



December 4, 2024

The Honorable Michael S. Regan
Administrator
U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

The Honorable Ms. Brenda Mallory, Chair
The Council on Environmental Quality
Executive Office of the President
Washington, DC 20500

Dr. Jalonne L. White-Newsome, Federal Chief Environmental Justice Officer
The Council on Environmental Quality
Executive Office of the President
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St NW
Washington, DC 20503

John Podesta
Senior Advisor to the President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Administrator Regan, Director Young, Chair Mallory, Dr. White-Newsome, and Mr. Podesta,

We are philanthropic and funder networks who share the Biden/Harris Administration's commitment to environmental health and justice and a healthier more prosperous future for all. As professionals in the philanthropic field, Health and Environmental Funders Network, Neighborhood Funders Group, Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders, and The Funders Network, work with foundations, private donors, and investors to ensure Americans have healthy and sustainable food, a stable climate, and thriving communities.

We write to urge the White House and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to obligate and release all of the funds mandated by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to the Thriving Communities Grantmaking Program by December 6, 2024. President Biden put down a strong marker on its commitment to environmental justice, as emphasized in Executive Order 14096. However, with the upcoming change in the Administration, **this legacy is at risk** unless the funds are promptly obligated and released. These funds are crucial to address air and water quality, lead contamination, other toxin clean-up, green infrastructure, food access, emergency preparedness, and more.

In particular, the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) was selected to administer \$50 million as a national grantmaker under the UNITE-EJ initiative. Despite being selected as a top-scoring applicant, meeting all milestones, and currently leading communities of practice for the entire program, including quality assurance, technical assistance, and communications and outreach, CJA has yet to receive these funds or an explanation for the delay.

EO 14096 rightly identifies the entrenched disparities faced by communities with environmental justice concerns, which stem from historic racial discrimination, segregation, redlining, and exclusionary zoning. CJA is uniquely equipped to address these inequities due to its longstanding relationships with impacted communities—relationships that other grantmakers in the program cannot match.

As a result of this selection, the organization hired staff and built infrastructure, applying other resources in good faith in order to ensure timely delivery of the grants objectives. The UNITE-EJ project designed a grantmaking program grounded in environmental justice principles, by and for communities most affected by the climate crisis and industrial pollution. Despite meeting all of the EPA's requirements, the organization remains in limbo, leaving the organization in a precarious position. CJA is an anchor organization in the environmental and climate justice ecosystem. Without these funds, vulnerable communities face heightened risks of cancer, respiratory illnesses, reproductive harm, developmental disabilities, and economic instability.

As funders who invest in projects and organizations to create healthy, sustainable, climate resilient communities for all across the country, we are deeply concerned about this oversight. To put this grant into perspective, in 2022 (the most recent year for which we have data) total funding to projects where environmental justice was the primary issue was around \$250 million according to data from the Health and Environmental Funders Network and the Environmental Grantmakers Association. The \$50 million allocated to UNITE-EJ represents a transformative 20% of annual philanthropic grants to the field.

The groups that the Climate Justice Alliance's grantmaking program is poised to support usually receive small grants but do a lot with them. The bottom 60% of the least-funded grantees combined received less than 6% of the funding in 2022. The \$50 million UNITE-EJ grantmaking program would infuse a game-changing amount of resources into these organizations and supercharge the ability of these groups to transform communities with historic disinvestment into innovative, healthy, thriving communities.

Failing to make good on the promise of this grant would be the exact opposite of the marker promised by the executive order, leaving a legacy of abandonment in communities that have been dumped on for generations, leaving our most vulnerable and disadvantaged Americans with disproportionately high rates

of cancer, asthma, lead poisoning and other health problems that lead to missed school days, premature births and deaths, mental health crises, and economic hardship.

It would be very unfortunate if EJ communities across the country doing good work that protects our planet and public health, etc. were made to suffer for whatever political reason, at a time when they most need to build their strength, with just weeks to prepare for encountering a new administration that has expressed a commitment to dismantling our institutions dedicated to protecting our most vulnerable communities.

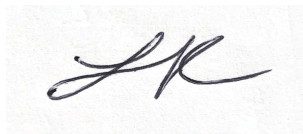
This administration has had such a strong and unprecedented commitment to EJ communities, and built momentum for real growth and change and building power. Ending on this misaligned note stands to forfeit that legacy.

We are incredibly grateful that from day one President Biden committed to elevate and operationalize environmental justice. The Climate Justice Alliance's UNITE-EJ Thriving Communities Grantmaking award enables this Administration to fulfill its commitment to Justice 40 and environmental justice communities that have been left behind by resourcing organizations with proven track records, strong connections and deep knowledge of the field. We urge the White House and EPA to leave the Biden Administration's strong legacy of environmental justice intact by obligating and releasing all of the funds mandated by the IRA, especially the Thriving Communities Grantmaking program.

Sincerely,



Ansjie Miller
Executive Director
Health and Environmental Funders Network



Lindsay Ryder
Director of the Integrated Rural Strategies Group
Neighborhood Funders Group



Clare Fox
Executive Director
Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders



Dion Cartwright
President & CEO
The Funders Network

Health and Environmental Funders Network (HEFN) is a network of funders mobilizing to accelerate solutions for environmental health and justice, whether that be climate, the built environment, environmental justice, food justice, democracy, or any other issue at the intersection of health and environment. We do this by supporting and growing a community of grantmakers to build knowledge, leadership, and grassroots power to create a healthier future for all, especially those affected first and worst by environmental harm.

Founded in 1980, **Neighborhood Funders Group** is a membership organization of foundations working to organize philanthropy so that Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities and low-income communities thrive. We offer learning-to-action programming and resources to support funders in advancing worker's rights and economic justice; equity for rural communities; housing justice; and more. Our members represent funders of all forms and sizes across the country, including large national philanthropies, local community foundations, and public and private foundations of all sizes.

Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders (SAFSF) is a non-profit national organization with a mission to mobilize diverse capital partners toward a more sustainable and just food and agriculture system. We do this by connecting, guiding, and collaborating with funders across the capital spectrum to invest in a more just, resilient, and democratic food and agriculture system.

The Funders Network is a philanthropy serving organization that helps its members advance shared learning, develop best practices, create policy agendas, support policy reforms, and improve outcomes in communities across the U.S. and Canada — addressing issues of deep relevance to people and place. TFN's mission is to leverage philanthropy's unique potential to help create communities and regions that are sustainable, prosperous, healthy, and just for all people. TFN is committed to helping funders understand and address racism, economic inequality, and the imbalance of power — while engendering community-driven solutions and amplifying the expertise and experiences of those communities who are least heard.