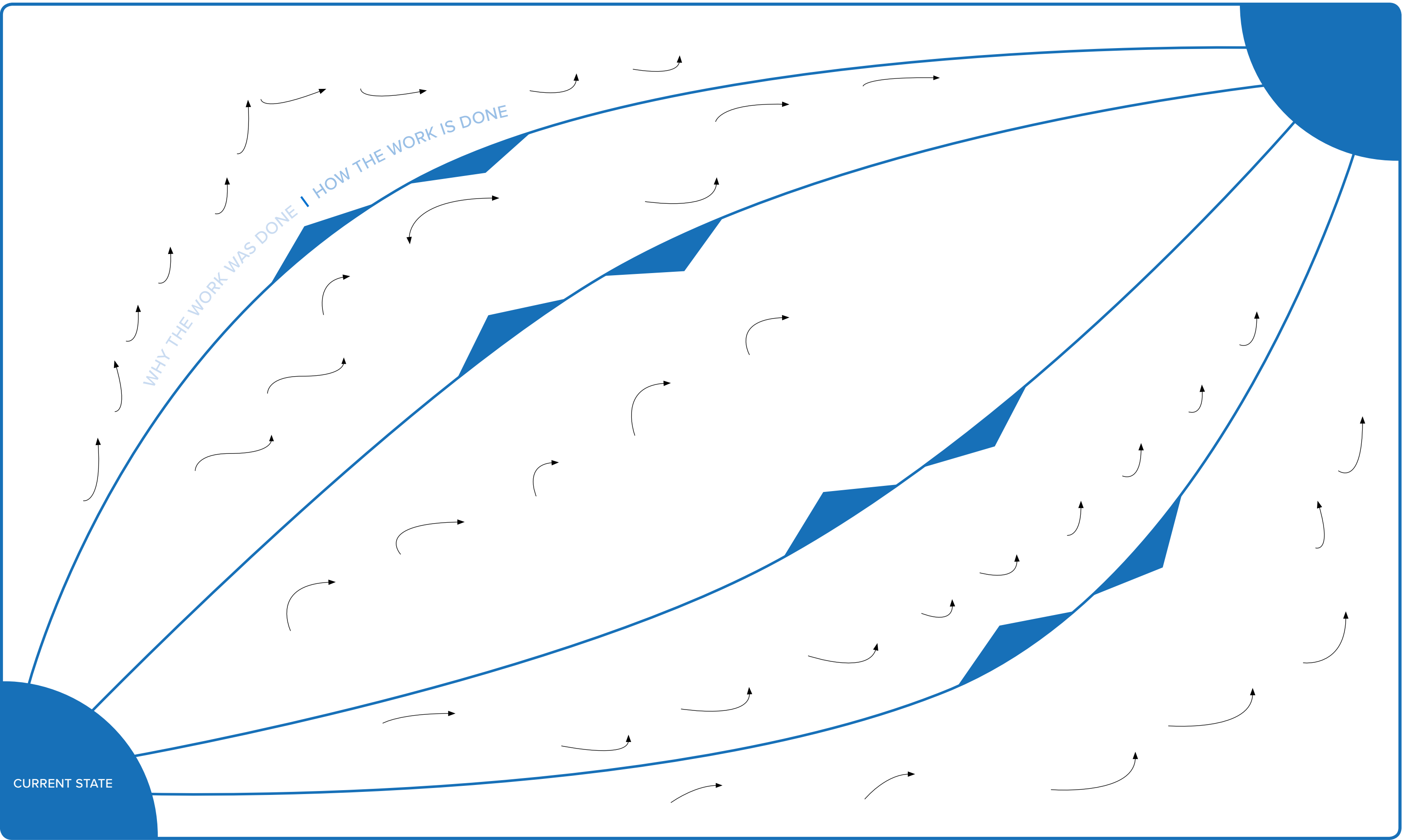
¹⁶ More funds are allocated in 2021, as the Fund expects to engage more deeply with steering committees in the Food System Resilience Fund and the Climate Resilience Fund. Those new grant programs will have their grantmaking committees that will receive honoraria.

¹⁷ In 2020, all events were canceled due to COVID-19.

¹⁸ Use of qualitative and quantitative data, lived experience, narratives, anecdotal evidence, and a host of other sources. The fund is working to build its evaluation capacity.

PROCESS MAP: 2020

Illustrates the process and effective information alignment on environmental justice and democratic grassroots engagement across six New England states, leading to improved environmental justice outcomes, stronger and more robust grassroots organizations, and better outcomes for New England as a whole. **All elements in the frame are clickable.**



Utilizing Organizational Assets

F. Develop and articulate the overall change management plan based on organizational assets an articulated and demonstrated needs of Grantee Partners

1. Reflect on the Common tools and additional tool development.
2. Develop strategies to share management plans and processes outwardly for community learning.
3. The participatory nature of GF facilitates access, communication, and sharing. The developing learning capacity will further develop ways that organizational assets can be utilized.

Process Map Flowchart

The heart of the process evaluation is the Process Map. It is expressed in a flow chart that presents a simple Process Map depicting the sequence of activities, constituent elements, and decision points. This prototype provides details on this process and can be augmented later as needed.

The Grassroots Fund process is complex and nuanced, and it includes many moving pieces, which in the aggregate form make up a catalytic force for change for grassroots groups, environmental justice, and representative disciplines, domains, and fields. The Process Map shows how the Grassroots Fund frameworks enable more effective foundation management, intersectional inclusion, capacity growth, developmental trajectories, generative approaches and synergies, and interaction among the components.

This customized framework outlining the Grassroots Fund's work was designed to make this intricate process more transparent. The five streams of interconnected components outlined on the Process Map—Approach, Governance, Commons, Enablers, and Change—may be refined as needed. The Process Map describes each element and how it is operationalized, and it indicates the relevant stakeholders, providing a bird's-eye view of interacting features.

Key Streams of the Process Map

- *Approach stream:* Defines the organizational approach; prioritizes nonprofit capacity, equity, information management, and organizational effectiveness.
- *Governance stream:* Establishes the structures and processes for managing the framework through development, implementation, evaluation, and sustainability; provides ongoing oversight.
- *Commons stream:* Develops the necessary support for effective information sharing, resources, and management of internal information and data; serves as a resource and passing gear for effective information management and sharing promising practices for organizational capacity.
- *Enablers stream:* Establishes an overview of the mechanisms, people, and processes used in the design and delivery of the developing framework; highlights all people and venues that enable the changes required to adopt the framework.
- *Change stream:* Establishes an overview of the change process mechanisms foundational to adopting the entire ecosystem's framework, resulting in achieving ultimate goals.

Building Connection and Community

The Process Map outlines connections. People are happiest and most fruitful in work pursuits when they feel a sense of **belonging** and **purpose**. Environmental justice connects people, place, disparity, and overarching connections of community.

Conversations about race and injustice are notoriously anxiety-provoking, but they are conversations the Fund is working to engage in more fully. The Fund is working to deepen its knowledge and prioritize authentic connections. The organization explicitly supports racial justice at a time rife with volatile racial dynamics. Based on some staff reports, some community undercurrents are changing because of the Fund's community-building efforts. Staff members are encouraged to have conversations with a diverse array of grassroots partners and colleagues. This participatory model has strengthened the Grassroots Fund's capacity to have difficult conversations, bring diverse communities together, and do this on terms set by traditionally marginalized communities. The Fund hopes to move more intentionally from dialogue to action.

Some of the communication and perspective sharing is ongoing. Opportunities include continuing education of Fund employees, deepening their understanding of the power of grassroots environmental justice at the heart of the Latinx and Black-led civil rights movement, today and in the past. Understanding the pillars of the movement and the perspectives of those most affected prompts empathy, authentic communication, connection and spurs the redesign of models, systems, and processes to reduce racial disparities. This work aligns with initiatives to build internal organization muscle and capacity. Realignment is central to re-envisioning a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization that creates and shares power with historically marginalized communities. There is a potential exponential effect resulting from these activities as parallel work occurs in communities across New England.

Process Evaluation: Conclusions in Summary

- ◇ The Grassroots Fund is respected as a leader because of its networks, healthy relationships with community leaders in the environmental justice movement, and knowledge of grassroots environmental communities and funders. The Fund seeks to realize its potential as a leader by more strategically engaging and convening grassroots partners, stimulating broad-based dialogues and collaboration around complex issues—from environmental racism to global warming—as well as educating funders and the traditional ecological movement and leaders about powerful grassroots insights, innovation, and strategic approaches. The Fund has potential to significantly amplify the voice of grantee partners and deepen the understanding of their interconnected endeavors.
- ◇ Funders have admiration for the Fund and its leadership. They are regarded as highly knowledgeable and innovative, and they provide vital information to the field. Many funders who are more traditional in their views find the Fund helpful in translating both food systems and racial justice issues. They are seen as informed on mutual aid groups' needs, given their proximity to those most directly affected. There is a recognition that traditional environmental groups need grassroots engagement to be most effective. Grassroots groups, organizers, and youth leaders can help

build the field and funders' knowledge. There is a need for the grassroots voice and perspective. The Fund has an excellent opportunity to be at the heart of grounding an integrated approach weaving grassroots lived experience, organizing, civic engagement, and building pathways to equity, sustainability, and justice. Effective change strategies, movement-building, and leadership development will amplify a diversity of perspectives and help move the region toward a more equitable future.

- ◇ The Grassroots Fund is beginning to address issues of racism and othering in a forthright manner while deepening insights on equity and undergoing self-examination. As a supporter of grassroots endeavors, the Fund prioritizes a spectrum of organizational missions, constituencies, and foci of environmental justice work. The Fund works across urban, suburban, and rural areas to build on the values of those interdependencies. However, the Fund is learning to be more transparent in addressing racism and other forms of oppression, which is in line with its environmental justice mission. Grantee partners working in or with organizations addressing ecological justice in traditionally marginalized communities communicate a more detailed analysis of the role of racism. In contrast, those working in organizations that do not explicitly address environmental justice and/or serve predominantly white communities are frequently dismissive, exclusive, and often offensive.
- ◇ The Grassroots Fund is working to build bridges in instances of lack of understanding, harmful language, and unfortunate tone-deafness to empathy about the role of oppression, othering, and the false perception that racism does not impact environmental work. Over time the Fund hopes to be engaged in the co-creation of accountable models to address our current, flawed systems of power. The Fund is also building its own internal capacities to be more aligned with this shift. The Fund is utilizing its convening capacity to build bridges and strengthen communication in communities and across long-standing divides of race, culture, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geography. This vital capacity at this divisive moment in our nation's history is essential, though complex and slow-moving. The Fund is learning to work as a teacher, healer, and convener, but also as a student excited and empowered by the opportunity to learn from its grantee partners and community leaders. Trauma, grief, and remorse are part of this process as a range of community members reckon with their past and possible futures.
- ◇ The Process Map highlights the Grassroots Fund's unique position to convene grantee partners for mutual learning, collaboration, and story-sharing, as well as collective anti-racism work in learning, listening, and co-creating means to address all forms of marginalization. These bridge-building skills are crucial in social justice work; improving understanding, communication, and perspective sharing expand the possibilities of what the work can accomplish. **There is a significant opportunity for the Grassroots Fund and grantee partners to leverage numerous relationships with other social justice activists in New England. Other environmental**

justice movements, policy leaders, and foundation funders can learn about the insights gleaned from the process and innovations of communities most affected by environmental injustices and make these needs a priority.

- ◇ The Grassroots Fund continues to innovate and experiment with approaches beyond funding, such as emergent technical assistance and capacity-building work that promises to strengthen grantee leadership. Through RootSkills, Catalyst Convenings, and the emerging virtual Communities of Practice, the Fund shares information, helps ground collective dialogue, prompts power-sharing, and strategizes to advance the environmental justice movement, without necessarily becoming the spokesperson for campaigns (**see pg. 25: Process Map**).
- ◇ The Grassroots Fund considers ways to amplify grantee partners' voices and work more intentionally to build grassroots groups and a vital generative movement and network as part of a broader social justice ecosystem. The focus to date has been internal, on the process. It has emphasized mechanics and proposal review, with a limited focus on many of the more significant environmental justice issues that are a stated focus. Staff continue to learn about equity and the depth of gravitas that communities of color and other marginalized communities bring to the dialogue.
- ◇ The Grassroots Fund has developed an intricate internal process and includes more grantee partners as grant proposal readers who offer depth, breadth, and gravitas in environmental justice. The Fund sees value in providing ongoing education to volunteers. However, there is significant value in working more intentionally with grantee partners and building on the knowledge and insight of those who have received grant support and allied advocates. This inclusion will bring additional gravitas to a participatory process and to environmental justice work in New England. The real promise of the model is the engagement of those directly affected in grantmaking decisions and building capacity, providing technical assistance, developing strategies and tactics to ground the field. This is the future work of the Fund.

Developing organizational and system capacity requires the alignment and inclusion of several issues. It is perhaps challenging to orchestrate 3,100 grassroots grantee partners in seeding a regional environmental justice movement, but it is a promising challenge! The alignment work is ongoing and forms Part II of the process evaluation endeavor, set to commence in the spring of 2021.

Equity Evaluation and Approach of the Process Evaluation

This process evaluation was undertaken with a comprehensive equity frame. Equity is the promotion of just and fair belonging throughout society and creates the conditions in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach his, her, or their full potential. The principles and values that underlie every assessment element and all interactions with staff, board, and partners have been consistently grounded in

advancing equity.¹⁹ **In this interest, critical thought was given to all aspects of the evaluative process—the questions asked, frameworks presented, research shared, reflections requested, methodology used, and sense-making around findings. The method, approach, and framework have substantial implications for the Grassroots Fund. The increasing use of systems thinking and design thinking in evaluations helps evaluators identify and evaluate the impacts of systemic drivers of inequity and be mindful of intentional upstream designs. This evaluation uses a traditional methodology, systems thinking, and design thinking with an equity backbone.**²⁰

The process evaluation was conducted with an approach that attended to staff, board, leadership, and grantee partners. Alignment with those experiencing and doing the work brings to the fore different cultural and historical orientations, assets, knowledge, and data. Conclusions from the data were discussed with many of those engaged in and affected by the work. This honors ownership of knowledge and decision-making power. Often the evaluator was an observer. The evaluator has specialized training, an explicit values framework, and works with an inclusive equity-driven approach to evaluation design. Time was invested in relationship-building, language and approach clarification, participatory planning, joint data collection and interpretation, and insights. These attributes were united with the core principles of equity evaluation; the work was done with a moral imperative to incorporate an equity lens.

A commitment to the following principles was at the fore and was reiterated throughout the process:

1. Evaluation and evaluative work are done in the service of equity. The process, management of the evaluation, and all evaluative work bear a responsibility to advance progress towards equity.
2. Evaluative work is designed and implemented in a balanced way with the values underlying equity work: multicultural validity and participant ownership orientation.
3. Evaluative work answers critical questions and outlines pathways to chronicle how historical and structural decisions have contributed to the Grassroots Fund's process, the community situation, and the effect of the underlying systemic drivers of inequity on the strategy.
4. Equity work is intentional when the cultural context is inseparable from the change initiative's structural conditions.

Philanthropy is showing a burgeoning interest in equity frameworks. Additional scrutiny on the sector's response calls for inclusive paradigms, theories, and rationales for change. The process of change, power dynamics, engagement,

¹⁹ <https://www.policylink.org/about-us/equity-manifesto#:~:text=This%20is%20equity%3A%20just%20and,and%20reach%20their%20full%20potential.>

²⁰ Dean-Coffey, J. (2018). What's race got to do with it? Equity and philanthropic evaluation practice. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 39(4), 527-542.

influence, implications, and attention to the drivers of inequities are at the heart of equity work. Therefore, the process evaluation with the Grassroots Fund examined the following:

- Comprehensive change: building an equity focus into all endeavors of the Fund through internal operations.
- Organizational culture and external values as exemplified by the process and grantmaking.
- Reflection on principles of equity in policies, practices, procedures, and people.
- Ways in which the Grassroots Fund addresses systems change and power dynamics by removing the systemic barriers that create inequities.
- Grantee partner selection with a focus on systems changes, advocacy, community organizing, public education, civic engagement, and power-building among grantee partners to co-create the systems that affect them and environmental justice.
- The participatory grantmaking model.
- Ways the Fund intentionally engaged specific populations on environmental justice issues, including marginalized populations who have been historically excluded from the environmental justice movement.
- How diversity and inclusion were reflected in the staff, board, proposal readers, volunteers, consultants, and grantee partners.²¹

The Grassroots Fund seeks to be firmly grounded in environmental justice work. However, currently, significant financial resources are given to well-established environmental groups throughout the New England area. The Fund is working to build a more in-depth facility with equity and is actively developing a more profound capacity to include traditionally marginalized communities' voices and perspectives and document the implications.

WHAT PARTICIPATORY PHILANTHROPY LOOKS LIKE AT THE GRASSROOTS FUND

The Fund is committed to a Just Transition of power based on guiding principles and practices of living its values. This commitment is evident throughout the organization. Over the past five years, the Fund has been working to embed participation in every organizational expression. The commitment to involvement is reflected in the Fund's values, practices, communication patterns, and behaviors. Numerous features that embody a participatory philanthropic organization are outlined in this document and highlighted below:

- Regularly inviting input and active participation from community stakeholders who are directly affected by present challenges on program

²¹ The Fund is diligently working to diversify the group of readers. Readers represent the population of New England. However, prioritization of grantee partners, grassroots activists in aligned fields, and those with an understanding of environmental justice would significantly strengthen this process.

strategies, priorities, tactics, and grantmaking.

- Adding new functions that strengthen the Fund’s capacity to engage those directly affected more effectively, including Communities of Practice, participatory community research, stakeholder mapping, and the RootSkills convenings.
- Developing recruitment and hiring practices that ascertain potential employees’ commitment to authentic community participation in all organization elements and engaging grantee partners and grant proposal readers for organizational roles.
- Ensuring that the Fund’s board committees include community stakeholders and non-grantmakers.
- Facilitating board discussion on the benefits of inclusion, authentic perspectives, community participation, and decision-making about Fund strategy, approaches, and rationale.
- Integrating an ongoing feedback loop of grantee partners and community participation in all the institution’s activities.
- Redesigning program staff’s role to serve as partners alongside grantee partners to co-create numerous organization elements, the grantmaking process, and strategy.
- Initiating field-wide discussions in a fluid manner that engage community voice in issues, approach, grantee partners’ participation in grantmaking processes, proper resource allocation, and emerging work to define grantee outcomes.
- Prioritizing transparency as an institutional value and practice by consistently making information and data about funded projects publicly available. The Fund is building an emerging capacity to highlight grant-funded work outcomes and is developing an evaluation process.
- Prioritizing these values in daily work: the elements are part of staff members’ performance reviews and are considered in compensation/promotion decisions.

THE RATIONALE FOR PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING TO BOLSTER ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Equity and the Participatory Model

The way a process is conceived and handled is often the best indicator of its outcome. A plethora of methodologies and approaches are used in the philanthropic process. These are usually closely aligned with an organization’s mission, vision, and values. The way the philanthropic process is developed, how it unfolds and is conducted depends upon the nature of its leadership and culture, the complexity of the issues, the field’s definition, and the perspectives sought. Philanthropic work requires comfort with the subject matter and methods, collegiality, and openness to serve the funder best. Therefore, a high level of engagement and clarity, and a comfortable style and manner of the Fund’s staff and leadership, are of paramount importance. The work process foretells the outcome; a robust process is predictive of a product that will be sustained over time.

As an entity, philanthropy can be very bureaucratic, originating as it does from a climate of privilege and as a means to demonstrate one’s generosity and compassion and to avoid taxation. Recent years have seen a surge in novel approaches to revenue generation, including but not limited to crowdfunding, giving circles, donor-advised funds, and countless digital giving platforms that allow anyone to be a philanthropist.

The impulse toward equity and inclusion is aligned with a participatory process that directly affects the learning dialogue’s heart. Those with the relevant lived experience often have insights far beyond a traditional classroom, bringing depth, breadth, and wisdom to the process.

Therefore, community leaders’ engagement brings community organizing, community development, public health, deliberative democracy, and environmental justice lenses to the process. Presenting the “what, why, and how” of participatory grantmaking demonstrates the approach’s catalytic value. **Participatory grantmaking is a small part of a participatory ethos that can result in robust and pivotal change for a community and/or region and opens up the potential of building a field when scaled throughout an organization.**

Participatory approaches are the passing gears that initiate a process that can move foundations from judges and decision-makers on what gets done, to facilitators of a process in which they work alongside grantee partners, other funders, and policy leaders. Community stakeholders define priorities and action. Turning an equity lens onto this approach allows us to look at ongoing questions of perspective and solutions. Challenges may appear very differently to residents, activists, workers, students, or nonprofits amid their daily activities. In the US, academic credentials are often valued more than relevant lived experience. Traditional philanthropy defines challenges and prescribes what are described as solutions; its view is often myopic, top-down, and, too often, tone-deaf. The intent may be positive, but the lack of insight can hamper the application of resources and cause missed opportunities that deepen marginalization. A traditional, quantitative scientific approach, despite statistical significance, frequently does not have the cultural fluency needed to ground or align the strategy with community reality, culture, organizations, or residents.

Participatory grantmaking may be influential at such a time as this. We may have a renewed focus and a deepened appreciation for our neighbors; we may fervently hope to overcome hatred, race-based violence, marginalization, and oppression; but that day has not yet come. Race-based inequities persist; many are as prevalent today as they were four hundred years ago. The US lags in achieving socioeconomic, health, educational, and criminal justice equity. The divisiveness over the past three-plus centuries is with us and was on full display on January 6, 2021, at the US Capitol storming. The same challenges undergird environmental racism. Trust is frayed. Community partners in many parts of the US are sick and dying. Many are at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. A moral society must account for the marginal material realities and lived experiences resulting from the matrix of social inequities that cause these disparities.

The approach is mindful of examining how, by whom, and for whom grant decisions are made. However, effective philanthropy and participatory benefits go far beyond monetary questions; participatory grantmaking is merely one rich element in participatory philanthropy. It is distinctive because it moves crucial decision-making about money to a broader group of participants. **This may be a significant power-sharing move and, therefore, worthy of exploration in a capitalist system.** Here, the people most affected by the targeted issues have a voice in decision-making. In the Grassroots Fund’s process, smaller grassroots groups, often too small to merit consideration by more prominent donors, are eligible for grants; many do not have 501(c)(3) status or audited financial statements.

Grantmaking processes are traditionally relatively limited and transactional. Typically, they include preparation of proposal guidelines by funders, preparation of proposals by prospective grantees, a funder-led proposal review process (sometimes with an outside expert or academic input), and a final decision on who is funded and to what extent.

Philanthropy must appreciate the diversity of context and the context of diversity more deeply. No one paradigm or solution can fit all. A disparate lived experience may not result from a sole “ism” or a single system of oppression as its cause. The embodiment of social and political processes—colonialism, labor relations and classism, racialization, gendering, and disablement—are at the core of social justice and participatory work and are far more likely to be unapologetically articulated in an inclusive process. Communities of color have vibrant and long-standing traditions of mutual aid, tithing, and philanthropy. This was often born of necessity as a society more broadly actively sought (and still seeks) to discourage their collective action.

Three-Phase Participatory Process Based on Values of Equity and Justice

In 2017, the Fund worked to incorporate equity more fully into its organizational, grantmaking, and programmatic work, including expanding participatory grantmaking and convening processes and explorations. Co-learning alongside several northeast grassroots grantmaking partners informed the process. The Fund deepened the participatory decision-making model incorporating **a three-part process of 1) an open call for** (hundreds of) grant proposal **readers** for the first phase of review; **2) staff due diligence** and interviews with grantees; and **3) utilizing a participatory planning committee to compile a fifteen-member Grantmaking Committee from the grant proposal readers’ pool for final decision-making during a two-day retreat.** All grant proposal readers receive webinar-based **training on decision-making biases**, followed by a more in-depth half-day bias training for the Grantmaking Committee ahead of making final resource allocations. This work has been adopted to foster an inclusive and growth-based mindset on applications and provide a deeper understanding of an inclusive environmental justice movement among grant proposal readers who have historically been white and privileged. The Fund is working on bringing more authentic voices to the pool of proposal readers. Unfortunately, many proposal readers are new to structural and systemic racism concepts, a reality in many environmental justice endeavors.

Grant proposal readers offer comments on their assigned applications and provide scores for six different categories on a scoring rubric. Proposal reader scores are aggregated to create an average score for each applicant. Grassroots Fund staff then conduct phone interviews with each applicant group and request more information based on the grant proposal readers’ questions or concerns²². The team also scores the applications using a scoring rubric with the same six categories used by the proposal readers and comments on each type. An overall staff recommendation (“Recommend Fund,” “Recommend Not Fund,” and “Discuss”) is also provided. Staff categorizes applications as “Recommend Fund” or “Recommend Not Fund” if the overall proposal reader score and staff score align. Staff classifies applications as “Discuss” if there is a discrepancy between overall proposal reader and staff scores, if there is an extensive range of proposal reader scores, or if there are specific questions or concerns about how the application fits the Fund’s guidelines.²³

In the interest of moving to an equity framework, approximately fifteen people are selected to serve on a Grantmaking Committee (GMC) from the proposal readers’ pool. Proposal readers that are interested in this role note this on their application. The staff then reviews those interested and selects a balanced and representative committee based on factors including geographic location, age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity, and other factors. The proposal readers represent the New England population. The Fund is working to diversify the proposal readers’ pool over time. The GMC selections are also reviewed by the GMC Planning Committee, which comprises individuals who have participated in the GMC in the past. Those selected to serve on the GMC meet in person for a one-and-a-half-day retreat (virtually during the pandemic) and are asked to approve the “Recommend Fund” and “Recommend Not Fund” applications. Staff facilitates these discussions, along with a Planning Committee member, but the staff does not vote on the final funding decisions. The GMC makes the final funding recommendations, which staff brings to the Grassroots Fund Board of Directors to approve the total dollar amount.

In 2020, the Fund had 269 grant proposal readers reviewing 184 grant applications, many past or present grantees themselves. Grant proposal readers come to this process with a wide range of organizing experiences and lived experiences and add breadth and depth of knowledge to resource allocation decisions. The Grassroots Fund asks proposal readers to self-identify across several demographic characteristics to clarify how the process is or is not shifting decision-making toward a more diverse and representative base.²⁴

A core part of the work with proposal readers and Grantmaking Committee members is discussing how personal biases show up throughout this work. Reviewing applications often surfaces biases. In collaboration with consultant CQ Strategies,²⁵ the Fund is learning how the anchoring effect, confirmation bias, survivorship

22 Grow Grants | New England Grassroots Environment Fund. <https://grassrootsfund.org/grant-programs/grow-grants>.

23 Volunteer as a Grant Reader! | New England Grassroots Environment Grassroots Fund. <https://grassrootsfund.org/readers> Accessed January 20, 2021.

24 Volunteer as a Grant Reader! | New England Grassroots <https://grassrootsfund.org/readers>

25 A consulting group.

bias, and blind-spot bias impact how perspectives influence decisions, what to pay attention to, and how to stay conscious of these biases. The process could be strengthened by prioritizing proposal readers who are grantee partners, have an understanding of environmental justice and systemic oppression, are engaged with grassroots work in related areas, and are residents of the areas directly affected or under consideration for funding.

The Fund is seeking ways to deepen its facility and understanding of equity. In addition to piloting this process within grantmaking practices, the Fund serves as an advocate for democratized, equitable grantmaking practices. The Grassroots Fund believes that this model can revolutionize traditional power dynamics in the grantmaking process of philanthropy. Critical to the design of this latest version of the Grassroots Fund's participatory process was the essence of participation. The statistics on decision-makers in the distribution of philanthropic dollars are clear (and they have not improved much in recent decades)—most philanthropic staff and trustees are older, wealthier, and white. In some funds, the process is led by staff, often overwhelmingly white and highly educated.

The Fund was aware that the open call for grant reviewers is merely a tiny step in shifting voices and power. It recognized that an authentic open call requires a dynamic shift across the organization. This shift has merit, yet, the Fund is aware of the need to bring those most affected into the process's heart. The participatory grantmaking process is part of an emerging participatory organization that has developed pop-up offices in communities and approaches to promote inclusion through program design, technical assistance, community-building, and emerging stakeholder mapping and participatory evaluation processes. The Fund is developing ways for more community members to be engaged in various ways. The Fund is only beginning to recognize the promise and power of a participatory organization, far beyond grantmaking and pivoting to a stronger focus on environmental justice, action, engagement, and results. The participatory grantmaking can be strengthened by including more grantee partners, people from the communities most affected, and prioritizing those with social justice insight, lived experience, and advocates from allied networks.

PARTICIPATORY PHILANTHROPY INCLUDING PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING: A PARTICIPATORY ORGANIZATION IS THE CORE OF THE APPROACH

The participatory grantmaking trajectory can yield exponential benefits to the funder and the grantee partner. It can move far beyond a simple transaction to reach mutual capacity-building, field-building, power-sharing, insight, and the achievement of desired outcomes.

The grantmaking process developed by the Grassroots Fund entails multiple steps:

1. It provides small grants to emerging grassroots groups and is working in an ongoing effort to more intentionally engage the communities directly

affected by disparities.

2. It builds relationships with others in related geographic areas, issue areas, or cultural communities.
3. It may encourage participation in any number of learning venues (RootSkills, Communities of Practice, and Catalyst Convenings; **see pg. 25: Process Map for details**).

The grant may be the entry point, but the work developed through the grant period, often through subsequent grant periods, is a powerful story, particularly in outcome-driven fields such as environmental justice. Selection of the most promising partners and pathways is vital. However, the grant itself and work with a dynamic grantee partner is the linchpin and often the catalyst for the essential work downstream. The participatory process gives grassroots groups entry to the playing field. This is an area the Fund hopes to understand more deeply. Optimally, the participatory process promotes civic discourse and power-sharing. The Fund continues to work on these goals as philanthropy plays numerous invaluable roles beyond funding, including providing technical assistance, convening partners, weaving networks, performing evaluations, conducting research, and field-building. The grantee partner brings a wealth of insight into strategies, tactics, culture, ways to work more effectively in communities, and a lived experience prism. Ultimately, the participatory organization infuses a culture of reciprocity throughout its milieu.

Desired Outcome

The participatory grantmaking process continues to evolve and informs and influences all aspects of the Grassroots Fund's grantmaking, strategy, structure, and technical assistance. The Fund works with staff, board, and community partners to distinctly define success, desired outcomes, and promising grantee partners' pathways to move the New England region toward environmental justice. The process is intentional and time-consuming. Attention is paid to anticipated outcomes linked to comprehensive definitions of success, with parallel attention given to how those outcomes may be achieved. Part of the process is a careful analysis of how power is built, shared, and used and assumptions that maintain current power arrangements in areas aligned with the Fund's mission.

This evaluation's most crucial finding is the far-reaching impact of a participatory lens that has informed and continues to inform the organizational structure, staffing, evaluation, grantmaking, technical assistance, and community partnerships. The work entails dialogue and reflection on how equity was incorporated into strategy development, funding priorities, and funding mechanisms.

APPROACH

The Grassroots Fund brings numerous assumptions to its work outlined in the

GUIDING PRACTICES in the Process Map (pg. 25). These are foundational practices at the core of the Fund’s work.²⁶

Centering Just Transition

The Fund values are rooted in co-creation, fairness, and equity. Strategies and programs are increasingly focused on moving from an extractive fossil-fuel-driven economy grounded in consumerism, militarism, and the exploitation of land, labor, and resources to a local, living, and loving economy grounded in ecological and social wellbeing, cooperation, and regeneration. To achieve transformative social change, the Fund advances direct-democratic decision-making and community organizing efforts that ensure that those affected by a problem are a part of the solution. The Grassroots Fund believes in supporting those closest to environmental and social issues as they determine their options. The power of grassroots organizations is their ability to organize, educate, and mobilize. The Fund aims to reorient power to be more local and democratic.

Shifting Power in Decision-Making: Transparency, Accountability, Democracy

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund believes that grant decisions must be made collectively, both by receiving grants and donating money. The Fund’s Grantmaking Committee transforms the traditional funder–applicant structure. The Fund seeks to create opportunities for people and groups to work together, particularly with those outside of their regular networks, so that they may share their expertise and experiences. The Grassroots Fund serves as an advocate for democratized, equitable grantmaking practices and is an avenue for widespread grassroots grantmaking through formal and informal funder networks. However, there is little done in shifting power during the grant period; there is a significant opportunity for deeper engagement and making connections. This is the real power of working in the realm of co-creation.

Equity in Participation

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund’s grantmaking and subsequent engagement are designed to share information and lessons learned to address root causes, not symptoms. The Fund is a relatively unique organization and often the only source of funding for unincorporated volunteer groups. This position means that the Fund needs to provide a range of services to meet the demand; the commitment is to helping groups realize their initial project visions. The Fund is committed to providing access to financial, technical assistance, networks, and information resources structured to provide support for groups. The change can be sustained and deepened through connections in the grant period, understanding more about grantee partners’ reality, and braiding the strands of promising grassroots work.

²⁶ Guiding Values | New England Grassroots Environment Fund. <https://grassrootsfund.org/dollars/guiding-values>. Accessed January 20, 2021.

Equitable Access to Resources

The Fund is interested in supporting projects that offer creative, new, community-based solutions that are unlikely to receive grant funding from other sources. The Fund is moving to understand the power of grassroots partners more intentionally during the grant period and ways to work more closely and augment their burgeoning promise.

Rooted Innovation

The Fund is coming to view applicants as potential partners catalyzing innovative change, addressing systemic challenges, casting bold visions, and garnering financial support to do their good in the world (see pg. 22, Process Map, Approach, K: Risk Management).²⁷ The Fund is building the capacity to understand ways they might work with grantee partners to face systemic challenges.

Initially, the New England Grassroots Environment Fund focused on the inclusion of grassroots groups, turning the lens to recognize extreme environmental inequality through the perspectives of race, class, and other historically marginalized identities. The Fund has recently extended its work beyond distribution questions to incorporate a more meaningful consideration of history, theory, approach, policy, culture, and the ways that gender, sexuality, and other identity attributes shape environmental equity.

This evaluation and the Fund urge a firmer grasp of the entrenched and embedded character of social inequality—reinforced by institutional power and systemic norms—in society and, therefore, a reckoning with the need for transformative approaches to environmental justice. Finally, the Fund is beginning to understand how historically marginalized communities and groups across New England are indispensable for building sustainable, just, and resilient futures.

The dominant societal and environmental paradigm in New England prioritizes and perpetuates unequal environmental degradation, inconsistently enforces policies, trades human health for business profit, placing the burden of proof on the victims, who are most often members of traditionally marginalized communities. This process legitimizes human exposure to toxic environments and hazardous substances, legitimizes a regulatory policy that favors business, promotes risky technologies, and devalues vulnerable, economically, educationally, and politically disenfranchised communities in the New England region. Moreover, such policies subsidize ecological destruction and neighborhood destruction and create an industry around risk assessment and management, furthering delayed action on pollution prevention, health promotion, and generative models as overarching and dominant strategies.

By contrast, the environmental justice paradigm embraced by the New England Grassroots Environment Fund is

²⁷ Guiding Values | New England Grassroots Environment Fund. <https://grassrootsfund.org/dollars/guiding-values>. Accessed: January 17, 2021.

- Grounded in a holistic approach to enhance environmental health policies and regulations.
- Developing risk-reduction strategies for multiple, cumulative, and synergistic risks.
- Founded on well-being principles, public health, human dignity, and sustainable economic development.
- Premised on public participation in environmental decision-making, co-creation, and engagement.
- Founded on the bedrock of community empowerment.
- Building infrastructure for achieving environmental justice and sustainable communities.
- Developing innovative public-private partnerships and collaboratives.
- Enhancing community-based pollution prevention strategies.
- Developing local and regionally oriented community-based and community-driven work.²⁸

The Fund sees promise in prioritizing some of these areas for more intentional focus, building connective tissue, and facilitating dialogue as a way to catalyze some of the work initially funded.

Reflection and Evaluation

Much like the US itself, the Grassroots Fund is at an inflection point. It has used a process evaluation to evaluate the foundational changes necessary to rectify systemic inequities and barriers to inclusion and to foster an organizational culture of belonging. The board, staff, leadership, and partners of the Grassroots Fund are troubled by the events that transpired during this process evaluation and are building significant internal capacity to advance justice and solidify themselves as a learning organization ensconced on the bedrock of belonging. There is dialogue on the work of grantee partners and ways to gather deeper insight on the reality and potential of these invaluable partners.

INCLUSION AND INTERSECTIONAL BELONGING

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund offers a framework for the work of philanthropy and environmental justice through its use of an **intersectional belonging lens**. Many who work on environmental justice focus on one or two identity categories, but injustices affect actors across myriad inequalities. A small but growing number of funders are exploring the ways that gender and sexuality, for example, shape environmental justice struggles. Moreover, the work of environmental justice, grassroots activism, and participatory engagement are multidisciplinary, drawing upon diverse fields, including ecofeminism, critical race theory, public health, and community psychology. Numerous forms of inequality

²⁸ Environmental Justice: Grassroots Activism and Its Impact https://web.stanford.edu/~kcarmel/CC_BehavChange_Course/readings/Additional%20Resources/J%20Soc%20Issues%202000/bullard_2000_13_justicegrassroots.pdf

perpetuate environmental injustice and shape actors' experiences. The Grassroots Fund's work is strengthened by greater attention to these dynamics, and inclusive intersectionality forms the heart of participatory processes. **The richness of different worldviews, disciplines, contexts, cultures, and approaches undergirds sound strategy.**

The environmental justice movement comprises people from communities of color, Indigenous communities, and working-class communities committed to combating the environmental injustice, racism, and gender and class inequalities that are most visibly manifested in the disproportionate burden of environmental harm that these groups face. For the environmental justice movement, the battle for environmental health, restoration, and sustainability cannot be won without addressing the ecological violence that falls upon vulnerable human populations; thus, social justice is inseparable from environmental protection. Increasingly, gender identity, disability, sexuality, citizenship, and indigeneity are shaping the terrain of ecological inequality. Unfortunately, women, children, people who have been incarcerated, and people with disabilities are often relegated to some of the most toxic residential and occupational spaces in communities and workplaces in New England.

Women resist discriminatory environmental policies in their workplaces, residential communities, and other gendered spaces. Still, women activists in the environmental justice movement have been less visible because they tend to work for smaller, community-based organizations that rarely make headlines and survive on volunteer labor and small grants. Nonetheless, women form most of the movement's leadership. This is an area that the Grassroots Fund intends to document more thoroughly.

Feminists and queer activists remind us of the importance of focusing on the human body, which opens numerous possibilities for Grassroots Fund work. The sexuality and reproductive rights of women of color, immigrant women, and Indigenous women have long been targets of state authorities, with troubling consequences for human health, cultural integrity, and ecological resilience. Too frequently, bodies of color are ignored, compounding challenges that they already face. Discourses of nature have been developed to enforce heteronormativity, regulate sexuality, and criminalize and marginalize persons deemed sexually transgressive. Sexuality is a target of oppression and environmental exploitation. Persons of varied sexualities challenge the oppression of their selves, cultures, and lands, resisting genocide and heterosexism.

Intersectional belonging goes a step further than mere inclusion: you are invited to participate in co-creating the thing you belong to actively. Active engagement, respect, seeking the story, and working to develop gateways to ecological justice is a powerful combination. The issues of philanthropy, participatory engagement, intersectional identity, belonging, equity, and environmental justice are too rarely connected. The complexity of developing a simultaneously matrixed model is evident in the Process Map. The power of traditional Eurocentric norms and organizational paradigms is ever-present across community engagement, intersectional identity, environmental justice, and traditional philanthropy. It defines reality, allocates resources, manages and manipulates beings, policies, governments,

and ecosystems.²⁹

The Grassroots Fund takes a hard look at tradition as a frequent impediment to environmental justice. The challenge of addressing humans' estrangement from healthy ecosystems and the disconnection of humans from resources is at the center of their work. Disconnections divide. Too often, we are required to work in siloed and separated domains, disciplines, and processes. Compartmentalizing is perilous; connectivity is often the catalytic factor in movement-building work spurred by belonging and co-creation.

The Grassroots Fund uses the opportunity to build its organization, capacity, and grantee partner base to push the boundaries of reformist thinking and action in the face of entrenched traditional philanthropy. Using the emerging equity lens to comprehend the history of environmental racism in New England creates a unique foundation on which grantee partners can build. The Grassroots Fund considers that timidity will not bring us to ecological justice or resource distribution. A bold and transformative approach is required.

Intersectionality can be used in multiple ways to develop social movements. Coalitions of distinct marginalized groups can be unified around a collective marginalized identity and experiences of oppression, but introducing intersectional logic to a partnership may impede the coalition's ability to post coherent positions and manage power balance among the member organizations. Intersectionality requires bringing together numerous traditionally marginalized groups in combination while ensuring that a raft of specific needs is addressed, affecting access, belonging, and co-creation opportunities inside the coalition structure.³⁰ This augments the power of traditionally marginalized groups within the environmental justice movement.³¹

The work of the Fund embodies principles established by Native, Indigenous, African American, Latinx, Native/Indigenous, and Asian American/Pacific Islander communities in developing tools and strategies to eliminate unfair, unjust, and inequitable conditions and decisions, most recently grounded in the social justice work of the 1960s.³² The Fund brings ethical and political questions to the surface on over resource distribution, access, local decision-making, and intersectional belonging to ensure that New England continues to move toward a safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing environment for all residents.

²⁹ Heaney, M. T. (2019). Intersectionality at the grassroots. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 1-21.

³⁰ Cole, Elizabeth. 2008. "Coalitions as a Model for Intersectionality: From Practice to Theory." *Sex Roles* 59 (5): 443–453.

³¹ Adam, Erin. 2017. "Intersectional Coalitions: The Paradoxes of Rights-based Movement Building in LGBTQ and Immigrant Communities." *Law & Society Review* 51 (1): 132–167.

³² Bullard, Robert D., Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres. 2011. *Environmental Health and Racial Equity in the United States*. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association

Intersectionality in Environmental Justice: The Case of Race and Disability

Intersectionality is a diagnostic tool for assessing the combined effects of power and complex social structures on lives. This approach's core insight is that those who have multiple marginalized identities suffer from oppression from more than one direction, creating distinct subjugation experiences compared to those with only one marginalized identity. Intersectionality recognizes these concerns and demands that multiple oppressions be challenged through struggles for social justice. **No struggle can be a single-issue because we do not live single-issue lives.** Addressing historical and institutionalized patterns that disadvantage groups of people based on their social identity.

Power

The Grassroots Fund works across multiple layers of power and is developing aligned organizational components to address the power imbalances that often result in intentional disparities and marginalization for the many and privileges for the few. The Grassroots Fund's work includes an expansive frame of environmental justice and collaboration spaces. The Fund is considering the roles of land, air, water, the Black Lives Matter movement, immigration, rural/urban/suburban dynamics, and the construction and maintenance of the prison industrial complex in the United States. All of these have ramifications for environmental justice. The interdisciplinary work of the Grassroots Fund is outlined in the methodology and epistemology that grounds this document.

The Fund shifts power and access to resources with the following imperatives:

- **Move Resources:** Invest in and center participant trainings on understanding (racial) bias, privilege, and structural oppression. Ongoing conversations and critical self-examination are a core part of the participatory process.
- **Shift Power:** Traditionally marginalized community members are central to decision-making and must take leadership in this process.
- **Change System(s):** System reform is at the roots of equity and justice. People/participants may be traumatized or maintain systemic barriers to participation willfully or due to bias. The Fund is committed to removing barriers and reimagining a system that liberates.
- **Flexibility to Change:** Processes to achieve equity and justice are frequently in flux and are moving more rapidly at the grassroots than in institutions.

With an intentional focus on power, transformation, and engagement, the Grassroots Fund regards social inequality and power imbalances as obstacles to environmental justice. **The Fund and the emerging participatory organizational framework**

have the potential to be integrity in action. Work with the grassroots amounts to recognizing that prescriptions for change and the forging of a just and sustainable future cannot rely on dominant institutions or social systems. These structural inequalities are inseparable from the formation and perpetuation of policies and an extractive economic system. Therefore, it is counterproductive for environmental justice grassroots groups and advocates to look to dominant institutions for solutions. Through an equity lens, work with grassroots groups recognizes that social justice cannot expect the institutions responsible for socioecological inequalities to remedy them. Shifting power in the Fund’s grant programs has deepened and broadened the types of work funded.

Demographic Shifts and Power:

Defining the community of concern is vital for a place-based organization. Who is in the community? Who are the partners? This is a crucial consideration for the New England Grassroots Environment Fund. As part of a nation struggling to come to grips with its past, present, and future, the commitment to learn, be respectful, and be generative is at the heart of the Fund. As a learning organization, the Fund has worked throughout this nine-month process evaluation and beyond to learn, adjust, and align with a factual and documented history. However, this is one that is often painful, obfuscated, and misunderstood. Though considered one of the most liberal areas of the US, racism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, homophobia, ableism, and other forms of intolerance are alive and well in New England. There are vestiges of slavery. (Slavery is part of these northern states’ history; the shipping industries in New England were active participants in the slave trade into the 1800s. The textile factories in New England were heavily dependent on southern cotton.) Sadly, historical trauma is part of the region’s shared history.³³ **The participatory grantmaking process and model provide an opportunity to build community and**

33 Massachusetts abolished slavery in 1783. This action affected the territory of Maine, which was part of Massachusetts until 1820. New Hampshire followed in 1783. Vermont prohibited slavery in its founding constitution of 1777. [Painter, N. I. (2006). *Creating Black Americans: African American history and its meanings, 1619 to the present*. Oxford University Press.] However, Newport was a hugely significant port in the North Atlantic slave trade, and from 1725 to 1807, more than a thousand trips were made to Africa in which more than a hundred thousand men, women, and children were forced into slavery in the West Indies and throughout the American colonies. African people built many prominent colonial houses throughout New England, including those in Newport [RI. Ward, J. (Ed.). (2016). *The fire this time: A new generation speaks about race*. Simon and Schuster]. Historical trauma, the trauma(s) inflicted upon a group of people who share an ethnic, national, or religious identity, includes both “the legacy of numerous traumatic events a community experiences over generations and ... the psychological and social responses to such events” among later generations [Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families, and communities. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 23(3), 316-338, p. 320]. This kind of trauma can reach across generations, “such that contemporary members of the affected group may experience trauma-related symptoms without having been present for the past traumatizing events” [Mohatt, N. V., Thompson, A. B., Thai, N. D., & Tebes, J. K. (2014). Historical trauma as public narrative: A conceptual review of how history impacts present-day health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 106, 128-136., p. 2]. Resilient responses to historical trauma have been documented among American Indians, Holocaust survivors, and Armenian genocide survivors [Barel, E., Van IJzendoorn, M. H., Sagi-Schwartz, A., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2010). Surviving the Holocaust: a meta-analysis of the long-term sequelae of a genocide. *Psychological bulletin*, 136(5), 677. Denham, A. R. (2008); Rethinking historical trauma: Narratives of resilience. *Transcultural psychiatry*, 45(3), 391-414; Fast, E., & Collin-Vézina, D. (2010). Historical trauma, race-based trauma and resilience of indigenous peoples: A literature review. *First Peoples Child & Family Review: An Interdisciplinary Journal Honouring the Voices, Perspectives, and Knowledges of First Peoples through Research, Critical Analyses, Stories, Standpoints and Media Reviews*, 5(1), 126-136; Karenian, H., Livaditis, M., Karenian, S., Zafriadis, K., Bochtsou, V., & Xenitidis, K. (2011). Collective trauma transmission and traumatic reactions among descendants of Armenian refugees. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 57(4), 327-337; Kirmayer, L. J., Gone, J. P., & Moses, J. (2014). Rethinking historical trauma (pp. 299-319)].

for communities to come together and commence a healing process. Population analysis is essential; aligned with the region’s population, most of the Fund’s grants have historically gone to white communities. However, this reality is under review, being balanced, and contemplating the disproportionate impact of environmental injustices on communities of color.

Economies and demographics change, but often philanthropic organizations remain with missions and funding processes based on standard practice. The Fund is agile in a dynamic and volatile world. Adapting to change is challenging; demographic changes make the commitment to equity more vital. Working toward equity is critical as the Fund seeks to be deeply engaged in local work- and place-based endeavors. Given the mission of the Fund, current priorities, population shifts, and political shifts, a careful demographic analysis deepens the participatory grantmaking process as the Fund works to ensure that the process is inclusive, grantee partners are included, and ongoing evaluation highlights the work of an increasingly diverse New England (the complete demographic overview is found in Appendix E).

STRATEGY

Organizational strategy is a compass, not a map, and is often the predominant factor in organizational impact. The process itself may be dynamic; what may seem strategic to environmental justice advocates, funders, and participatory grantmaking theorists may not be in complete alignment in all cases. Many grantees may have very different perspectives. Some are deeply offended that their lives and communities are becoming part of a social experiment; traditionally, that approach has not gone well for historically marginalized communities. Gross power imbalances, lack of empathy, and often drastic differences in worldview are predictive of tensions, challenges, and compromises, with people’s lives in the balance. Traditionally, foundations have seen the importance of developing and retaining their strategies to evaluate themselves and their progress. This approach may come from a more traditional investment strategy where the funder sees themselves as a source of investment capital in community intervention. The social science world is replete with dialogues on results, returns on investment, and evidence-based approaches. This paradigm prioritizes theories premised on academic models, most often not informed by the affected communities. The co-creation of a strategy development process to develop the participatory grantmaking realm is time-consuming but valuable. The Grassroots Fund is exploring models for grantee partners and community stakeholders to lead.

Additionally, the participatory grantmaking approach, taken as a model out of the context of a particular domain, may itself become overly burdensome and complex. Traditionally, philanthropy has always prioritized an end goal or desired outcome, for example, improving outcomes in a specific geographic area, for a particular population group, or in an issue area. A strategy must balance the dynamics of approach and results. Imbalance predicts an outcome that may be skewed to a process with amorphous ends or promising ends without understanding or using the most propitious means.

The Grassroots Fund has several theories that ground its participatory grantmaking approach:

- Institutional philanthropy is historically—and intentionally—structured to create a power imbalance through which a privileged few determine the allocation of resources (grant dollars).
- Grassroots organizers—especially those from low-income, traditionally marginalized communities that are the most harmed by environmental degradation, economic injustice, and the climate crisis—are typically systemically excluded from crafting and implementing strategies and solutions, inherently making their efforts less sustainable, less useful, and less relevant. Participation in the decision process gives those who are most affected some control in a society where they are traditionally excluded from meaningful discussion.
- Grassroots organizers offer critically important insight into problems, solutions, and practical strategies drawn from their lived experiences.

The Grassroots Fund is part of a movement to disrupt the power imbalance at the community level and across philanthropy. In its participatory environmental justice work, the Grassroots Fund defines a strategic direction that increases civic engagement, influence, and power transfer to grantee partners. In 2020 and 2021, the realities of COVID-19, economic volatility, environmental challenge, and social unrest have made it impossible to focus on many of the typical characteristics of strategic philanthropy. There has been a paradigm shift prioritizing strategic direction and management imperatives aligning timelines with measurable strategic objectives. The Grassroots Fund's emphasis on and increased interest in capacity-building, generative networks, and stakeholder analysis is informed by engagement across the New England region in the communities that it has funded. The challenges facing traditionally marginalized communities are simultaneously shaped by local realities, policies, and politics. This reality permeates the daily lives of residents and is starkly reflected in the fact of COVID-19. The challenges are far beyond a single grassroots organization's ability to realize goals from a small grant. However, greater civic participation, often because of the Fund's support, helps build community, a vital source of resilience in these challenging times. Residents are influential, influencing power dynamics and driving civic engagement and community education on New England's environmental issues. Consequently, the Fund is building pathways to a broader focus on civic engagement and impact.³⁴

A strategic direction includes broad pathways towards making a change in particular issue areas. The strategic-directions approach focuses on multiple strategies and highlights supportive institutions, policy changes, collaborations, and civic engagement. The Fund's ethos, board, and staff are also aligned with these pathways. The Grassroots Fund builds, seeds, supports, and nurtures a matrixed model of generative networks. The Black Lives Matter protests over the summer of

³⁴ Why we do what we do | New England Grassroots Environment Fund. <https://grassrootsfund.org/why>. Accessed January 21, 2021.

2020 stimulated internal reflection among grassroots partners, staff, board, and communities. The Fund has recognized the need to invest in a more in-depth analysis of stakeholders, influence strategies, develop a generative network, and engage in field-building. These actions exemplify the Fund's trajectory from a participatory grantmaker to a participatory organization seeding a generative network. The process of participatory grantmaking, begun more than five years ago, has resulted in aligned organizational, staff, strategy, communication, and collaborative means to support grassroots work mindful of contexts and roles as outlined in greater detail in the Process Map (pg. 25).

The Fund is a small organization that seeks to maximize its impact. It co-creates with grassroots partners, bolsters grassroots capacity, nurtures civic engagement, and encourages field-building efforts. In this trajectory, the Grassroots Fund supports New England communities in a movement toward environmental equity and out of poverty. The Fund is at the front of a process that has come from years of reflection, the just-completed year of soul-searching, re-tooling, and co-creating with **grantee partners as thought partners**. The New England Grassroots Environment Fund balances the nature of the work, which infused the strategy with an equity lens and grantee partner perspectives. This highly matrixed, nuanced, and multilayered approach includes developing an internal evaluation and learning capacity and building generative networks' capacity. The Grassroots Fund emphasizes place-based endeavors. Hence, it is interested in offering technical assistance to collaborative efforts. Also, issue areas and field-building across the environmental justice field are of interest. The emerging food justice work, highlighted later in the document, will strengthen this capacity. Over the coming year (2021), the Fund will prioritize and clarify the most promising pathway with many promising possibilities.

Part of the Fund's learning is that funding singular grassroots organizations has significant limits in the formidable environmental justice world. For this reason, the Fund will be more intentional in developing a stakeholder analysis framework, providing technical assistance to grantee partner clusters, and enhancing grantee participation in data collection. These insights come from this process evaluation, discussions with other funders, and insights from continued engagement with grantee partners and grantee constituent communities.

Executive Director, Julia Dundorf, asserts that the Fund's mission has been consistent, but its strategy is evolving with its learning. The Fund is intensifying its work on equity, civic engagement, economic opportunity, and supportive endeavors, and its approach has changed in the past few years. It maintains a laser focus on building the infrastructure of grassroots engagement, working in and with communities, and pursuing environmental, social, and economic justice. However, the role and impact of a single, small funder is essential for grassroots groups but is limited in the larger environmental justice context. Increasing engagement, stakeholder and power-mapping, and local policy change, for example, are a handful of ways in which smaller investments can have a broader impact. The Fund is also working closely with other funders across the region and is leveraging its small but mighty influence. There is hope that there will be a significant infusion of resources into this area that is drastically underfunded and tragically overlooked by so many.

Strategy and Tactics: 2021

As the New England Grassroots Environment Fund has been refining its strategic direction for 2020/2021, it has prioritized elements of the participatory process and organizational implications. The Fund considers various tactical ways to build capacity, structure learning loops, and examine activities during the grant periods of grassroots groups. This would allow the Fund an opportunity to build a culture of evidence for and with grantee partners to understand better what grantees are doing and why and how it is useful. This type of learning harnesses the brilliance of a comprehensive process, insight at the local level, and lessons for the fields of environmental justice, participatory grantmaking, and democratic engagement. During the past few years, there has been an intentional focus on implementing deep participatory grantmaking. The Fund has prioritized the process of inclusion and getting funds to grassroots groups. The Grassroots Fund now moves to a broader and potentially much more impactful learning realm alongside these grantee partners. In this process, understanding engagement strategies, influencing strategies, braiding areas of interest, capturing promising practices, and structuring learning to build a reliable on-ramp to environmental justice and power will be prioritized. The seed grants to grassroots groups are pivotal. However, the Grassroots Fund is becoming more strategic about its work. The synergies and community power vested in over 3,100 grantee partners is formidable. The Fund is building internal organizational capacity to look at the grant period, the power of a generative network, more impactful use of the Fund's assets, agility, and insights beyond the transactional grantmaking process. The participatory process lays the groundwork for exponential social engagement, capacity-building, movement-building, and field-building. This moment in history has much to learn from rural and urban areas with shared visions and from civic engagement across the divides of race, ethnicity, disability, immigration, and socioeconomic status.

Aligned Strategy and Learning

The Grassroots Fund views **strategy as learning**. Strategic directions are set, and the organization commits to increments. A set of measurable objectives keeps the Fund focused and guides staff. Operational goals are aligned with learning objectives and staff roles, grantee partnerships, and the commitment to co-creation. The focus is on learning while being sensitive to indications that the goals and strategic direction are on track. This provides an opportunity to assess whether the process is moving forward in the way that was anticipated. Staff, management, board, and community partners can call a pause, a point of reflection, so that challenges can be reviewed, discussed, and resolved.

The Grassroots Fund is developing domains to build the capacity of the organization and the network:

- Determining the balance between reflection, analysis, and learning at the beginning of a project when there is more uncertainty. This results in the **thoughtful spacing of the implementation process** to integrate models and adequate time to reflect, analyze, and learn.

- **Including the entire Grassroots Fund Network** (board, staff, grantee partners, and community stakeholders) **in reflection, analysis, and learning periods**. This model embraces belonging, perspective, and grounds divergent thinking.
- Setting a **strategic direction** and **measurable objectives** to achieve tasks in a more impactful manner.

Developing a consistent alternation between a focus on implementation and a pause for reflection, analysis, and learning can be applied at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. The Grassroots Fund has adopted a respect and an interest in learning. As an organization, it actively incorporates learning as part of ongoing work to reflect, analyze, and learn. **The co-creation, refining, and bolstering of organizational characteristics, capacities, and resulting networks are likely among the most powerful outcomes of this process evaluation. Beyond the participatory grantmaking process, the New England Environmental Grassroots Fund has developed a participatory organization and an emerging generative grantee partner network.**

Features of Generative Organizations and Networks³⁵

The process evaluation helped describe and support the Grassroots Fund in identifying the organization's generative component elements. The evaluation crystallized the potential of an emerging network of stakeholders spawned by the Fund's work, namely, 3,100 grantee partners. The Fund is building adaptive capacity to navigate changing circumstances, resulting in innovative ideas and solutions that create activity in the field beyond the status quo, forging a new paradigm. **Generative organizations and networks adapt to changing conditions in ways that advance themselves and create new possibilities for the broader field.** This aspect of the field-building capacity of the Fund grounds future work. Beyond the transaction of participatory grantmaking lies the potential of generative engagement with grantee partners and field-building. Their distinctive capabilities are outlined below and make it more likely for the Fund to develop innovations that create catalytic possibilities for environmental justice, participatory grantmaking, and democratic process. The emerging grassroots network is promising but nascent. It is very promising but beyond the scope of this process evaluation. Its promise should be recognized, and further analysis and documentation is merited. This process evaluation served as a catalytic force in recognition of the work of the Fund. The process review forced reflection, analysis, articulation, and sharing among staff and the board and further supports the importance of learning as a strategy.

The leadership and management characteristics of the Grassroots Fund are briefly outlined below. They can be used as a prototype for other organizations interested in the promise of a **participatory organization** model.

Investing in Employee Education

In the interest of ensuring that staff are connected and feel a sense of belonging,

³⁵ Entire section based on the unpublished manuscript of C. Robinson and S. Ashley on Generative Organizations and Networks.

attention to capacity is aligned with an equity frame and the Process Map. White employees and others at the Grassroots Fund are taking responsibility for their education by tapping into a [wealth of resources](#). The Grassroots Fund is serious about the role they seek to play in educating employees and board members about inequities in American society, increasing awareness, and offering strategies to build accountability and make the structural changes to support inclusive workplaces. The staff is working with Fund consultants, participating in partner training, and facilitating internal all-staff learning sessions. Models of training, education, mentorship, and shadowing abound as the Fund aligns with other funders and grassroots partners to traverse a pathway to racial equity. The Grassroots Fund seeks to partner on numerous paths to advancing justice.

Leadership and Management Characteristics

Divergent Thinking: Generative organizations and networks can reframe social problems and their solutions in ways that challenge the dominant institutional and societal norms. The Grassroots Fund is working to move beyond the accepted set of choices to envision different paradigms and numerous possible results. The Grassroots Fund may integrate divergent thinking from grantee partners, staff, board, funders, proposal readers, and consultants. It is working to be a listening and learning organization. The Fund celebrates divergent thinking as a source of innovation and improvement, emanating from its commitment to grassroots innovation. There are numerous points where the organization listens, reserves judgment, and explores ideas with curiosity.

Groundbreaking Attitude: The Fund's leaders see themselves as leaders within the environmental justice arena and in the broader philanthropy field. They desire to create public value in many areas, from the participatory model to their aspiration to revolutionize philanthropy. If the promise is realized, they may lend their intentionality to the plethora of grantee partners and the potential of a grassroots movement for environmental justice. The Fund is developing internal processes to gather data and build mechanisms to reflect on outcomes and experiences to solidify learning while creating and producing.

Systemic Perspective: Managers and leaders seek to be agile and operate within larger systems to interact with and influence colleagues in nonlinear ways. This is a work in progress and demands an understanding of the complexity and an anticipation of the emergence of new dynamics that reveal new possibilities and options for change. Achieving a balance in a dynamic environment is challenging and fundamentally an art. The Fund works to balance numerous elements simultaneously: the complexities of race, ethnicity, cultures, geography, environmental justice, traditional environmental paradigms within the nonprofit sector, the philanthropic sector, and the challenging political climate of 2020/2021 are daunting.

Strategy: As an emerging generative organization spawning a network, there is an evolving sense of the Fund's capacity. The Process Map details numerous capabilities and approaches. As a partner in the environmental justice milieu, the Fund's position and potential to work more fully with grantee partners provides

a strategic perch to continuously scan the horizon and constantly be aware of innovation opportunities. Creating a learning and adaptive organization requires implementing a nimble, adaptive, aligned, and multifaceted framework. The Fund is working to align strategy, level set operations, and finally, specify tactics.

Collaboration: Collaborative leaders seek purposeful relationships and have the capacity to facilitate mutually beneficial interactions within and across sectors. These leaders have greater contextual intelligence and a broader view of environmental resources and constraints. The participatory process serves to address the concerns of many groups and communities who have been worried about being irrelevant and consistently sidelined. This is a developing skill of the Fund. Over time, the ability to learn, adapt, and operate with agility becomes more engrained in the organization. The understanding of how humans deal with change is part of the work of the Fund.

Creativity: The Fund makes a continual effort to foster and model creative performance. Initiation is a developing capacity as the Fund seeks to create a culture of teamwork and ownership.

THE CHALLENGE: MOVING TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Throughout New England, grassroots community groups have emerged in response to practices, policies, and conditions that residents have judged unjust, unfair, and illegal³⁶. Among these challenges are food insecurity; arbitrary enforcement of environmental, civil rights, and public health laws; differential exposure to harmful chemicals, pesticides, and other toxins in the home, school, neighborhood, and workplace; faulty assumptions in calculating, assessing, and managing risks; discriminatory zoning and land-use practices; and exclusionary practices that prevent some individuals and groups from participating in decision-making or limiting the extent of their involvement.³⁷ All these challenges and others have been reflected in roughly 3,600 grants made to over 3,100 unique grassroots groups by the Grassroots Fund from 1996 to January 2021.

Headline Recommendations

- Develop liaisons and connections to public health and health disparities research in support of traditionally marginalized communities.
- Support increased public education on pollution prevention strategies and implications for health and wellbeing.
- Facilitate matrixed cross-disciplinary, geographic, and cultural coordination to ensure environmental justice.
- Provide intentional outreach and engagement, and foster belonging,

³⁶ Why we do what we do | New England Grassroots Environment Fund. <https://grassrootsfund.org/why>. Accessed January 21, 2021.

³⁷ Bullard, R. D. (1999). Dismantling environmental racism in the USA. *Local Environment*, 4(1), 5-19.

education, and communication.

- Co-design policy pathways and trajectories.
- Attend to matters of scale: leverage collaboration and cohort-building to empower grassroots group to tackle issues beyond the merely local.
- Organize grassroots grantee partners into cohorts in order to catalyze deeper understanding, creativity, and shared purpose and to bring promising partnerships to light and scale.
- Amplify unheard voices through a blending of stories, videos, data collection, and other means of documentation.
- Conduct demographic analyses of the New England region in service of ensuring resources are being adequately delivered to traditionally marginalized communities.

Environmental Justice

As we saw above, environmental justice is defined as the fair treatment and involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, concerning the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies³⁸. Fair treatment means that no racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group should bear a disproportionate share of the environmental harm resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs or policies (US EPA, 1998).³⁹

Ongoing research demonstrates the harmful environmental and neighborhood health risks borne by people of color and low-income people. Their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and playgrounds have disproportionately been consigned to being contaminated wastelands. The US EPA, state and local policymakers, and stewards have not consistently recognized the deleterious effect that government, industry practices (whether intended or unintended), and industrial products have on traditionally marginalized populations. By law, the EPA is to enforce the nation's environmental laws and regulations equally. It is required to protect all Americans, not just affluent communities.⁴⁰

The environmental protection apparatus manages, regulates, and distributes risk. The dominant environmental protection paradigm institutionalizes unequal enforcement, trades human health for profit, places the burden of proof on the victims rather than the polluting industry, legitimizes human exposure to harmful

38 Bullard, R. D., Johnson, G. S., Smith, S. L., & King, D. W. (2013). LIVING ON THE FRONTLINE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSAULT: LESSONS FROM THE UNITED STATES MOST VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES. *Revista de Educação, Ciências e Matemática*, 3(3).

39 Bullard, R. D., Johnson, G. S., Smith, S. L., & King, D. W. (2013). Living on the frontline environmental assault: Lessons from the United States most vulnerable communities. *Revista de Educação, Ciências e Matemática*, 3(3).

40 Bullard, R. D., & Johnson, G. S. (2000). Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555-578.

chemicals, pesticides, and hazardous substances, promotes risky technologies, exploits the vulnerability of economically and politically disenfranchised communities, subsidizes ecological destruction, creates an industry of risk assessment and risk management, delays cleanup actions, and fails to develop pollution prevention as the overarching and dominant strategy.⁴¹ As a result, a growing body of evidence reveals that traditionally marginalized populations bear the most significant environmental and health risks. The Institute of Medicine, the National Academy of Sciences, and the American Public Health Association's research reveals adverse outcomes and individual, collective, and historical trauma caused by environmental toxins and threats. Significant research in the fields of public health, economics, education, zoning and city planning, neuroscience, behavioral health, and environmental health reveals that traditionally marginalized communities bear greater educational, health, economic, and ecological risk burdens than society at large. **These studies confirm what most affected communities have known for decades: traditionally marginalized areas are exposed to higher toxins and pollutants and are diagnosed with certain diseases in greater number than are more affluent, white communities.**^{42 43}

The recent legal case in the UK on asthma offers a powerful example. The Guardian has reported on a legal finding that a nine-year-old's death was attributed to air pollution's health effects because the child lived close to a highway. The legal result reported that children and those with asthma were particularly at risk; the air pollution induced and exacerbated the child's particular form of severe asthma.⁴⁴ ⁴⁵The ruling is the first of its kind in the UK, has international ramifications, and is likely to increase pressure on governments to tackle illegal air pollution levels. These circumstances disproportionately affect urban communities of color directly aligned with social engineering, redlining, zoning, and siting of highways in the middle of these communities. Grassroots environmental justice groups have taken a holistic approach to environmental health policies and regulations. They have developed risk-reduction strategies for multiple, cumulative, and synergistic risks; ensured public health; enhanced public participation in environmental decision-making; promoted community empowerment; built infrastructure for achieving environmental justice and sustainable communities; ensured interagency cooperation and coordination; developed innovative public-private partnerships and collaboratives; enhanced community-based pollution prevention strategies; ensured community-based sustainable economic development; and developed geographically oriented

41 Bullard, R. D., & Johnson, G. S. (2000). Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555-578.

42 Gee, G. C., & Payne-Sturges, D. C. (2004). Environmental health disparities: a framework integrating psychosocial and environmental concepts. *Environmental health perspectives*, 112(17), 1645-1653.

43 Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Environmental Justice. (1999). *Toward environmental justice: research, education, and health policy needs*.

44 Levy, M. L. (2021). Risks of poor asthma outcome in 14,405 children and young people in London. *npj Primary Care Respiratory Medicine*, 31(1), 1-5.

45 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/16/girls-death-contributed-to-by-air-pollution-coroner-rules-in-landmark-case>. Accessed January 27, 2021.

communities.⁴⁶

Environmental protection is a right, not a privilege reserved for those who can vote with their feet and escape or fend off environmental stressors.⁴⁷ The impetus behind the environmental justice movement came from people of color, grassroots activists, and their bottom-up leadership approach.⁴⁸ Grassroots groups have organized, educated themselves, and empowered themselves to change the administration of environmental protection in their communities. The predominant view that environmental justice has come from within government, academia, or mostly white, middle-class, elite nationwide environmental and conservation groups is misguided and again ignores Black, Latinx, and Native/Indigenous Americans' power and rich history. The Grassroots Fund honors the history and truth of the movement, marks the gravitas that grassroots leaders bring to New England's discourse, and co-creates to build an on-ramp to systems, policies, and changes that will create healthier community outcomes throughout the region.

As noted, New England is predominantly white. However, the Fund has made a conscious effort to do its work with an equity lens, bringing forth the voices and perspectives of traditionally marginalized populations and establishing a balance. This has been a challenge at a time of growth for the organization within a divisive political climate and squarely places the Fund amid racial, ethnic, and religious tensions. Recognizing the humanity of all people has been at the core of how the Fund conducts its work. **Future demographic analysis and review of the work are recommended.** New England is home to numerous brownfields (sites with actual or perceived contamination), Superfund sites, nonexistent zoning areas, and opposition to integration. There are many challenges ahead, but the Fund has articulated its commitment to charting a course through them.

Significantly, Dr. Martin Luther King went to Memphis in April 1968 to address economic and environmental justice for Black sanitation workers on strike. Issues of environment, health, sanitation, and health are intertwined. Environmental justice in the United States is tightly tethered to social justice and civil rights actions and practices.⁴⁹ The convergence of the social justice and environmental movements originated as local, grassroots, and often isolated community-based struggles against toxins, brownfields, workplace hazards, lead in drinking water, and other iniquities. This is the sweet spot for the Grassroots Fund. The environmental justice movement has blossomed into a multi-issue, multi-ethnic, multigenerational, and multiregional movement. History illustrates the depth and breadth of grassroots change and the power of grassroots groups who share action strategies, redefine the environmental movement, and develop common plans for addressing

⁴⁶ Bullard, R. D. (1999). Dismantling environmental racism in the USA. *Local Environment*, 4(1), 5-19. 1

⁴⁷ Bullard, R. D. (1999). Building just, safe, and healthy communities. *Tulane Environmental Law Journal*, 12(2), 373-404.

⁴⁸ Bullard, R. D., & Johnson, G. S. (2000). Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555-578.

⁴⁹ Latinx farm workers organized by Cesar Chavez in the 1960s fought for protection from harmful pesticides in the farm fields of California. The United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ), under the leadership of Reverend Benjamin Chavis, Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States, a 1987 report that became an indispensable tool in galvanizing support for environmental justice action.

environmental challenges that affect New England's traditionally marginalized communities. The Grassroots Fund has come to embrace a wide range of issues, including children's health, pollution prevention, housing, brownfields, community reinvestment, urban sprawl, transportation, land use, worker safety, and food systems (see Appendix F).

History, Grassroots, New England, and Environmental Justice

Across numerous disciplines, research confirms that traditionally marginalized populations disproportionately experience adverse outcomes and health consequences in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and playgrounds. For decades, grassroots activists have addressed local structural and systemic issues throughout New England to change the way government implements environmental, health, farmworker, and civil rights laws.⁵⁰ Local grassroots groups have organized, educated, and worked with community residents; built infrastructure; responded to policy; and empowered themselves to work on issues of environmental justice. **Environmental justice is a civil right.** Many economically impoverished communities in urban, rural, and suburban areas are exposed to toxic conditions in their homes, neighborhoods, schools, and jobs, while more affluent communities are not.⁵¹

Critical Environmental Justice, Critical Ecological Justice

While environmental justice is a vision of a possible future, environmental inequality is defined as disproportionality, one group being at increased risk of exposure to environmental hazards.⁵² One form of ecological imbalance is the phenomenon of environmental racism, defined as racial discrimination in environmental policymaking, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in communities, and the history of excluding people of color from the leadership of ecological movements.⁵³

Environmental and ecological justice are intertwined. Ecological justice is about the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world. This framework includes humans taking responsibility for practicing transformative socioecological political work and extending to understanding inequalities within and across species and making space to imagine and struggle for a more democratic, multi-species world.

The Grassroots Fund follows a path that produces relationships, practices, organizations, and institutions that support (and, when necessary, are critical of) these ideas through conversation, discourse, and peaceful action that deepen

⁵⁰ Bullard, R. D., & Johnson, G. S. (2000). Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555-578.

⁵¹ Bullard, R. D., & Johnson, G. S. (2000). Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555-578.

⁵² Fischer, M. (2015). Fit for the Future? A new approach in the debate about what makes healthcare systems really sustainable. *Sustainability*, 7(1), 294-312. m

⁵³ Brulle, R. J., & Pellow, D. N. (2006). Environmental justice: Human health and environmental inequalities. *Annu. Rev. Public Health*, 27, 103-124. 4

democratic possibilities and futures. Across New England, social inequalities by race and class and environmental iniquities are paired in the neighborhoods where traditionally historically marginalized groups reside. Exposure to higher levels of pollution, toxins, natural disasters, and the effects of climate change/disruption, as well as the exclusion from regulatory and policymaking bodies, influence these outcomes. Because of redlining, inadequate zoning, and regulatory enforcement, neighborhoods with high percentages of historically marginalized residents are overrepresented. This disturbing finding has devastating sociological health and policy implications. The Grassroots Fund strives to enrich the data on process, implications, engagement, and connections through stakeholder analysis and models of grassroots groups organizing on these issues, using an inclusive definition of justice: distribution, belonging, participation, recognition, fairness in procedure, access to power, and recognition of capabilities.

Data

The work of the Fund is determined by numerous sources of data including but not limited to an emerging interest in demographic data, environmental justice challenges (see Appendix E), geographic balance across the portfolio, urban, rural, suburban balance, policy realities, such as COVID-19, economic devastation, and the work of grantee partners over time. This elaborate list of possibilities raises detailed questions about how grassroots environmental justice and philanthropy imagine problems and solutions, and how they engage the community. For example, the Fund is considering enhancing its data collection, learning, and analysis capacity. There are multiple and cumulative exposures and numerous data types on traditionally marginalized populations who may be at disproportionate risk. The Fund co-creates and promotes participation and leadership of these populations.

The Grassroots Fund is developing a more robust learning and evaluation capacity on the phases of assessing impacts, including qualitative and quantitative data-gathering, equity analysis, mitigation, and monitoring. Such an endeavor might collect information from authorities concerning

- environmental risks;
- public hearings;
- democratic participation in decision-making regarding the future of any threatened community;
- compensation for injured parties from those who inflict harm on them;
- expressions of solidarity with survivors of environmental injustice; and
- calls to abolish ecological racism/injustice.

Such a log could be useful to local Fund grantee partners.

Data and Power

Data can have robust impacts when aligned with an understanding of the types of extreme hazards facing historically marginalized communities, garnering respect for their reality, and granting them access to democratic processes and the exercise

of power. The Fund is focused on reordering power relations among its stakeholders. **Challenging the underlying power structures that perpetuate environmental injustice is at the heart of the work. Procedural justice shifts attention from distributive outcomes to decision-making processes and the importance of recognizing groups who have been excluded from participatory democracy and participatory approaches.** Proponents maintain that a focus merely on distribution will be incomplete. A closer examination of group recognition and political and cultural practices involves acknowledging and including traditionally marginalized groups and their unique experiences of oppression. These issues have salience in communities of color and Indigenous communities. Dominant state forces and elites have denied residents the opportunity to participate in decisions regarding environmental impacts that shape their lives for centuries.

The state is one of the primary forces contributing to environmental injustice and related institutionalized violence. Traditionally, communities of color have fared poorly in obtaining ecological justice through the courts and the legal system.

A significant component of justice is inclusion in all elements of decision-making and substantive system changes. This is at the heart of the participatory organizational process and is closely aligned with democratic theory, community organizing, and advocacy.

Value of the Developing Stakeholder Analysis Framework

Ordinary people have traditionally been denied access to the deliberative tables, the terms of debate, and the questions considered for discussion. In policy and regulatory discourse, there may be a minimal discussion of the following:

- The questions concerning the emphasis on intersectional identity categories versus a focus on multiple forms of inequality.
- The extent to which environmental justice issues should focus on single scale versus multiscale analyses of the causes, consequences, and possible resolutions of environmental justice struggles. The multiscale approach is aligned with the matrixed ways in which the Fund operates.
- The degree to which forms of social inequality and power, including corporate, policy, and racial dynamics, are entrenched in society. The Fund maintains that these elements must be confronted, not embraced.
- The unanswered question of the expendability of human and nonhuman populations and neighborhoods facing socioecological threats from industries and other political and economic forces.

The emerging stakeholder analysis process has promise in clarifying

- the priorities of issue areas;
- geographic interests and priorities;

- tactics that are promising;
- influence strategies; and
- ways that grassroots partners may combine efforts on issues of interest.

Understanding what is underway and its utility and forward trajectory provides a way to do a more systematic analysis and build a more precise strategic direction on environmental justice, participatory practices, and civic engagement. This understanding is at the heart of strategic movement-building.

Grassroots Organizing and Scale

A result of the process evaluation is the recommendation that the Fund attends to matters of scale. Social movements and numerous responses to environmental injustices can connect hazards in one place to harm in another. Environmental justice movements are examples of collaborative grassroots activism. The Fund has supported grassroots partners with mounted campaigns that are local, regional, issue-focused, or aimed at multinational corporations, for example.

A multiscale analysis may produce a robust understanding of why environmental inequalities exist and allow for the development of more effective responses. A critical examination raises the question as to whether grassroots groups should turn to the primary actors responsible for producing environmental injustices for remedies. Thus, **activists ask whether we should rely on the state to facilitate social change or whether there may be other paths that can lead to those goals.**

A focus on the role of scale and its implications in environmental injustice is at the heart of a comprehensive movement. The relationship between the local and the global is ever-present. This extensive frame includes the spatial and temporal dimensions of how objects, ideas, bodies, beings, things, environmental harms, and resilient practices are ecologically linked. Though grassroots grants are made to only one scale of analysis (such as a neighborhood or census tract), acid rain may have originated far away; activists in Maine may stand in solidarity with activists in Somalia, Bhutan, or Indonesia who are fighting the existential threat of climate change or a global oil corporation; pollution generated by a coal-fired power plant in New Hampshire can emit carbon, particulate matter, and other substances that contribute to asthma in children who live in Boston. All these examples show the ways in which problems of scale exacerbate the challenge of global climate change/disruption. As the Fund is connected to a rich family of over 3,100 grantee partners, it is strongly recommended that the implications of these issues of scale and connections between movements are investigated carefully.

Scale, Race, and Difference

Issues of scale, race, and difference are central to environmental justice work. This reality informs all elements of a fund that works to promote belonging and inclusion in selecting grantees, technical assistance, Communities of Practice, and ongoing collaborative work. The evidence is strong that when people of color, immigrants, and other historically marginalized populations move into majority-white neighborhoods, their presence often sparks a disproportionate amount of anxiety; there is anecdotal evidence of this dynamic in the Fund's work. The term

environmental privilege has been coined to articulate this dynamic: a privilege gained as whites cling to scarce and cherished socioecological spaces in exclusive communities. Race and scale intersect to reinforce white supremacy and resist efforts by even a small group of people of color to move on up into more desirable neighborhoods with greater access to valued amenities and infrastructure.

Research on implicit bias and interpersonal interactions has found that white research subjects perceive Black and Brown people as threatening when no such threat exists. If people of color are perceived to be threatening, then nonwhite individuals and communities are perceived to be much larger in the cognitive terrain of whites. This (mis)perception and social inflation of the implications of the presence of people of color, and the anxiety-inducing meaning of that presence, suggest responses ranging from everyday exclusions and social slights to white vigilante violence, institutional racism, and state violence. Race and scale intertwine to reveal that when Black people respond to racism, their actions are viewed as an outsized menace. We can see this in the militarized response by police departments when interacting with the Black Lives Matter movement, which was on full display in the summer of 2020 and in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014.

As long as traditionally marginalized people are feared, equitable investment is impossible. A vicious cycle of “undesirable” neighborhoods aligns with disinvestment, poor schools, and crumbling infrastructure. Notably, the Fund's emerging community-building work builds bridges across race, culture, ethnicity, and language and can begin the long path to possible futures. There are elements of teaching and healing at the core of participatory philanthropy as people meet, build understanding, and move toward a common purpose in their communities.

Advocacy

The work of the Grassroots Fund is focused on a Just Transition. The organization is in the process of building a trajectory to change. This process evaluation progression served to support the organization in clarifying, articulating, and mapping this trajectory. **There is work yet to do: to organize grassroots grantee partners into cohorts that might catalyze deeper understanding, creativity, and shared purpose and bring promising partnerships to light and scale.** This work will be initiated in 2021 and likely continue. With more than 3,100 grantee partners, there are numerous potential combinations, collaborations, and synergies. A matrix model will be conceptualized in 2021. Through this process, the Fund supports grassroots partners' authentic voices and perspectives, amplifies voices, and develops more coordinated advocacy muscle.

With an inclusive organizational culture, the Fund simultaneously builds internal capacity and field-building capacity. These are the skills needed in catalytic advocacy work that is effective at multiple levels.

To champion public-interest advocacy on issues of environmental justice as a necessary activity worthy of support from individual donors and philanthropic institutions, the Fund has a unique role to play. Moreover, the Fund can play a critical role in capturing and disseminating promising practices; convening thought leaders,

practitioners, and policymakers; and providing the connective tissue that can turn diverse and decentralized entities into a powerful force for enduring catalytic endeavors.

Violence, Race, Xenophobia, and Racism: Environmental Justice Views

For Black, Native/Indigenous, Asian, and Latinx people in the US, the relationship between land, environment, and race has often been a violent panoramic saga with deeply traumatic results. Elements of historical trauma remain in New England and permeate the realities of communities throughout the region. The work of environmental justice in the region is a confluence of positive relations between Black communities, nature, and community gardens, for example, aligned with the memories of Native People being murdered and raped on their land and the reality of newer immigrant groups from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Bhutan, or Syria. They seek to form a new community and relate to their new home/land. For the past twenty years, Latinx, African, and Asian immigrants have been repopulating small towns across America, their presence is very familiar in New England; immigrants of color are revitalizing small towns and rural New England (see Appendix E). Yet, these newcomers are not always welcome.

The contrast between distant relationships with slavery and the land, the reverence and care for the land of Native/Indigenous people, and love of the great outdoors is palpable. The result of a long history of anti-Black violence, anti-immigrant violence, anti-Native/Indigenous bias, and forced expulsion from natural spaces are impossible to ignore. The associations between racial violence and natural environments in the US have resulted in the oppression of numerous traditionally marginalized Black communities and the degradation of environmental landscapes.⁵⁴ The confluence of racial and ecological violence has codified race into the very earth. The Fund is mindful of spiritual traditions, trauma, pain, and the need to heal amid economic struggles and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.

Black and Native/Indigenous people have a deeply troubling history in the US and New England. Research demonstrates how spatial segregation, over-policing, surveillance, and other practices disproportionately impact Black communities and force people in (and out of) place. For example, segregation, enforced via redlining, created and petrified the Black ghetto at the same time. The slaughter and theft of land from Native/Indigenous people erased them from their place. Hence, Black and Native/Indigenous people have become easily erased, even in spaces with which they are most intimately and historically associated. Slavery existed throughout New England and was not completely abolished in all areas until 1865. Though abolished in 1865, and much earlier in some New England states, there exists a historical memory, trauma, and manifold manifestations of being disenfranchised and torn from nature.

Despite the obfuscation of Native/Indigenous and Black people's presence and contributions to place, scholars, artists, storytellers, and writers have continuously tracked the land's racial codification. While the forms of violence against Native/Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian, and Muslim communities in the US have shifted

⁵⁴ Wright, W. J. (2018). As above, so below: Anti Black violence as environmental racism. Antipode.

over time, the land has become no less sacred. Many scholars see environmental racism as a form of slow death like shootings, tasing, murders, lynching, incarceration, or refusal of medical care. Environmental racism consigns Black individuals, families, children, and adults to another type of premature death.

Toxic Pollution, Violence, and Sacrifice Zones

Toxic pollution is a form of violence. Communities gradually being brutalized by degradation, redlining, and unregulated industry contributes to political geographies of violence and environmental justice. The constructs of slow violence and slow death emphasize the intimate connections between structural and slow forms of harm. The concept of slow death argues that structural inequality mutates into multiple forms of oppression, marginalization, ostracism, and substandard housing, education, health care, transportation, air quality, soil quality, and water quality, culminating in death by a thousand cuts. Toxic landscapes appear across New England and are largely “out of sight.” One might ask, out of sight to whom? By posing the question, it is possible to begin claiming visibility, agency, and power. Communities of dignity have been forced to inhabit toxic spaces. Open discourse is a means to start to unravel the political structures that sustain the uneven geographies of pollution.⁵⁵ Researchers and activists have coined the term sacrifice zones—heavily contaminated communities that society has abandoned. Based on the government's inaction, history, and policies, some conclude that people from those communities are expendable. The Fund has a strongly opposing view; these bodies, populations, and spaces at risk are indispensable to our collective futures.

The participatory structure of the Fund is a method of engagement. It may lead to long-term ethnographic documentation of New England regions, revealing how people gradually witness the impacts of slow violence in their everyday lives. The storytelling, documentation, evaluation, and data gathering will draw upon multiple sources. Tragically, many in the environmental justice movement conclude that slow violence does not exist due to a lack of stories and documentation about inequities.

These stories do not count. They are not visible. This invisibility renders specific populations and geographies vulnerable to sacrifice. A possible result of the process evaluation is a role for the Fund in amplifying voices. Presently this recommendation is under discussion. A blending of stories, videos, data collection, and other means of documentation can ground numerous elements of change.

⁵⁵ Davies, T. (2019). Slow violence and toxic geographies: ‘Out of sight to whom?’. Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, 2399654419841063.

- Documentation of the present reality and challenges.
- Authentic perspectives, language, and the implications of culture and care.
- Historical trauma, violence, and the land.
- The value of grassroots partners as story weavers and diarists.
- A matrix of analysis across issue areas, places, and cultures.
- Building a platform for sharing power and movement-building.

Slow violence presents us with the political geography of deferred environmental threats, where violence is at the root of numerous systemic failures. Traditionally marginalized human populations are treated and viewed as inferior and less valuable to society. The sacrifice zone and the implication of expendability imply that there is no escape. The Fund contends that these bodies, populations, and spaces are indispensable to building socially and environmentally just and resilient futures for us all. Data collected through the stakeholder mapping process may be beneficial to bring

- Reflection on the numerous social categories of difference entangled in the wicked problems of environmental injustice, from ability, race, and socioeconomic status to species status, begins to attend to the ways that both the human and the more-than-human world are affected by and respond to environmental injustice and related forms of state and corporate violence.⁵⁶
- An embrace of multiscale methodological and theoretical approaches to evaluating environmental justice grantmaking organizations to better comprehend the multiple interwoven networks, leverage points, synergies, and promising strategies and tactics.

Communities as Expendable

As a result of this process evaluation and reflection by the board and staff, the Grassroots Fund is building paths and strategies to be more intentionally engaged with **Communities Under Siege**. Elevated public health risks are strongly correlated with race. For example, race is strongly correlated with air pollution, the consumption of contaminated fish, toxic waste, the location of landfills and incinerators, abandoned poisonous waste dumps, cleanup of Superfund sites, and lead poisoning in children. It is well known that elevated levels of lead in children result in neurological dysfunction, cognitive delays, and other behavior challenges that may lie at the root of numerous educational disparities.⁵⁷

Policy concerns include residential segregation, unhealthy living conditions, disparate highway siting, and noise, air, and visual pollution. When some of these

⁵⁶ Bullard, R. D. (Ed.). (1993). *Confronting environmental racism: Voices from the grassroots*. South End Press.

⁵⁷ Yeter, D., Banks, E. C., & Aschner, M. (2020). Disparity in risk factor severity for early childhood blood lead among predominantly African-American black children: The 1999 to 2010 US NHANES. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(5), 1552.

inequities are redressed, many environmental policies distribute costs in a regressive pattern that confers disproportionate benefits upon whites and individuals who fall at the upper end of the education and income scale. Grassroots activists have known for decades that all communities are not treated the same way. Communities on “the wrong side of the tracks” are at greater risk for exposure to lead, pesticides in the home and workplace, air pollution, toxic releases, water pollution, solid and hazardous waste, raw sewage, and industrial pollution.

The United States was founded on the near extermination of Indigenous people and the enslavement of Black people. Policymakers have blamed the victims, people of color, and have decided that confinement to urban ghettos is sufficient. Living in a toxic environment over time, as outlined above, perpetuates environmental racism. If these populations are frequently associated with filth, waste, and uncleanness in the popular imagination, locating factories, freeways, and other toxic elements in their communities can be rationalized as acceptable by callous leaders.

The concept of indispensability is gaining traction in some environmental justice movements because it challenges the logic of racial expendability. Belief in all people’s inherent dignity advances the idea that institutions, policies, and practices that support and perpetuate racism suffer from the misconception that the future of historically marginalized people is divorced from the fate of those who are white, able-bodied, and heterosexual. These communities have always depended on different, othered communities for their survival, for labor, as consumers, and for perpetuating the idea of whiteness.

MODELS IN FORMATION THAT BUILD A GENERATIVE NETWORK

Dr. Martin Luther King possessed a profound understanding of indispensability. The impacts of climate change offer a telling example of environmental racism and injustice in the face of indispensability. One of those principles reads, “The Principles of Working Together recognize that we need each other, and we are stronger with each other. This principle requires participation at every level without barriers and that the power of the movement is shared at every level.” This statement reflects the truth that all people are needed to offer their ideas, labor, and participation to address our common socioecological crises. Such a principle is in confrontation with historical and ongoing segregation, exclusion, othering, and state-sanctioned and market violence.⁵⁸

Participatory grantmaking funds can serve as a powerful liaison between grassroots organizing and traditional donors, serving as learning hubs for influential donors and grantee partners. They often offer significant technical assistance and support in addition to grants. In doing so, they help build the capacities of their grantees

⁵⁸ King, M. L., Carson, C., Luker, R. E., Holloran, P., & Russell, P. A. (1992). *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959 December 1960 (Vol. 5)*. Univ of California Press. *Principles of Working Together - EJnet.org*. <https://www.ejnet.org/ej/workingtogether.pdf>

and their partner communities.⁵⁹ The Grassroots Fund convenes changemakers as part of its continuing work. This work consists of an ongoing journey that respects the voices and perspectives of those directly affected. The Grassroots Fund is developing a formidable cadre of changemakers.

First, a cross-cutting framework is described. This framework will be utilized across all models: Youth Leadership Development, Food Justice, Communities of Practice and Deepening Engagement, and the COVID Rapid Response work. The Fund is working to understand its grantee partners' pivotal work more deeply by developing the stakeholder mapping framework to clarify strategies and tactics. This tool is part of the Fund's system redesign and alignment with policy, engaging with history, mining implications, and assessing and building evaluation capacity within the Fund and across grantee partners. A wide-ranging and specific framework will sharpen insight and impact on the crucial work of changemakers.

Headline Recommendations

- Build an intentional internal learning process and capacity for internal evaluation, research, and documentation capacity.
- Develop an intentional, collaborative food justice model for the region.
- Develop an intentional stakeholder and power-mapping analysis identifying priorities for outreach and relationship-building.
- Instigate a comprehensive cross-program evaluation of the Fund's current programs.
- Expand ways to act as a convener, facilitator, and coalition builder.
- Define a strategic direction that is inclusive and strategic.
- Refining an influence strategy focused on messaging, narrative change, building synergy across domains, including early warning systems and promising leverage points.
- Chronicle the stories of grassroots leaders and movement builders to highlight how the participatory work is building the field.
- Reconsider the structure of all formal application processes in order to reduce burden on grassroots organizers.
- Reconsider definition of "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color" (BIPOC) in order to shift focus on who is making decisions on financial resource allocations and program priorities.

⁵⁹ see Who Decides: How Participatory Grantmaking Benefits Donors, Communities and Movements, a report from The Lafayette Practice, contact Matthew Hart at mhart@thelafayettepractice.com.

Organizational and Network Systems and Processes Characteristics

Strategy and Changemakers

The Grassroots Fund uses the 4 R's framework from ***Spirit in Action's Theory of Transformation***: Reform, Resist, Recreate, and Reimagine. This approach represents a continuum of necessary actions. Within each of the defined procedures, there are further distinctions and blending of strategies. The development of tactics is a process of invaluable conversations. These dialogues require the practice of holding space for differences while acknowledging shared values and principles—operating from a place of love and respect. The Grassroots Fund explores utilizing the 4 R's framework to have conversations with applicants and grantee partners to connect place-based/community-focused projects with larger movements toward environmental justice.⁶⁰

- **REFORM: Working Within the Current System**—The current structures in society have a real impact on daily lives and the ability of people to self-determine. While working to build new structures, it is necessary to change society's facilities that are in place now, simultaneously. There are very immediate and real needs of people who lack food, housing, well-paid work, safety, and opportunity; there is a sense of urgency in addressing these needs. Suppose the Fund seeks to build a base from the ground up led by those most impacted by injustice: in that case, resources must be directed toward immediate needs and current social and political institutions are required to remedy pervasive social problems. Approaches can include human services and policy development.
- **RESIST: Working on the Current System**—History has taught us that "power concedes nothing without a demand." Resistance struggles have given rise to society's most significant wins and must address the root causes of injustice; it is vital to stand against the destruction of what we hold dear. This strategy analyzes and challenges the current political and social institutions to the very soul of democracy by contesting the legitimacy and threats posed and directly confronting how they perpetuate inequity. Approaches can include direct action, community organizing, and electoral work.
- **RECREATE: Generating New Systems**—The future we envision calls for creating new institutions and practices to take the place of the broken ones that have not been serving us. As we resist and succeed at dismantling current unjust systems, we will need to erect new institutions and paradigms. This strategy enables us to experiment with new ways of constituting society by building entirely new models, forms of governance, and leadership structures. Approaches can include democratic schools, restorative justice processes, local economies, and open-source technologies.
- **REIMAGINE: Conceptualizing New Systems**—We are in a critical period of social evolution that requires new ways of being. To generate a just world,

⁶⁰ Spirit in Action | Changing the way we do change. <https://spiritinaction.net/about-us/our-approach/> Accessed January 21, 2021.

the community must imagine a society based on partnership, inclusion, and interdependence. This strategy area engages how the community envisions itself, possible connections, the social whole, and taps into individual and collective ability to engender new cultural norms. Approaches may include the arts, the creative process, media, and cultural and spiritual traditions.

The Fund establishes diverse stakeholders' conditions to work together across traditional boundaries to produce systems redesign and impacts more successfully and creatively at the grassroots level. The Fund is developing emerging capacities to work with grassroots leaders on participatory evaluation, equipping leaders with data and dynamic models to understand their systems' complexity and interactions, play out plausible scenarios, identify opportunities, set priorities for action, and measure progress over time. As outlined above, as a learning organization, the Fund is working to solidify a process to enact ongoing learning loops, analysis, reflection, and accommodations as needed.

Youth Leadership and Philanthropy

The Fund has a burgeoning and dedicated funding track focused on youth and young adults interested in philanthropy and environmental justice to support their leadership development. The involvement and leadership of young adults (defined as those aged up to 25 years) in environmental justice community organizing are critical in fulfilling the Grassroots Fund's mission of creating sustainable communities and a Just Transition. The Young Leaders grant program seeks to support initiatives that allow young adults to design, lead, and engage a community-based effort from inception. It also seeks to substantively incorporate young adults into governance and program design/delivery. Youth ingenuity and input are at the forefront of these projects as the Fund prioritizes youth-led work rather than non-youth working for youth. The model invites young people to design and lead a program or project with autonomy. A core component is youth leadership. The work challenges adultism—the cultural practices that tell us that adults' ideas are inherently better or more practical—and requires allowing the views of youth to be expressed and explored without overbearing advisement. Models where youth are in the decision-making roles are prioritized; evidence of youth cultivating a trajectory to learn and build skills and power is essential. Peer leadership, mentorship, action, learning cohorts, and skills development are all potential uses. There is interest in continuity, sustainability, and transitions in these models. Scrutiny is given to the youth leader/advisor relationship to ensure consistency and accountability across programs. Partnerships with adults may be supported if there is evidence of power-sharing, self-awareness, and access to numerous resources that build power for youth engagement and capacity. The proposal readers in the review process were mindful of geographical location; not all areas have equal access to resources. Contextual factors were part of the prioritization process and grant amounts.⁶¹

Youth are residents, engaging with others in communities as partners and thought leaders, conducting community needs assessments and evaluations and launching

61 Young Leaders Grants | New England Grassroots Environment Fund. <https://grassrootsfund.org/dollars/young-leaders-grants>. Accessed January 21, 2021.

learning and community-building endeavors. They are developing work grounded by equitable and collaborative processes that are participatory and egalitarian and often foster open discussion and consensus-driven decision-making. Commitment to place, equity, environmental justice, and facility with technology is vital for this approach.

Food Justice Movements

As a result of a complex matrix of policy mechanisms that tend to subsidize and support the industrial agricultural system, working-class communities and communities of color are often sites of hunger and malnutrition because of the dominance and control of food systems by a small group of large corporations focused on making a profit rather than feeding communities. This is exacerbated by zoning, contamination, and pursuit of profit motives that often undervalue urban communities. Moreover, corporations tend to produce food using large quantities of toxic herbicides, pesticides, and fossil fuels that imperil consumers, adjacent/downstream communities, ecosystems, and the climate. The transport of food exacerbates air pollution and resulting health disparities.

The Fund is taking unprecedented steps toward regional food equity. The region's economy had traditionally been driven by farming and fishing. Local vegetable stands, sugar houses, fishing boats, and dairy farms remain in some areas. However, only a small portion of land in New England, a region with nearly 15 million inhabitants, is food-producing. Ninety percent of our food comes from outside the region. Food transport is detrimental to the environment. The global food system has displaced populations and pays minimal wages. The system depletes the soil and water and ravages the climate. Notably, nearly 15% of the residents of New England are food insecure. These factors constitute a tremendous food security crisis.⁶²

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund is part of a group of grassroots activists and scholars who document, study, and combat the problem's roots across the New England states and working closely with New England funders. The Grassroots Fund sees a need for a new level of grantmaking focused on regional collaboration and solidarity. Community organizers connect efforts and approaches as they work towards innovative solutions. The New England Food System Resilience Fund (hereafter "the Resilience Fund"), a new fund at the Grassroots Fund, will consider larger funding amounts and explore financing mechanisms that would catalyze effective, rooted, and just food system efforts. The Resilience Fund was initially established by several foundation partners, including The Henry P. Kendall Foundation, The John Merck Fund, The 1772 Foundation, The Sandy River Charitable Foundation, and The Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation. Its initial objectives are

- to elevate and advance practical and innovative solutions to food system crises;
- to center and support solutions/innovations developed, led, executed, and/or directly benefiting marginalized or excluded communities; and

62 The food vision 50 by 60: <https://foodsolutionsne.org/a-new-england-food-vision/> accessed February 4, 2021; Executive summary: https://foodsolutionsne.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Executive-Summary_0.pdf. Accessed February 4, 2021.

- to build relationships and mutual understanding between funders and food system stakeholders through a collaborative outreach and decision-making process.⁶³

The Grassroots Fund has been a leader in food system work, providing grants to grassroots projects across New England. Seed, Grow, and the Young Leaders programs use a participatory decision-making process in which frontline organizers, nonprofit colleagues, funding partners, and Grantmaking Committee members determine program priorities and funding allocations. Food systems work has been a dominant issue area across all the Fund's program levels for several years. As the Grassroots Fund integrates a redesigned Resilience Fund into their programs, relationships will be leveraged to conduct a series of interviews with food system organizers in the region to better understand the networks and community groups focused on food system solutions who center the voices of traditionally marginalized populations. Based on these interviews and context from staff and existing grantees, the Grassroots Fund will be exploring a cohort model that utilizes a participatory, gifting circle model. This cohort of roughly fifteen food system organizers will be chosen based on existing practices that center equity in their work and that understand and put into practice systemic solutions in their communities with representation from all six New England states and from a range of food system sectors. This cohort model is designed to build relationships with one another, understand the breadth and depth of each other's work, and get to a level of understanding and comfortability where members can provide feedback and can learn from each other. Through cohort meetings, members will participate in collaborative food system visioning and decision-making around the distribution of funds through a gifting circle.

In addition to questioning who receives funding, the process challenges the program priorities and the decision-making process. These elements shape the culture and understanding of participating individuals and organizations in deepening innovative community-led work. This process focus may foster a paradigm shift and stronger relationships between key food system organizers and a change in priorities and understanding of the depth of systemic racism and practices.

The Resilience Fund grows out of a one-time funding pool in response to COVID-19 and the Movement for Black Lives, police brutality, systemic racism, and anti-Blackness. Leveraging the Resilience Fund demonstrates the impact and potential of building a strong case for the philanthropic community to center participatory approaches in response to food system organizers' demands. The outline chronicles the Grassroots Fund's work in developing a learning framework to nurture the Resilience Fund's transition to becoming a more permanent entity. The job entails building an authentic participatory process that centers the voices of traditionally marginalized populations in decision-making.

There are significant learning, engagement, and community-building efforts that are part of this work, including

Fall 2020 New England Food System Resilience Fund Interest <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScwlgv2NIRemv-jM07HaXvXK3O9FzENwLQDfq0gOVuPyY0lgw/viewform> Accessed January 21, 2021. 63

- Development of a Community of Practice to deepen grantee capacity, connect, listen to, and share challenges and ideas, and co-create values-driven interventions that work for their groups or communities.
- Learning and collaboration sessions for the philanthropic community to share priorities and process insights and amplify innovative food systems to other funders.
- Development of an online platform to share information publicly, align with additional partners, and collaborate in the interest of strengthening outcomes.

An equity evaluation and future planning is part of the process.

Participatory Processes Beyond Grantmaking: Taking Stock

The Fund's grantmaking processes are mirrored in programs that convene changemakers. The Fund meets with grantee partners and interested community members through gatherings and events like pop-up offices, RootSkills trainings, and Catalyst Convenings. The staff of the Fund, in non-COVID times, travel to communities across the northeast to engage with a broad range of local leaders—especially those who do not recognize themselves in dominant environmental spaces and language—on their terms. All convenings are designed and delivered through open calls for planning committee members, who make decisions on the goals, logistics, content, and speakers (sought through another open call), as well as helping to assess post-event outcomes and revisions for future events. Through these convening processes, the Fund has learned that **progress moves at the speed of trust**. An investment of time and actively showing up builds the trust necessary for people to invest their hearts and time in the review process. Interested community partners sign up multiple times to participate in committees, finding the methods a worthwhile commitment of their most precious resource—their time.

The deepening of relationships—of grant proposal readers, planning committee members, convening attendees, donors, and funders—through the participatory processes builds a much broader and more diverse pool of ambassadors of the work. There is an increase in grant applications, and the focus is more tightly woven around an equity/justice lens. Through the expansion of the participatory process, some of the merits of participation are manifest.

COVID Rapid Response

The Grassroots Fund developed a COVID rapid response grantmaking process in response to the crisis in the spring/summer of 2020. The pandemic's reality, the urging of frontline organizers, and the strategic imperative to resource and amplify the tactics, practices, and strategies that build community was at the heart of this decision. The shifting of power in the Fund's grant programs has deepened and broadened the types of work supported and the range of organizers who recognize themselves as part of the environmental justice movement. The participatory model has refined the co-creation of definitions of environmental justice with those directly impacted, reducing funding barriers. The approach is both timely and deeply needed in these unprecedented times.

The Grassroots Fund responded to the COVID pandemic in mid-March by adjusting the traditional seed grant program to bring rapid response grants to emerging, mostly volunteer-run mutual aid efforts across the region. The Fund secured additional grant commitments from various funding partners, distributing more than \$175,000 to 180 projects in the first round of funding. The Fund often turned requests around in less than 24 hours and engaged in conversations with frontline organizers around how best to support work happening in neighborhoods and towns during a crisis throughout New England.

Subsequent Rounds of COVID-Related Funding

Communities of Practice calls with grantee partners and the realities of disparities on the ground in the region and across the nation spurred action to support additional rounds of COVID-related funding. The widespread societal response to the murder of George Floyd on top of COVID realities urged an intentional pivoting of the Fund's work to prioritize the needs of traditionally marginalized communities, prioritizing work led by Black organizers. The Communities of Practice participants articulated the need for a paradigm shift. The Fund surveyed the first round of COVID response grantees and other 2019/2020 grantee partners about how they define mutual aid work and what it means to be led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). The survey also invited respondents to apply to be on the special grant round's advisory committee.

The resulting nine-member BIPOC advisory committee defined the additional round's goals and parameters. The Fund is committed to supporting funding decisions made by the communities most affected. Recommendations included

- Reconsidering all formal application processes. Organizers are stretched thin, and many philanthropic processes take considerable time and energy, and often do not yield results.
- A highly nuanced definition of "BIPOC," shifted to focus on who is making decisions on financial resource allocations and program priorities. The context of diversity and diversity of context is multifaceted and multilayered. Definitions of "Black-led" highlight distinctions between immigrant communities and groups led by Black people who have been in the region for generations. The definition of "Indigenous" is also involved; tensions remain in Indigenous communities. The Fund was spurred to add a question to all grant application forms asking applicants to self-identify, providing their definition of BIPOC (see Appendix E).

Guided by the Communities of Practice and a select advisory group, the Fund distributed \$100,000 in additional, restricted funds to COVID-specific work in the fall of 2020 without using another application form.

NEXT STEPS

The Grassroots Fund is building internal capacity. Key actions will include

- Building an intentional internal learning process to track elements of organizational culture, systems, procedures, policies, purposeful learning sessions, and promising learning loops to deepen the knowledge and facility of all staff.
- Building internal evaluation, research, and documentation capacity. Developing an aligned participatory evaluation model to share with grantee partners. Defining the metrics, desired outcomes, and promising pathways to environmental justice.
- Developing an intentional, collaborative food justice model for the region. The Resilience Fund will distribute funds and create a regional food system venture through existing Grassroots grantee partners.
- Developing an intentional stakeholder and power-mapping analysis identifying priorities for outreach and relationship-building; chronicling promising strategies and approaches.
- Further analysis of the Process Map and its implications, and a comprehensive cross-program evaluation of the Fund's current programs.
- Discussions and presentations with environmental and progressive funders about the needs of the environmental justice movement.
- Expanding ways to act as a convener, facilitator, and coalition builder.
- Defining a strategic direction that is inclusive and strategic, leading to environmental justice outcomes.
- Refining an influence strategy based on insights from grantee partners on environmental justice issues. Focus on messaging, narrative change, building synergy across domains, including early warning systems and promising leverage points. Mapping grantees, issues, and evidence of moving the needle.
- Chronicling the stories of grassroots leaders and movement builders. Look at process, community connections, and ways to engage stakeholders. Highlight how participatory work is building the field. Move from the more tactical focus on the participatory grantmaking process to the value to the mission and vision of the New England Grassroots Environment Fund and ways this tactic has helped to move the field.

CONCLUSION

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund works to identify, learn, and plant emerging models, build synergy with community partners on common interest issues, facilitate connections, and integrate understanding. When the participatory framework is aligned with an equity lens, the entire process is permeated, the whole organization is affected, and the work of grantee partners and Fund leaders benefit over time. The participatory approach is **belonging in action** and requires power and capacity to co-create. Authentic belonging means we are creating for all. **The participatory process creates space to hear and see each other. The space does not require agreement, but it does require respect. Creating a compassionate learning space and aligned practices permits sharing of realities, struggles, and environmental challenges.** The participatory process is about co-constructing a larger “we.” Tackling environmental justice challenges, systems, and policies requires capacity-building, an accurate grasp of the history and mitigating factors, a wealth of constituents’ voices, cultural fluency, and level-setting in the present reality. This informs staff’s work at the grassroots and philanthropic levels and in data collection, use of technology, and policy advances; it builds political will and popular support for change. The Grassroots Fund’s emerging work on collaboration, community power, community organizing, and community education are substantial and will build the muscle of a participatory grantmaking process and a participatory organization. **Environmental justice must grow with a framework of collective access, which means that everyone can participate in the movement and live in a world where they can thrive. This dynamic is at the heart of a participatory organization.**

The present moment seems promising for environmental justice and philanthropy in general. With evident public dissatisfaction over inequality and racial injustice, along with surging social justice movements and increased urgency on ecological justice, there may be a time of reckoning in the sector. As a nimble, values-based grassroots funder, the Fund has been testing and continually improving its grantmaking processes since its inception and deepening roots in a six-state region. **The process evaluation reveals opportunities for a participatory organization and the power, urgency, and potential for reciprocity, inclusion, and movement-building.**⁶⁴

The Grassroots Fund is working to incorporate new ways of thinking, operating, collaborating, partnering, and building power with grantee partners. The challenge of environmental justice demands lived experience, depth of insight and alignment with community, and a future view. Community members, grantee partners, and a range of experience are invited to bring insight on promising approaches and strategies. Possibly more important is the striking benefit of a participatory endeavor: if the participatory framework is aligned with an equity lens that permeates the entire organization, grantmaking, engagement, constituents’ voices, and aligned field-building are part of the grantmaking transaction and permeate the organization. Adopting the framework strengthens the work of grantee partners to yield substantial results over time through successive grant periods. **Over time,**

⁶⁴ New England Grassroots Environment Fund Inc. <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/03-0364677> Accessed: January 17, 2021.

aligned field-building may result in a cumulative exponential impact in aligned fields and ultimately move the needle on numerous social challenges philanthropy wrestles with. Authenticity, community engagement, deliberative democracy, and community organizing are all central to bolstering this promising philanthropic practice.

A participatory lens has informed the organizational structure, staffing, evaluation, grantmaking, technical assistance, and community partnership development at the Grassroots Fund. Philanthropy, participatory engagement, lived experience, moving to scale, intersectional identity, equity, and environmental justice in combination are powerful. Developing a consistent fluidity between a laser focus on issues, grassroots movements, strategies, and tactics, and a pause for reflection, analysis, and learning applied at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels grounds a promising approach. The Grassroots Fund has adopted respect and hunger for learning. They are working to actively center learning as part of ongoing work, to reflect, analyze, and understand. Refining, building, and bolstering organizational characteristics, capacities, and resulting networks are likely among the most powerful outcomes of this process evaluation. Beyond the participatory grantmaking process, the New England Environmental Grassroots Fund is creating a participatory organization and a generative network whose power is formidable.

The participatory process is holistic and at the heart of how change happens. Participatory grantmaking is a component of and the entry point to a different type of investment. The organizational investment in people, place, insight, lived experience, trust, and relationships with the expectation of future benefits is a substantial investment. **Beyond money, this is all about people. People make the change happen, generate the possibilities, and can serve either as movement builders or barriers. The participatory process begins a movement to bring the people most directly affected to the heart of the dialogue.**

Moreover, the value of divergent thinking grounds dialogue, sharing perspectives, and a diversity of possibilities that can reframe social challenges. Participatory organizations that see themselves as network weavers challenge dominant institutional and societal norms and build alternative structures and means for communication and action. Visionary leaders are often connectors within and beyond their communities, working within their domains but forming invaluable connections and understanding. Agility and adaptability make up a crucial influence strategy that denotes belonging. As outlined above, a multidisciplinary approach and transformative capacity respecting individuals and perspectives are necessary to move toward equity. They are essential components of strategy development, movement-building, and sharing power. **Generative organizations working within an emerging network are primed to build capacity, foster creativity, join forces, and seed innovation.**

Working with an equity backbone confers a sense of respect, trust, and psychological safety. Sharing perspectives across numerous intersectional identities deepens the connections, builds relationships, fosters communication, and grounds a more expansive set of possibilities over time. Acknowledgment, respect, and providing a means for community members to feel valued solidifies a participatory

organization. Ideally, all are involved in the thought and planning process and are invited to participate actively and authentically. **Trust is gained over time and is foundational to promising participatory endeavors. Honesty builds trust. The openness and transparency of the process help people to understand and feel engaged.** The equity backbone can ground a more generative dialogue when facilitated well over time. The constructive approach weaves divergent thinking, creativity, innovation and exponentially builds a pathway to hope.

The participatory grantmaking process and aligned participatory organization model provides an opportunity to build an inclusive community dedicated to environmental justice; a means to come together and commence a healing process. The process brings a balance of perspectives to the table. Most of the Fund's grants have historically gone to white communities. Yet, as the demographics change, the grantee partners change. An even-handed approach is inclusive of the disproportionate implications of environmental racism on traditionally marginalized communities. Bringing people together across the New England landscape in a respectful manner to shape the terms of an inclusive and generative dialogue that honors place and seeks environmental justice leverage points is at the heart of the Grassroots Fund's work.

The Grassroots Fund thinks beyond a normative set of choices and imagines generating different paradigms and numerous possible solutions. The Fund's leaders see themselves not only as leaders within the environmental justice arena but also in the broader field of philanthropy. The grantee partners and Fund leaders have contextual intelligence and a comprehensive view of environmental resources and constraints. The participatory process serves to address the concerns of many groups and communities who have been regularly sidelined. **A healthy and fair community is built on a balance between personal, relational, and collective wellbeing; this equilibrium can be achieved as part of a participatory process grounded on belonging.**

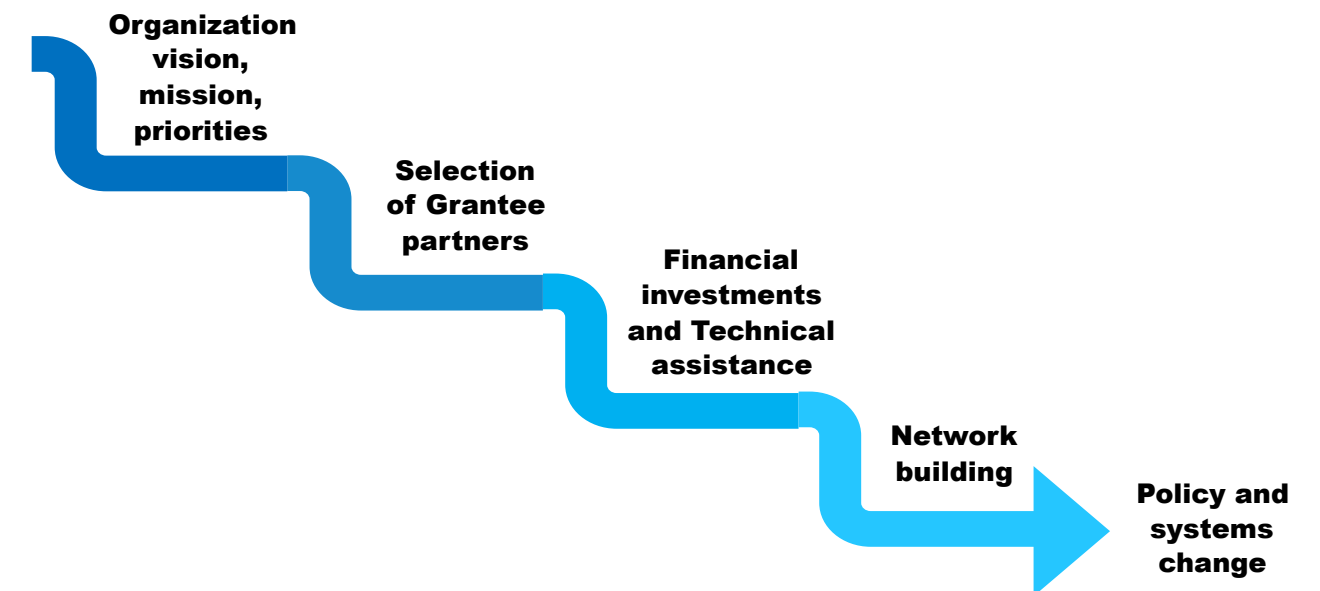
Change happens as systems of power, culture, and values align, forcing a paradigm shift. Our cognitive, behavioral, and cultural patterns, through relationship-building, may help us become more authentic and grounded. Participatory processes communicate all people's inherent dignity; when all have a seat at the table, a generative product can result⁶⁵. Real social cohesion forms exponentially in a communal setting as we get to know each other. Working across race, ability, immigration status, urban-rural divides, and strata of wealth levels the playing field. We all need clean air and water to live. Soil quality affects our food quality.

A participatory process helps us realize that our commonalities are more significant than our differences. Working with each other on a common goal builds interpersonal, organizational, and systemic solutions. A participatory organization connects people and experiences and fosters being heard, being seen, and being cared for; this is the heart of environmental justice.

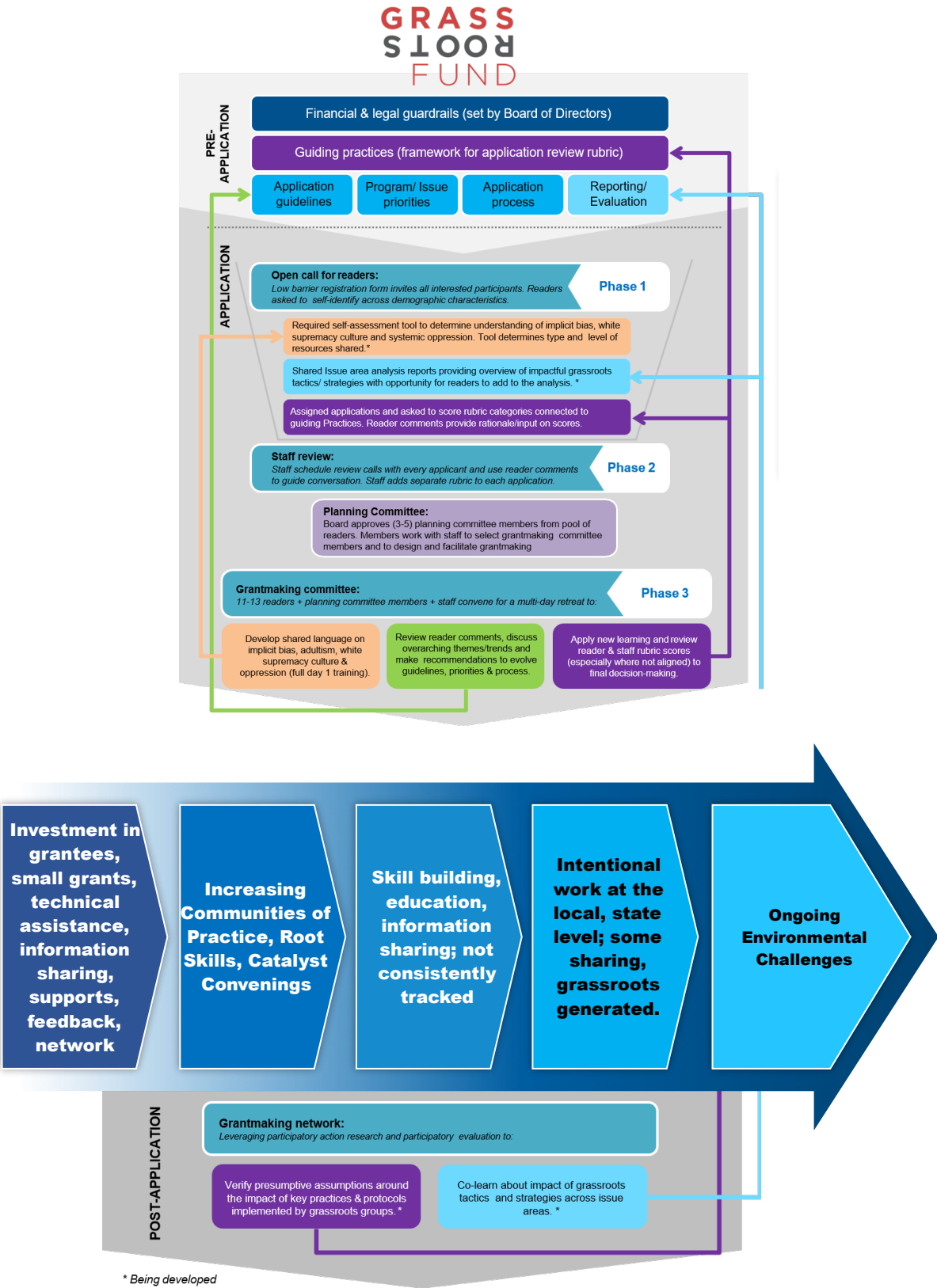
⁶⁵ Doetsch-Kidder, Sharon. 2012. Social Change and Intersectional Activism. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATORY FUNDER TRAJECTORY TO OUTCOMES

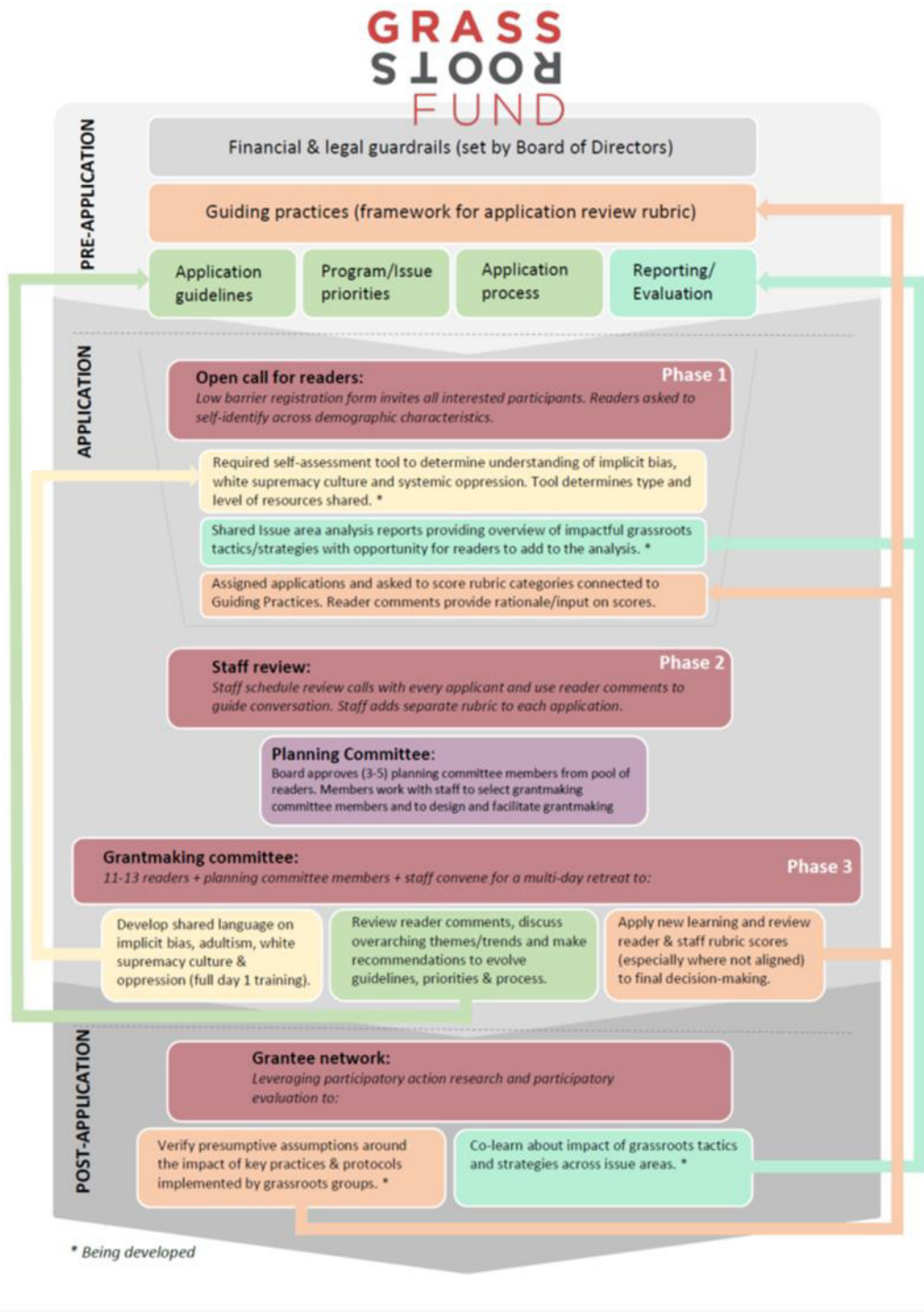
Participatory Organization moving the needle: Policy changes and accountability



APPENDIX B: TRAJECTORY FROM INITIATION TO FIELD-BUILDING



APPENDIX C: GRASSROOTS FUND PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING PROCESS DETAIL



APPENDIX D: FIELD-BUILDING AS A STRATEGY⁶⁶

Field Investments

Field-building invests in changing practice and the shifting rules and belief systems that guide practice in the field of environmental justice and others, including housing, education, health, and human services. The challenge is to move to an enabling environment that encourages growth, development, intentionality, and learning. Moving to an enabling climate involves shaping the standards of practice to replacing old norms and ways of knowing with those that lead to greater effectiveness and resilience.

Requirements

- Exposing staff and leaders to new ideas and practices.
- Supporting leadership development.
- Supporting and disseminating applied research that enhances understanding of field dynamics and establishes a body of credible evidence of results.
- Creating tools and guides to foster the adoption of emerging practices.
- Ensuring that there are accessible clearinghouses that make information and effective practices easily accessible.
- Improving training and credentialing to provide skills to meet complex challenges.
- Bolstering organizational infrastructure.
- Ensuring that programs are robust, evidence-based, guided by the reality of constituents, accessible, and culturally relevant.

Field-building endeavors are prioritized to focus on improving the effectiveness of human services for creating pathways out of poverty.

Central Elements of a Field

- **Identity:** *A field comprises standard and recognized practices that can be clearly described.*
- **Knowledge base:** *A field has credible evidence of results, derived from research and practice, as well as the most promising approaches for practitioners to obtain the desired results.*
- **Workforce and leadership:** *A field has trained practitioners, researchers, and practitioner educators; structures and institutions for training, credentialing, supporting, and retaining this workforce; incentives and organizations for*

⁶⁶ Intellectual property of Christine Robinson.

leaders and leadership development; and ways of attracting a workforce representing the field's components.

- **Standard practice:** *A field has a codified vocabulary and descriptions of traditional procedures, an understanding of an acceptable level of quality. A common language is used to describe the practice. Effective practice demonstrates a capacity to achieve desired outcomes.*
- **Information exchange:** *A field has the means to collect, analyze, discuss, co-create, and disseminate information and knowledge.*
- **Critical mass of engagement:** *A field has the support of key constituencies, organizations, and individuals vital to sustaining it—including practitioners, researchers, administrators, policymakers, constituents, thought leaders, and others.*
- **Advocates:** *A field has adopters who work to foster critical supportive energy, garner goodwill, secure assistance, and ensure an appropriate policy context at all government and pertinent institutions.*
- **Systemic support:** *A field has systems and structures of support, including appropriate public policy and encouragement for practitioners to learn and use standard practice.*
- **Innovation:** *A field has room for innovation, including promising evidence-based approaches and creative ideas and energy.*

Field-building is a set of practices to help a field fulfill its potential. Field-building is essential when systems and policies are in flux and established ways of doing things are insufficient for generating effectiveness. The nonprofit sector and all of its subareas are experiencing a time of changing funding, shifting demographics, and changing demands to demonstrate results. Field-building is necessary for a setting with inadequate financing to cover essential costs where market forces have failed. In the US and internationally, the government's role as a funder and the constant pressures to increase revenue and develop or revise tax codes have led to an undercapitalized field, one that is highly dependent on human capital (talent). In particular, professional development and adaptive leadership capacities need to be enhanced at this pivotal moment. All these require a new set of capabilities, priorities, and philosophies, not in any single organization but within practice fields. Field-building requires collaborative efforts of practitioners, researchers, service recipients, funders, and policymakers to make agreements on specific research questions, standards for practice, and policy recommendations.

Typically, a field's practitioners share research and practice-based knowledge, a common language, and have access to ongoing opportunities for professional education. They also acknowledge standards of practice and are strengthened by constant communication. Field-building serves to develop cohesion, capacity, scale, and depth.

APPENDIX E: GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Geography and Demographics

New England, composed of the six states of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, had an estimated total population of 14,853,290 in 2018, according to the American Community Survey, which reported that 48.7% were male and 51.3% were female.⁶⁷ Analysis by age reveals that roughly 19.7% were under 18 years of age, and 17.4% were above 65.⁶⁸ The majority, 80.7%, were White Americans, with 74.4% reporting being whites of non-Hispanic origin.⁶⁹ Black Americans were 7.1% of the region's population, and 6.4% were Blacks of non-Hispanic origin. There were 43,917 Native Americans, 0.3% of the population. The Asian-American population was 5.0%, 650,000 people comprising more than 240,000 (1.6%) Chinese Americans and more than 212,000 (1.4%) Indian Americans. Pacific Islander Americans were 5,794, or 0.04%, of the populace; a sizeable Bhutanese community exists in New Hampshire.⁷⁰

The largest population of color in New England is Hispanic and Latinx people, making up about 11.4% of the region's population; nearly 1.7 million Hispanic and Latinx individuals are reported in the most recent census data.⁷¹ The largest subgroup of the Latinx population is Puerto Ricans, at about 710,000, or 4.8%. Connecticut has the largest Puerto Rican community, and the cities of Hartford, Bridgeport, Holyoke, Springfield, and New Haven have some of the largest Puerto Rican population percentages in the US. People of other Hispanic and Latinx ancestries, such as Mexican Americans, Dominicans, Colombians, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Cubans, among many others, form about 4% of New England's population, at over 600,000 people.⁷²

New England is a rare region in the US where Blacks of recent immigrant origin outnumber Blacks of a multigenerational American heritage, at a 60 to 40 ratio. There is a large Haitian population in the Boston metropolitan area and a sizeable Jamaican population in Connecticut, especially around Hartford. Groups of Caribbean Blacks reside throughout New England. There are smaller numbers of other groups, such as Bajans, Bahamians, Trinidadians, etc. African groups represented in New England include Liberians and Cape Verdeans, both heavily represented around Boston and Providence, and smaller communities of people

⁶⁷ "ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates. 2018 ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles (DP05): New England Division". data.census.gov. Retrieved January 18, 2021.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Monica Chiu, ed. Asian Americans in New England: Culture and Community (University of New Hampshire Press, 2009) 252 pp.

⁷¹ "Hispanic or Latino Origin by Specific Origin. 2018 ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles (DP05): New England Division". data.census.gov. Retrieved January 18, 2021.

⁷² "People Reporting Ancestry. 2018 ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles (B04006): New England Division". data.census.gov. Retrieved January 18, 2021.

from East Africa, various parts of West Africa, and North Africa live in the Boston area and in southwest Connecticut, near New York City. There is a sizeable East African community in the Boston area, with members from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan. The Boston metropolitan area and southwest Connecticut are among the most racially diverse areas in New England. However, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont began to welcome immigrant populations to a greater degree before 2017.⁷³

Multiracial Americans make up more than 3.1% of New England's population. The largest mixed-race group was those of both African and European descent, including people of mixed Native American and European American, and Asian and European, heritage. The majority of the Hispanic and Latinx population are multiracial but are not counted on US Census forms. Rhode Island and eastern Massachusetts have large Cape Verdean and Brazilian communities; many identify as multiracial.

Approximately 9.3% of New England residents under the age of 65 have at least one disability, at the following rates: Vermont, 10.6%; Rhode Island, 9.7%; New Hampshire, 9.0%; Maine, 11.7%; Massachusetts 7.8%; and Connecticut, 7.4%. However, these numbers must be viewed with caution as far more residents over age 65 have at least one disability.⁷⁴

Population Distribution

New England states are generally divided into small municipalities or towns; town meetings govern many. There are unincorporated areas; most are located in Maine. Sparsely populated areas in northern Vermont and New Hampshire are also unincorporated. New England maintains a strong sense of cultural identity. In present-day New England, a cultural divide exists between urban, mobile New Englanders along the densely populated coastline and others. In much of Connecticut and rural areas in western Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine, the population density is low. The ethos of hardiness, closeness to nature, hardworking rural life, and general tolerance are pervasive. Some New England communities struggle to welcome increasing numbers of immigrants. Three-quarters of the population and most major cities are located in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. The population density across the region varies with high density in this area, 839.7/sq mi, contrasted to more sparsely populated regions of northern New England, 67.1/sq mi. Massachusetts is the most populous state, and Boston the most populous city.⁷⁵

The coast is more urban than the western parts of the region, which are typically rural, even in urban states like Massachusetts. Vermont is the least urbanized and the only New England state without access to the Atlantic Ocean.⁷⁶ Coastal New England is sprinkled with numerous urban areas such as Portsmouth, Portland, Boston, Fall River, New Bedford, Providence, New Haven, Bridgeport, and Stamford.

⁷³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_New_England

⁷⁴ <https://ne-ada.s3.amazonaws.com/Data+on+Disability+in+States+Cities+and+Sub-Groups+in+New+England+04.12.19.pdf>

⁷⁵ "ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates. 2018 ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles (DP05): New England Division". data.census.gov. Retrieved January 18, 2021.

⁷⁶ US Census figures. Allcountries.org. Retrieved 2010-10-16.

Smaller cities dot the coast: Bath, Rockland, Newport, Westerly, Newburyport, Gloucester, Biddeford, and Groton-New London. The concentration of urban centers in southern New England forms an integral part of the BosWash megalopolis, stretching from Boston to Washington, D. C. Three of the four most densely populated states in the US (Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island) are part of the region.⁷⁷

APPENDIX F: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND WELLBEING



⁷⁷ US Census figures. Allcountries.org. Retrieved 2010-10-16.