

Health and Environmental Funders Network - National

Increasing Resources for Environmental Health and Justice

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, the Health and Environmental Funders Network (HEFN) has been working to improve health and equity outcomes by expanding philanthropic investment in those most impacted by climate change. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 2. Learn more about HEFN [online](#).

HEFN is a philanthropy-serving organization (PSO) working toward advancing solutions, building leadership, expanding funding for environmental health and justice issues with their health and environmental philanthropic members. HEFN's CCHE-funded activities are outlined in a 2022 CCHE theory of change [here \(slide 12\)](#) and described in more detail below. HEFN's explicit and ongoing focus on environmental health and environmental justice is one way they have been growing the field to galvanize their membership and partners around these issues and increase collective philanthropic impact at this intersection. Through these efforts, HEFN has seen growth in both total giving and number of grantors supporting environmental health and justice; the increase in overall grantmaking for these issues grew by 58 percent from 2015 to 2023 according to Tracking the Field. HEFN has also observed an increase and deepening of collaboration among funders and peer PSOs working at this intersection and efforts to "de-silo" climate and health funders' efforts. HEFN's own membership has grown during the grant period, and the organization has seen ripple effects from their engagement with the CCHE initiative in the form of new projects and partnerships related to environmental health and equity issues.



Mission:

Mobilize philanthropy to accelerate solutions for environmental health and justice by supporting and growing a community of grant-makers to build knowledge, leadership, and power for environmental health and justice.

Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

Expanded information about who is engaged to give grant-makers, grant seekers, and PSO staff a better, shared picture of the landscape and potential partners. HEFN has achieved this strategy through a variety of means, including public-facing materials and resources as well as member-oriented materials, learning opportunities, and one-on-one or small group conversations with funders. For example, along with seven PSO partners, HEFN developed the [Investing at the Frontlines of Climate Change Toolkit](#), which has become a go-to resource for funders and donors supporting work at the intersection of climate, health, and equity. This Toolkit provides information on government (federal, state, local, and tribal) and philanthropic funding and hubs of funder and nonprofit collaboration. HEFN works with the Environmental Grantmakers Association and Candid on the [Tracking the Field](#) project. This project helps funders understand trends in the field, including at the intersection of environmental health and justice, and provide funding to grassroots

Select Resources and Media

- [Giving Insights Blog](#) shares weekly insights and information about philanthropic giving to protect health and the environment
- [Investing at the Frontlines of Climate Change Toolkit](#)
- [Tracking the Field](#)

organizations. Internally, HEFN maintains an inventory of grassroots groups of color for member funders to reference and build connections. All these efforts have fostered more connectivity and information sharing for funders to be aware of big needs and opportunities as well as areas of alignment or misalignment between funders and groups in the field. As part of their work, HEFN strives to continuously be in better touch with movement organizations to support bi-directional learning and ensure frontline communities inform HEFN's strategy and that of their membership.

Supported advocates and private/public funders to collaborate for investments in disproportionately impacted communities. HEFN's focus is on communities who are disproportionately impacted by environmental justice issues. The organization helps to ensure philanthropy is supporting groups who have not traditionally received federal funding. For example, during the CCHE initiative, HEFN's Participatory Grantmaking Learning Community, which engages in monthly peer learning opportunities hosted by HEFN, grew by 47% from 90 to 133 members. Through this and other learning communities and affinity groups hosted by HEFN, funders are increasing their capacity to identify and support grassroots groups, collaborate with funders in other sectors, and collaborate with grantees with more transparency and participation, especially groups representing communities of color.

HEFN has also been working to ensure federal funding makes it to those same communities. In December 2022, HEFN and PSO partners brought together public, philanthropic, non-profit, and health sectors to build relationships, share information, and strategize together to ensure federal funding flows like Justice40 go to projects at the state- and local-levels that are consistent with community's climate, health, and equity priorities. Feedback and interest from participants influenced the convening design, which also incorporated considerations of accessibility, inclusion, and equity. Since then, HEFN has continued to work with the federal government, philanthropy, and community organizations partners to ensure funding makes it to the grassroots groups and communities. HEFN hosted a 2023 convening to share feedback with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) about community grantmaking, participated in the White House Environmental Justice Action Summit, and attracted additional funding from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to support a partnership with The Funders Network and Neighborhood Funders Group and leverage their role to support and coordinate funding around federal investments. Some of these learnings are described in an August 2024 HEFN blog post, "[Threats to Federal Funding are Looming.](#)"

Expanded resources for work led by highly impacted populations to accelerate preparedness and mitigation of harmful climate impacts. Through the activities describe above, HEFN has contributed to an increase in funding for communities disproportionately impacted by climate change and health impacts of environmental justice issues. According to Tracking the Field, HEFN members have increased their funding for environmental health and justice by 35% since 2015. HEFN also developed programming, resources, webinars, conferences, and more to improve funders' understanding of the intersections of climate change, COVID-19, and racial/sociopolitical inequities. HEFN has observed that different funders may use different language or lenses to approach similar issues; working with their partners to bridge the gaps in terminology and concepts around environmental justice and equity issues is a core part of their work with partners and members. Internally, HEFN also engaged in a yearlong project that grew out of a racial equity training held by the Philanthropy Forum that has sharpened and honed their strategic vision and approach to their work.

Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **Climate and health are coming together more clearly as an intersection for funders; more funders are talking about climate equity and intersections between issue areas.** HEFN has been able to reach funders who feel like they have slightly different focus or only see themselves funding in one sector and "pull people in from both worlds." HEFN is seeing success in broadening the scope of partners they work with and developing collective strategies around environmental health and equity. Funders are changing the way they talk about the issues they fund and expressing interest in more holistic approaches. For example, the Lead Funders Action Network (LFAN) that HEFN staffs has been discussing the framing of "healthy homes," which includes but is also broader than the framing of lead. Another workgroup has formed around detoxification and decarbonization, merging two previously separate groups and enabling funders to break down silos and labels and find new ways of working together.
- **COVID-19, the racial justice movement, pressure on philanthropy from grant-funded organizations to address race and equity, and unprecedented federal funding have affected the field.** Since 2020, organizations increased their focus on equity and racial justice and have demanded the same of funders. Furthermore, with federal funding opportunities such as Justice40 and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) that provide once in a lifetime investment in historically disadvantaged communities, there has been a cascading effect in philanthropy. "Philanthropy loves to leverage federal funding and see if smaller investments have an outsized effect!"

- Increased funding for environmental justice may attract opportunists.** While it is encouraging to see the increased funding for environmental health and justice work and support to frontline communities, there are also concerns about organizations who seek and receive those funds without genuine commitment or impact for environmental justice. “As EJ funding grows, the amount of people who aren’t deserving of that funding who are trying to get it, will also grow.”

Looking Ahead

Through the CCHE initiative, HEFN has emphasized the value and importance of co-learning, collaboration, and community building among members and partners to facilitate knowledge exchange in all directions and create space for open and honest dialogue. This aspect of their work will surely remain a cornerstone as they pursue their core strategies to mobilize philanthropy and accelerate solutions for environmental health and justice. Looking ahead, HEFN continues their work with federal funding to build capacity and support grant-funded organizations to receive those investments for more resilient systems. Additionally, HEFN launched an inaugural [Lifetime Achievement Award for Environmental Health and Justice](#) in 2024 to recognize leaders of the environmental justice movement and support resilient, intergenerational movements. In the near term, HEFN will also support their members and partners to engage and play a meaningful role at federal-, state-, and local-levels during the presidential administration transition in 2025.

Key Partners

Organization	Type
Biodiversity Funders Group	Funder
Climate and Energy Funders Group	Funder
Environmental Grantmakers Association	Funder
EPA Office of Environmental Justices and External Civil Rights	Government Partner
Grantmakers in Health	Funder
Neighborhood Funders Group	Funder
Philanthropy California	Funder
Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders	Funder
The Funders Network	Funder