



New England
Grassroots
Environment Fund

GRASSROOTS TREND REPORT: Environmental Health *Working Draft*

July 2018

*"We won't have a society, if we destroy the environment"
Margaret Mead*

INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Health movement was born in the 1970s as a result of concerned citizens protesting the health effects of a toxic waste dump in Love Canal, New York. For years residents complained about odors and substances on their yards or in the public playgrounds. However, it wasn't until Lois Gibbs rallied her neighbors and spearheaded an effort to investigate community concerns about the health of the residents that the federal government responded. Her efforts led to Congress passing the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), better known as the Superfund Act and Love Canal became its first entry.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), environmental health "addresses all the physical, chemical, and biological factors external to a person and all the related factors impacting behaviors. It encompasses the assessment and control of those environmental factors that can potentially affect health. It is targeted towards preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments."

Throughout the New England states environmental health is of major concern. In the coming year, organizations indicated multiple avenues they plan to address in order to combat the over-arching issue of environmental health, with the most noted being various forms of pollution. The New England Grassroots Environment Fund (Grassroots Fund) supports grassroots efforts to prevent and eventually eliminate toxic pollution in New England including air pollution, hazardous waste, herbicides/pesticides, incinerators, landfills and power plants.

Toxic chemicals, hazardous waste and pollution are all equal opportunity offenders. They, themselves, do not discriminate who they affect. Due to the products we use, the food we eat, air we breathe and water we drink, every person living in the United States, is exposed to these chemicals on a daily basis. However, due to policy design, implementation, lack of enforcement, or just the fallibility of humans, some people are at a greater risk for toxic exposures and the health problems associated with them. This is an environmental injustice.

As defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. The Grassroots Fund believes it is imperative to not only address the tangible issues (pollution, pesticides, chemicals, etc.) but also their root causes. Therefore, the Grassroots Fund is committed to addressing the complex issues that communities face, through an environmental justice lens. Thus ensuring a safe and healthy future for all regardless of race, ethnicity, geographic location, or income.

Since 2014, the Grassroots Fund has seen a steady increase in the number of grant applications that are received and, subsequently, the number that is funded. However, more work is needed.

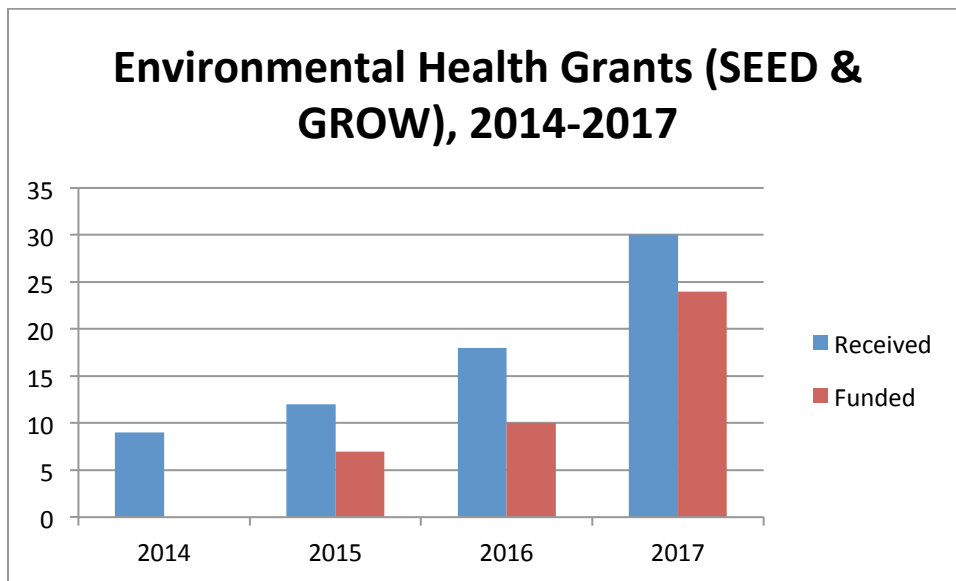


Table 1

THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an analysis and evaluation of the current needs, challenges, barriers and opportunities present within grassroots organizing around Environmental Health issues in New England. To accomplish this, a survey was developed with the overall aim of highlighting key issues within grassroots organizing, so that the Grassroots Fund and its partners can collectively drive more dollars, resources, and support to grassroots organizing efforts.

The survey was sent out to the Grassroots Fund's network. All six (6) New England states, with the exception of Rhode Island, were represented. There were ten (10) survey responses.

The Grassroots Fund considers this a living document and intends to conduct an annual survey and trend report to provide the Grassroots Fund Grant Making Committee with context around the current state of environmental health issues and to inform their decision making. We recognize this is a modest survey pool and seek to build in future years on the breadth of respondents.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Majority of responding groups classified themselves as non-profit grassroots groups
- Responding groups' work is evenly distributed among rural, urban and suburban areas
- Majority of responding groups are more closely aligned with the "Resist"ⁱ approach within the [Spirit in Action's "Theory of Transformation"](#)
- Majority of responding groups indicated that the following criteria, human-centeredⁱⁱ, human-scaleⁱⁱⁱ, equitable^{iv} and creates co-benefits^v, are the most important when implementing community-based Environmental Health solutions
- One-third of responding groups indicated that the most effective change comes from state environmental laws
- Majority of responding groups seek to create co-benefits between environmental health and land and water or climate and energy
- Environmental Justice plays a central role in the projects that are implemented
- Although a majority of responding groups indicated that it is important for the group to be representative of the community in which it serves, the actual representativeness in regards to gender, racial, age, or SES^{vi} of responding groups is varied
- Responding groups are trying to directly reach out to marginalized or under-represented groups, however many indicated difficulty in doing so

BARRIERS/CHALLENGES/NEEDS

- Funding was listed as a barrier to addressing many of the issues that were presented. Increased funding would allow organizations to:
 - Increase staffing
 - Produce educational material/tools
 - Obtain administrative support
 - Increase community outreach
 - Increase collaboration
- Lack of support from community decision makers was noted as a key barrier/challenge to environmental health organizing efforts
- Providing community education is seen as the number one way to address barriers and challenges
- Lack of education was noted as a barrier to addressing environmental justice issues
- Time, followed by funding, were noted as the two biggest barriers to furthering collaboration between groups

RECOMMENDED ACTION AND NEXT STEPS

The Grassroots Fund is committed to furthering partnerships and strengthening collaborations with both grassroots and grasstops^{vii} organizations and to driving more dollars, resources, and support to grassroots organizing efforts. We ultimately want to build a strong collective that can achieve just and sustainable change at the community level.

Based on the results of the survey below is a list of recommended action. This list is by no means exhaustive.

Recommendations for Grassroots Organizations:

- Actively search for and participate in DEI^{viii} trainings. Many free resources are also available online.
- Work with other local organizations that are addressing similar problems, to help build an extensive network of resources and information

Recommendations for Grasstops Organizations:

- Funds and resources should be focused on community-based initiatives that create co-benefits, focus on intersectionality, and those that work to increase community education/participation.
- DEI trainings should be encouraged for all grant applicants

- Funders should be encouraged to take risks on innovative and “un-tested” efforts that represent potential new and creative solutions

ABOUT THE GRASSROOTS FUND

Grassroots Fund is dedicated to co-creating healthy and sustainable communities throughout New England. With a focus on those who have often been marginalized, Grassroots Fund empowers individuals, groups and organizations working across a broad range of environmental and social justice issues. By helping them identify, select and access the specific tools, resources and connections they need to challenge existing systems, they are able to develop lasting solutions to the complex problems affecting the places they live and the health of the people who live there. To learn more visit grassrootsfund.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was developed by Ashley Bell, a Grassroots Fund Fellow through the [Environmental Grantmakers Association’s 2017 Environmental Fellowship Program](#).

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ⁱ Resist: Working on the current system

ⁱⁱ Human-centered: Designed to meet local needs. The user is seen as the “subject” not the “object” of the technology

ⁱⁱⁱ Human-scale: Can be understood and replicated locally

^{iv} Equitable: Can be assessed by all community members

^v Co-benefits: Helps restore ecological systems in multiple ways

^{vi} SES: Social economic status

^{vii} Grasstop: Nonprofit working at the state or regional level

^{viii} DEI: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion