NAACP
Environmental and Climate Justice Program

Advancing leadership of frontline communities eliminating environmental and climate injustice and igniting an environmental, social, and economic revolution.

A DECADE OF CHANGE

1,000+
leaders engaged in political education training/collective strategizing at local, state, regional and national levels

ORGANIZE

250+
city, state, and regional equity-based action plans developed via community visioning sessions and capacity building training

RESEARCH

170+
city, state, and national actions injecting equity into decision making on policy priority areas

ADVOCATE

144+
protective policies and practices enacted addressing fossil fuel infrastructure, advancing energy efficiency and clean energy, and promoting livable communities

CHANGE

JOIN US AS WE STAND
FOR HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

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The mission of the Environmental and Climate Justice Program (ECJP) stands to advance the leadership of frontline communities eliminating environmental and climate injustice and igniting an environmental, social and economic revolution. It’s advancing the following strategic objectives: 1. Reduce harmful emissions of greenhouse gases and co-pollutants; 2. Advance energy efficiency and clean energy; 3. Strengthen community resilience and sustainability.

**SNAPSHOT**

250+ city, state, and regional equity-based action plans across the country developed through community visioning sessions and capacity building trainings

30 Climate Adaptation Resilience Plans

50 Coal Blooded Action Plans

100+ Energy Justice Plans

25 Sea Level Rise Plans

15 Faith Leadership Plans

20 Youth Leadership Plans

**39 ECJ-Related Resolutions**

Fracking

Clean Energy

Disaster Equity

Ending Coal Pollution

Clean Air

Gentrification and Displacement

**100+ Partnerships/Collaborations/Working Groups/Coalitions/Steering Committees**

MoUs—PACIA, FEMA

CJA

USCAN

RE-AMP

100% Network

Advancing Equity and Opportunity
Reports/Toolkits/Articles

Coal Blooded
Fumes Across the Fenceline
In the Eye of the Storm
Lights Out in the Cold
Our Communities, Our Power
Fossil Fueled Foolery
Teaching Environmental Justice in the Classroom
Beast of the Southern Wild Film Screening Discussion Guide
And the People Shall Lead
Diversity is Not Enough: And Done Alone, It Can Be Counterproductive

170+ city, state, and national actions to inject equity into decision making on policy priority areas of protecting the Clean Air Act, supporting clean water addressing fossil fuel infrastructure, advancing energy efficiency and clean energy, promoting livable community policies

Testimonials/Public Comments at EPA Hearings
Letters to Local Elected Officials
Letters to Congress
Letters to the Editor
Testimony at Public Service Commissions
Testimony at Zoning Boards
Testimony at the United Nations

1000+ Leaders Engaged in Political Education /Collective Strategizing at Local, State, Regional & National Levels

10 Energy Justice Trainings
30 Coal Blooded Trainings/Strategy Sessions
3 Resistance and Resilience Convenings
2 Black Labor Convenings on Just Transition
2 Centering Equity in the Sustainable Building Sector Convenings
1 Transit Equity Convening
1 Rural Electric Co-op Convening
5 Building the Gap, Connecting the Black Community to the Green Economy Summits
3 General ECJ Trainings
10 Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Trainings

2 Youth and College Leadership Initiative on Environmental and Climate Justice Training/Strategy Convening
2 Black Church Leadership Initiative on Environmental and Climate Justice Training/Strategy Convening
RESULTS

144+ protective policies and practices enacted

50+ Coal Plants Closed
5 Clean Air Ordinances
20 Energy Efficiency/Clean Energy Policies
10 Solar Power Projects
30 Skills Training/Jobs Created
10 Local Food Projects
5 Water Equity Projects
10 Municipal and Sub-Municipal Climate Action Resiliency Plans
2 Recycling Projects
2 PowerUP Employment Projects

300+ ECJ Leaders Cultivated

31 State ECJ chairs,
52 members serving on state ECJ committees
100+ Local ECJ Committees
17 members serving as ECJ Board Committee Members.
60 Youth ECJ Leaders
45 Faith ECJ Leaders
6 ECJ Leaders Elected to Office
15 ECJ Leaders Newly Employed in the Environmental and Climate Justice Field

NARRATIVE/ANALYSIS SHIFT

Our framing, messaging, and analysis has greatly influenced how ECJ issues are addressed

Thousands of Social Media Hits
30+ References to ECJ Materials or Messaging in Government Documents
50+ Documented Instances Where Policymakers Referenced Our Work/Messaging in Writing/Speeches
100+ Documented References to ECJ Materials or Messaging in Ally/Partner Documents
Countless Instances of Allies and Others Referencing Our Work/Messaging in Writing/Speeches/Planning Processes
History

In the United States, the phrase ‘environmental justice’ emerged as a concept in the early 1980s with the NAACP quickly reflecting this trend with the first resolution titled “Environmental Protection” in 1983. Though the resolution was short and focused mainly on the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) role on the control and cleanup of toxic waste in low income areas, the topic of Environmental Justice metamorphosed through the years to include more environmental concerns, including but not limited to themes of: climate change, economic development, energy, environmental racism, health, food security, international affairs, wilderness, and youth engagement.

Climate change is caused by industrial society’s greenhouse gas emissions—the majority of these emissions are produced by wealthy industrialized nations and transnational corporations. The impacts of global climate change are universally felt by ecosystem-humanity, the animal kingdom, land, air, water, flora and fauna. But these impacts disproportionately affect the wellbeing of people of color, Indigenous peoples, and low-income communities, both in the U.S. and around the world. In fact, these communities feel the negative impacts of the fossil fuel economy at every stage of its life cycle, from exploration to production, distribution, consumption and the disposal of waste.

With NAACP as a massive organization with an entrenched history, and policy priorities that existed since the inception of the organization, it was a heavy lift to introduce what, without contextualization, may seem like a disconnected and almost abstract concept, an tie it to our civil rights and social justice agenda. This took a considerable amount of time and intense effort in both listening and facilitating discussions across the nation. In the course of these discussions, we focused on connecting the NAACP membership with the issues of climate change and through integrating their storytelling, we facilitated an understanding of the real connections between what they are experiencing in their communities, with the reality of climate change. Through this process, we were able to begin to engage our membership in discourse and increased understanding of how policies on everything from air quality, to energy, to disasters, to food, connect with our quality of life in our communities, as well as the broader climate change debate. We were successful in beginning to facilitate advocacy by our community on various aspects of environmental, economic, health, housing infrastructure, and social policy, and more. We were further able to begin to develop the infrastructure and the tools to advance a comprehensive equity-based policy and practice agenda.

Infrastructure and Leadership Development

A vision of just transition calls for greater emphasis on localism and the emerging political context required more focus on state-based and municipality focused policy work. As such our first decade of existence was characterized by leaps in national, state and local capacity. Thanks to increased investments by new philanthropic funders focused on racial equity, energy justice, and climate resilience, the ECJ program expanded staff and programming support resulting in executing over fifty (50) ECJ-led community visioning sessions and capacity building trainings. As a result, over two hundred fifty (250) city, state, and regional equity-based action plans were developed by leaders which strengthened key areas of work supporting communities in executing policy campaigns as well as demonstration projects around community solar and energy efficiency, while supporting others starting resilience projects around local food, sea level rise, and disasters.

The program aimed to deepen democracy and ambitiously reached over one thousand (1,000) leaders in political education training and collective strategizing at the local, state, regional and national levels, advancing the leadership of frontline communities to advocate, pass, and enforce policies and regulations on clean air, clean water, healthy food, housing, energy, education, sustainable livelihoods and more. This resulted in more than one hundred seventy (170) city, state, and national actions injecting equity into decision making on policy priority areas protecting the Clean Air Act, supporting clean water, addressing fossil fuel infrastructure, advancing energy efficiency and clean energy, and promoting livable community policies through: EPA hearing testimonials/public comments; letters to local elected officials; letters to Congress; letters to the Editor; as well as testimonies to Public Service/Utility Commissions and Zoning Boards. This wave in political education and transformative policy and practice implementation also led to the cultivation of over three hundred (300) NAACP ECJ leaders, many garnering seats in local and state government as well as nonprofit organizations, federal agencies, and philanthropy, bringing ECJ perspectives to bear on their new mantles of leadership.
Transformed Communities

Through developing materials, such as research, policy analyses, guidance documents, toolkits, etc., local units grew empowered with knowledge and tactics needed to further connect ECJ as human and civil rights issues, such as drafting thirty nine (39) ECJ-related resolutions addressing fracking, clean energy, clean air, closure of coal plants, and gentrification driven displacement. NAACP units are building trans-local and transnational ally/partnership in coalition work and using media to uplift and highlight the lived experiences of community stories connecting local ECJ issues. Similarly, through documenting civil and human rights challenges during the Gulf Oil Drilling Disaster, Alabama Tornadoes and Mississippi Flooding, and Flint and East Chicago Water Crises, communities made bold recommendations to the Oil Spill Commission, Gulf Coast Claims Facility, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), American Red Cross, and the Environmental Protection Agency. As a result, NAACP units, families, and individuals are better equipped to manage the continuum of emergency management from preparedness through rebuilding, including understanding the systems and the resources available.

NAACP units are deepening democracy through municipal and sub-municipal climate action planning, increasing resilience for all residents and bringing frontline community perspectives to the decision-making table. Through engagement in a range of interventions, communities are building economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. From closing fifty (50) toxic coal-fired power plants, to implementing nearly a dozen solar power projects, to the advancement of twenty (20) energy efficiency and clean energy policies, including projects providing skills training/job creation for thirty (30) individuals, ECJ leaders are securing the rights of citizens to political, social freedom, and livelihoods when economies are shifting to regeneration and sustainability.

Field Building

The last decade has enabled the ECJ program to solidify its presence in the environmental and climate justice movement as a reputable thought leader, cementing over one hundred (100) partnerships, collaborations, working groups, coalitions, and steering committees alongside trans-local and trans-national forums like the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA), the US Climate Action Network (USCAN), and Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACIA) among others. Solidifying common lines of action with PACJA and FEMA through Memorandum of Understanding/Agreements, growing our perspective and message. With over one hundred (100) speaking engagements worldwide each year, including individual consultations, advisory boards, steering committees, and Board of Directors seats, including advising the philanthropic sector from the Hewlett Foundation to the Kresge Foundation, ECJ’s equity-based perspective has influenced a wide tapestry of diverse stakeholders to the problem-solving table, amplifying the needs of frontline communities. Discussions on community demands have reached far and wide including even corporate entities such as Microsoft, Bank of America, Apple, Paypal, Wells Fargo and Anheuser Busch.

Since its inception as a new player in environment, clean air, clean water, energy, climate, disaster, and other policy arenas, the ECJ program has established a leading role amongst various organizations and individuals with decades of work in the field. With a constituency once largely disconnected from decision making spaces, the ECJ program has examined the landscape of the climate/environmental justice movement, established the credibility of the NAACP ECJP as an asset in the field of environment/climate, built the internal infrastructure, tools, and processes to engage membership, and built the external partnerships with individual and organization mavens which have experience, skills, and tools to support the advancement of our constituency’s vision for change.

Today, the roles of the ECJ program continue to range from leading campaigns to co-leading coalitions, to using data and framing from program reports to strengthen aligned campaigns implemented by comrades calling for just transition. The program has been in intense demand like never before in its ten year existence. There has been an explosion of invitations to engage in campaigns at national, state, and local levels, to write op-eds or reports at the national, state, and local levels, to speak at multitudinous events, to provide technical assistance for community level work, to join advisory boards, to join boards of directors, to advise on Congressional, Mayoral, and Public Utility/Service Commissioner campaigns, and even Presidential Campaigns, and so much more. It has been an extremely intense period at the national level and certainly for some of the more active state and local leaders.
With the significant increase in the NAACP voice and equity frame, combined with that of other social justice focused groups, as well as market signals and increases in administration regulatory policies, comes an intensification of efforts of polluting industries to hold on to their business. Utilizing a pseudo equity frame, along with an “activation” of groups and individuals with whom they had been building relationships over the years built on financial support, contractual agreements, and otherwise, they have executed an all-out assault on energy efficiency, clean energy, and anti-pollution regulations. It’s critical that we defend our communities from many angles with future change of political administrations roll backs of environmental protections, while also resisting other assaults on voting rights, immigrant rights, the right to health care, and so much more. The program must continue to surge in emerging unit leadership to usher a new era and cadre of NAACP voices and leadership on energy efficiency and clean energy and strengthened the voice on transitioning from fossil fuel based energy while also advancing community led, community owned, resilient and sustainable systems for municipalities as we adapt to climate change impacts.

**Narrative Shift**

Over the last decade, the ECJP has worked, bringing frontline community perspectives front and center to once homogenous spaces such as EPA hearings, the Public Service Commissions, Zoning Board meetings, as well as at international United Nations gatherings where the presence of African Americans was minimal. Our messaging, framing and analysis is present in the influence we’ve made externally with thousands of social media hits, reference to program material from government documents, allies, and partners to policymaker speeches, ECJ has greatly influenced how environment and climate issues are discussed and addressed. Through our extensive influence, the term and concept of “intersectionality” has become an integral part of the environment and climate movement lexicon, analysis, and strategy.

**The Path Ahead**

In this moment of the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is through these acute and chronic shocks impacting our daily lives that we begin to draw parallels to the environmental injustices, we’ve been fighting over the years which result in constant shocks, morbidity and mortality in communities most impacted. In unmasking and the rethinking the failed globalized capitalist industrial economy in light of the necessity of shift to a a regenerative and living economy, we continue to support NAACP members to reimagine and re-commit to building localized systems and strengthening social cohesion that will respond to continuous community shocks. The ECJ program enters the next decade steadily with strong civil and human rights bearings, splashing cold water on its face, breathing deeply and zooming confidently with one foot in front of the other, a clear purpose to use arts and culture together with grassroots organizing to build a creative resistance and a narrative, policy, and practice shift rooted in cultural reparations and just transition.