PRACTICE—LESSONS LEARNED

Capacity-Building for Successful Climate Justice Collaborations

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Greens REALIGN

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ABSTRACT

The traditional environmental movement has historically excluded communities of color and ignored environmental issues of concern to them. This has impeded partnerships with climate justice communities and groups and perpetuated inequitable climate policies. For climate justice to be achieved, the traditional environmental movement must repair relationships, collaborate with climate justice communities on just and equitable terms, and incorporate climate justice into its agenda. These efforts will succeed only if traditional environmental organizations invest in building their capacity to engage in climate justice work, including training staff in new skills such as cultural competency. This article examines the barriers impeding climate justice partnerships and details the skills organizations must develop to overcome these barriers. The article then explores systems of accountability to hold organizations responsible for building their capability to engage in climate justice partnerships and recommends criteria to assess their progress.

INTRODUCTION

Solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change effects can transform lives. However, if they are not equitably designed, they can fail to benefit communities most vulnerable to climate impacts. Low-income and disadvantaged communities and communities of color are often historically burdened by disinvestment, cumulative environmental pollution, and other hazards (we refer to these communities as “environmental justice” or “frontline” communities). These communities routinely face a “triple injustice” from climate change. They are most vulnerable to climate change impacts, contribute least to global emissions, and experience the least benefit from climate investment and action, all of which deepens patterns of inequity (Newell et al., 2021).

There is ample research that connects the “climate gap” (the acknowledgment that low-income communities and communities of color will experience the hardest and most dangerous consequences of climate change) and the racial wealth gap (the acknowledgment that systemic racism activates financial barriers for people of color). A 2009 report from the University of Southern California states consequences of climate change, including extreme heat, flooding, and toxic air pollution, result in higher risks of death for African Americans and low-income individuals compared to White and wealthier neighborhoods (Morello-Frosch et al., 2009). The report links this climate vulnerability to unequal geographies that people of color experience, establishing that there is a “positive relationship between the proportion of

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people of color and proportion of concrete, heat-trapping surfaces and a negative relationship between the proportion of people of color and amount of tree cover" (p. 8). Though the racial wealth gap is a significant marker of inequitable climate outcomes, a lack of recognition, power, and representation in political structures also prevents these communities from being more climate resilient. The systematic failure to propose climate solutions that rectify inequity, both existing and expected from climate impacts, is a form of denial that is ongoing.

For over four decades, the environmental justice movement, "a social movement to address the unfair exposure of poor and marginalized communities to harms associated with resource extraction, hazardous waste, and other land uses," has been working to make justice issues a focus and not just an afterthought of environmental policy and programming (Schlosberg, 2007). Research from the early 1990s led by Dr. Robert Bullard (1993), a long-time academic and advocate known as the "father of environmental justice," found that the best predictor of whether someone would live near a toxic waste site was race. That was true even after controlling for geography and income.

The environmental justice movement has been at the forefront of the climate justice movement and the fight to address the climate gap, keenly understanding that dangerous environmental exposure is worst for communities that are poor and minority (Tokar, 2014). Unless the climate movement undertakes widespread policy and cultural change to center vulnerable populations, their issues, and their expertise, the climate gap will continue to widen.

This article explores the perspectives and skills that the traditional environmental movement needs to achieve climate justice. We use the term "traditional environmental movement" to mean the White-founded and historically White-led environmental groups that were created to address conservation issues. First, we discuss how the traditional environmental movement's racist legacy and failure to diversify prevents it from bridging the climate gap. Then, we examine the barriers to collaboration between the traditional environmental movement and the environmental/climate justice movement. Next, we discuss how organizations and their staff must develop new skills to make such partnerships successful. Finally, we discuss the importance of using metrics to track organizations' development of capacity to engage in climate justice work and recommend criteria for such assessment.

THE TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT'S SEPARATION FROM JUSTICE

To understand how the traditional environmental movement can advance climate justice, one must first understand why the movement has failed to do so thus far. The Climate Justice Alliance, an alliance of more than 80 frontline communities and organizations working in the climate justice movement, provides one vision of climate justice:

> Frontline, community-based organizations have the solutions to the extractive industrial systems that are eroding human's primary means of existence on the planet. Nature and humans are interdependent. Effective climate crisis solutions honor human rights and the rights of nature. Localized democracies that champion community rights to energy, land, water, and food sovereignty are the best answers to combating exploitation. Shared leadership produces community well-being and the most innovative solutions to our climate crisis. Workers should be at the forefront of shaping new economies rooted in fairness, equity and ecological values. (Climate Justice Alliance, 2022b)

This statement emphasizes that those most impacted by climate change should lead the developments of its solutions. This value is central to environmental justice and is seen in

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foundational documents such as the 1991 Principles of Environmental Justice (First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991) and the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing (Working Group Meeting on Globalization and Trade, 1996). Traditional environmental organizations who intend to meaningfully further climate justice can do so by partnering with, and taking the lead from, frontline communities and organizations. Yet, the movement's racist, exclusionary history and continued lack of diversity has alienated environmental justice communities. The separation of the traditional environmental movement from the communities closest to climate harms has led to the movement's support for climate policies that do not adequately protect these communities.

The Movement's Exclusionary Origins

People of color have long been excluded from environmental policy and conservation, creating blind spots that perpetuate inequality (Bonta & Jordan, 2007). Today's leading environmental organizations are grappling with their racist founding histories. The National Audubon Society, for example, was named after founder John James Audubon, a naturalist known for his illustrations of birds. Less known is his reputation for buying and selling Black people as slaves, his contributions to White supremacist thought and policy, his opposition to abolition, and his appropriation of Black and Indigenous observations of bird species (Fears, 2022). Environmental organizations are only the latest in a global movement to confront foundational histories of enslavement, genocide, apartheid, and colonialism (Irfan et al., 2021). In the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement and the national protests and civil unrest in response to the killing of George Floyd have helped make "environmental justice … a foremost concern to climate activists" (Buckley, 2022). Many traditional environmental organizations have recently announced their intention to build partnerships and alliances with environmental justice groups and communities who have historically been excluded from the movement. This reckoning is not pathbreaking, it is overdue.

The White-led environmental movement's origins in conservation led it to ignore the impact of environmental harms on people, the central issue for environmental justice communities. These origins, rooted in the premise that humans are outside of nature rather than active participants in it, has led the traditional environmental movement to engage in community extraction and political influence to defend natural places at the expense of communities of color (Gibson et al., 2015). It has been insensitive to the concerns of these communities that live in the shadow of chemical and power plants, lack access to clean drinking water, and operate under scarcity due to the impacts and repercussions of industrialization. In a 1971 national membership survey, the Sierra Club asked: "Should the Club concern itself with the conservation problems of such special groups as the urban poor and ethnic minorities?" The results showed 58% of members either strongly or somewhat opposed the idea (Cole & Foster, 2001, p. 30).

Environmental organizations saw these plights as social justice issues, not environmental ones, and operated under the myth that communities of color did not care about the environment. A survey conducted by WE ACT For Environmental Justice (2021) shows, however, that environmental justice communities view social justice and environmental issues as linked. The survey polled 1,809 Black and Latino/a/x voters in Nevada, Arizona, Texas, Georgia, Florida, and Pennsylvania and found that communities of color "understand the inherent link between climate change solutions and economic benefits, with 72% of respondents agreeing that a clean energy transition can reduce bills and create jobs, and 80% agreeing that the transition will create millions of well-paying jobs in underserved communities."

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The Movement's Lack of Diversity

A major gap between the traditional environmental movement and the environmental justice movement is the inclusion of impacted constituencies at every decision-making table. The environmental justice movement is made up of low-income communities and communities of color who are the most impacted by environmental and climate hazards. These same constituencies have been excluded from the traditional environmental movement, impeding its ability to address environmental justice issues. A 2021 study by Green 2.0, an independent advocacy campaign that tracks racial and gender diversity within the environmental movement, found that while organizations have started to diversify, "it has been at an incremental pace that begs for 'improvement at all levels'" (Ortiz, 2021). Most recently, Green 2.0 (2023) reported that 33% of the senior staff of organizations surveyed are people of color. Given that the U.S. population is more than 40% people of color (Boschma et al., 2021), and that these communities are at the frontlines of environmental degradation, it is clear the movement continues to lack adequate representation. Bridging the gap between traditional environmental and environmental justice organizations must start with diversifying staff and recruiting for environmental justice expertise.

The Traditional Environmental Movement's Divergence From Climate Justice Strategies and Solutions

As discussed above, the traditional environmental movement's conservationist origins and lack of diversity have given it a narrower perspective and goals that often oppose those of the environmental justice movement. The movements' different constituencies also result in different advocacy approaches and tactics. The traditional environmental movement is dominated by professional staff and members who are predominately White, highly educated, and upper and middle class. In comparison, the environmental justice movement's constituency is low-income, people of color, and other groups with marginalized identities. Environmental justice communities tend to "have a social justice orientation, seeing environmental degradation as just one of many ways their communities are under attack" (Cole & Foster, 2001, p. 33). Thus, "they seek remedies that are more fundamental than simply stopping a local polluter" and "view the need for broader, structural reforms." This can lead to conflicting views about appropriate climate solutions or scope of climate reforms.

As Cole and Foster (2001) have explained, environmental justice organizations engage in "transformational politics" through which activists "transform the possibilities for fundamental social and environmental change through redefinition, reinvention, and construction of innovative political and cultural discourses" (p. 14). The focus is not just winning a singular environmental goal, but to transform community members "from passive victims to significant actors in the environmental decision-making process." They explain that this approach is born out of the recognition that environmental justice communities are overly burdened because of social, economic, and political factors that exclude them from decision-making processes that impact their lives (Cole & Foster, 2001, chap. 5). The struggle for environmental and climate justice is thus *political* and requires building the political power of those targeted (Cole & Foster, 2001, pp. 44–47).

But the traditional environmental movement has largely relied on "an insider strategy based on litigation, lobbying, and technical evaluation" (Cole & Foster, 2001, p. 29). Moreover, professionals within the traditional environmental movement are likely to have been "socialized into a technocratic worldview characterized by formal rationality and confidence in their ability to solve problems" (Bailey et al., 1995, p. 36). As Brian Tokar (2014) writes,

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> there has been a serious divide between those who view environmental issues as fundamentally social and political, and those who focus entirely on the technical aspects of individual problems and on narrow, status-quo solutions. [M]ost traditional environmental groups view ecological problems as primarily technical in nature, typically ignoring the larger picture. (p. 32)

Their tactics are more likely to exclude the voices of those most impacted and less likely to transform social and political norms. Technical and technocratic perspectives also often contain blind spots to distributive and other impacts of concern to environmental justice communities (Bailey et al., 1995). Solutions formulated in this perspective often not only fail to benefit but actively perpetuate harm against environmental justice communities. Thus, environmental justice organizations continue to distrust traditional environmental organizations, as their proclamations of support for environmental justice are inconsistent with their proposals of "false solutions" that fall short of equitable outcomes.

These false solutions not only fail to deliver on their environmental justice claims, but often worsen our ecological crises. The mainstream environmental movement has previously promised ambitious climate and environmental justice action only to see the continued funding of fossil fuels to the tune of billions of dollars. Repeatedly, it has backed climate solutions that never achieve the touted just outcomes.

Environmental justice communities have criticized mainstream support for problematic climate legislation that would exacerbate the climate gap instead of resolving climate injustices (Tokar, 2014). For example, the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, also known as the Waxman-Markey Bill, proposed greenhouse gas reduction goals but was rejected by environmental justice organizations who feared it would not reduce emissions in their communities (Mock, 2022). The act relied almost completely on a cap-and-trade program that would create a market for carbon emission allowances by setting a limit on the amount of carbon dioxide that could be emitted each year and allowing businesses to purchase credits to produce excess carbon. Specifically, it allowed companies exceeding carbon limits to trade for credits with those that had extra, thereby creating a market. It also allowed polluters to purchase "offsets," such as funding to protect forests, to permit carbon emissions that would otherwise have to be reduced. The bill, though it did not become law, established mainstream support for cap-and-trade programs as climate solutions.

The mainstream environmental movement has since pushed carbon cap-and-trade policies and the related tool of carbon offset markets as a key mechanism to address the climate crisis. These policies take advantage of the fact that greenhouse gas emissions reductions anywhere have global climate benefits but ignore that such emissions are often accompanied by toxic air pollutants that do have localized impacts. Environmental justice organizations have sharply critiqued cap-and-trade policies for failing to benefit environmental justice communities (The Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change, n.d.). Facilities located near environmental justice communities are often the same facilities that benefit from purchasing carbon credits and offsets. Thus, they continue to release greenhouse gas emissions and toxic co-pollutants that have localized air quality impacts, creating pollution hot spots. These communities thus do not benefit from air quality improvements accruing in other Whiter, wealthier areas. One advocate explained that environmental justice organizations had been warning lawmakers and leaders that cap-and-trade programs were inherently racist. However, "[p]olicymakers at the time said climate change is too important for us to let the disproportionate impacts that will occur in black and brown communities hold us back" (Brown, 2020).

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A more recent example of propping false solutions despite environmental justice push-back is the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (Climate Justice Alliance, 2022a; Hersher, 2022). Pundits readily refer to the bill as the largest climate investment in U.S. history (Mock, 2022). But, much like its predecessor climate bill, the Inflation Reduction Act celebrates funding advancements while continuing to harm fence-line communities. It promises billions of dollars to oil and gas industries and to the same carbon capture and sequestration programs that climate justice advocates rejected in 2010. In theory, 40% of benefits from all clean-energy investments will go to communities that have been historically overburdened with pollution, per President Joe Biden's Justice40 Initiative (The White House, n.d.). But even the most charitable estimate of environmental justice funding—$60 billion—is far less than the total $370 billion of environmental funding pledged. Biden's Justice40 Initiative stems from a bold executive order from the president's first week in office, addressing front-line communities most burdened by climate change and fossil fuel production and how they could directly benefit from funds that are meant to improve programs and policies in their communities.

Justice40 is a historic commitment from the federal government, which follows President Barack Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009—commonly called Obama's "stimulus plan"—which invested a historic $90 billion toward clean energy investments in the country (The White House, 2016). Much like the stimulus plan, which drew scrutiny for prioritizing funding to shovel-ready projects that only massive corporations and developers could achieve, Justice40 draws questions about where and how money will be appropriated to communities. The executive order does not call for spending 40% of the money in environmental justice communities, instead calling for these communities to receive that share of "overall benefits" from federal funding activities (Colman, 2021). The administration has not determined how to measure those monetary benefits for communities to know what funding they can access and, more importantly, how to access it.

Justice40 has learned a few lessons from its predecessor—mainly to build accountability structures, to take a whole-of-government approach to environmental justice through separate interagency groups, and to expand data and measurement tools. One major lesson still unlearned is knowing where to make these investments to combat climate harm, rather than perpetuate false solutions. Organizations have urged the administration to properly define "clean" energy, and not perpetuate legacy pollution from supposed "clean" energy such as carbon capture utilization and storage, nuclear energy, bioenergy, hydrogen, mineral mining, waste to energy, and geothermal energy (Environmental Justice Leadership Forum, 2022). When these false solutions masquerade as effective actions, but harm communities and use their futures as a bargaining chip, how can the climate movement begin to address gaps in equitable outcomes?

Realigning Relations Between the Movements

In addition to the high-level conflicts over climate policy, the movements have also struggled with localized attempts to collaborate and person-to-person relations. This section reviews data about missteps in these localized interactions and proposes a skill-building and training agenda to improve collaborations going forward.

Barriers to Partnerships

Environmental justice advocates often report negative experiences with partnering with traditional environmental organizations (Cable et al., 2005). The NAACP Environmental and

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Climate Justice Program produced a report on the barriers to successful collaboration. The report, for which we here provide a summary, identifies seven categories of challenges:

1. “Reputation of Environmental Organizations”

Challenges emerge from environmental justice communities feeling that the traditional environmental group is not truly invested in the environmental justice community or its goals and simply engaging to further its own conservation/traditional environmental agenda. This is particularly so when the traditional environmental group controls all or most decision-making and/or tokenizes a few members from the environmental justice community to bolster its image as inclusive of frontline representation (NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, n.d., pp. 3–4).

2. “Differential Modus Operandi”

Challenges arise in jointly determining key strategic questions when each group brings a radically different approach. Such questions include how the groups will undertake planning and campaigning, make decisions, and measure success. The last of these can be a key hurdle, as the report explains:

> For example, with coal plants, a community that is forced to consume pollution from a neighboring coal plant may also be dependent on the jobs for the plant and might consider installing pollution controls as a successful compromise, whereas the mainstream environmental group with whom they are partnering may not consider this a success at all because the plant continues to emit carbon dioxide which drives climate change. Similarly, for some achieving interim objectives such as educating community members or training new leaders is cause for celebration while others might focus only on the bottom line. (NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, n.d., p. 4)

3. “National/Local Dynamics”

Tensions can arise when national organizations inordinately take credit for joint work to seize power, influence, and funding, particularly when they do not share funding with the partner community. When resources and power are not shared, the environmental justice community can feel tokenized and used. Other tensions can arise when predominately White and White-led organizations lack the cultural competency to work with communities of color and rural communities, leading communities to feel patronized, condescended to, taken advantage of, and disrespected (NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, n.d., pp. 4–5).

4. “Connecting with the Issue/Conflict of Interest”

Challenges can arise due to differences in perspective. The traditional environmental organization is more likely to have a singular goal, such as shutting down an environmentally polluting facility, and may not understand other community dynamics. Community residents may have perspectives and experiences that hinder support for that singular goal. For example, they may: lack awareness of how they are being impacted by the environmental target; feel they have no power to affect change; have competing, more urgent social and economic priorities; feel there are no viable alternatives to the status quo given the livelihoods, tax revenue, and/or

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other resources the environmental target is providing; and not want to challenge a target that has ties to the community and funded community resources (NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, n.d., pp. 5–6).

5. "Cultural/Situational Differences"

The traditional environmental movement has primarily consisted of white professionals while environmental justice communities are diverse across race, background, and socioeconomic status. Thus, traditional environmental groups may not consider how immigration status, language fluency, cultural values and assets, and education/literacy level may impact community members' ability to participate in campaigns without accommodations (NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, n.d., p. 6).

6. "Logistical Challenges"

Communities without access to technology or who are not comfortable using technology will be limited in participating in efforts that rely on technology. Similarly, communities lacking access to transportation may be prevented from participating in efforts that require travel. Staffing and financial constraints can limit a group's ability to engage equally in the partnership and high turnover rates among staff can also hamper relationship-building efforts (NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, n.d., p. 6).

7. "Lack of Trust/Relationship Building"

All of the above factors can contribute to a lack of trust between groups, particularly when time and effort are not expended in intentionally building strong relationships (NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, n.d., p. 7).

The Need for Cultural Competency

Building authentic, trusting relationships with environmental justice communities and organizations is essential to the success of collaborations. Repair is needed to overcome distrust after decades of environmental justice communities being ignored, tokenized, used, and harmed. Many of the traditional environmental organizations have now promulgated statements of commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and announced their intentions to engage in authentic environmental justice partnerships. However, such words are meaningless without action to build the knowledge, skills, and capacity to undertake this work in more just and equitable ways.

We argue that cultural competency at the movement, organization, and staff level is essential for the traditional environmental movement to finally embrace climate justice. The movement must understand and empathize with environmental justice communities, their goals, perspectives, and priorities, and work in solidarity with them. The movement must also have the cultural competency to communicate, solve problems, and collaborate effectively with such communities on local and national campaigns.

While there are many definitions of cultural competency, here we offer two models well-suited to our context. First, Stanley Sue's (1998) formulation (developed in the context of the field of psychology) provides: "Cultural competence (along with the broader concept of multiculturalism) is the belief that people should not only appreciate and recognize other cultural groups but also be able to effectively work with them" (p. 440). Sue's model encompasses the

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three components of awareness, knowledge, and skills. Domenech Rodríguez et al. (2022) describe these components as follows:

> *Awareness* refers to the person's recognition of belonging to a cultural group and allows for self-examination of values, beliefs, and practices in a manner that enhances humility and facilitates empathy. Awareness also includes understanding that there are others that are culturally different than oneself. The *knowledge* dimension refers to acquiring and retaining information specific to cultural groups. Knowledge could be language (e.g., words, phrases, proficiency), specific traditions (e.g., practices around childbirth), or rules for interpersonal exchanges (e.g., whether or not to shake hands). Finally, *skills* refer to communicative or behavioral repertoires that result in successful exchanges between culturally different people. (p. 2)

Second, we offer a definition developed by Wanda Thomas Bernard and Jemell Moriah (2007), modified from Cross et al. (1989) (and developed in the context of the field of social work):

> [C]ultural competence embraces the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural relations, vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural differences, including issues of power, privilege and oppression, the expansion of cultural knowledge, and the enabling and empowering of clients to improve their lives and their communities by building on the strengths of individuals and communities, and adapting services to meet culturally unique needs. (p. 87)

For our purposes, cultural competency includes the ability to identify the ways in which a community's perspectives, needs, goals, preferred tactics, and capacity to participate in joint campaigns may vary based on factors such as race, background, socioeconomic status, immigration status, language fluency, cultural values and assets, and education/literacy level. After identification of such issues, one must also be able to adapt actions and plans to allow the community's full participation and benefit. Cultural competency encompasses skills necessary to communicate in ways that are resonant and relevant to the community and to identify and learn contextual and historical information relevant to the partnership's goals (e.g., how has the community engaged with this issue in the past and how might that engagement inform future advocacy?). It includes the ability to recognize, value, and uplift the community's particular knowledge, skills, and expertise. Finally, it includes awareness and analysis of systemic inequities, power, privilege, and the impacts of oppression on all parties and the ability to act based on this information.

Collaborations will also require related and additional skills necessary for relationship-building. One study of community-based research partnerships found transparent communication, conflict resolution, and balanced power were key attributes in overcoming historical mistrust between communities and outside researchers (Andrews et al., 2012). Those working with communities must have skills with self-reflection, listening, and cultural humility. Cultural humility is defined as "the capacity to reflect on personal and institutional power and to redress power imbalances to develop and maintain mutually respectful and dynamic partnerships with communities" (p. 568). Communication and listening skills will allow staff to hold and navigate transparent, respectful discussions to determine the partnership's shared goals, tactics, and strategy to determine how the groups will make decisions. Conflict resolution skills will allow staff to manage the relationship when inevitable disagreements arise. Cultural humility will allow staff to reflect on power dynamics both to share power, including credit, funding, and visibility, and to further community empowerment, autonomy, and capacity building.

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Accountability Mechanisms to Track the Traditional Environmental Movement's Progress on Building Capacity for Environmental Justice Partnerships

Organizations and staff need to both prioritize climate justice and build their capacity to do climate justice work. In this section, we discuss systems of accountability to hold environmental organizations responsible for acting toward these goals.

One model to explore systems of accountability for environmental organizations engaging in climate justice work comes from Tony Carrizales (2019). Carrizales draws on a framework developed by Romzek and Dubnick (1987) to explore the cultural competency of public agencies through four systems of accountability. The four systems vary in whether the "authoritative source of control" is external or internal and in the "degree of scrutiny exercised by those sources of control" (pp. 32–33). This presents a matrix with four quadrants, each representing one system: bureaucratic (internal, high level of control); legal (external, high level of control); professional (internal, low level of control); and political (external, low level of control).

Bureaucratic systems of control consist of internal procedures and rules whereby those leading the organization set internal priorities for the remainder of the organization (Carrizales, 2019). Legal systems of control consist of external laws and rules by which the organization must abide. Professional accountability systems derive from the expertise of employees within the organization, which may be gained through education and professional institutions. Finally, political accountability systems comprise oversight from external members of the public and impacted constituencies.

We focus on bureaucratic, professional, and political accountability as tools to hold environmental organizations responsible for their environmental/climate justice commitments—as the role of the legal system merits further exploration and is outside the scope of this article. Some organizations have embraced bureaucratic accountability by incorporating environmental justice and the related issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion into their mission statements, strategic plans, and other organizational documents. For example, Defenders of Wildlife's 2019–2028 strategic plan sets a goal to "[m]obilize a broader constituency for wildlife conservation," under which the organization plans to "strengthen and expand our current membership, networks and partnerships and engage new constituencies, particularly those historically left out of the conservation movement" (Defenders of Wildlife, 2019, 14). One of their strategies to achieve this goal is to recruit and retain more diverse staff, and to "[c]ollaborate with underrepresented communities in our efforts to achieve our conservation mission and equip our staff with the capacity and capabilities to serve as genuine partners" (p. 15).

Carrizales (2019) explains that incorporating such goals into the organizational mission "allows for subsequent policies and standards to be measured against and increased accountability," while their exclusion "makes it harder to develop and support innovative ways to infuse [these goals] within the organization" (p. 35). Carrizales (p. 35) cites to Siegel et al. (2003) for additional opportunities to assess bureaucratic accountability with regard to cultural competency including:

1. Cultural competence as part of the mission statement
2. The existence of a cultural competence plan
3. Cultural competence plan requirement for organizational components
4. Named responsibility for cultural competence
5. A budget for cultural competence
6. Governing board membership

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Siegel et al. (2003) also suggest training and education and hiring and retention as additional assessment areas. Parallel assessments can be developed for the related but broader goals of environmental/climate justice.

Professional accountability can be achieved through organizational staff who have expertise in environmental and climate justice. This expertise can be gained in a number of ways, including through knowledge and skills gained from educational and professional institutions and from other external organizations specifically focused on providing resources and programming to advance staff competency. In the context of environmental justice, this expertise may also come from lived experience.

Finally, political accountability arises from the general public's observance of organization activity and progress. One powerful mode of political accountability has come from watchdog Green 2.0, who has published transparency report cards publicly revealing staff diversity numbers across green organizations. Reporting in major publications on the shortcomings of environmental organizations in the areas of environmental/climate justice have also provided public oversight. Donors, organization members, and other constituent groups all have a role to play. Moreover,

Table 1. Action Items to Assess Organizational Progress on Environmental Justice Capacity-Building

Organization Action Item
Has the organization included achieving environmental justice and building its organizational capacity to engage on environmental justice issues (including building cultural competency) into its mission statement and/or strategic planning documents?
Does the organization have a plan for building cultural competency and other skills necessary to engage environmental justice issues?
Do organizational components have a plan for building cultural competency and other skills necessary to engage environmental justice issues?
Is there named responsibility for building the organization's cultural competency and other skills necessary to engage environmental justice issues?
Is there a budget for building the organization's cultural competency and other skills necessary to engage environmental justice issues? Is that budget sufficient/proportional to the organization's environmental justice goals?
Does the organization provide staff training on cultural competency and other skills necessary to engage environmental justice issues?
Does the organization disseminate training and education materials, both on the substance of environmental justice issues and on developing cultural competency and other skills necessary to engage those environmental justice issues?
What resources are available to staff to increase their knowledge on environmental justice issues and to build cultural competency and other skills necessary to engage environmental justice issues?
Do staff feel they have the resources, flexibility, and authority necessary to engage in authentic environmental justice relationships to achieve climate justice goals?
What processes and mechanisms are in place to recruit, hire, and retain staff who possess cultural competency and other skills necessary to engage in environmental justice work?
Are questions about environmental justice knowledge, cultural competency, and competency with other skills necessary to engage in environmental justice work incorporated into staff evaluations?
Is there diversity across all levels of organization staff and board?
Is there a task group or other mechanism to provide feedback on the organization's environmental justice and cultural competency training activities?

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organizations can proactively integrate the role of the public into their practices through "task groups that are composed of community members, the staff at all levels, board members, and those knowledgeable about cultural diversity issues" (Carrizales, 2019, p. 43).

Formal mechanisms of accountability, such as the ones discussed here, are needed to build trust among constituencies that have historically been excluded from and harmed by the traditional environmental movement. Without such mechanisms, these constituencies will have little reason to believe the traditional environmental movement is operating differently than it has in the past. Moreover, accountability mechanisms such as these can help steer organizations in more just directions. We finally draw on specific themes, ideas, and action items explored by Carrizales to propose a checklist of actions (Table 1) that can help organizations, internal staff, and the public assess organizational progress toward environmental/ climate justice.

CONCLUSION

The traditional environmental movement has a long journey ahead of it to recompense for its decades of exclusion of frontline communities and their priorities. The ever-pressing need to address climate change impacts is an opportunity for the movement to prioritize the leadership and voices of impacted communities and to support solutions that will achieve equitable outcomes. Yet, false solutions continue to abound. While many of the traditional environmental organizations have voiced a desire to partner with environmental justice communities, to date there have been few accountability mechanisms to assess their progress on building capacity to collaborate in just ways. Without such accountability mechanisms in place, communities have plentiful reasons to doubt that collaborations with mainstream organizations will be any different than past failed efforts.

To achieve climate justice, mainstream environmental organizations must learn to work in authentic and trusting relationships with frontline communities, and this requires developing new skills such as cultural competency in organizations and staff. Here, we have explored how bureaucratic, professional, and political accountability systems can further an organization's adoption of the necessary skills. Building on these systems, we also provide objective criteria by which to assess an organization's progress in developing such capacity.

Seeing the need for greater systems of accountability, we developed Greens REALIGN (2022) (www.greensrealign.org). Greens REALIGN is a member-based collective of current, former, and future staff of environmental organizations organizing for a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just environmental movement. It is doing this through two primary channels: (1) building the skills of staff within traditional environmental organizations to do transformational work within their respective organizational cultures (and thus building professional accountability) and (2) developing transparency and accountability mechanisms to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice work at these organizations (through political accountability).

Through creating Greens REALIGN, we have found that staff are seeking spaces and resources to build their cultural competency and other skills to better undertake justice-oriented work. Many staff within the traditional environmental movement feel they lack the skills necessary to engage in environmental justice partnerships and that their organizations are not providing sufficient guidance or resources to do this work. Ultimately, we need the traditional environmental movement to allocate resources, both time and funding, to remedy the skill gap of their employees and to change practices to recruit and retain diverse staff who have cultural competencies. Only then will staff be empowered to collaborate with frontline communities successfully to achieve climate justice solutions.

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Transparency is required so that frontline communities and the public can be assured that organizations are not simply making easy, sweeping promises but are actually investing resources and budgets to support these new directions. Without action toward the commitment, this movement will not amount to substance, and environmental justice will not be prioritized to achieve our collective climate justice goals.

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