

THE DATA IS IN: GRASSROOTS EJ GROUPS ARE DELIVERING BIG WINS



THE IMPACT OF BEA FUND'S GRANTMAKING (2022-2024)



Executive Summary

BEA's 2022-2024 grant cycle, backed by an investment from the Bezos Earth Fund, demonstrates that strategic investments in grassroots groups are a tipping point for environmental justice ("EJ") wins. As an incubator and accelerator, BEA provides unrestricted funding and technical support to frontline groups. Our data demonstrates that BEA's ecosystem approach strengthened the sustainability and resilience of the grassroots organizing sector, helping communities build power and advance their own solutions. The result: a powerful, growing network of EJ groups turning investment into real, lasting impact.

BEA's Understanding of Grassroots-Driven Change

BEA identified two separate types of outcomes:

- The first: an **enabling outcome** is a strategy or action that creates the necessary foundation for further progress, making it easier for a group, initiative, or movement to achieve its long-term goals.
- The second: an **EJ outcome** is the structural or systemic change that results from tangible and measurable progress in addressing environmental and climate injustices.

While **enabling outcomes** lay the groundwork—such as stronger grassroots networks or increased funding equity—**EJ outcomes** reflect the deeper transformation that follows. Our evaluation of this grant cycle demonstrated the vital effectiveness of BEA's funding in achieving both outcome types and revealed a powerful synergy between them.

Key Findings

Investing in Organizational Capacity is a Catalyst for Impact

EJ groups that received BEA funding nearly doubled organizational capacity from Year 1 to 2; the data shows that this growth translated into multiple enabling outcomes—key wins in advocacy, building inclusive community institutions, workforce development, and movement building.

Enabling Outcomes Lay the Foundation for EJ Wins

An increase in enabling outcomes served as a key driver of high-impact EJ wins, paving the way for grassroots groups to achieve wins in policy, pollution reduction and remediation, and expanding local and state resources for environmental protection.

Flexible Multi-Year Funding Fuels Durable and Interconnected Impact

When groups have the flexibility to strategically channel funds, a ripple effect of interconnected outcomes, rather than isolated, short-term effects, result. Enabling outcomes collectively drove concrete EJ wins, amplifying impact over time and turning capacity-building into systemic change.

\$11.75M IN MULTI-YEAR GRANTS. 89 GRASSROOTS EJ GROUPS. 28 STATES. 2 TERRITORIES. **REAL CHANGE,** POWERED FROM THE FRONTLINES.

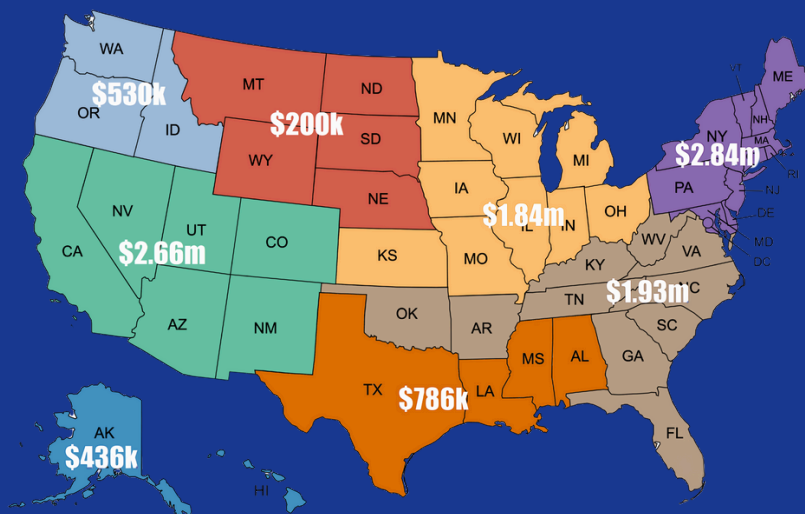
By the Numbers: Who We Fund and Impact Areas

89% BIPOC Leadership 89% of grantee organizations were BIPOC-led, with Black, Latinx, and Indigenous groups receiving 76% of grants and \$8.1 million.

91% Climate Justice Focus 91% of grantees focused on climate justice, followed by food security & sovereignty (54%), legacy pollution remediation (48%) and clean energy & efficiency (44%).

96% Multi-strategy approach 96% of grantees use at least three strategies to drive progress, with movement building, advocacy, and training and skills development being the most common.

Geographic Distribution

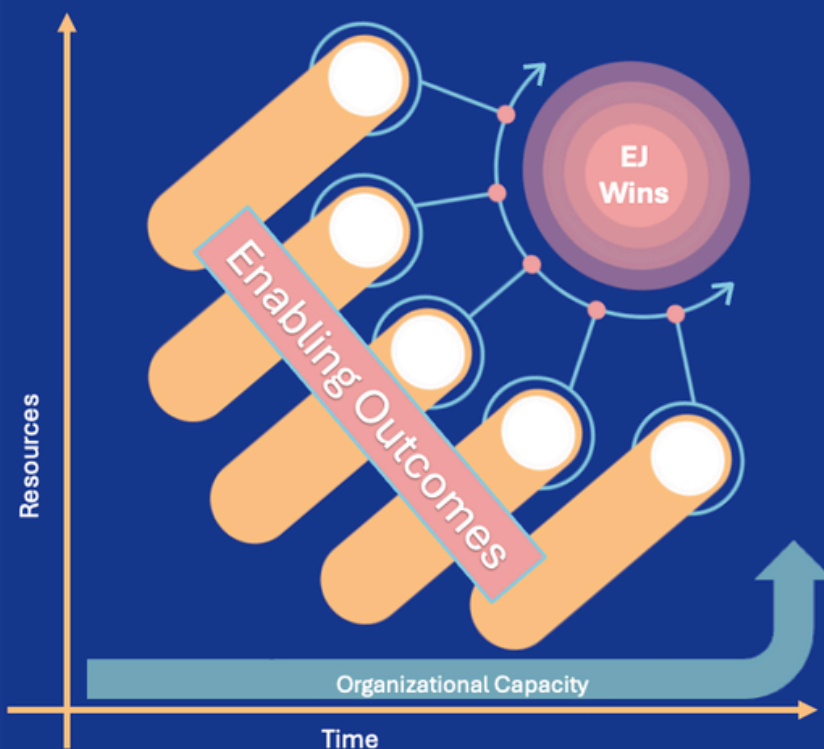


- \$2.84m Northeast
- \$2.66m Southwest
- \$1.93m Southeast
- \$1.84m Midwest
- \$786k Gulf South
- \$530k Northwest
- \$436k Alaska & Hawaii
- \$200k North Great Plains
- \$540k US Territories and Freely Associated States

HOW GRASSROOTS GROUPS CREATE CHANGE: THE ROAD TO IMPACT IS PAVED WITH ENABLING OUTCOMES

- **Enabling outcomes:** The strategies or actions that create the necessary foundation for further progress, such as strengthened movements, workforce development, advocacy, and building inclusive community institutions.
- **Environmental justice outcomes:** The structural or systemic change that results from tangible and measurable progress, including improved infrastructure, policy advancements, pollution prevention/remediation, and increased resources for environmental protection and justice.

The data from this grant cycle highlights a core truth about grassroots change: it is not a single moment, but a progression—where increased organizational capacity unlocks a series of enabling outcomes that collectively lead to environmental justice wins.



For funders aiming to drive structural and systemic change, supporting grassroots groups to achieve at the level of key enabling outcomes is a strategic, data-informed, and effective approach.

Stronger Organizational Capacity Leads to Greater Impact

Grantees saw a major rise in capacity—from 45% in Year 1 to 87% in Year 2. Investments in staffing, skills development, and internal infrastructure (technology, equipment, and physical spaces) allowed organizations to adapt to challenges, mobilize communities, and expand programming.

As capacity grew, so did nearly all enabling outcomes from Year 1 to Year 2:

Advocacy outcomes: 48% → 60%

Workforce development: 51% → 61%

Stronger movements: 66% → 69%

49%
of BEA’s grantees added new staff in leadership, organizing, or communications

Capacity growth is closely tied to enabling outcomes. The data suggests a correlative, and possibly causal relationship: stronger internal capacity fuels outcomes that enable bigger wins. When groups are resourced and stable, they are better able to engage in policy work, build local economies, and strengthen collective power.

“The BEA Fund general operating grant contributed to the growth and expansion of our policy and organizing on building decarbonization, inland flooding, and green jobs in addition to our core work on cumulative impacts and air emissions reductions.”

- New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance (NJEJA)



Enabling Outcomes Lay the Foundation for Long-Term EJ Wins

Over two years, enabling outcomes stood out starkly as strengthened grantee capacity led to broader organizing, advocacy, and community mobilization. **These outcomes represent essential steps necessary for achieving concrete environmental justice victories such as policy change, pollution reduction, and infrastructure improvements.**

Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) built a strong advocacy network through educational webinars, community meetings, and coalition-building with Native, labor, and health organizations. After seven years of persistent community-driven organizing, their efforts culminated in the passage of the historic Alaska Senate Bill 67, banning PFAS in firefighting foam.

Redeemer Community Partnership's (RCP) decade of organizing in Los Angeles County led to the successful closure of the Murphy and Jefferson oil drill sites, improving air quality and reducing environmental hazards. RCP is now working to transform the Jefferson site into a community space with a park, affordable housing, and a community center and in coalition secure an LA City Council ordinance to phase out oil extraction within 20 years.

Sachamama's community organizing efforts, resulting in 650+ advocacy actions—petitions, legislative appeals, public comments, and phone banking—drove Miami-Dade County to commission the Biscayne Bay Economic Impact Study, the first since 2004. This milestone will shape policies to improve water management and combat plastic pollution in inland communities.



These successes also highlight another powerful insight: organizations with a longer history in the EJ movement, greater access to support, and more time to build momentum in tackling entrenched environmental injustices reported the most significant impact.

Flexible Multi-Year Funding Fuels Durable and Interconnected Impact

Funding served as a catalyst, amplifying grantees' impact over time. **With the flexibility of unrestricted support, groups strategically deployed resources throughout the grant period—driving waves of interconnected outcomes, not short-term or isolated effects.** Grantee outcomes—from skills development and coalition-building to advocacy successes—collectively contributed to concrete policy and infrastructure wins.

Challenges and Lessons

Even with gains in capacity, many grantees continued to struggle with:

- Staffing shortages and a lack of skilled professionals;
- Financial instability due to shifts in the philanthropic sector in 2023 and 2024;
- Opposition from powerful lobbying groups, including legal threats; and
- Policy reversals and rollbacks of key laws requiring increased action.

In Conclusion

BEA's evaluation of this grant cycle introduces a fresh and nuanced way to understand how grassroots groups drive change. Rather than seeing major EJ victories as isolated breakthroughs, the data reveals they emerge from smaller, strategic wins that pave the way. Hiring staff, educating communities, and developing research, for example, are not just milestones; they are the critical foundation that makes broader success possible. This insight shifts the focus—community-based work is not just important, it is the most powerful catalyst for change. Deep, sustained investment at this level is not just support; it is the key to driving lasting impact.

BEA will use these findings to continue scaling support to community-led EJ programming. In doing so, we are strengthening grassroots infrastructure to implement groundbreaking, legacy-shifting, sustainable change.

Join us in growing this impact together.