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Climate Equity Policy Fellowship Program

Driving Environmental, Economic, and Social Justice



An Introduction to the Policy Fellows Program

In 2021 the Climate and Clean Energy (Equity Fund) conducted [a landscape analysis on the equitable climate policy environment in the United States](#). The Equity Fund created the Climate Equity Policy Fellowship in response to the report's recommendations to "invest in building in-house policy capacity, directly connected to organizing and movement" and "[support a pipeline of intersectional policy talent](#)". The report shares that **"the Climate Equity Policy Fellowship has a unique opportunity to situate policy capacity building in a power building context"** through work that connects members to policy opportunities, strategy, and leverage.

The Climate Equity Policy Fellowship program, launched in 2022, is a transformative three-year program designed to **enhance grassroots organizational policy capacity and cultivate the expertise of emerging leaders in the field. This fellowship aims to accelerate the adoption of comprehensive and equitable policy solutions that advance environmental, economic, and social justice at the state level.**

Equity Fund staff prepare fellows for success with robust programming, including an onboarding retreat, regular policy webinars and workshops, community calls, personalized one-on-one check-ins, and an annual retreat to strengthen cohort connections. Fellows also receive an annual stipend for professional development and are matched with a professional mentor in their area of focus in the second year of the fellowship.

Policy Fellows Program Timeline

The first six Climate Equity Policy Fellows began at their organizations in September 2022 in New Mexico and Virginia. In 2023, sixteen more Fellows were hired at organizations in CO, NV, IL, PA, MD, NC, and FL, and two more hired in 2024.



This report seeks to understand the impact of the Climate Equity Policy Fellowship since its start in 2022 through input from Policy Fellows, their supervisors, and interim grant reports. What have the Climate Equity Policy Fellows been able to accomplish at their organizations? Have they achieved the goals of the program and contributed to meaningful policy capacity development supporting the missions of their organizations? How has Equity Fund's training program set them up for success?

Policy Fellows Program Impact

Climate Equity Policy Fellows have made significant contributions to their host organizations, including



Drafting and championing legislation addressing key policy priorities.



Educating government officials on climate & clean energy issues.



Conducting essential research and policy analysis to support advocacy.



Engaging with communities on climate & clean energy issues.



Drafting and publishing comments, testimony, and other communications to inform government decisions.



Providing strategic policy recommendations and organizational direction.



Launching new campaigns to advance policy solutions.



Developing op-eds, reports, toolkits, presentations, and case studies to advance policy efforts.



Collaborating with state coalition partners to amplify policy efforts.

“For the Florida Climate Equity Cohort, this is the first year we’ve been able to organize a dedicated work group around research and policy. It’s taken us from members taking meaningful, but limited individual action to a powerful, coordinated effort. The Climate Equity Policy Fellowship is a clear capacity and value add especially with the built in programming, cohort, and professional development support provided by the Equity Fund.”

-Hannah Holland, Florida Climate Equity Cohort

Climate Equity Policy Fellowship Impact Highlights

Legislative Successes

Maryland

- + **Transportation Equity Act (HB 9/SB 19)**: Requires equity considerations in all transportation planning.
- + **Clean Trucks Act of 2023 (SB 224)**: Mandates the Maryland Department of Environment to adopt regulations on truck emissions and promotes the sale of zero-emission trucks.
- + **Promoting Offshore Wind Energy Resources Act (SB 781/HB 793)**: Subjects offshore wind projects to community benefits agreements and analyzes transmission system upgrade and expansion options.
- + **Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program (SB 148)**: Allocates at least 40% of funding to projects benefiting underserved or overburdened communities.
- + **EmPOWER Reform bill (HB 864)**: Requires plans from electricity and gas companies for energy efficiency, conservation, and greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, with support for low- to moderate-income households in reaching them.

Virginia

- + **Shut off Protections Bill (HB 906)**: Prevents utility companies from suspending service during states of emergency or extreme weather events.

Colorado

- + **Transit-Oriented Communities (HB 1313)**: Encourages cities to build more housing or upgrade existing housing near transit corridors, with anti-displacement provisions.

Policy Development and Funding Secured

Illinois

- + Drafted a comprehensive public transportation bill for the 2024 General Assembly to increase investment in public transportation, electrify trucks, and set greenhouse gas standards.

New Mexico

- + Secured \$100 million in the state budget for workforce development and just transition investments.

Pennsylvania

- + Secured \$5 million for the Built to Last program in Philadelphia's city budget, making energy efficiency, clean energy, and other home improvements possible for low-income homeowners.

Community Engagement and Publications

Nevada

- + Hosted 18 listening sessions to drive their policy agenda for the 2025 Nevada general assembly session.

New Mexico

- + Published the Southeastern New Mexico Oil & Gas Workforce Study.

Florida

- + Published 9 op-eds in local news and media outlets co-authored with allied organizations and supportive legislators around **just energy policy**, **extreme heat protections**, **investor-owned utilities**, utility **cost** and **profits**, **child labor laws**, **Florida's Public Service Commission**, and **preemption bills**.

North Carolina

- + Published **blogs** on affordable and sustainable energy in North Carolina.



1 Drafting and championing legislation addressing key policy priorities.

In 2023 Jose led CASA's push for Transportation Equity Act (HB 9/SB 19), Clean Trucks Act of 2023 (SB 224), and Promoting Offshore Wind Energy Resources Act (SB 781/HB 793), all of which passed. He also worked on Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity (SB 743/HB 849), which did not pass, but would have required Maryland's DOE to evaluate the impact of environmental permits in environmental justice and overburdened communities. Jose was critical in championing these environmental and climate equity bills from building relationships with legislators on key committees, to organizing member testimony, and being a strong presence in environmental coalitions and tables. In the second year of his fellowship with CASA, Jose championed Impact of Environmental Permits and State Agency Actions (HB 24 - failed), Comprehensive Flood Management

Grant Program - Funding for Underserved and Overburdened Communities (SB 148 - passed), EmPOWER reform bill (HB 864 - passed), and Reclaim renewable energy bill (HB166 - failed) in coalition with Senay's organization, Progressive MD. Jose has been crucial in ensuring CASA's membership is reflected in Maryland's policy and legislation.

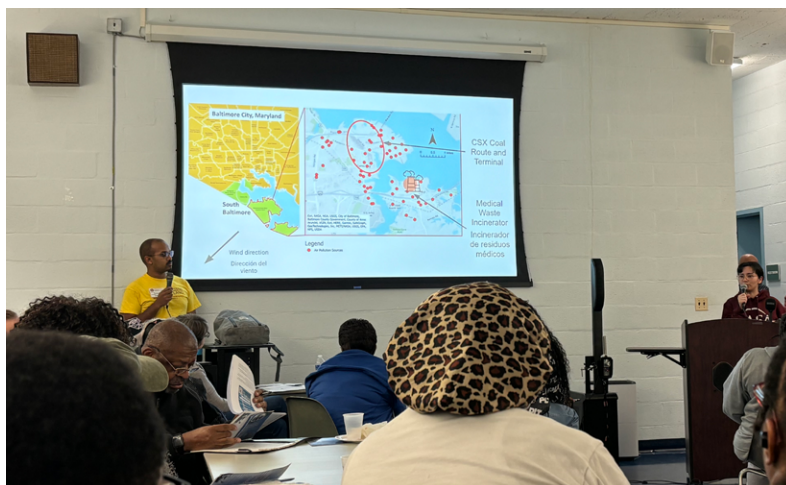
Senay Emmanuel led Progressive Maryland's to fight to end renewable energy subsidies for trash incineration by championing the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2024 (HB166 - failed). As Progressive MD's first climate policy staffer, his expertise brought critical capacity to the campaign effort, connecting with other community based organizations in a coalition as a big step towards eliminating trash incineration in environmental justice communities.

Fellow Jose Coronado Flores (left) leads CASA's strong and visible presence on climate in Maryland.

With Virginia Organizing, Elisabeth Chaves led their shut off protections bill ([HB 906 - passed](#)) to stop utility companies from disconnecting service during a state of emergency in response to Virginia Organizing's membership interest and need.

In Chicago, Nika Lofton helped draft a comprehensive public transportation bill to run in the 2024 IL General Assembly with their organization The People's Lobby in coalition with other environmental and grassroots organizations through the IL Clean Jobs Coalition. This bill's three main priorities are: a) increase investment in public transportation, b) electrify trucks, and c) set GHG standards.

In 2023, Samantha Salazar participated in Power for New Mexico and other meetings during the development of NM House Bill 188 which would have established an Economic Transition Division and Fund in the New Mexico Economic Development Department. Although the bill did not pass, P4NM efforts resulted in nearly \$100 million in the state's budget committed to workforce development and just transition investments.



Fellow Senay Emmanuel giving a community presentation about the incinerator in South Baltimore.



Fellow Elisabeth Chaves speaking to legislators and coalition members in Richmond regarding utility justice.



Fellow Jose Coronado-Flores (middle back) with CASA Maryland members in Annapolis meeting with legislators.

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Conducting essential research and policy analysis to support advocacy.

Policy Fellows provide extensive and comprehensive research support on climate and clean energy policy issues for their organizations informed by their members and communities. Fellows conduct equity-driven research in utility justice & investor-owned utilities, public transportation, building decarbonization and retrofitting, weatherization, Justice40, federal implementation of the IRA and IIJA, clean energy development, workforce development, just transition, incineration and zero waste strategies, local power plants, carbon capture and sequestration, sole source drinking water regulations to combat carbon sequestration pipelines, community benefit agreements, greenwashing, false solutions, and more.

Policy Fellows synthesize highly detailed and complicated information into easy-to-understand frameworks, memos, bill comparisons, community presentations and fact sheets for internal and external policy support that are integrated into organizational strategy. This research conducted by Fellows is essential for developing organizational climate policy priorities that center frontline communities, guide campaign strategy, and assess opportunities to advance or block legislation.

Dayana Maldonado, Climate Equity Policy Fellow with Somos Un Pueblo Unido in New Mexico, undertook and completed an [extensive research project in collaboration with the University of New Mexico](#). She conducted focus groups and surveys with oil and gas workers throughout the state on working conditions in their industry and ideas on how to expand workforce development opportunities in their communities. Dayana assisted in presenting this information to NM's Sustainable Economy Task Force Advisory Committee and the public during the 2024 legislative session.

Policy Fellows conduct legislative tracking for their organizations to report on bills that connect to climate equity priorities or defend against legislation that could harm members and communities. This enables grantees to seize opportunities to engage in climate and clean energy policy conversations, build political capital on issues new to their advocacy work, and be seen as a powerbroker by elected officials and state agencies on key climate and energy issues.



Fellow Jackie Spicer tabling for her organization Nevada Environmental Justice Coalition.

Philly Thrive members advocating for clean energy and energy efficiency repairs in homes at a city budget hearing, lead by their Fellow, Ella Israeli.



3 Drafting and publishing comments, testimony, and other communications to inform government decisions.

Policy Fellows represent their organization on equitable climate and clear energy policy when communicating with the government in a number of ways:

- + **Compiling environmental policy recommendations** for the Building & Electrification taskforce, governor, and state legislators in MD,
- + **Testifying in committee to support bills** like the Climate, Labor, and Environmental Equity bill and EmPower bill in Maryland,
- + **Organizing member testimony** in support of equitable climate policies, like Dayana's efforts to support undocumented oil and gas workers traveling to the New Mexico state capitol to discuss just transition legislation,
- + **Presenting testimony to state climate banks**, Solar for All, and GGRF hearings emphasizing the importance of racial equity in implementation of state-funded climate projects,
- + **Writing letters** to the Public Service Commission demanding a return to in-person public hearings,
- + **Preparing, submitting, and presenting comments** on state Priority Climate Action Plans and in support of initiatives like the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative during board hearings.



Fellow Leslie Vega meeting with members of PLAN (Progressive Leaders Alliance of Nevada).



Fellow Maria Claudia Schubert-Fontes (at the lectern) in Tallahassee for Lobby Day with Catalyst Miami.

4 Developing op-eds, reports, toolkits, presentations, and case studies to advance policy efforts.

Policy Fellows produce policy materials to support allies and drive a clear public narrative on their organization's policy campaigns and positions. Fellows wrote, developed, and published materials such as:

- + A [2 page summary](#) of a Shut-off Protections Bill ([HB 906](#)) in Virginia,
- + A shareable [case study on energy burden](#), the importance of climate equity, and its intersections with mental health in Virginia,
- + A series of policy op-eds published in local Florida news and media outlets co-authored with allied organizations and supportive legislators around [just energy policy](#), [extreme heat protections](#), [investor-owned utilities](#), utility [cost](#) and [profits](#), [child labor laws](#), [Florida's Public Service Commission](#), and [preemption bills](#).
- + [Blogs](#) on affordable and sustainable energy in North Carolina,
- + Speaking on webinars for their organizations on topics such as leveraging federal funds from the IRA.

"The capacity help this program creates is stellar, especially for multi-issue organizations like ours."

-Jovita Lee, North Carolina Black Alliance

THE INVADING SEA FLORIDA AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

[NEWS](#)[COMMENTARY](#)[MULTIMEDIA](#)[PUBLIC OPINION](#)[ABOUT](#)

Legislation would perpetuate pollution while bolstering utility profits

HB 683/SB 480 would cost consumers by forcing them to pay to maintain a dying fossil fuel industry even as renewables emerge

by Chelsea Rivera and MacKenzie Marcelin — February 15, 2024 in [Commentary](#)

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Publication co-authored by Chelsea Rivera, Fellow with Florida's Climate Equity Cohort.



5 Educating government officials on climate & clean energy issues.

Policy Fellows work hard to educate local and state elected officials about equitable climate and clean energy policy solutions that work for their members and communities. Fellows:

- + **Powermap** legislators and track their committee assignments for their organization's priorities.
- + **Facilitate** meetings with legislators around specific bills of interest and invite legislative champions to organizational events like environmental justice retreats.
- + Develop strong **relationships** with pertinent caucuses in their state houses like the Black Caucus, Latino Caucus, and API Caucus, and lawmakers championing environmental and climate issues to strategize on moving the bill forward.

Many Policy Fellows participate in one or several legislative visits during their states' general assembly sessions to lobby for or against climate policy solutions being considered by their state legislature. Fellows

will often organize these state capitol trips with coalition partners and community delegations to speak with legislators about the importance of climate and environmental justice. Some Fellows assist with Spanish translation allowing lawmakers to hear real stories of climate impacts from community members in constituent meetings and legislative committee hearings. For these visits Fellows will often develop leave behind materials for legislators.

In Virginia, Elisabeth Chaves produced a case study on energy burden specific to a key lawmaker's district as part of their advocacy for protections from utility shutoffs. After meeting with Elisabeth and constituents she brought to discuss the case study with him, the legislator changed his vote to support their bill in committee.

Policy Fellows create multi-part education series for legislators on climate policy intersections with housing, water, transportation and extreme heat in response

Fellow Elisabeth Chaves (left) in Richmond for their Day of Action with members and legislators.



Fellow Chelsea Rivera (right) with members of Central Florida Jobs with Justice meeting with legislators in Tallahassee.

to their members' priorities. Fellows also create educational [materials](#) for elected officials to learn of the harms of "false solution" bills that would exacerbate climate change like hydrogen, CCS, natural gas, and more.

Beyond the legislature, Policy Fellows also track state agency activity, following rulemaking and implementation plans. Policy Fellows participate in municipal budget conversations, in one case getting \$5 million dollars set aside in the Philadelphia city budget for the Built to Last program, making energy efficiency, clean energy, and other home improvements possible for low income homeowners.



Fellow Jackie Spicer (left) meeting US Senator for Nevada, Jacky Rosen.

"Elisabeth has helped us develop a clear policy intersection between healthy, livable homes, tenant rights, and climate justice. It's influencing our chapters' local campaigns, legislative priorities, and coalition work for the better."

-Nik Belanger, Virginia Organizing

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Engaging with communities on climate & clean energy issues.

Policy Fellows work to ensure that their organizations' policy priorities are connected to their members' lived experiences by coordinating, and facilitating listening sessions or creating online surveys to gather feedback from their organization's members. For example, Jackie Spicer, a Fellow with NV Environmental Justice Coalition (NEJC) conducted 18 listening sessions across Nevada, and developed and distributed a community survey to support the creation of NEJC's policy agenda. Nika Lofton, working with the People's Lobby in IL, supported drafting legislation for clean and equitable transportation. Nika facilitated "listen, lead, and share" events to listen to grassroots leaders to ensure that the issues covered in this legislation is speaking directly to their members' concerns, and provide political education with materials they developed.

In addition to connecting with members, Policy Fellows are critical in providing policy education to ensure that their members are knowledgeable about their organizations' strategies on climate and clean energy issues. Fellows:

- + **Design, coordinate, and facilitate trainings** for students and membership regarding energy justice advocacy, environmental justice, how to speak to their elected officials, power building, power mapping, and understanding oppression.
- + **Present at community meetings and town halls** about topics such as the incinerator in South Baltimore, and the EmPOWER bill's benefits to low-income renters.
- + **Provide education for members about potential and existing local and state campaigns** and bills like the Climate, Labor, Equity Act, EmPOWER bill, and Flood Management Funding bill, where members have the opportunity to ask questions, deepen their knowledge, share their personal experiences, and express why the bill matters to them.
- + **Connecting community organizers and their local issues with resources**, developed by Fellows, on upcoming advocacy and other policy opportunities.



Fellow Jackie Spicer (right) leading an NEJC listening session.

“Our Policy Fellow has been instrumental in getting our listening sessions and community survey off the ground. This is something that the coalition has been talking about doing since 2021; however, due to capacity issues, we were unable to do so. The addition of the fellow to the NEJC has made it possible for the coalition to finally get this up and running.”

-Cinthia Moore, Nevada Environmental Justice Coalition 12



Fellow Ella Israeli (one from right) with members of Philly Thrive at Philadelphia city hall for a budget meeting.

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Providing strategic policy recommendations and organizational direction.

Fellows provide policy guidance for their organizations with limited policy capacity to channel their grassroots, power building efforts into legislative or agency change. Fellows enable grassroots organizations to create effective policy agendas by connecting policy research and analysis with input from their members and a larger understanding of the state-wide opportunities. Policy Fellows develop clear pathways for their organizations to fight for intersectional policy solutions that advance the interests of their members and climate justice. For example, listening sessions allow Fellows to identify organizational policy priorities and bills to champion. Fellows also develop and execute organizational strategies for engagement during their states' general assembly session.

Grassroots organizations, typically focused on organizing, are now able to read and analyze legislation themselves with the support of their Fellows. This enables faster and sharper organizational responses, and more connection to state-level policy work.



Fellow Chelsea Rivera (front middle) with members of Central Florida Jobs with Justice meeting with legislators in Tallahassee.



Fellow Jose Coronado-Flores (right) with CASA Maryland members meeting with legislators in Annapolis.



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Launching new campaigns to advance policy solutions.

Policy Fellows work closely with their organizations and members to develop campaigns once intersectional and mission-aligned climate justice policy priorities are identified. This has looked like:

- + Developing a campaign to protect workers from extreme heat,
- + Developing campaigns to pressure local elected officials to seek resources and available IRA funding for weatherization programs that could be transformative in working-class communities to combat climate change,
- + Engaging with the EPA's Region 3 Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center around federal funding,
- + Developing a housing campaign, including compiling literature, a rolling out a survey, and a facilitating public meeting,
- + Submitting an EPA Community Change Grant with partners to develop a resilience hub in Southwest Philadelphia for workforce trainings, climate education, and youth programming.

Maria Claudia (one from the left) and members with Catalyst Miami meeting with legislators in Tallahassee.

“Our advocacy, both in Tallahassee and around the state, has been greatly amplified. Our ability to do responsive research has doubled, and we are actively educating legislators on REAL solutions to climate inequity. Our ability to explain greenwashing and false solution bills has greatly expanded due to our Fellow.”

-Leticia Harmon, Florida Rising



9 Collaborating with state coalition partners to amplify policy efforts.

A very important role Fellows take on are as representatives for their organizations in local, statewide, and national climate justice coalitions. Policy Fellows engage and lead coalition meetings with grassroots leaders and allies at aligned organizations to assess and participate in opportunities to champion policy solutions for climate justice. Below are some of the coalitions and groups Fellows represent their organizations and members at:

- + Affordable Energy and Energy Burden Coalition and disconnections protection sub-group
- + Climate Defense Coalition
- + MCA Energy Justice Working Group, Gulf South for Green New Deal policy table, Clean

Energy For All (CEFA) table, FL Climate Equity Cohort around energy justice, Florida For All Education Fund, Climate Justice Alliance, Miami Climate Alliance

- + IL Clean Jobs Coalition with sub groups focused on clean, affordable and clean buildings, clean and equitable, transportation, and inclusive financing
- + People's Action cohorts around leveraging federal funds and people and planet first
- + Beginning the formation of an environmental justice table in MD
- + North Carolina Environmental Justice Group, Black and Brown policy network, Flood Resiliency Group

Elisabeth Chaves (one from the left) with the Affordable Energy Coalition in Richmond.

Grantee Partner Testimonials

The impact of having Policy Fellows for grassroots organizations has been extremely supportive of their work. This Fellowship has been deliberately designed to span multiple years allowing for both organizations and Fellows to build at a sustainable pace, test different strategies, and invest in a long-term multi-year opportunities for policy solutions. With the cohort model, Fellows develop relationships with peers, especially within their state, at similar organizations that encourage effective and accountable collaboration across their organizations.

Throughout this document, you can read quotes from Policy Fellow supervisors themselves:

“The Climate Equity Working Group’s Policy Fellow has greatly strengthened and broadened our ability to pursue equitable clean energy policy solutions in Virginia. Leah’s leadership on policy research and development has enabled CEWG’s Coalition Manager to focus on group governance, strategic planning, and project management, allowing our work in both areas (policy progress and coalition management) to flourish.”

-Lauren Landis, Climate Equity Work Group

Of the Fellowship supervisors who responded to our survey:

- + **100%** agreed that their Fellow has helped them **advance current campaigns for policy solutions**
- + **87.5%** agreed that their Fellow has **collaborated with state coalition partners**
- + **75%** agreed that their Fellow has developed reports, toolkits, presentations, case studies, and other **materials to help allies and partners in advancing policy efforts**
- + **87.5%** agreed that their Fellow has **facilitated meetings with community, government, and business leaders** (including listening sessions) to drive advocacy forward
- + **87.5%** agreed that their Fellow has **educated legislators** on climate & clean energy issues
- + **62.5%** agreed that their Fellow has **educated their base** on climate & clean energy issues
- + **87.5%** agreed that their Fellow has **drafted comments and testimony, policy memos**, or other public communications pieces
- + **87.5%** agreed that their Fellow has conducted **research and policy analysis** to support advocacy efforts (including tracking policy)
- + **75%** agreed that their Fellow has explored **new climate & clean energy policy issue areas**
- + **37.5%** agreed that their Fellow has **developed new campaigns** to advance policy solutions
- + **12.5%** agreed that their Fellow has **drafted legislation in response to policy priorities** elevated by your members

In Conclusion

*75% of Fellowship supervisors agree that their organization would not have been able to expand their equity-focused policy work in climate and clean energy. To be able to continue the Climate Equity Policy Fellowship and provide crucial policy support to strengthen our grantee partners, **the Equity Fund needs to partner with foundations for long term and sustainable support.** In addition to providing for Fellows' salaries and benefits for three years at a minimum of \$100,000 per year, the Equity Fund provides policy trainings, retreats, mentorship, and professional development opportunities for the Fellows. To run this program for ten more Fellows, the Equity Fund would need an estimated \$3,150,000. In growing the Fellowship, the Equity Fund would prioritize in-person gatherings for Fellows, supervisor support and possible training, and ensuring that the selected grantee partners are in a good position to set their Fellows up for success.*

***The Climate Equity Policy Fellowship's goal of supporting frontline and grassroots organizations to build strong climate and clean energy policy capacity that advances environmental, economic, and social justice at the state-level is being realized within months, through the added support, capacity, and talent of their dedicated Fellows,** and we hope to expand this impact.*