

Call for Greater Cleveland Environmental Justice Local Journalism Collaboratives February 18, 2021

In Cleveland and across the country, decades of deliberately racist policies and planning decisions have caused tremendous environmental harm to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Disproportionate exposure to air and water pollution, climate change (flooding, high heat days) and lead exposure translate to higher rates of asthma, infant mortality, lead poisoning and other life-threatening comorbidities. The COVID-19 pandemic has only underscored this reality, where BIPOC communities are three times as likely as their white neighbors to be infected by the coronavirus and nearly twice as likely to die from it, according to [data from the CDC analyzed by the *New York Times*](#).

Racial injustice, environmental injustice and the health of our democracy are inextricably linked; Gerrymandered districts deny our most impacted citizens' concerns to be heard, and corruption in the political process acts as sand in the gears of good governance – preventing communities from taking back power. However, communities are not powerless to change their circumstances and confront environmental and racial injustices.

Progress is possible when communities build power, speak truth to power and build coalitions that shift the balance of power and result in real policy change. The advocacy and leadership of Mayor Carl Stokes and Representative Louis Stokes elevated environmental justice to the policy arena – eventually leading to the passage of the Clean Air and Clean Water acts and the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency. Sustained advocacy of BIPOC community leaders, organizers and residents across Cleveland also advanced historic legislation to finally address the devastating impacts of lead exposure. Amidst heightened awareness and nationwide protests around the extent and depth of our nation's racist history and enduring barriers – most acutely to the Black community's health, prosperity, and basic safety – immediate and sustained action is needed.

It is urgent to leverage the power of our local news ecosystem and the local philanthropic community to help support information collaborations that lift up environmental justice narratives, stories and solutions led by BIPOC leaders, organizers, organizations and residents. This request for proposals (RFP) is an open call for small-scale collaborations among traditional media outlets, hyper-local organizations, nonprofits and resident media makers/citizen journalists.

The [Black Environmental Leaders \(BEL\)](#), The Center for Community Solutions, Cleveland Foundation and The George Gund Foundation are partnering to launch this open call for ideas to test, refine and/or build out an environmental justice reporting project in Greater Cleveland to elevate BIPOC leaders and organizations taking action to improve the health of our communities, our climate, our environment and our democracy. BEL was founded in 2016 to steward the natural and built environment through collaboration and partnership, raise awareness, and advocate for environmental and economic justice.

It is anticipated that up to **\$40,000** will be granted through this initial round via project awards of up to **\$10,000** each. The aim of this commitment is to launch a series of small, hyper-local collaboratives. We are excited to see what projects the various partnerships take on and how the information ecosystem can begin to evolve.

FUNDING PRIORITIES

How might media, nonprofit organizations and community members in Northeast Ohio collaborate to advance environmental justice efforts?

For this RFP, we want to encourage hyper-local media, community organizations, resident media makers and traditional outlets to collaborate to spark innovation, experimentation and contextual learning. These collaborations should meet residents where attention is needed most: at the neighborhood level.

The priorities of this initial round of grantmaking are to:

- Create topic-based collaborative journalism projects that respond to community information needs around environmental disparities and one or more of [The Principles of Environmental Justice](#), [Principles of Climate Justice](#) and/or [Principles of the Youth Environmental Justice Movement](#) and explore and elevate solutions to those needs.
- Partnerships should represent new, non-traditional collaborations where all parties are able to equitably contribute as capacity allows to get information in the hands of those who need it.
- Identify partners that will contribute to a deeper understanding of and commitment to climate, land, water, air, transportation and energy issues that impact quality of life, through the lens of health, equity and racial justice.
- It is highly recommended that funded collaborations work with [BEL](#) to connect with grassroots organizations and advocates already working on the ground.
- Encourage media outlets to explore the strengths and resources already present in the region, especially among BIPOC and other marginalized groups, and to build trust among these communities.
- Conduct restorative journalism that reframes community narratives to spotlight resident resilience and neighborhood progress, lifting up perspectives that are often not reflected in the traditional news media. (solutions-based journalism)
- Serve as a credible resource, bridging the information/awareness gap in the Greater Cleveland community by utilizing different formats of modern media, including print media (books, magazines, newspapers), television, movies, video games, music, cell phones, various kinds of software, and the Internet.
- Distribution, through both mainstream and alternative media outlets, is encouraged.

WHO MAY APPLY?

- Traditional legacy media, hyper-local media, ethnic media, nonprofit organizations and resident media makers are all welcome.
- Each application should be a collaborative project -- no individual applications please.
- Applicants must be in and/or serve Greater Cleveland.
- Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations are encouraged to apply. Journalists from these groups are encouraged to participate.
- Applications with a Cleveland youth/intergenerational component to its newsgathering are given more weight.
- Journalistic output need not be in English. We welcome projects that are in other languages or are multilingual.
- Applicants should base the amount requested on the scope of the project. There is not a set grant minimum, but **\$10,000** is the maximum project award for this round.
- Projects must be completed within **six months** of receiving this grant award (*estimated October 2021*).

HOW TO APPLY

From Feb. 18 to March 26, you are invited to submit your collaborative project idea to receive a grant award of up to \$10,000 to be used across all participating parties. Awards will be made in April 2021. After the open call closes, the committee will review all entries received.

Apply online here: http://bit.ly/ENVIRO_JUSTICE_RFP

Using the online form, submissions must include:

- A brief project description
- A narrative that describes the project in detail, including what you intend to do, which principles of environmental justice your project elevates, potential BIPOC representation both in the collaboration and the audience, who your partners are and what success would look like. Please limit the narrative to the indicated word count.
- Estimated project budget
- A contact for each of the partners involved in the project

TIMELINE

Feb. 18: Application period opens.

March 9 & 19: Virtual office hours will be held these two days in order to answer questions about your idea, the grantmaking process, or anything else you'd like to bring to the table. Sign up for your 30-minute block here: <https://calendly.com/ejcollab/30min>

March 26: Application deadline! Completed proposals must be submitted by **5:00 p.m.** via the online form: http://bit.ly/ENVIRO_JUSTICE_RFP

March/April: All applications will be reviewed during this time. Participating funders may contact the applicant to request additional information, if necessary.

April 12: Grant decisions and award information will be shared with applicants. If a grant is approved, the award letter will be sent by **April 19**. The first payment will be issued by **April 30, 2021**, conditional upon receiving the signed terms of the grant agreement.

April 19: Grants will be publicly announced.

Sept. 14: Cleveland Mayoral primary

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Grant recipients will be required to submit a report at the end of the grant period to share the results of the project and to demonstrate that all funds were spent as intended. We hope that, in the spirit of collaboration, organizations will choose to share their learnings through regular gatherings.

On behalf of all the funders, thank you very much for your interest.