



# What the Earth Asks of Us

A Toolkit for Environmental Justice  
& Community Action

By Intersectional Environmentalist *Developed in partnership with Plant Baby Plant*

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## welcome

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This toolkit is a first step towards taking action and addressing environmental injustice in your own communities. Plant Baby Plant invites us to “raise a garden & raise a ruckus,” and we hope you do just that. Using this toolkit, we encourage you to transform your knowledge into actions you can take to better your community and fight against systems of oppression.

In addition to the grounding U.S. environmental justice history and resources in this toolkit, you can also find a three-step guide to community action. This process will take you through how you can get involved in local environmental justice initiatives.

If you want to dig deeper into these actions, you can find interactive prompts and reflections towards the end of the toolkit.

This toolkit was produced by Intersectional Environmentalist in collaboration with Plant Baby Plant, a movement by Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer.

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## ***Ask yourself: Who is carrying the burden here, and how can I share the weight?***

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**Intersectional Environmentalist** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit eco-media organization on a mission to deepen environmental awareness and inspire climate action through the power of art, education, and storytelling. Through dynamic educational resources and an inclusive, engaged online community, we aim to create a space where everyone experiences and contributes to climate solutions that are valued and celebrated. We produce resources, programs, and creative opportunities that connect all people to the climate justice movement and support grassroots environmental solutions. Learn more at [intersectionalenvironmentalist.com](https://intersectionalenvironmentalist.com)



**“To me, intersectional environmentalism is a lens through which we can see the world that reminds us that we aren’t separate from nature, but a part of it. It reminds us that earth and its ecosystems thrive with diversity and inclusion, and so does environmental media, organizing, academia, and more. It’s about ensuring everyone is included in the environmental conversation.”**

**LEAH THOMAS, IE FOUNDER**

## The question we need is: “What does the Earth ask of us?”

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**Plant Baby Plant** is a new grassroots movement launched by Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, renowned botanist, enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, and author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. The Plant Baby Plant movement mobilizes people to take tangible, regenerative action to care for the Earth, translating the values expressed in Robin’s works into daily practice. Issuing a call to “raise a garden and raise a ruckus,” PBP invites planters to heal land, build community, and grow power through acts of reciprocal care. Learn more at [plantbabyplant.com](http://plantbabyplant.com)



**“Isn't this the purpose of education, to learn the nature of your own gifts and how to use them for good in the world?”**

DR. ROBIN WALL KIMMERER  
BRAIDING SWEETGRASS



# Environmental Justice History + Grounding

## What is Environmental Justice?

WE Act states that **environmental justice (EJ)** “seeks to address the disproportionate exposure to pollution and other environmental hazards that people of color face across this country, along with the resulting adverse health impacts this causes.”

- According to ProPublica, there are more than 1,000 cancer-causing hotspots across the nation with residents of color experiencing roughly 40% more cancer-causing air pollution than areas with predominantly white residents.
- In areas with predominantly Black residents, the cancer risk from air pollution is more than double that of areas with predominantly white residents.

**Environmental injustice** occurs when these conditions are **not** met and communities, primarily low-income communities of color, are disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards.

**Environmental racism** is central component of environmental injustice. According to Dr. Benjamin Chavis, *“environmental racism is racial discrimination in environmental policy making and the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of color from the leadership of the environmental movement.”*

## What does environmental injustice look like in my community?

Although environmental injustice can manifest in different ways, you can identify it through (1) noticing the disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards people of color, primarily low-income people of color, face in a city/town/or region and (2) recognizing how policies perpetuate environmental racism by placing polluting facilities in communities of color and bypassing community input.

You can use resources like the Environmental Justice Data Action Portal to help you identify what environmental justice might look like in your community. In the later sections, we’ll discuss how you can connect with organizations to identify how environmental injustice impacts your community.

### Did You Know?

The EPA used to have a publicly available screening and mapping tool called “EJSCREEN,” which provided communities and organizations with data to help them understand where low-income communities of color were disproportionately burdened by toxic air and water pollution.

**The tool has been removed by the Trump administration, threatening EJ advocacy.**

## Environmental Justice History + Grounding

The 1982 protests led by African Americans in Warren County, North Carolina are viewed as the beginning of the EJ movement. These protests began in response to the community addressing the state's decision to dump toxic waste in Warren County, dismissing the community's concerns of the toxins leaching into drinking water. Frustrated by systemic inequality and environmental racism, residents marched for six weeks which led to 500 arrests. This illustrates the deep Black historical roots of the EJ movement, and its ties to the resistance spirit and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Key EJ leaders who have made significant contributions to this movement during this time include Hazel M. Johnson, Dr. Robert D. Bullard, Bunyan Bryant, and Peggy Shephard, among many other crucial contributors.

Although the EJ movement was born out of deep concerns with toxic waste pollution, it is an expansive movement that includes a wide range of environmental topics with the shared goal to address the disproportionate environmental and health hazards people of color face. Keeping this in mind, when we look deeper into what issues touch EJ, we see how this applies on an ecological scale. In the 1960s, deeply intertwined with the EJ and Civil Rights Movement, the farmworkers' movement gained traction.

This highlights the deep connections between labor injustice, economic inequality, racial inequity, and environmental health, due to the harmful pesticide, toxic exposure, and low wages immigrant workers, primarily Mexican and Filipino workers, received.



Source: The Washington Post (Greg Gibson/AP)



Source: The Washington Post (Ricky Stille)

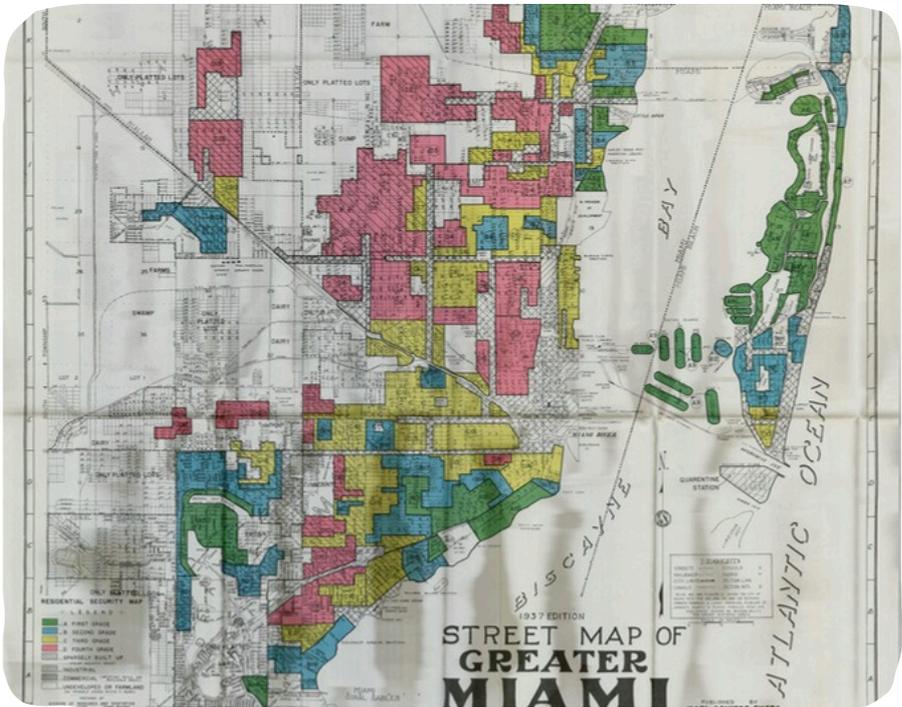


Source: The Washington Post (Ricky Stille)

## Environmental Justice History + Grounding

In addition to low income and communities of color experiencing health concerns from exposure to toxins, these impacts were compounded by their lack of access to green spaces. This occurred due to several discriminatory practices put in place during the 1930s including Redlining, which denied neighborhoods/areas where communities of color lived access to financial mobility, homeownership, and credit loans. Not only did this limit economic vitality in these areas, studies have shown that it also reduced tree coverage in redlined areas by 20% in comparison to greenlined areas of predominantly white neighborhoods.

Indigenous resistance is another vital part of EJ history, which is deeply tied to the ecological roots of this movement. Due to colonization, Indigenous resistance and its ties to EJ began several decades before the 1982 protests. The impacts of colonial industrialization in the U.S. and resource extraction led to environmental degradation, which has disproportionately affected Indigenous people.



Source: Mapping Inequality

## Environmental Justice History + Grounding

Forced to migrate to reduced and degraded land, Indigenous communities have experienced land dispossession and migration into areas with less fertile soil for agriculture/mineral value, more exposure to toxins, pollution, and land more susceptible to climate change risks. For decades, Indigenous communities have stood up against the generational impacts of settler colonialism which have put and continue to put an ecological strain on the land. This includes the Northern Cheyenne Tribe in southeastern Montana’s push to limit pollution sources on tribal lands, Idle No More protests, Stop Line 3 resistance, Standing Rock protests, and more recently the Arctic Refuge drilling resistance.

Today, numerous EJ organizations, grassroots groups, and activists continue to fight against the disproportionate ways that environmental issues impact low-income communities of color. These efforts continue to expand to capture a more intersectional view of how various issues including housing insecurity, economic injustice, and fashion waste all contribute to disproportionate environmental impacts on low-income communities of color.



Idle No More protests.  
Source: Global News



Standing Rock protests. Source: The New Yorker

### Sources:

- [black-woman-savior-trope-toolkit-intersectional-environmentalism-bipoc-eco-media-climate-justice – Intersectional Environmentalist](#)
- [Cole-and-Foster-From-the-Ground-Up\\_-Environmental-Racism-and-the-Rise-of-the-Environmental-Justice-Movement-2001-NYU-Press.pdf \(Chapter One, p. 19 - 33\)](#)
- [Redlining—and Greening—of Cities. What’s the Connection? - American Forests](#)
- [Marching for Justice in the Fields \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#)
- [On Bridging Environmental Justice and Farmworker Realities - NCEJN](#)
- [How workers’ rights and environmental justice movements collide in California’s Central Valley - EHN](#)
- [UFW History – UFW](#)
- [Environmental Justice and Indigenous Environmental Justice - PMC](#)
- [Effects of land dispossession and forced migration on Indigenous peoples in North America | Science](#)
- [Native American Activism: 1960s to Present - Zinn Education Project](#)

## Environmental Justice in Action

As you begin to understand environmental justice concepts, it's useful to see what these terms and examples look like in practice. [Philly Thrive](#) shows what EJ in action is and how impactful organizing can be in transforming lives, changing policies, and creating thriving futures.

### About Philly Thrive:

*“Philly Thrive is a multi-racial, cross-class, intergenerational organization rooted in the communities most impacted by the legacy of the South Philly oil refinery. They are a basebuilding, membership organization that believes in the power of nonviolent direct action to achieve environmental justice.”*

### Shutting down the Philadelphia Energy Solutions (PES) refinery:

The oil refinery in South Philly was a toxic injustice for decades. Not only was the massive refinery solely responsible for over two-thirds of Philadelphia's toxic air pollution, but it operated next to a majority Black and working-class neighborhood that suffered from surging levels of asthma and cancer. For years, Philly Thrive organized fenceline community members and fought against the expansion of the PES refinery. Their "Right to Breathe" campaign used nonviolent direct action to drive awareness and force decision-makers to listen to the people.

In 2019, after a series of massive explosions at PES released more than 5,000 pounds of poisonous hydrofluoric acid into the air and forced the refinery to shut down, Philly Thrive used the power they had built to push for the refinery's permanent closure. Among many direct actions, Philly Thrive organized a bus to the refinery auction in New York City in 2020. Ultimately the U.S. Bankruptcy Court judge confirmed the sale of the PES refinery to a company who plans to redevelop the land for non-refinery uses. The environmental justice work continues; Philly Thrive now organizes & contests for justice as the 1300-acre refinery site is redeveloped.





# Exploring Environmental Justice Topics

EJ shows up in many forms, from food and water access to housing, labor, and land. The topics on the next three pages highlight some of the key topics shaping EJ today. Use this as a guide to better understand the scope of the EJ movement before you learn how you can take action in the next section.



### Health Equity

Addresses the disproportionate environmental health disparities and exposure that low-income people of color face because of policies that deliberately place environmental hazards in communities of color.

Learn more: [The Long Fight And Dangerous Climate Threat At A Toxic Waste Site](#) | [NBC News](#)

Source: [WE ACT - Environmental justice](#)



### Tree Equity

Strives to close the gap in tree coverage for low income and neighborhoods of color, due to systemic racist housing policies.

Learn more: [In Washington state, a new initiative to boost urban tree cover](#) | [Grist](#)

Source: [Tree Equity - American Forests](#)



### Water Justice

Ensures that everyone, regardless of race or economic background, has access to clean, safe, accessible, sustainable and affordable sources of water.

Learn more: [Flint, Michigan residents still fighting for safe water 10 years after crisis](#)

Source: [The Intersection Between Climate Justice and Water Justice — NW Environmental Justice Center](#)



### Just Transition

A framework for change to shift communities from extractive economies to regenerative economies rooted in redistributing resources of power and democratizing decision-making.

Learn more: [What would a just transition look like for the Navajo Nation?](#) | [Grist](#)

Source: [Just Transition](#) | [Movement Generation](#)



### Land Rematriation

An Indigenous women-led movement and practice to restore Indigenous lands to Indigenous people, while honoring Indigenous matrilineal societies, and rejecting patriarchal systems.

Learn more: [Rinihmu Pulte'irekne \(Sequoia Point\) - The Sogorea Te Land Trust](#)

Source: [What is Rematriation? - The Sogorea Te Land Trust](#)



### Food Justice

Aims to provide intersectional solutions to transform the exploitive food system into a regenerative source that addresses land ownership issues and provides humans and nonhumans with the right to access healthy, affordable, culturally rich foods without the threat of systems of oppression.

Learn more: [Watch | Gather Film](#)

Source: [Food Justice Sovereignty Toolkit | Intersectional Environmentalist](#)



### Housing Justice

Ensuring everyone has access to affordable housing that promotes environmental health, well-being, accessibility, and economic mobility by tackling the historical and current disparities caused by systemic racism and ableism.

Learn: [Housing and Climate: Prioritizing Black and Disadvantaged Communities in Crisis](#)

Source: [Environmental and Housing Justice Policy Platform - California Environmental Justice Alliance](#)



### Outdoor Access & Equity

Addresses the nature gap in the U.S., which is the large disparity in access to nature and outdoor space on the basis of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and ability.

Learn: [Rooted & Relentless: Rue Mapp on Black Joy in Nature with Outdoor Afro — Compost, Cotton & Cornrows](#)

Source: [Addressing Outdoor Equity Myths Toolkit | Intersectional Environmentalist](#)



### **Mobility Justice**

Demands that we recognize and solve the historical and current discriminatory barriers to access and achieve safe and equitable mobility and transportation both in the construction of streets and the modes of transit that communities use.

Learn: [Just Transition in Transportation - Front and Centered](#)  
Source: [Principles of Mobility Justice](#) | [Untokening Collective](#)



### **Circular Fashion Economy**

Tackles fashion waste through a sustainable production loop that promotes justice for garment workers and uses safe recycled materials to generate less waste, reduce environmental degradation, and emit less pollution.

Learn: [The Joy Report | The Intersectional Environmentalist: These Brands are Championing a Circular Economy](#)  
Source: [Circular Fashion | Circular Economy for the Fashion Industry | Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#)



### **Ecological Justice**

According to Movement Generation, ecological justice is, “the state of balance between human communities and healthy ecosystems based on thriving, mutually beneficial relationships and participatory self-governance.”

Learn: [The Core Principles of Deep Ecology | Atmos](#)  
Source: [Ecological Justice | Movement Generation](#)



### **Labor Justice**

Advocates for equitable pay and the fair and safe treatment of workers through safe working conditions, environmental protections, health protocols, and active participation in labor decision making.

Learn more: [Labor Organizing + How it Intersects with Environmental Justice](#)  
Source: [The common ground between labor and climate justice - EHN](#)

## Environmental Justice in Practice

There are several examples of groups, organizations, and environmental leaders who are working on critical environmental justice initiatives. From education to land management, these organizations and leaders are addressing systemic issues in EJ. If you're interested in learning more about them or supporting these organizations, follow the three-step guide to community action to get in touch with them.

### Land Management

**Shelterwood** is a 900-acre community forest stewarded by Indigenous, Black, Disabled and Queer leaders, land protectors and cultural changemakers. Based on unceded Kashia territory in so-called Northern California, Shelterwood heals interconnected ecosystems through land stewardship, forest restoration, wildfire risk reduction, community and cultural organizing, and hosting retreats.

For over 40 years, **Ka'ala Farm** has provided programs that cultivate a sustainable and pono (righteous) food system through strengthening relationships with the land and practicing the traditional Hawaiian land tenure system.

### Agriculture

**Dreaming Out Loud** strives to create equitable, healthy, regenerative community-based food systems in the DC metro area. Their Fort Stanton Farm initiative turned an abandoned property and developed it into a farm for teaching workshops, growing food locally, and providing resources to the community so they are able to farm and receive fresh food.

**Concrete Jungle** addresses food insecurity in Georgia by rescuing and redistributing fresh fruits and vegetables to food banks and shelters.



- **Sources:**
- [Shelterwood | Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ-led community forest and retreat center](#)
- <https://kaalafarm.org/>
- [Our Farms | Dreaming Out Loud](#)
- [Concrete Jungle | Foraging, farming, and supporting food access across Georgia](#)
- [In Search of George Washington Carver's True Legacy](#)
- [Homepage - The Sogorea Te Land Trust](#)
- [LANDBACK - NDN COLLECTIVE](#)
- <https://dscej.org>
- <https://detroitenvironmen.tajjustice.org>

## Health

[Deep South Center for Environmental Justice](#) promotes the rights of all people to be free from environmental harm, particularly communities of color along the Mississippi River Chemical Corridor and the broader Gulf Coast Region.

Led by a team of activists, advocates, organizers, artists and storytellers, [Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice \(DWEJ\)](#) advocates for a healthy environment through innovative community and policy action that values all people.

## Landback Movement

A movement with generational history with the goal of getting Indigenous Lands back to Indigenous people. The [Sogorea Te' Land Trust](#), an Indigenous women-led land trust based in the San Francisco Bay Area, created the Shuumi Land Tax fund which lets residents of traditional Lisjan Ohlone territory contribute financially to maintain the Indigenous lands they reside on.

The [NDN Collective](#) is an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to building Indigenous power through organizing, activism, philanthropy, grantmaking, capacity-building, and narrative change. Deeply rooted in community organizing, their LandBack work exemplifies large-scale mobilization and movement building.

- **Sources:**
- [Shelterwood | Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ-led community forest and retreat center](#)
- <https://kaalafarm.org/>
- [Our Farms | Dreaming Out Loud](#)
- [Concrete Jungle | Foraging, farming, and supporting food access across Georgia](#)
- [In Search of George Washington Carver's True Legacy](#)
- [Homepage - The Sogorea Te Land Trust](#)
- [LANDBACK - NDN COLLECTIVE](#)
- <https://dscej.org>
- <https://detroitenvironmentaljustice.org>



Source: <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org>



Source: <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org>

## Ecosystem Revitalization

As a green space solution to address local environmental issues, [Sustaining Our Urban Landscape \(SOUL\)](#) based in New Orleans, Louisiana has been planting over 10,000 trees in the city since 2016.

[Acres of Ancestry](#) is a multidisciplinary, cooperative nonprofit ecosystem rooted in Black ecocultural traditions and textile arts to regenerate custodial landownership, ecological stewardship, and food and fiber economies in the South.

## Education

[New Roots Institute](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering the next generation with knowledge and training to help end factory farming, has delivered over 10,000 lessons in high school and college classrooms, fostering an understanding of the impacts and solutions of factory farming.

[Latino Outdoors](#) is a Latine led organization that creates outdoor recreation, conservation, and environmental education opportunities through volunteer-powered programming.

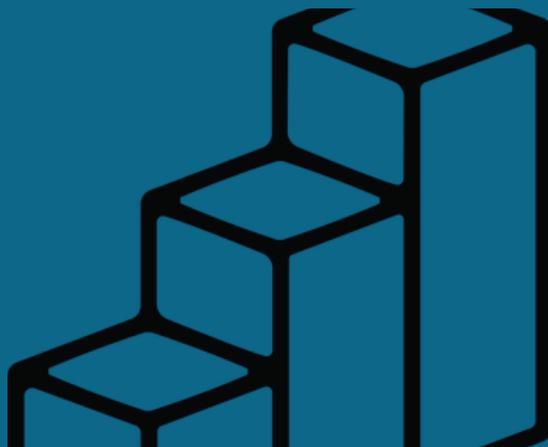


Photo: Soul Photo Gallery

- **Sources:**
- [Shelterwood | Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ-led community forest and retreat center](#)
- <https://kaalafarm.org/>
- [Our Farms | Dreaming Out Loud](#)
- [Concrete Jungle | Foraging, farming, and supporting food access across Georgia](#)
- [In Search of George Washington Carver's True Legacy](#)
- [Homepage - The Sogorea Te Land Trust](#)
- [LANDBACK - NDN COLLECTIVE](#)
- <https://dscej.org>
- <https://detroitenvironmentaljustice.org>



Farm Aid. Photo: New Roots Institute



**A THREE-STEP  
GUIDE TO  
COMMUNITY  
ACTION**

## Finding an Environmental Justice Organization

Now that you have a better understanding of the various EJ issues impacting communities, it's time to explore organizations that are doing this work in your community. EJ movements are more effective when they are led by the people most impacted, so this step is about taking the time to reflect on where you can provide the most support to an organization or group.

As you look for groups or organizations, use the “Exploring Environmental Justice Topics” section as a tool to help narrow down your search and find groups targeting specific topics in your area.

### How to research and find an environmental justice organization:

- Search online for “Environmental justice organizations in [your city]” or “Environmental justice organizations addressing [issue area, i.e. food justice, labor justice, etc.]”
- OR use this list of databases/resources/websites to help you identify organizations and volunteer opportunities aligned with your interests and the needs of environmental justice communities:



- [Patagonia Action Works](#) - Discover grassroots organizations, volunteer, donate, or sign petitions



- [IE Database | Intersectional Environmentalist](#) - Find grassroots and intersectional organizations to support or engage with locally



- [Catchafire](#) - Explore volunteer opportunities that connect your professional skills with nonprofits that need capacity-building support

**Once you find an organization, spend time on their website or social media to learn about their mission, leadership, and current priorities.**

## Getting Involved with an Environmental Justice Organization

After finding an organization that you're interested in supporting, the next step is to find opportunities where you can get involved and connect with the organization.



**Volunteering**



**Attending events and/or meetings**



**Donating**  
(financial support or resources such as meals, art)



**Signing petitions**



**Sharing community resources and information**



**Lending your talents/skills to help build capacity**

Whatever you decide, it is vital that you lead with humility and center the needs and requests of the organization you'd like to support.



### How to find opportunities:

- Look at the organization's social media for volunteer opportunities or events
- Sign up for their newsletter for updates, events, volunteer opportunities, and ways to get involved
- Visit [Eventbrite](#) or [Luma](#) to search or find events, trainings, or volunteer
- Check out your local library or community center to find volunteer opportunities and event flyers
- Ask! Tap into your community and see if folks know of any organizations looking for community support



### **Bonus Tip: Bring a friend!**

**Joining a new group can be intimidating, but if you bring a friend, it feels a lot more comfortable and easier to do. Plus, now the organization has two new volunteers/attendees!**

## Aligning Your Gifts with Organizational Needs

This final step is about learning, listening, and finding ways to support existing efforts. The goal is to align your skills, resources, position, or connections with environmental justice organizations' needs.

Although using your skills, talents, resources, and position to support a group is important, it is vital that you make sure it is something that the organization needs. Coordinating effectively with organizations helps deepen impact and minimizes fragmented efforts and miscommunication. Attend that first event, have a conversation with an organization member, or check their website to see if your skills, resources, or position align with the organization's needs.

Once you've participated in that action and analyzed where your skills may align with the organization's needs, make a commitment to get involved several times a month so that you can continue to grow your relationship with the organization.

This could look like drafting an action plan, journaling, or simply making a mental note to yourself that you will commit to attending x number of events (3, 4, 5, 8, etc., make the commitment accessible and in alignment with the organization's needs). Showing up consistently and becoming familiar with the organization you are supporting is a key pathway towards building trust and taking effective community action.



**Use the section on the next page to make a commitment and create an action plan for yourself.**



# Creating Your Environmental Justice Action Plan

Use this outline to draft a one-year action plan for how you will share your time and efforts with the environmental justice organization you plan to support. Fill in each phrase or sentence with ideas for your plan to help you commit to sustaining your efforts and actions.

I [name] commit to taking action with [organization name] over the next year to support their efforts in addressing [issue area].

I plan to spend [number] hours per week supporting [organization name] and I will focus my actions on [three different actions] throughout the year. Although this is my initial plan, I will also be open to shifting these actions if the needs of [organization name] change throughout the year.

- **Months 1 - 4** will focus on [one action]. I will amplify my impact by [insert additional action, i.e. bringing a friend, sharing organization efforts/events online]. Each week, I will [one action], with the goal to [insert type of support for organization].

- **Months 4 - 6** will focus on [one action]. I will focus on [one action] and will amplify my impact by [insert additional action, i.e. bringing a friend, sharing organization efforts/events online]. Each week, I will [take one action], with the goal to [insert type of support for organization].

- **Months 6 - 12** will focus on [one action]. I will focus on [one action] and will amplify my impact by [insert additional action, i.e. bringing a friend, sharing organization efforts/events online]. Each week, I will [take one action], with the goal to [insert type of support for organization].

Throughout my experience, I commit to listening, learning, and taking community-oriented action. I will center the needs of [organization name] and the community I am supporting through [three different actions].

This is the first step I will take to fight against environmental injustice in my community. I will refer back to this every [number] of months to hold myself accountable as a reminder of my commitment to [organization name].

## Raise a Garden, Raise a Ruckus: Growing the Movement for Environmental Justice

"Drill, Baby, Drill" is more than an energy policy. It's an old story -- one that says the highest and best use of our beloved Mother Earth is to rip her open and burn her up. Environmental injustice is what happens when that story gets applied to people as well as land. That's how communities become sacrifice zones. That's how certain neighborhoods end up with refineries, with freeways, with floodwaters -- and no trees.

Environmental justice organizers have always known that you cannot separate the health of people from the health of land. Robin Wall Kimmerer's teaching arrives at the same place: when she says "all flourishing is mutual," it's a statement about justice as much as ecology. The land and the people are one system. We need each other.

**Raising a ruckus** means taking acts of individual and collective courage that challenge the systems--and the stories--that erode life. We must insist instead on futures rooted in reciprocity, gratitude, and abundance. For everyone, on every block, in every neighborhood.

The ruckus is just reciprocity, made loud.

**So get loud. Get organized.**



**Through inaction, we uphold systems of oppression and stifle our ability to think of a future beyond the realities of today.**

**However, with action we can use our skills, time, position, and resources to imagine and co-create a world that addresses the inequities and harmful systems that seem impossible to dismantle.**



Joanna Macy. Photo: The New York Times

“

“Action on behalf of life transforms. Because the relationship between self and the world is reciprocal, it is not a question of first getting enlightened or saved and then acting. As we work to heal the earth, the earth heals us.”

— WORDS FROM JOANNA MACY  
QUOTED BY ROBIN WALL KIMMERER IN *BRAIDING SWEETGRASS*, P. 340



**GOING DEEPER:  
ADDITIONAL  
RESOURCES  
+  
EXERCISES**

# Helpful Definitions

## Environmental Justice:

WE Act states that environmental justice “seeks to address the disproportionate exposure to pollution and other environmental hazards that people of color face across this country, along with the resulting adverse health impacts this causes.”

## Climate Justice:

The Solidarity Economy Association explains mutual aid as “where people in an area, or a community, come together to support one another, collectively meeting each other’s needs without the help of official bodies like the state or NGOs.”

## Intersectional Environmentalism:

is an inclusive version of environmentalism that advocates for both the protection of people and the planet. It identifies and centers the ways in which injustices and social inequality happening to marginalized communities and the earth are interconnected.

## Reciprocity:

TreeSisters describes reciprocity as “a state of mutual exchange and benefit. Concerning Nature, it means giving back to the environment as much as we take from it. This can take many forms, from reducing our carbon footprint to supporting conservation efforts and reconnecting with the natural world.”

## Collective Care:

Aja Reynolds expresses collective care “as a communal commitment to upheave oppressive systems to invest in humanizing relations and processes rooted in love and deeply informed by Black feminism. It is an embodiment of ancestral teachings of joy and grief.”



Dr. Robert Bullard

- U.S. EPA details that **“Environmental justice will be achieved when everyone enjoys: (1) the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and (2) equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.”**
- Dr. Robert Bullard explains that **“environmental justice embraces the principle that all people and communities have a right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulation.”**



Aja D. Reynolds



These definitions have been sourced from a range of environmental justice organizations, collectives, and groups.

### Traditional Ecological Knowledge:

Rooted in Indigenous culture, “traditional ecological knowledge refers to the knowledge, practice, and belief concerning the relationship of living beings to one another and to the physical environment, which is held by peoples in relatively non technological societies with a direct dependence upon local resources (Berkes 1993).

### Environmental Racism:

“Environmental racism is racial discrimination in environmental policy making and the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of color from the leadership of the environmental movement.” Dr. Benjamin Chavis, 1982



Dr. Benjamin Chavis



Dara Cooper

### Food Justice:

Dara Cooper defines food justice as “a process whereby communities most impacted and exploited by our current corporate controlled, extractive agricultural system shift power to re-shape, re-define and provide indigenous, community based solutions to accessing and controlling food that are humanizing, fair, healthy, accessible, racially equitable, environmentally sound and just Food Sovereignty.”

### Ecological Justice:

Movement Generation defines ecological justice as, “the state of balance between human communities and healthy ecosystems based on thriving, mutually beneficial relationships and participatory self-governance. We see Ecological Justice as the key frame to capture our holistic vision of a better way forward.”

### Frontline community:

Front and Centered describes frontline communities as “those impacted most by climate change and its root causes, which include white supremacy, patriarchy and colonization. These communities are embedded in legacy struggles against social, economic, and environmental injustices exacerbated by extractive and pollutive industries that have been purposely and systemically situated adjacent to their communities, and in some communities, on the actual land of the communities.”



These definitions have been sourced from a range of environmental justice organizations, collectives, and groups.

### Regenerative:

A holistic way of being that focuses on restorative, community-centered, equitable, and justice-focused methods to achieve a thriving community and planet that shifts from an extractive society to one that flourishes and replenishes the resources that we use.

### Collective action:

Root Cause defines collective action as the “action taken together by a group of people who share knowledge, resources, and effort to achieve a common purpose.”

### Individual action:

According to the Sustainability Directory, individual action is a “personal commitment & daily choices towards a sustainable, equitable world, reflecting values in actions.

### Direct action:

Justice Together asserts that direct action is an “action taken by a group intended to reveal an existing problem, highlight an alternative, or demonstrate a possible solution to a social issue.”

### Mutual Aid:

The Solidarity Economy Association explains mutual aid as “a horizontal mode of organisation...where people in an area, or a community, come together to support one another, collectively meeting each other’s needs without the help of official bodies like the state or NGOs.”



A People’s Orientation to A Regenerative Economy

- Climate Justice Alliance states that “**Regenerative systems maintain positive reinforcing cycles of wellbeing within and beyond themselves, especially between humans and wider nature, such that “life begets life... and the system progresses from a deprived state of functioning towards a revitalized state of functioning”**”



These definitions have been sourced from a range of environmental justice organizations, collectives, and groups.

## Environmental Justice Reflections

The questions below are meant to help you sit with the history, language, and ideas you've encountered throughout this toolkit, not to test your knowledge. EJ is not something to master all at once; it's something we come to understand over time, through being in right relationship, cultivating trust, and lived experience. Use these questions to notice what stood out to you, and how this information connects to your own community.

**Bonus Tip: Use this in group settings or organize a discussion group to create a group learning experience!**



**Question #1:**

What ideas, terms, or parts of EJ history were new to you, or helped you put words to something you've noticed before?



**Question #2:**

What are some similarities and differences between the protests/direct actions for EJ today versus in the 1980s?



**Question #3:**

Where do you see examples of environmental injustice, or environmental protection, in the place you live, work, or spend time?



**Question #4:**

What connections do you notice between EJ issues like housing injustice, food inequity, and labor exploitation? What systems do these issues perpetuate?



**Question #5:**

What inspiration can you draw from the history of EJ into taking action on environmental issues in your community?



**Question #6:**

What disproportionate outcomes does racial capitalism fuel in environmental injustice? And what are some potential solutions to address this harmful system?

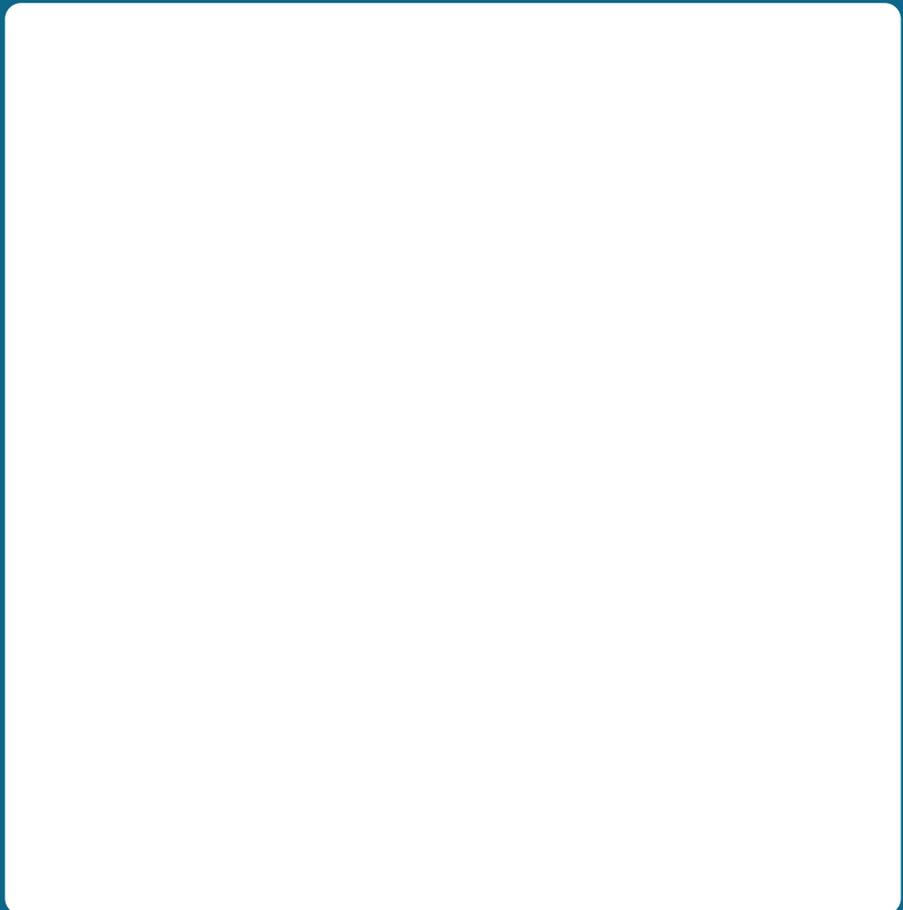
## Creative Writing or Drawing Prompt

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### What does a transformative world look like to you?

Use this prompt as a space for imagination and possibility. In the environmental justice movement, a key part of taking action is harnessing hope and believing in the possibility of a better and more just world. Explore what your role in helping to create this world could look like.

You might choose to draw, write a poem, tell a story, or journal freely. You can focus on issues you hope to see resolved, systems you'd like to see changed, or ways communities care for one another and the Earth. Let this be a space for dreaming of a world rooted in justice, reciprocity, joy, and collective thriving.



# Find Your Environmental Advocacy Role

Everyone can be a changemaker. By authentically showing up with what you already have, your skills, experiences, and care, you can become an earth steward and contribute to meaningful environmental justice work. When your strengths are paired with issues that need attention, you create opportunities for effective, collaborative change.

The Changemaker Roles outlined in this next section (the organizer, nurturer, collaborator, and amplifier) are designed to help you reflect on how you might best contribute to the environmental movement. Read through each of the four roles and notice which ones resonate most with your interests, skills, and energy.

These roles are not fixed or exclusive as many overlap, and most people embody more than one. If a role doesn't quite fit, feel free to adapt it or choose multiple roles that align with your skill set.

## Organizers

**Organizers** bring people together around a shared cause. They help build structure, momentum, and collective power.

**Example actions:**

Sending newsletters, planning events or meetings, coordinating logistics, building communication plans, inviting people into movement spaces, supporting direct action, or even starting an organization.

**Example advocates/organizations:**

Dolores Huerta is a renowned American labor leader and civil rights activist who co-founded the United Farm Workers (UFW) in 1962. She played a central role in organizing the 1965 Delano grape strike and served as the lead negotiator for farmworker contracts that followed. Throughout her life, Huerta has organized and fought for workers. Her lifelong commitment to building and mobilizing people makes her a powerful example of an Organizer. [Source: Dolores Huerta Foundation](#)

The NDN Collective is an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to building Indigenous power through organizing, activism, philanthropy, grantmaking, capacity-building, and narrative change. Deeply rooted in community organizing, their LandBack work exemplifies the Organizer role through large-scale mobilization and movement building. [Source: NDN Collective](#)

## Nurturers

**Nurturers** help movements and organizations build capacity by caring for people, systems, and day-to-day needs.

**Example actions:**

Supporting behind the scenes work, building spreadsheets, helping with logistics, providing food, checking in on people, volunteering time or resources, and helping organizations function sustainably.

**Example advocates/organizations:**

Cecil Corbin-Mark dedicated his life to serving communities of color and fighting environmental racism, particularly in Harlem. As the first paid staff member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice, he played a key role in building the organization's capacity and advancing its initiatives. His commitment to care, consistency, and infrastructure exemplifies the Nurturer role. [Source: Grist](#)

Concrete Jungle addresses food insecurity in Georgia by rescuing and redistributing fresh fruits and vegetables to food banks and shelters. By nourishing communities and strengthening food systems, their work reflects the heart of the Nurturer role. [Source: Concrete Jungle](#)

## Collaborators

**Amplifiers** help build support through storytelling, communication, and sharing perspectives that inspire others.

**Example actions:**

Sharing personal stories, reposting content with context, creating art or writing, forwarding articles to friends, speaking publicly, or using social media to highlight issues and solutions.

**Example advocates/organizations:**

Dr. Jessica Hernandez is a globally recognized Indigenous scientist, climate justice leader, and author of *Fresh Banana Leaves*. Through storytelling and the amplification of Indigenous science, she challenges dominant environmental narratives and embodies the Amplifier role.

[Source: Jessica Hernandez, Ph.D.](#)

Grist is an independent nonprofit media organization dedicated to climate journalism. By shaping narratives and elevating equitable climate solutions, Grist plays a key role as an Amplifier within the environmental justice movement.

[Source: Grist](#)

## Amplifiers

**Collaborators** show up where help is needed and support movements through consistent participation and service.

**Example actions:**

Attending volunteer events or meetings, supporting tasks as needed, bringing friends or community members along, and committing to volunteer regularly within your capacity.

**Example advocates/organizations:**

George Washington Carver was a pioneering agricultural scientist who shared his knowledge freely with rural farmers in the early 1900s. Through education, experimentation, and hands-on support, he exemplified the Collaborator role by showing up to support others where he was needed.

[Source: In Search of George Washington Carver's True Legacy.](#)

Latino Outdoors is a Latine led organization that creates outdoor recreation, conservation, and environmental education opportunities through volunteer-powered programming. Their national growth and community-centered approach exemplify the Collaborator role.

[Source: Intersectional Environmentalist Outdoor Equity Toolkit](#)

# Using Your Role: What Does Your Environmental Advocacy Look Like in Practice?

This journaling exercise is designed to help you reflect on how your changemaker role(s) might show up in real life. Use these prompts to explore where your strengths thrive, what environments feel supportive, and how you might contribute when working with or volunteering for an environmental justice organization. As you answer, keep in mind that roles can shift over time, and it's okay to evolve or take on more than one role.

## Reflection Prompts:

- What does your role look like in practice for you?
- When working on a group project, how do you usually show up?
- What inspires you to lead or take initiative?
- I feel like a leader when...
- I feel most fulfilled when I am...
- I feel least fulfilled when I am...
- When do I feel most action-oriented?
- How do I show up in group settings?
- For groups:
- Break into pairs or small groups and take turns asking and discussing these questions together.

A large white rectangular area with horizontal lines for writing, intended for journaling responses to the reflection prompts.

## Creative Reflection Exercise

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### What does success look like to you in your changemaker role?

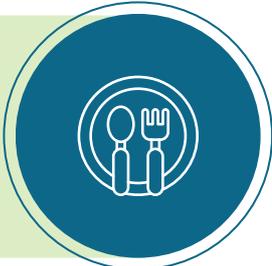
This is a creative, open-ended exercise. Choose a format that feels natural and expressive to you. The goal is exploration, not performance.

Here are a few ideas to get you started, based on the changemaker roles:



#### Amplifier:

Write a poem, create a visual piece, or record a short reflection that captures what success feels like when you're sharing stories or shifting narratives.



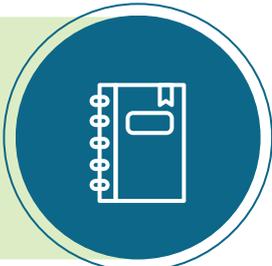
#### Nurturer:

Express your answer through an act of care, preparing a meal, organizing a small food drive, tending to a shared space, or committing to a regular practice that supports others.



#### Organizer:

Design a flyer, invitation, or outline for a gathering, meeting, or action you'd like to host or help organize.



#### Collaborator:

Write a short story, journal entry, or create a short video documenting your experience showing up with an environmental justice organization, what you hope to learn, feel, and contribute.