

**Fund to Build Grassroots Power**

# **2023 Evaluation Report**

**Assessing our Practices and  
Understanding our Impact**



# Executive Summary

**This evaluation examines the impact of the Fund to Build Grassroots Power's (FBGP) two active grant dockets, through which it distributed \$19.2MM to support organizations working to advance environmental and climate justice. The report assesses notable outcomes and how those outcomes align with the FBGP's theory of change.**

## Topline Findings

- ✓ **What the FBGP Did:** The FBGP made grants to 106 grassroots organizations, predominantly led by underrepresented groups (BIPOC and people who identify as women, transgender, or non-binary) in historically underfunded regions of the country.
- ✓ **How Grantees Grew Their Capacity and Power:** Grantees used the resources in several ways to build their capacity and power to meet their unique organizational and community needs. The top three ways grantees reported using resources were: (1) hiring supporting staff, (2) developing organizational plans or capabilities, and (3) coalition building and convening.
- ✓ **How the FBGP Strengthened Field Infrastructure:** There are some indications that the funds enabled grantees to better engage with their networks, but more work needs to be done to clearly define the objectives related to strengthening this infrastructure.
- ✓ **How Organizations Wielded Power to Advance Change:** Grantees channeled their power in four primary ways:
  - Engaging and mobilizing people
  - Informing and influencing decision-makers
  - Building the data and research to inform solutions
  - Enabling residents to bring their priorities for their communities to life
- ✓ **What Else Is Needed:** While these resources contributed to important progress, grantees identified that more funding and other resources are needed to achieve their ambitious goals for their communities and environment.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

If grassroots organizations that have ties to national networks have enough capacity and resources, they will be better equipped to effectively engage with these networks, which in turn will strengthen the networks themselves. A stronger set of networks means a stronger infrastructure for the environmental justice movement, allowing all participants in the movement to wield more power at local, state, and federal levels.

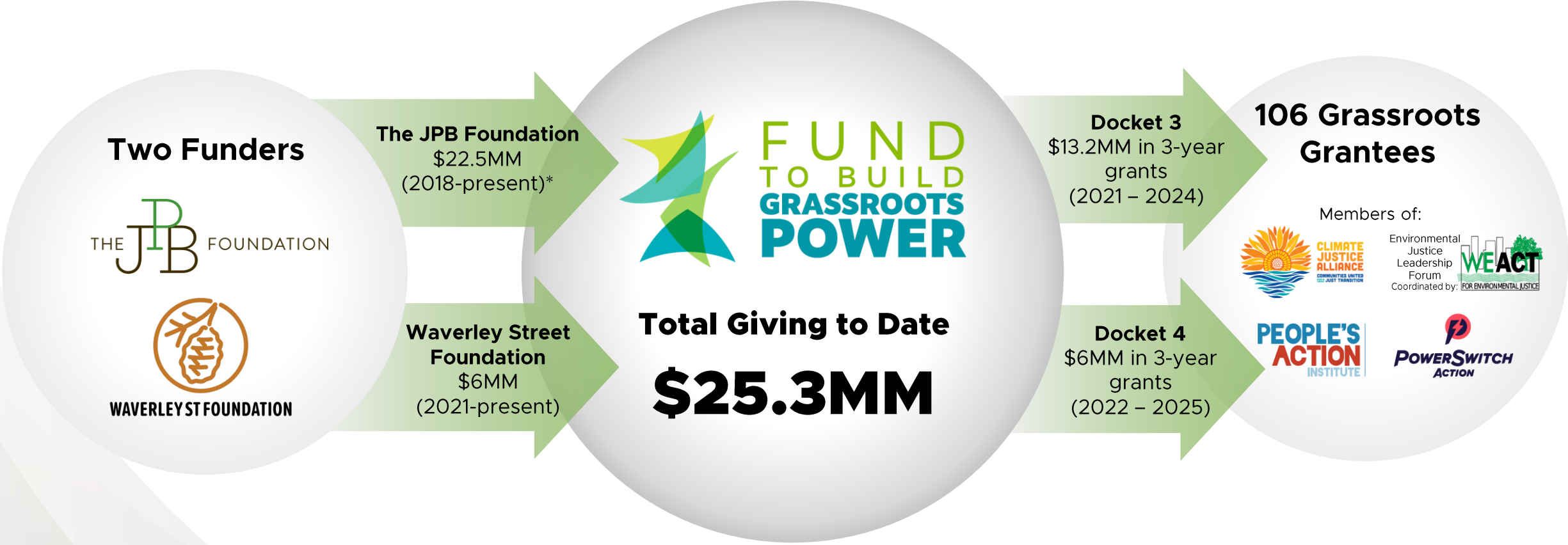
# Table of Contents

<b>Slide 2</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>
<b>Slide 4</b>	<b>Overview of this Evaluation Report</b>
<b>Slide 7</b>	<b>Growing Capacity and Power of Grassroots Organizations</b>
<b>Slide 12</b>	<b>Strengthening Environmental and Climate Justice Movement Infrastructure</b>
<b>Slide 14</b>	<b>Wielding More Power to Advance Environmental and Climate Justice</b>
<b>Slide 16</b>	<b>Engaging and Mobilizing People</b>
<b>Slide 18</b>	<b>Informing and Influencing Decision-Makers</b>
<b>Slide 20</b>	<b>Building the Data and Research to Inform Solutions</b>
<b>Slide 22</b>	<b>Enabling Residents to Bring Priorities for their Communities to Life</b>
<b>Slide 24</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Slide 26</b>	<b>Appendix</b>

# Overview of this Evaluation Report



# Since 2021, the FBGP has raised, coordinated, and distributed \$19.2MM to support organizations working to advance environmental and climate justice



\*The JPB Foundation has committed an additional \$12.3MM from 2023-2025

# This evaluation examines the impact of the FBGP's two currently active grant dockets

The evaluation assessed what notable outcomes occurred associated with dockets 3 and 4, and whether they align with the fund's theory of change.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

If grassroots organizations that have ties to national networks have enough capacity and resources, they will be better equipped to effectively engage with these networks, which in turn will strengthen the networks themselves. A stronger set of networks means a stronger infrastructure for the environmental justice movement, allowing all participants in the movement to wield more power at local, state, and federal levels.

This report assesses the FBGP's contributions to advance three elements of the theory of change, specifically whether and how the fund has:

- Grown grassroots organizations' capacity and power

- Strengthened the infrastructure of the environmental and climate justice movement

- Helped organizations build more power and ultimately advance environmental and climate justice

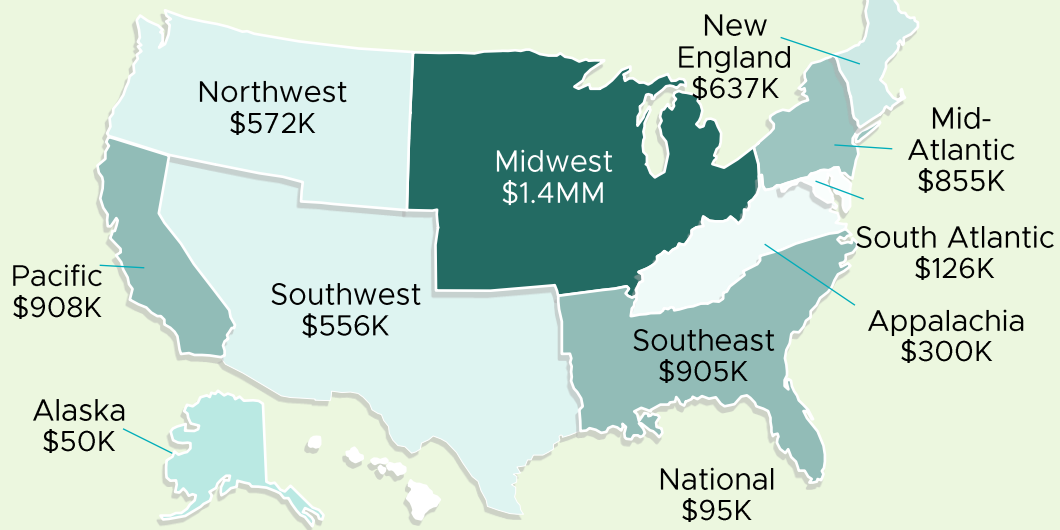
# **Growing Capacity and Power of Grassroots Organizations**



# The FBGP's recent dockets granted to 106 grassroots organizations, predominantly led by underrepresented groups in historically underfunded regions

## Geography

FBGP Funding in 2022 (Docket 3 and Docket 4 one-year amounts)

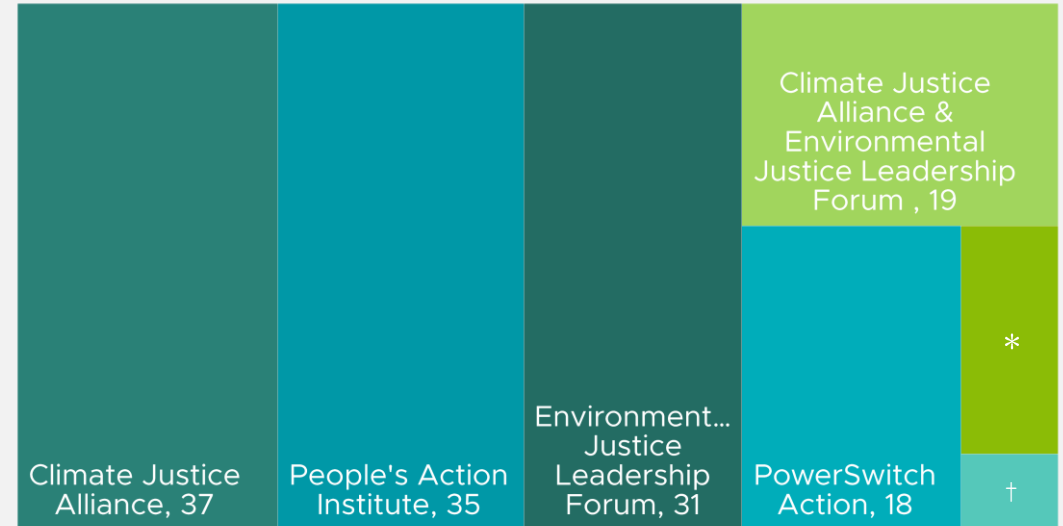


## Budget Size

The average size of 2022 grantees' budgets is **\$1.2MM**. For most grantees, at least 50% of the budget supports climate or environment work.

## Networks

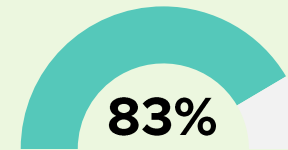
Grants by Network



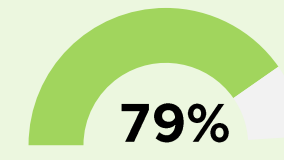
\* Climate Justice Alliance & People's Action Institute, 6

† People's Action Institute & PowerSwitch Action, 2

## Leadership



of grantees are led by a person/people who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color



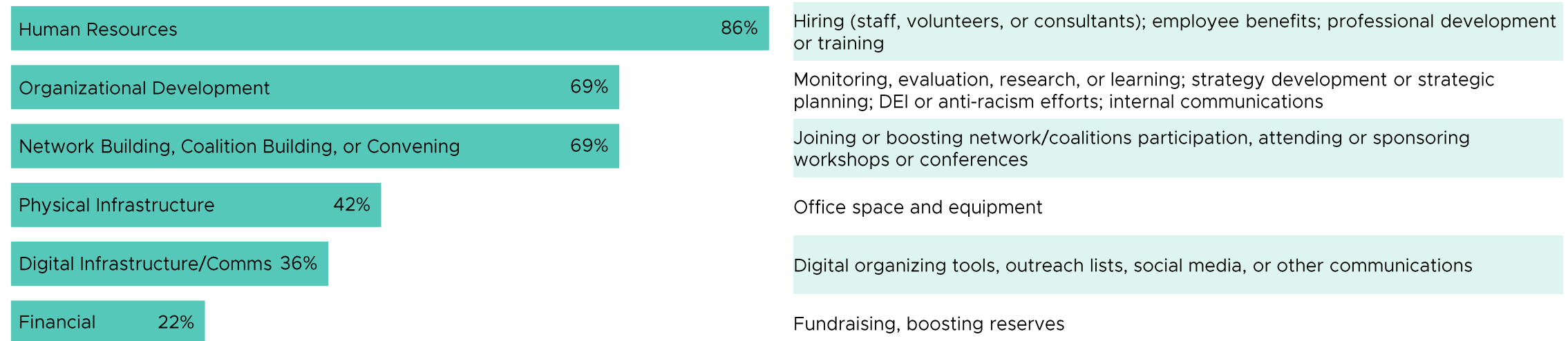
of grantees' leaders are people who identify as women, transgender, or non-binary



# FBGP resources are being used to grow grassroots organizations' capacity and power

Almost all grantees (97%) reported that FBGP grants helped them build their capacity. They used the resources to invest in:

Grantee Use of Funds (n=38)



The funds helped many organizations do things they otherwise could not have achieved; many grantees made hires that were not possible in prior years, and some reported that the funds bolstered their financial stability.

“FBGP enabled us to hire our first staff member, which added significant capacity to our organization. This in turn made it possible for our organization to spend the needed time to strategize with other partners.” – FBGP Grantee

“FBGP helped us build reserve funds and build stability in our fundraising. Now we are moving through a staff transition. This stability is invaluable as capacity shifts and we focus internally on building longevity in the organization.” – FBGP Grantee

# FBGP systems and processes strive to enable grantees to use resources flexibly and minimize the burden on already over-extended organizations

Overall, **grantees appreciated the streamlined application and reporting processes**, with 95% reporting that the application process was “very” or “somewhat” easy.

**Most grantee respondents reported that FBGP funding is unique** due to its:

- “No strings attached” approach, which allows discretion and flexibility in using funds
- Trust in grantees to spend money appropriately
- Minimal paperwork and oversight

**Grantees reported that multi-year commitments provide an invaluable sense of security.**

“The flexibility of general operating support is still rare, and as valuable as ever, especially in the world of grassroots organizing and movement building where we frequently need to be able to turn on a dime.” – FBGP Grantee

“We have always appreciated FBGP’s approach to funding and partnership, grounded in transparency around expectations and values. Examples of this abound, even in our grant agreement which includes language about clarity of expectations in the second paragraph, a non-discrimination and non-violence stipulation, and reporting requirements which are as friendly to grantees as possible.” – FBGP Grantee

We received no consistent points of feedback across grantees. Please see the appendix for individual respondents’ suggestions for improvement.

## However, grantees identified additional types of support that would further build their capacity to advance their goals

**Connections to Funders and Peers:** When asked what additional supports they need, some grantees expressed interest in connections to:

- Other funders affiliated with the FBGP, such as through regional briefings or other information-sharing platforms
- Fellow grantees, particularly opportunities to learn about work happening in other parts of the country

However, one grantee we interviewed reported they are “okay with funders just being funders and letting coalitions do that type of additional work.”

**Centralized Supports, Training, or Resources:** Individual grantees also identified the following areas of need:

- Fundraising training
- Support for enhancing communication capacity
- Guidance on financial management processes and tools
- Developing technology skills, especially in the area of digital organizing
- Best practices for base-building
- Communications support, with an emphasis on strategies for online organizing.

# **Strengthening Environmental and Climate Justice Movement Infrastructure**



# The FBGP leverages and strengthens the national networks' connections and coordinating function

All grantees of the fund are members of at least one of four national networks and leaders of those networks are part of the advisory board and contribute to the grant decisions. There are two ways in which the relationship between the networks and their members both supports the FBGP's success and reinforces the network-grantee relationships:

- 1 Minimizes the grant process burden on grantees**  
Leveraging the infrastructure of the four national networks enables a streamlined grant process because the network leaders already have significant knowledge of and relationships with potential grantees
- 2 Enables members to engage more deeply in their network(s)**  
89% of grantee respondents said that the funding helped “a bit” or “a lot” with enabling them to engage with their respective network(s)

However, advisory board members noted that there is no requirement for the relationship between grantees and the networks to change as a result of receiving a grant, and the fund could better define its goals for how it intends to a) help networks better support their members' goals, and b) help grantees contribute to the networks' collective efforts, to ultimately assess its success in doing so.

“We didn't need these resources to work closely, we were already working at a very high level. But, the fact that we were generally devoting more staff time to climate meant we could have a bit more capacity to be part of the national cohort.” – FBGP Grantee

“Our participation with People's Action skyrocketed during the grant term. We went from going to one conference and one week-long training, to having deep relationships with mentors and participating more fully in national tables...Because of the grant, we could dedicate the staff time to make this possible.” – FBGP Grantee

# **Wielding More Power to Advance Environmental and Climate Justice**



# FBGP resources support grantees who are advancing environmental and climate justice in several ways

Grantees are advancing environmental and climate justice goals in ways that address their communities' particular contexts and priorities. Broadly, grantees are using four approaches to create change and build power:

## Engaging and Mobilizing People

FBGP grantees are engaging their constituents by educating, organizing, and encouraging them to take action in their community.

## Informing and Influencing Decision-Makers

Grantees are engaging with decision-makers to give voice to community concerns and advocate for policies and practices that protect vulnerable communities.

## Building the Data and Research to Inform Solutions

Our grantees are strategically building power by conducting research that facilitates informed decision making.

## Enabling Residents to Bring Priorities for Their Communities to Life

FBGP grantees play a crucial role in providing essential services to their communities, from creating community spaces to improving transportation options.



# Environmental Transformation Movement of Flint

**Environmental Transformation Movement of Flint** (ETM Flint) collaborated with the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition and Flint Rising to organize an Energy Democracy Dinner for Flint's environmental justice advocates. This event aimed to **raise community awareness** about energy democracy, the structure and funding of the energy system, and ways to reduce Flint's high energy costs through renewable energy, such as community solar. Affordability is a pressing issue for Flint residents, who face some of the nation's highest energy bill rates, and solutions can also contribute to reducing the city's environmental impact.



**As a direct outcome of the energy democracy event, ETM Flint and its partners secured a small grant from the University of Michigan Graham Sustainability Institute to conduct the Flint Solar Feasibility Study with academic and community collaborators, to address questions that community members raised during the dinner. ETM Flint will play a leading role in this feasibility study.**



## Kentucky Student Environmental Coalition

**Kentucky Student Environmental Coalition** is **engaging students and other community members** in a coalition opposing a Louisville Gas & Electric (LG&E) pipeline project in Bullitt County, Kentucky, in line with the Coalition's broader goal to halt the development of new fossil fuel infrastructure.

**The coalition mobilized over 100 community members to participate in the condemnation case between LG&E and Bernheim Forest, which culminated in the successful passage of a resolution against the LG&E pipeline by the Louisville Metro City Council.**



# New Florida Majority Education Fund

**New Florida Majority Education Fund (NFMEF)** has long urged the city of **Doral's commissioners** to transition to genuine zero-waste solutions and address environmental racism from the Covanta incinerator--which has caught on fire and created health hazards such as low air quality for the residents who live near it. NFMEF collaborated with Earthjustice to file a complaint with the US Environmental Protection Agency, targeting the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for discriminatory practices, including a lack of translated notices for residents who don't speak English.



**Influenced by the powerful stories and experiences shared by NFMEF's staff and members, the Miami-Dade County Commission reversed its earlier decision to establish a new incinerator in Doral. This represents a significant victory for the Doral community and Miami-Dade County and takes them a step closer to implementing a true zero-waste system.**

### UPROSE

**UPROSE** has achieved significant success in **influencing how corporate decisions are made** in the rapidly expanding offshore wind industry. Previously, the industry had engaged primarily with government and environmental representatives but had not involved environmental or climate justice leaders from communities directly impacted by or hosting offshore wind facilities. UPROSE, collaborating with organizations like the Climate Justice Alliance, Taproot Earth, and Rogue Climate, has led the effort to establish Principles for a Just Transition in Offshore Wind Energy.



**This framework serves as a guiding resource for frontline communities advocating for offshore wind or seeking a place at the table in planning and procurement processes. The framework also sets standards and expectations for offshore wind industry stakeholders, including developers and trade associations, to ensure accountability and the operationalization of a just transition throughout offshore wind development.**

## Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition

As part of a broader effort to achieve equitable home electrification, **Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition** invested in storytelling about recent power outages and **completed a research project** that studied the cost of home heating electrification in Michigan. The study informed how electrifying residential heating in Michigan could meaningfully repair – or seriously worsen – the legacy of racist, profit-driven housing and energy policies in the state.

**Urging policymakers to act now, the report highlights the transformative impact of equitable home electrification on health, affordable housing, and climate resilience.**



## North Carolina Environmental Justice Network

**North Carolina Environmental Justice Network (NCEJN)** launched its Spidey Sense-r **community science initiative**, which uses spider webs as air quality monitors. Metals in the air settle on spider webs and community members can collect and send these webs to a lab for analysis. This bioindicator approach enables NCEJN and its partners to detect air quality differences at the neighborhood level.

**NCEJN's goal is to increase community involvement in air monitoring, which will help inform air quality standards that prioritize the most impacted individuals.**



## People for Community Recovery

To promote adoption of solar power in Chicago, **People for Community Recovery (PCR)** created a series of webinars featuring a local homeowner who shared her experience working with the organization, and the resulting cost savings and positive environmental impact. PCR is also actively involved in a South Side coalition to **establish a community-owned** solar model through the Green Energy Justice Coop, with the goal of having community-owned projects within a year.



**PCR has assisted over 50 residents of Chicago's South side subscribe to community solar and has supported three homeowners to successfully install solar panels.**

## PODER

**PODER's** Bicis del Pueblo (Bikes for the People) program is **providing resources and training** to nurture a culture of cycling among immigrants and communities of color. The project:

- ✓ Teaches community members how to repair bikes.
- ✓ Distributes refurbished bikes to individuals who may not otherwise have access to them.
- ✓ Builds community through bike maintenance workshops and community rides.
- ✓ Organizes working-class communities to advocate for sustainable transportation infrastructure.



**PODER recently celebrated the opening of a storefront space for Bicis del Pueblo at a 100% affordable housing building in San Francisco. The organization is working toward opening another storefront space later in 2023.**

# Recommendations





## In line with its commitment to continuous learning, the FBGP can continue to refine its approach to advancing its theory of change

While grantees did not identify consistent points of feedback, these findings do point to opportunities for the FBGP to continue to scale and clarify its impact. In particular, it could explore opportunities to:

1

### **Increase Regranting Resources**

Grantees report they need more financial and other resources to achieve their goals, so scaling impact will require scaling the resources available to the field.

2

### **Consider How to Support Grantee Connections to Donors**

As the FBGP grows its resources and connections to new funders in 2024 and beyond, it could reconsider if there are mechanisms for connecting grantees directly with funders to share the relationship building.

3

### **Clarify Objectives for Building Movement Infrastructure**

The FBGP can continue to better define the impact it hopes to achieve with respect to building a stronger, coordinated infrastructure for change, and how it can support and measure that impact. Moreover, many of the grantee suggestions related to connections to peer grantees or centralized supports, trainings, and resources are functions that the national networks engaged in the FBGP can or do provide. The FBGP can work with its advisory board to consider what resources, if any, the FBGP should supplement or if there are opportunities to better connect grantees to existing resources.

# Appendix



# Methodology

This mixed-method evaluation used data from grantee surveys and questionnaires and interviews with the FBGP's grantees. Specific data sources included:

A questionnaire that 38 grantees completed, which asked about their use of grant funding and the qualitative experience they had being grantees. (106 grantees received the questionnaire.)

Interviews with 10 grantees who received multi-year general operating grants in 2022, which asked about how they used grant funds, how grant funding impacted participation in their networks, other capacities they would like to build, etc.

Written reports submitted by all 106 grantees at the conclusion of the first or second year of a three-year grant administered in 2022 or 2023.

## Limitations

**Response Bias:** Grantees may have felt pressured to provide responses aligning with perceived funder preferences. Although the Arabella team articulated to the grantees that Arabella was not representing the funder, the association with the grantmaking activities could still have influenced responses.

**Reliance on Self-Reports:** Information gained from surveys relies on grantees' self-reports. Although there is no reason to question the accuracy of grantee self-reports, a degree of error is inherent.

**Sample Representativeness:** The survey results are based on a subset of grantees (38 out of 106), which may not fully represent the pool of grantees, introducing potential variability in the findings.

# How we did on our recommendations from last year

In last year's evaluation report, we identified nine recommendations that grantees and other stakeholders made. While we implemented a number of these suggestions, we considered but ultimately did not pursue other recommendations.

## MADE PROGRESS

Dedicate time for network leaders to discuss their own priorities and the needs they are seeing in the field to allow for more collaboration, both for grant recommendations and for activities outside of FBGP.

Refine FBGP's theory of change to describe with more specificity what strengthening the four national networks entails.

Continue to provide grants that grantees can use flexibly, as this allows grantees to use funding where they see fit, ranging from hiring and providing benefits to attending convenings.

Re-evaluate the process for allocating grants, including how to align the advisory board on overall goals/priorities and what an equitable distribution of funding among network affiliates means.

## DID NOT IMPLEMENT

Explore with network leaders on ways to mitigate power imbalances between funders and grantees and encourage grantee transparency.

Consider a way for grantees to learn from one another about practices, successes, and challenges.

Consider if there are opportunities to connect grantees to supplemental funding or resources, as many grantees reported they could use even more resources beyond their current FBGP grant.

Consider if there are opportunities to connect grantees to additional resources for time sensitive needs outside of the official grant cycle or setting aside FBGP resources for emerging needs.

Consider opportunities to connect FBGP grantees to interested funders and potentially developing a way for grantees in similar geographic areas to learn from one another about practices, successes, and challenges.

# Suggestions for Improvement from Grantees

There were no consistent points of feedback across more than one respondent. We received the following suggestions for improvement from individual organizations:

**Provide funding proportional to the size of the community served.** One grantee suggested that the FBGP should allocate larger grant amounts to regional or national groups that serve broader areas, as opposed to groups serving a smaller region.

**Re-think how we treat fiscal sponsorship transitions.** One respondent reported that when they moved from a fiscal sponsor to their own independent 501(c)(3), being asked by Windward Fund to provide their mission and programs felt disrespectful and delegitimized the organization's work.

**Make the reporting process clearer to eliminate confusion.** One grantee reported that receiving multiple reminders from different sources to complete reports (e.g., an automated request from Windward's grantseeker portal and then an individualized request from Arabella) made it unclear how many reports they were required to submit.

**Provide transparency about who makes funding decisions.** One grantee mentioned that they were unsure of who the actual decision-makers of the FBGP are.