



From Inclusion to Leadership Advancing Equity in Climate and Environmental Justice

Shaking the foundations of organizations and coalitions that have long espoused a commitment to racial equity, recent events have catalyzed a new clarity that deep structural changes are necessary. Our communities have been on the frontlines of environmental movements for generations, but our strategies and solutions have been invisibilized, minimized and tokenized in the historically white-dominant organizations and campaigns that have monopolized financial resources, political agendas and public awareness. At our **July 2020 event**, we examined how environmental and climate justice narratives and agendas need to not just be *influenced* but truly *led* by BIPOC organizers who hold the insight and solutions that can bring real change.

Speakers included

- » Mysti Babineau and Sam Grant, MN350
- » Dominique Diaddigo-Cash, Sierra Club North Star Chapter
- » Nazir Khan, BIPOC Environmental Justice Table
- » Kathryn Hoffman, MN Center for Environmental Advocacy
- » Janiece Watts, Fresh Energy

Values

We recognize and honor the wisdom and legacy of Native and Indigenous peoples living with and caring for the earth.

Our environmental and climate crises are a direct result of white supremacy, genocide and colonization of Native peoples who lived in deep connection to the land, water and air for generations. Our environmental strategies must be grounded in indigenous knowledge, healing and transformative justice.

The issues of humanity are environmental issues — they are one and the same.

What's happening in people's lives is inextricably connected to what's happening in our ecosystems. What hurts the earth, hurts our bodies. What hurts our bodies, hurts the earth.

Environmental justice is racial justice.

At the individual and community scale, Black and indigenous bodies are hurting the most — and are centered, prioritized and resourced to lead this work.

We connect through our shared values.

Revolution begins and is alive in our bodies and spirits. Moving intentionally from love, making and holding space with one another is itself the work of co-creating a sustainable and vibrant future.

Vision

Environment and climate campaigns center people not places.

Shifting from a focus on pristine parks or wilderness conservation, our efforts start from the experiences of the *people* in our most impacted communities.

Our work is rooted in an anti-racist and working class analysis.

From policy recommendations to campaign decisions, our efforts grow from the voices and needs of low-wealth, immigrant and communities of color, and a recognition that we must dramatically remake our economy to sustain our people and planet.

We make change by building people power.

We need more than the right solutions; we need robust people power. We focus our energy not just at policymakers, but invest in deep and sustained community and worker organizing.

Our expertise is essential.

We know that current political systems and funding streams, prioritize the lawyer over the mother, the nonprofit with "staff capacity" over frontline collectives. We call out the assumptions about whose work is valued and resourced and hold organizations and institutions accountable to breaking these patterns of marginalization.

Radical Solidarity

As Sam Grant emphasized: "There is a cultural revolution that is necessary in humanity to organize at the depth of solidarity this moment requires of us." More than any collective campaign or funding changes, how we relate to each other, as people and collaborators, must shift to a commitment of radical solidarity. **What does that look like in practice?**

Gestures of solidarity say "You lead and we'll back you up" instead of boldly saying "We, as environmental organizations, know that state violence impacts our work." Instead of relying on folks to put their bodies on the line and then following up with a statement, solidarity is stepping into leadership, holding all relationships accountable and risking losing support and funding. It's not just sharing the spotlight but also sharing the dark.

-Dominique Diaddigo-Cash

*White-led organizations have to stop asking us to help them and turn around and ask "How can I practice deep, meaningful solidarity with you now and always?" Part of solidarity is that you will listen to me at all times. Rather than only hearing me when I sugarcoat my words, it means you will listen to me **more** when I'm throwing dark energy.* -Sam Grant

*Environmental injustice is the end result of white supremacy and genocide: massacring and colonizing the people who care for and are connected to the earth. But we can't talk about that because it makes white people uncomfortable. We expect BIPOC to come into spaces and be vulnerable and share their experiences and put themselves at risk of physical harm, but white people fail to mirror that vulnerability. We don't prioritize **how** we're doing the work and then wonder why nobody is standing next to us.* -Mysti Babineau

It's not just about building power in BIPOC communities. When Black folks were given power during Reconstruction [after the abolition of slavery], they were terrorized and stripped of their power. That continues to happen in our city and says something about how scary that power is to white folks. So, it's not as though BIPOC communities have not built power. It's that, when they do, it's taken away. -Nazir Khan

RESOURCE:

Climate Equity Table Strategic Plan Report

This report outlines the four-month strategic planning process for the MN Climate Equity Table, which focused on: "How can we build a truly equitable coalition that is directed by BIPOC leadership and frontline communities, and what will that require of us?"

Intersectional Organizing

As Nazir Khan pointed out, "There are clear intersections that the [environmental and climate] movement is not prepared to speak about." And those intersections — with unions fighting for better job conditions or indigenous women demanding their right to life and dignity — are where true equity and real power lie. Khan and Mysti Babineau shared two powerful local examples of intersectional organizing in action.



In February 2020, SEIU Local 26 released [Sky High Pollution](#), a report outlining the dramatic ways commercial and office buildings in Minneapolis drive climate change and add to dirty and dangerous trash incineration. With support and active solidarity from groups like the MN BIPOC Environmental Justice Table, SEIU Local 26 included a **Green Demand** in its contract negotiations, calling for building owners to commit to collaboration with cleaning workers to move Minnesota to 100% renewable energy, and close the HERC trash incinerator that pollutes local communities of color. After a one-day strike turned out hundreds to march in solidarity, the SEIU workers won their demand. Given that many workers are climate refugees themselves, their victory was a powerful example of international solidarity. "We are people from the countryside in Ecuador, and when I was young it was a fertile place," Local 26 member Elsa Guaman said. "But then the droughts began, and the land didn't produce anymore. As people who lived on what we took from the earth, we had to leave. Millions of people from the areas near my village left too, in one of the biggest migrations ever out of South America. Now I clean buildings that are some of the biggest polluters in Minnesota, which furthers the same problem that made me immigrate. [When] we win green cleaning, we send a message."



Recognizing that "extractive industries and systemic oppression put indigenous women at risk," MN350's campaign is "combating the **epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, and relatives** in Anishinaabe and Dakotah territories in Minnesota." Through education, legislation and rapid response, the MMIR campaign is informing neighbors and lawmakers about the epidemic; fighting for funding to assist in healing and justice; and standing with the directly impacted. **Learn more at mn350.org/campaigns/mmir.**