

## Climate Funding Trends and Impacts | A 2025 Assessment

**Intro and Methodology.** Sutherland & Associates (S&A) works across networks and communities to develop, track, adjust, and scale the climate field. They do this via their primary function as seed-funding intermediary, **designing and executing regranting<sup>1</sup> opportunities** that move resources to cross-sector climate advocates to develop the field in specific ways. **These funds are used to develop, test, and scale methods to make people healthier, safer, and more economically stable where they live. Impact data is collected, tracked, and assessed for trends** in customer relationship management systems (CRMs).

Equipped with this data, along with grantee / grantor signals, S&A performs their secondary function: program development assistance through **production of time-relevant tools and field movement analytics**.<sup>2</sup> As methods are tried and lessons are learned, **funding mechanisms are adjusted to push the field forward**. Additionally, the team anchors multiple funding programs through funder, staff, and membership turnover while intensifying physical, social, political, and fiscal extremes play out in the field – some climate friendly and some not. This “push, assess, adapt” cycle continually repeats.

**Background.** A previous examination classed the effectiveness of regranting in advancing the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study found that **community strength lies in partnering to make civic life more sustainable** in mindset and operations – especially excelling at making buildings more energy efficient.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the study captured **experimentation in improving systems** like water, food, and industry,<sup>4</sup> along with evidence that **communities still struggle to broadly improve economy, health, education, and equality**.<sup>5</sup>

This study also showed that communities primarily **use regranted seed funds to partner across sectors** (41%) and governmental levels (39%); **collaborate city-to-city** (51%), **regionally** (28%), and **globally** (20%); **evolve climate practices** (42%) and **build tools to scale these practices** across cities (37%); **share knowledge** with each other (56%) and **experience** with stakeholders to develop climate programs (44%), and **incorporate equity** principles (39%) into climate work.

Regranting programs were then adjusted to: (1) **give the grantees more context** to ground their work; (2) make smaller awards to **target experimentation** in grantee weak spots; and (3) allow **flexibility** to pivot.

**Document Purpose.** This document is S&A’s **newest examination of current climate field trends, and what seed investment in communities is accomplishing**. Findings are meant to:

- **Inform funders / regranting networks** as they refine strategies in a constantly shifting landscape.
- **Show climate practitioners** the impacts of their work on the field, not just in their communities.

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<sup>1</sup> **Regranting is the act of using funds from one large grant or a pool of grants to create smaller sub-grants.** Larger grants are typically made by government or philanthropic organizations. Sub-grants are typically given to practitioners in a specific field to accomplish a specific outcome.

<sup>2</sup> S&A has led or significantly contributed to 33 climate field-building efforts – largely based on trends and lessons from years in fund management. These resources have been created while also continuously managing and evolving the design of 18 unique pooled funding mechanisms across 6 different networking organizations over 12 years.

<sup>3</sup> **Local government SDG strengths:** Partnership for the Goals (57%); Climate Action (34%); Sustainable Cities and Communities (33%); Affordable, Clean Energy (26%); and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (26%).

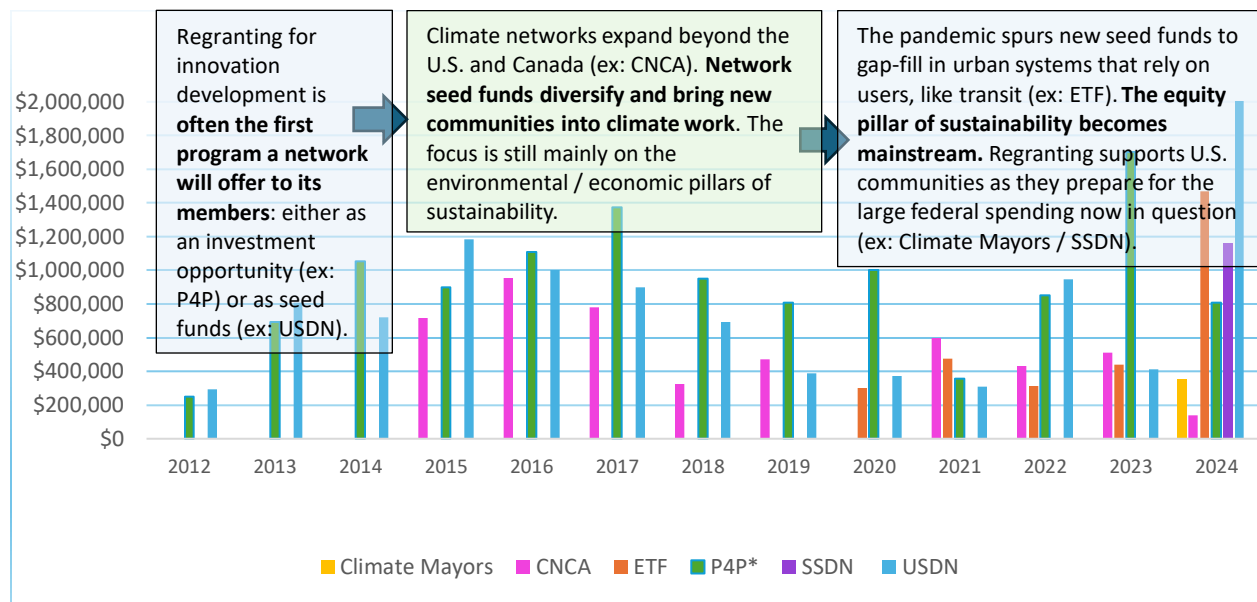
<sup>4</sup> **Local government SDG experiments:** Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (14%); Clean Water and Sanitation (12%); Responsible Consumption and Production (9%); Zero Hunger (8%); and Life on Land (7%).

<sup>5</sup> **Local government SDG weaknesses:** Decent work and economic growth (4%); Good health and wellbeing (4%); Reduced inequalities (3%); No poverty (3%); Quality education (2%); Life below water (1%); and Gender equality (0%).

- Provide fund case studies for others who may want to form their own regranting programs.

**Designing for Impact.** S&A periodically queries the grant portfolios to discover what has changed because of climate investments. This serves to ground funding opportunities in the broader context of the field and coordinate regranting programs across organizations, so that each fills a specific gap instead of duplicating work.

- In an environment of constant change, intentionally designed regranting consistently produces exceptional return on investment<sup>6</sup> and clear field-building impact (ref. Appendices).
- Many start up initiatives and / or fiscally sponsored projects have become multi-million-dollar organizations over the last decade – in part by expanding their regranting practices to draw new membership, funders, and funding sources.<sup>7</sup>
  - Not necessarily by granting more money annually, but by expanding the types of grants offered to ease pain points for their members – sometimes by splitting 1 fund into 2.
- Figure 1 gives a sense of investment size. A seed fund usually starts between \$100-300,000 USD, ebbing and flowing as it responds to funder preferences and practitioner needs in real time.



**Figure 1. Total Climate Seed Investments (USD) Across Sample Funds by Year and Field Trend.**

\*Partners for Places numbers do not include matching funds from grantee partners. USDN’s actual 2024 number is \$22,443,380 due to re-granting for the U.S. Forestry Service. This chart intentionally stops at \$2M so as not to skew trends with federal anomaly.

**Color key and case study:** Climate Mayors Community Climate Implementation (CCIF) Fund, Appendix 1; Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA), Appendix 2; Equitable Transportation Fund (ETF), Appendix 3; Partners for Places (P4P), Appendix 4; the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network (SSDN), Appendix 5; and the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), Appendix 6.

<sup>6</sup> To date, the \$53,204,044 in climate investments flowing through S&A’s regranting processes have supported 770 boots-on-the-ground projects. As of spring 2025, these competitive awards have leveraged an additional \$2,840,929,052 from additional investors.

<sup>7</sup> Notable examples include The Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance, the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network, and the Urban Sustainability Directors Network, who have each expanded regranting as part of their investment options for funders and resource opportunities for members.

The first question funders often ask is how much money it takes to get real impact. However, a more strategic approach involves asking **what is the investment goal, how is it best achieved, and who is best suited to achieve it?** From there, a fund balance can be set, an opportunity built, and impact tracking established in a more informed way.

- Consistently, the portfolio shows that **smaller awards** act like **venture capital** – a community is paid to partner up and try something new, and learning is gained by all in exchange. Small awards also **spur crowdfunding**, as partners feed momentum as additional investors. For example:
  - Indianapolis, IN received a **\$150,000** grant from The Funders Network via its Partners for Places grant program, to support starting up a “Great Places” program hosted by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). LISC is now **leveraging an additional \$50 million** by requiring neighborhoods to match every dollar invested in selected projects.

**Giving Trends.** Mirroring the fluctuations in the example snapshot (Figure 1), **total charitable giving globally switches between growth and decline in response to the market** - with different trends by country. For example, giving has been declining in the U.S. since a pandemic-era spike, even as it rebounds in Europe – largely in response to recovering European economies and the Ukraine war.<sup>8</sup>

**Philanthropy tends to gap-fill where governments cannot** or will not. It tries not to replace government services, but to augment work in and around them to make sure that systems include philanthropic priorities – like addressing human health in a changing climate. Funders large and small, organizations and individuals, are **in charge of administering a lot of resources**.

- The pendulum has once again swung the United States (U.S.) **federal government away from climate work**, immediately **after it had flooded the field with resources**. U.S. philanthropies – who have typically stepped up when the federal government steps down – are mostly still gauging the market. Some are signing **solidarity statements** in anticipation of retribution.
  - Recent funder conversations have shown that current strategies are as varied as the foundations themselves. Some are overshooting their **5% payout** to show that they are all in, while others are underpaying to hedge bets. Some are focusing on funding litigation, others on influencing U.S. **state** and **congressional** leadership changes. Some are giving their grantees layoff runways. Many are simply **staying the course they were on before**.
  - **There is chatter about a new executive order designed to target them. Hence, solidarity.**

**Service Trends.** Nonprofits are doers, **blending philanthropic resources with governmental funding** sources to patch together budgets that support staff teams running mission-advancing initiatives. They can go where governments often cannot and are used to extending their capacity to meet their goals via outsourcing and regranting – which is often cheaper and more effective than taking on full time employees (FTEs). This blended approach to maintaining capacity keeps them creative and nimble.

- No stranger to lay-offs – regardless of U.S. federal administration – many U.S. nonprofits are belt-tightening and shifting resources around. They may be considering regranting less - **or they may be regranting more now in rapid response** to keep partners afloat.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Global Philanthropy Tracker: <https://globalindices.indianapolis.iu.edu/tracker/index.html>. Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.

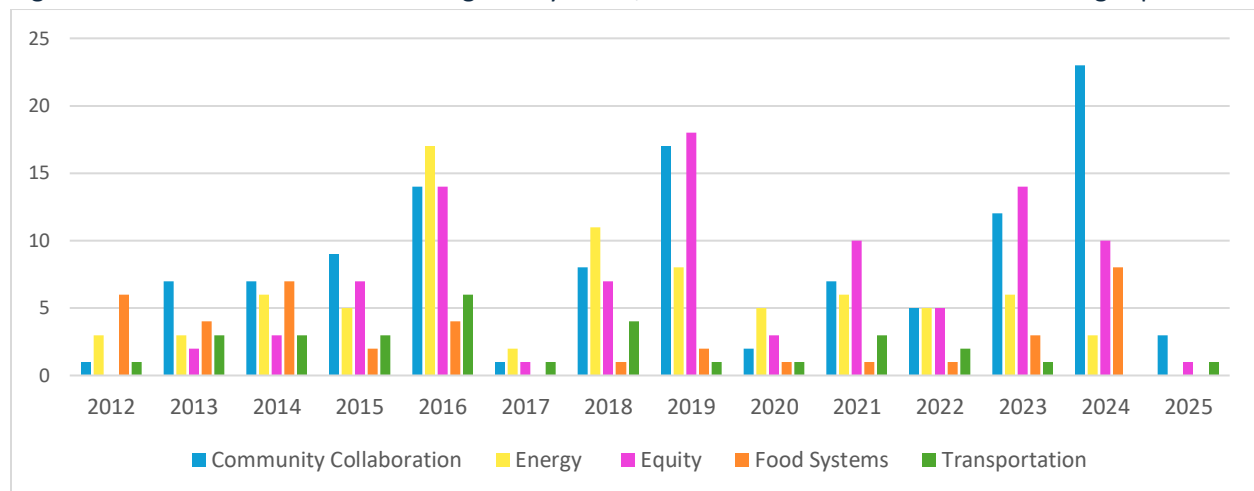
<sup>9</sup> For instance, the [Equitable Transportation Fund](#) launched its 6<sup>th</sup> funding round early for advocates impacted by Dept. of Transportation freezes.

- Some who grew FTEs to keep up with federal funding under the previous administration are considering cutting programming to keep those hired. Others are preemptively shedding FTEs in favor of outsourcing or folding work as federal funding goes through freeze / thaw / freeze cycles.
- **Larger U.S. 501(c)3s who are set up to litigate are doing so**, trying to slow (and ideally reverse) the current federal programmatic gutting processes as much as possible.
- In the more mature organizations, there is a refreshed desire to **grow beyond dependence on philanthropy** – mostly by monetizing services, and by partnering up with different sectors.

**Local Trends.** Community-driven work is **the test tube for new ideas**, and community-to-community sharing is **the conduit for scaling good ideas** between local governments. This normalizes climate work as a basic service that any good local government provides. Here, data is narrowed to city and funder networks with a longer history of investment to get a sharper view of longer-term trends.

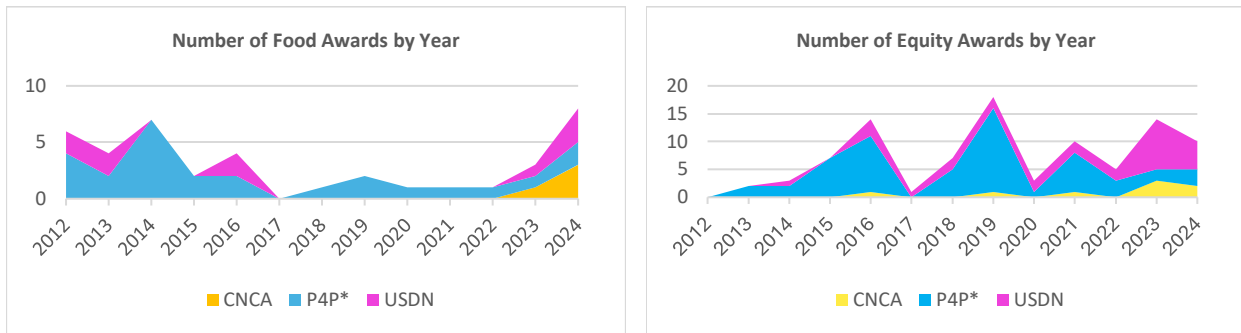
- **Exploration, innovation, and scaling** draws philanthropic funds. Groups of local governments driven by mayoral climate goals work with non-profit and private partners to **test and ideally standardize** as many effective climate practices as possible.
- Large research projects are often phased, spanning **multiple grants, partners, funders and years** to **form a body of work** around strategies like building decarbonization – which has appeared in some form in the funding portfolios since the early 2000’s. One of the more recent examples is:
  - In 2020, CNCA funded Seattle, New York City, Santa Monica, and Washington, D.C. to develop performance standards for medium to large non-residential and multifamily buildings. Like similar studies before, it required alignment of multiple funding sources, partners, expertise, utility incentives, benchmarking, audits, and market analyses.
  - Performance metrics – always a key part of building work in the funding portfolio – this time included Energy Use Intensity (EUI) and ENERGY STAR scores. Over several years, a Performance Targets Tool was built. It informs Seattle's policies, Washington D.C.’s proposed standards, and is informing New York’s Carbon Neutral Roadmap. It is used by the American Cities Climate Challenge to help cities set their own standards.

Figure 2 tracks the number of awards given by CNCA, P4P and USDN over time in 5 recurring topics.



**Figure 2. Number of Awards Across Sample Funds by Year and Topic.**

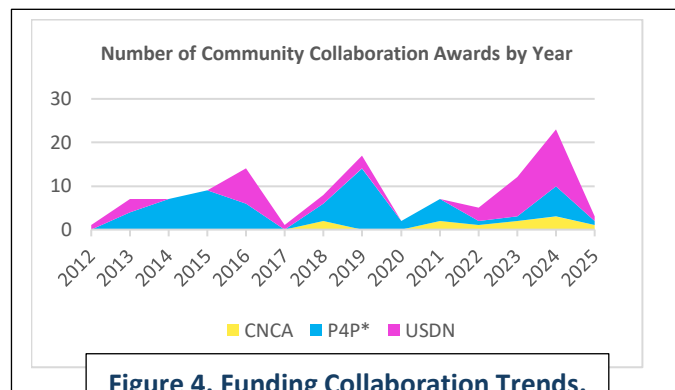
- **These products when put together serve as markers of climate field development:** (1) what local governments are ready for and when; (2) how effective they are or aren't in any given endeavor; and (3) what general climate topics rise or fall at any given point in time.
  - For instance, food is experiencing another uptick in investment, and equity investment in the USDN and CNCA portfolios increased notably over the last 3 years (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Visual of Topical Interest and Investment Ebbs and Flows.**

- As various frontiers – like greening building codes – become manageable frameworks and adaptable templates, **focus shifts to replication and refinement**. There is still creativity in a time of scaling, though it is now widely known what technology and practices can work in most communities to reduce emissions and deal with climate events.

- The creativity is seen most right now in the more complicated side of climate – **people's behaviors and their power-dynamics** – which was first tackled by the field in earnest during the pandemic era.



**Figure 4. Funding Collaboration Trends.**

- Local governments shifted focus from refining technical climate solutions in favor of building climate relationships.

- For 5 years now, the bulk of philanthropic seed funding has been awarded to help climate practitioners **connect to people** in new ways that resonate with real humans and **to re-think government's role** from standard-bearer / lead to collaborative participant (Figure 4).

- When the U.S. federal government signals climate-friendly agendas, cascades of government grants follow. **When these recede**, more progressive **local governments dig deeper into their own funding** to support climate work. Less progressive communities go back to “business as usual.” Their **offices of sustainability typically survive**, though – just on less.

**Private Trends.** Corporations of all classifications have been working to address climate change too, though more quietly than other sectors. Here, it can be less about mission, and more about gaining profit and / or tax incentives. The clean energy industry is established, huge, and **unlikely to be significantly**

**boosted or depleted** by any U.S. federal agenda. These agendas can cause ups and downs, but don't dictate life or death.<sup>10</sup> The industry is used to the tariffs / no tariffs, the not-in-my-backyard mentalities, the encroaching hot new tech, and the drill / don't drill roller coaster that can impact fuel prices. Yet, it is **still profitable to be in the clean energy business**, and like the climate field, it is no longer precariously new.<sup>11</sup> Like other industries, it pulls back or plows ahead based on market influencers and projections.

- **Following the European philanthropic model, private U.S. financial institutions** are giving more to climate work through their gifting arms: funds set up for individual donors, or for companies like Citi, JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, etc. to disburse charitable donations through.
- This is bringing a **fresh wave of philanthropists onto the climate scene** – which has featured the same foundation players with very little attrition or growth for the past 10 years. Intermediaries have cropped up for everything from people under 35 who are in the top 10% of wealth-holders, to those who pool large donors and move billions in a matter of years.
  - Some newer donors are looking for a fresh approach to climate investing, while some deploy existing methods. Topics like target markets and impact investing are resurfacing.

**Opportunity.** The climate field has been here before, just not to this extreme. **When systems are breaking, positive changes can be made before they harden again.** There is a tendency in the climate field in times of chaos to declare this or that approach “dead” when the going gets tough – or, sometimes, just when people get bored with or tired of **the long slow grind that leads to systems transformation.**

**Work streams and sectors go in and out of vogue** in the climate world, **but the testing and scaling doesn't stop.** In this cycle of near constant disruption, it can be easy to say that there is no strategy and no real impact. Efforts can feel random and disconnected. Jobs are quit, investing structures are realigned, plans are scrapped and redone, portfolios are recategorized, and language is updated to fit the current trends. The work is re-dressed and carries on until the next upheaval occurs and necessitates re-branding.

**These are bumps along a continuum.** Building a field that is larger than the sum of its parts is a slow movement over time. **The climate field is bigger than the various trends it lives through.** Certainly, it can be boosted or hindered - yet it stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before, builds on what is now known, and learns from the past on how to adapt to the present and plan what comes next. The data portals stand open. It shows a multiplier effect that is transforming systems, community-by-community.

**Findings.** Regardless of who oversees any given climate ecosystem, what they value at any given point, or how they decide to brand their work in different periods of field evolution, the data indicates that:

**(1) Communities are repeat customers across funds.** Some become very adept at applying to various funding sources for multiple projects. Within this example portfolio, 60 different communities have received multiple awards from 6 different network funds:

- Two communities repeatedly appear in 5 of the 6 funds: **Washington, D.C.** has received 14 grants across 5 of 6 network funds featured in this report. These grants have addressed topics like marketing, energy efficiency / financing, renewable energy, planning, engagement, equity, and

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<sup>10</sup> <https://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/5092718-try-as-he-might-trump-cant-kill-clean-energy/>

<sup>11</sup> Deloitte's [2025 Renewable Energy Industry Outlook](#).

transportation. **San Francisco, CA** has received 19 grants across 5 of the 6 funds. These grants touch on all the Washington, DC topics, and add environmental monitoring, urban biodiversity, waste management, building decarbonization, and food systems to that list.

- Eight communities overlap in 4 of the 6 funds. For example, **Boston, MA** is the recipient of 13 grants dealing with topics like renewable energy, climate adaptation, equity, sustainable urban agriculture / food systems, stormwater management, and transportation. **Atlanta, GA; Baltimore, MD; Charlotte, NC; Denver, CO; Los Angeles, CA; Minneapolis, MN; and Seattle, WA** follow suit, using various funds to fill climate funding gaps.
- Sixteen communities overlap in 3 of the 6 funds. Thirty-four communities overlap in 2 of the 6.

**(2) Communities are good at using seed funds for cross-regional collaboration.** Eight regional networks have received multiple awards, some to create their networks and / or to expand their work. Each of these instances is backed by competitively won network grants:

- The **Western Adaptation Alliance (WAA)** formed in 2011 to coordinate the adaptation work of 7 cities in the inter-mountain west. In 2015, WAA developed an extreme weather toolbox to address heat, flooding, drought, wildfire, and wind. In 2023, 8 Arizona cities within WAA developed a proposal for a U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) grant program. They **obtained a \$3.5 million DOE grant** to develop an energy and green building code to address climate change.
- The **Cascadia Regional Network** convened cross-sector experts around urban forestry in 2015 to explore adaptation opportunities for urban forestry. This effort has now spanned the nation, and USDN just awarded funds to Boston, MA to **start up a national Forestry Network** (April 2025).
- **Green Cities California (GCC)** convened representatives from regional climate adaptation networks in CA in 2014 to clarify effective roles for local governments in regional climate adaptation efforts. In 2016, GCC adapted a USDN Innovation Fund project on community based social marketing to address drought response. This served as a model to other networks like the **Michigan Green Cities Network (MGC)** as they also designed for regional resiliency.
- The **New England Municipal Sustainability Network (NEMSN)** was created in 2016 to host Design and Resiliency Teams, which helped NEMSN cities identify resiliency opportunities.
- The **Southeast Sustainability Directors Network (SSDN)** first convened in 2010 with a USDN award. In 2016, the Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance (SEEA) and the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) were funded to help SSDN members integrate equity principles into municipal policies and practices - particularly in energy efficiency (EE) programming. A curated toolkit of web-based content serves those orienting to and those refining equity efforts. They have also used network funds to influence a major regional power producer toward cleaner energy sources.
- In 2017 the **Utah Climate Action Network** created a climate change engagement, policy, and programmatic clearinghouse for local governments to promote applications in major climate impact areas like water, energy, transportation, public health, green economics, and land use.
- In 2012 the **St. Louis Sustainability Funders Network** was created to support the city's Sustainability Plan and the **Regional Sustainable Funders Network in Cincinnati, OH** was created to build regional community-foundation support.

**(3) Communities transfer practices across nations and globally via city-to-city networks, which are built to enable testing and speed the scaling of climate work.** Cross-network examples include:

- **Cities across Europe**, including Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Berlin, and London - explored the integration of green infrastructure and **clean vehicles together as vital links between cities, regions, and countries**. This partnership promoted green vehicles in Northern Europe via cooperation among cities, car industries, energy companies, and mobility operators.
  - Copenhagen also played a key role in advancing **Carbon Capture Storage (CCS)** and **Carbon Capture Utilization (CCU)** technologies from waste and biomass, offering these innovations for exploration beyond Scandinavia.
  - In London, **value-based food procurement** was implemented as a test case on how large cities around the world can enhance sustainability and equity in food systems, encouraging plant-based diets, reducing food waste, and improving access to healthy, affordable food. Additionally, **London adapted a Dutch retrofitting model** to their own context so that building wraps can be available to residents.
- **Canadians** appear in the regranting portfolio as **leading climate initiatives that scale nationally**:
  - Vancouver’s research on **international building standards reshaped national energy efficiency regulations**, resulting in the adoption of the Passive House Standard for City-owned buildings, alongside \$1.6 million in Zero Emission Building incentives and the creation of a Centre of Excellence for industry capacity building.
  - Toronto merged environmental and social engagement as they **visualized climate change within the community by paying local artists**, teaching other cities how to follow suit.
- **Australian regions** are at the forefront of **driving sustainable innovation across sectors**:
  - Sydney, AU found that **transitioning to net-zero high-rise residential buildings** in Australia is economically feasible with good regulations and incentives. Additionally, they:
    - **Established a carbon credit seller’s market**, supporting Indigenous enterprises in regeneration projects.
    - Launched the Better Buildings Cup to **reach net-zero goals in buildings and businesses** while fostering inclusivity.
    - Developed a **comprehensive blueprint for hydrogen refueling stations**, outlining the necessary activities, stakeholder roles, and permitting processes using global case studies from **Germany, California, Europe, Japan, and the U.S.**
  - Melbourne created a **procurement guide for cross-sector energy users** considering **Renewable Energy Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs)** that spread to other AU cities.
- **U.S. cities collaborate with each other and around the world**, using their network channels:
  - For instance, **New York City** developed a primer for building electrification market transformation that is still supporting decarbonization efforts around the globe. **St. Louis** leveraged **Seattle’s** more recent building performance targets tool – which built on the NYC work – to help develop their own building performance standards.
  - Seattle, WA provided guidance for implementing performance standards and offered support to cities like **Boulder** and **Helsinki** in their biochar work. Boulder in turn helped **Minneapolis** establish a program that embedded a city position to advance biochar.

- **Networks often host working groups tackling a topic that resonates across borders.** For instance:
  - **CNCA’s food collaborative is addressing various obstacles within current food systems.** New York City is working on low-carbon foods for incarcerated individuals and plant-based culinary training to improve career prospects. London, UK is developing a replicable model to increase low-carbon food consumption and reduce food waste. Vancouver, BC is testing circular food waste solutions along its food supply chain. Portland, OR is building best practices for structuring food infrastructure. San Francisco, CA is refining tools that will help cities quantify and redirect organic waste streams into resources that stabilize the climate, generate economic opportunities, and create equitable community benefits.

**Implications.** The examples provided here - and more in each fund’s case study appendix - are surface skimming **snapshots that show how funding networks are continuing to pave flexible, adaptable pathways for embedding sustainability** into local, national, and global cultures.

- Regardless of what era the climate field is in, these funding networks know that their **north star is to put practitioners together and fund them to visualize the end game, benchmark their progress, ideate, and work on eliminating field obstacles.**
- This approach **hopscotches jurisdictional and sector barriers, enabling the field to scale faster with or despite political winds.** It may not be new, but it is **still proving to be incredibly effective.**
- Funded projects are consistently asked to **think beyond the band-aid to the cure.** The networks encourage **leaning into risk** and give the grantees permission to **embrace dynamic messiness, combine tech and people-centered solutions,** and to **fail forward if necessary.** Then, the networks **push relevant lessons out for others** to apply.
- This has **made climate work increasingly accessible** to a growing number of communities - especially in the U.S., which is [a nation of small towns](#). A significant portion of regranting funds over the past 5 years have gone to **communities that are new to applying the principles of sustainability.** Places like Shoreline, WA, South Bend, IN, and Alachua County, FL are gaining community traction by **creatively visualizing the impacts of climate change on daily life** with residents and assessing together **the tools available to help them** adapt.
- Being an effective testing and scaling mechanism requires becoming an expert in delivery channels. The feedback loop **consistently enables resource access, flexible management** of workstreams, and **a steady flow of communications tailored to practitioners, funders, and decision-makers** to show context, progress, and possibilities.
- The cycle is adjusted in real time. The beat goes on. The field alternately survives and thrives. These **funding networks incubate, nurture, and map progress** in good times and hard, from a position of strength born from experience. They **know what works, and how to get it done.** They **provide a benchmark** for those entering the field, **a safe space** for those under attack to regroup and troubleshoot, and a place to quietly **test, incubate, refine, and make normal** cross-cutting culture changing practices.

## Appendix 1. The Community Climate Implementation Fund Case Study

**Value Proposition.** To gap-fill around specific climate initiatives, allowing non-profit organizations working with local governments to **implement necessary actions that federal grant budgets won't cover** – like role development and project planning across multi-sector partnerships. The Community Climate Implementation Fund (CCIF) has run 1 Request for Proposals (RFP) thus far. It opened in 2024 as a funding opportunity available to [Climate Mayors](#) members, [Urban Sustainability Directors Network Members](#) (USDN), and [C40](#) Cities. It is unknown if any additional funding rounds will happen or not.

**Designing for Impact.** CCIF's initial investments called for grantees to:

1. Deploy federal funding programs to reach economically disadvantaged or under-resourced communities, maximize impact, and support inclusive growth.
2. Deploy tax incentives and rebates to aid climate friendly behavior change in an equitable way.
3. Collaborate across sectors to integrate areas of practice.
4. Accelerate the clean energy transition.

**Investment Summary.** The CCIF awarded **10 projects**, totaling a **\$354,500** (USD) investment. These communities brought **\$727,000** to the table in additional funds to help promote climate action, representing just over **\$1 million in new climate investment**.

- **Alameda, CA.** (\$26,000): Advancing Marginalized Resident Leadership: The Alameda Point Regeneration Project. **Non-Profit Organization:** Build it Green.
- **Austin, TX.** (\$40,000): Equitable Climate Resiliency in Affordable Multifamily Housing with Energy Audits. **Non-Profit Organization:** Foundation Communities **Additional funding** (\$4,000).
- **Baltimore, MD.** (\$40,000): Achieving Climate Financing and Adaptation Strategies through the creation of a Regional Energy and Climate Resilience Authority. **Fiscal Sponsor:** Baltimore Civic Fund. **Additional funding** (\$50,000).
- **Charleston, SC.** (\$40,000): Green the East Side: Equitable Climate Solutions for Resilient Communities. **Non-Profit Organization:** Charleston Climate Coalition.
- **Duluth, MN.** (\$30,000): Minnesota Point Coastal Resilience Annual Site Visit and Action Planning. **Non-Profit Organization:** Minnesota Point 50. **Additional funding** (\$12,500).
- **Healdsburg, CA.** (\$40,000): Catalyzing Energy Efficient Appliance Replacement for Low Income Families. **Non-Profit Organization:** Corazon Healdsburg. **Additional funding** (\$601,000).
- **Los Angeles, CA.** (\$40,000): LA Nursery Network: Collaborating Nurseries to Address Climate & Community Needs. **Non-Profit Organization:** City Plants.
- **Philadelphia, PA.** (\$18,500): Stakeholder-Informed Funding Solutions for Equitable Building Decarbonization in Philadelphia. **Fiscal Sponsor:** Innovation Network for Communities. They are providing up to \$21,500 in in-kind support.
- **Salem, MA.** (\$40,000): Delivering Resilience, Renewables, and Energy Savings to The Point/El Punto Neighborhood. **Non-Profit Organization:** St. Peter's-San Pedro Episcopal Church. **Additional funding** (\$59,500).
- **San Francisco, CA.** (\$40,000): Ensuring Equity in Electrification through Outreach. **Non-Profit Organization:** San Francisco Physicians for Social Responsibility (SF Bay PSR).

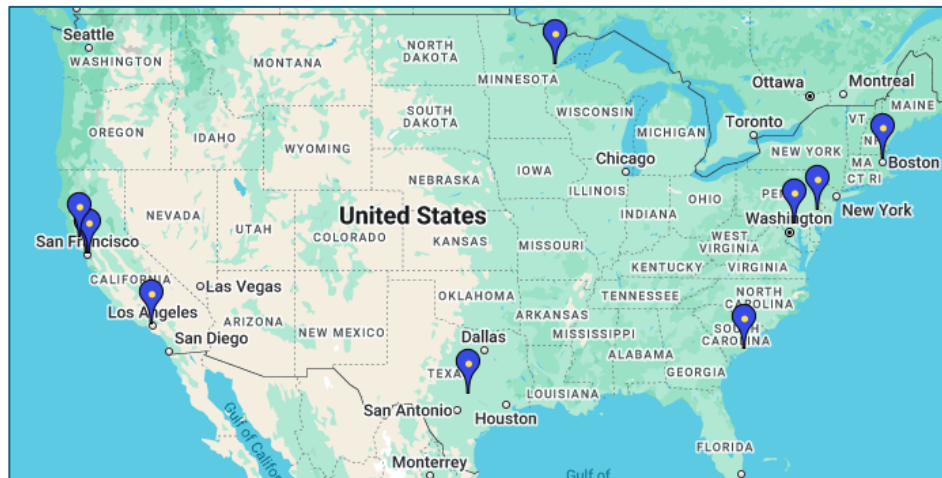


Figure 1. Community Climate Implementation Fund Awarded Projects.

**Lessons.** Though funded work is still early stage, lessons are available:

1. **Effective climate governance** requires **nimbleness, proactive strategies, and strong leadership** to successfully secure investments and leverage funding sources. **Clear coordination across multiple government services, private entities, and non-profits is essential** for climate mitigation / resiliency work. Baltimore, MD is creating the Baltimore Resilience Authority to streamline access to funding and enhance collaboration across sectors to achieve citywide climate goals.
2. **Navigating funding opportunities**, requires **flexibility in planning**. Austin, TX has learned:
  - Even with federal leadership changes, **much of the funding remains accessible**, so it's still important to **prioritize project approvals**.
  - New grant requirements, such as decarbonization savings modeling, present challenges - like **overcoming limited engagement** from local auditors.
  - It's essential to **shop around** for the best funding options, as existing partners may not always offer the most favorable terms.

**Implications.** The partners are assessing the impacts of a federal administrative change and testing philanthropic interest in continued support of this funding opportunity. There is:

- **Interest in future rounds, being tracked [here](#)**. Unsolicited organizations continue to express interest in being notified of future CCIF rounds.
- There is a need for **planning and pivot grants** that are designed to help cities deal with the new funding landscape and maintain their momentum. Other funds are starting to see applications for work that had federal support grants which are now in question. Instead of shelving ideas and work, some cities and their partners are **deconstructing their federal scopes into smaller, more manageable pieces and applying to different philanthropic funds** to keep moving forward.
- Should Climate Mayors and their partners gain funder interest, a second RFP can gap-fill in the new federal funding landscape, **giving partnerships a runway to segue their good ideas and established partnership energy into other funding avenues**.
- There is no seed fund that is currently built for this, and the **funding demand** from local governments and their partners is now the **highest it's been since 2020**.

## Appendix 2. The Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance Funds Case Study

**Value Proposition.** *To enable cross-national and cross-continental iteration that develops and advances cutting-edge city climate practice.* This global network of cities with carbon neutral commitments provides lean and ambitious funding opportunities to its members, so that they can **drive innovation in new and emerging policy areas** and advance the **development of new governance models**.

**Designing for Impact.** To achieve this goal, CNCA offers competitive funding opportunities for members. Right now, these include:

- **The Game Changer Fund**, currently supporting the development, adoption, and implementation of transformative work in these categories: (1) decarbonizing buildings and renewable energy, (2) decarbonizing transport, (3) regenerative systems and economies, and (4) carbon neutral districts.
  - This request for proposals (RFP) is open once per year. CNCA utilizes its annual meeting to spur idea discussions between members and partners and refine each RFP.
- **The Climate Justice Fund**, currently supporting cities and their partnering community-based organizations to create climate policies and programs that center the needs of priority communities.
  - This RFP is offered on a rolling basis and refined with input from various equity experts.

**Investment Summary.** CNCA has funded **74 awards** since 2015, totaling **\$4,928,296 USD** investment. CNCA projects have **leveraged an additional \$46,118,743** to support continuing work.

- **2015 – 2019 CNCA Innovation Fund** investments:
  - 30 awards - \$2,854,537
  - 4 special project awards - \$286,000
  - 14 technical assistance awards - \$68,259
  - 1 quick turnaround award - \$2,500
- **2019 – 2024 CNCA Game Changer and Climate Justice** investments:
  - 1 Game Changer technical assistance pilot award - \$40,000
  - 13 Game Changer awards - \$1,187,000
  - 2 special project awards - \$110,000
  - 9 climate justice awards - \$380,000

The investment portfolio, classed in the 5 CNCA funding categories, shows funded work (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Percent of CNCA Awards by Game Changer Fund Category.**

Goals for CNCA’s investments are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Game Changer Fund Sub-Categories with Goals.**

Primary goals	Sub-categories	Sub-category Goals
<b>Regenerative systems and economies.</b> To dramatically reduce the use of fossil-fueled vehicles and congestion (34%).	<a href="#">Embodied Carbon</a>	To dramatically reduce embodied carbon in the built environment.
	<a href="#">Carbon Drawdown</a>	To use nature-based solutions to draw down atmospheric carbon.
	<a href="#">Consumption-based Emissions</a>	To reduce consumption-based emissions.
	<a href="#">Resource Recovery and Circular Economy</a>	To get to zero food and plastics waste.
<b>Decarbonizing buildings and renewable energy (RE).</b> To phase out fossil fuel use and consume less energy overall (33%).	<a href="#">Renewable Energy</a>	To increase uptake of distributed and utility-scale renewable energy
	<a href="#">Energy Efficiency</a>	To facilitate deep energy efficiency retrofits of existing buildings.
	<a href="#">Building Electrification</a>	To electrify buildings
	<a href="#">Carbon Neutral Districts</a>	To zero out emissions in entire neighborhoods.
<b>Transformative Governance.</b> <sup>12</sup> To develop, enact, and scale policies and relationship models that advance shared climate priorities (18%).	Policy & Governance (no link)	To ensure that new policies and governance approaches move cities toward carbon neutrality.
	Stakeholder Engagement (no link)	To build lasting relationships with partners across all sectors that can weather political changes and maintain climate priorities.
<b>Decarbonizing Transport.</b> To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while developing clean energy solutions for mobility (15%).	<a href="#">Transport Electrification</a>	To encourage wide-scale adoption of zero-emission mobility.
	<a href="#">Congestion Pricing</a>	To implement congestion pricing programs.
	<a href="#">Parking Reform and Ultra Low Emission Zones</a>	To reform parking policy and enact ULEZ’s.
	<a href="#">Zero Emission Freight</a>	To move toward zero-emission freight in ports and last-mile deliveries.

To see snapshots with examples, lessons, and trajectory in each sub-category, access the full CNCA document [here](#).

**Lessons.** CNCA members are driving global climate action through creative collaborations that gain stakeholder ownership in local climate work. With CNCA’s support and funding, cities are developing cutting-edge climate policies, technologies, and governance models that not only help address immediate climate challenges but also foster long-term cultural and behavioral changes.

- **Cross-continental innovation and collaboration.** CNCA is unique in that it supports cross-border collaboration. Instead of being a *staff* of experts, CNCA views its *members* as experts. And that design allows them to easily share their expertise and lessons learned, which further encourages process refinement. It does not prescribe what or how they should innovate – only that they should consider how transformational their proposed work can be. CNCA knows it’s a long game. Figure 2 shows CNCA grantees to date.

<sup>12</sup> Original game changer subcategories included [Carbon Budgets](#), which most CNCA members are now doing on their own, and [Climate Justice](#), which has its own RFP opportunity now.

- **Building all work on Climate Justice principles:** Climate Justice awards are designed for scalability, enabling replication of processes across cities to drive global progress toward carbon neutrality.
- **Cross-sectoral pioneering:** CNCA funding seeds the convergence of governments, businesses, and communities, and accelerating adoption of cutting-edge technologies and practices.

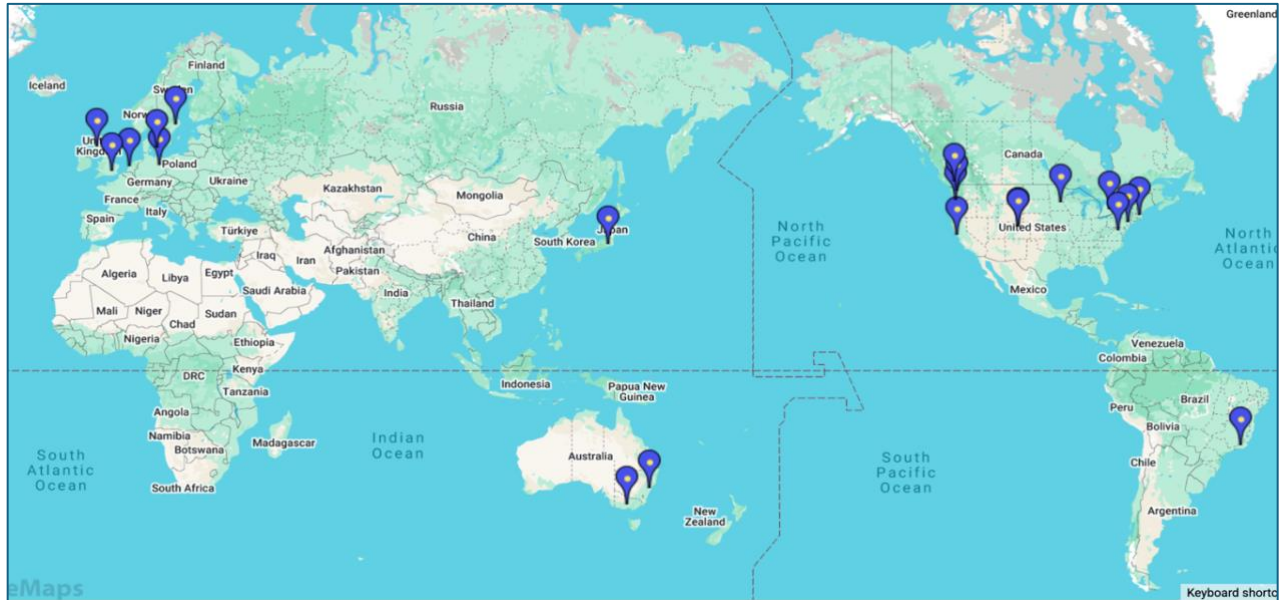


Figure 2. CNCA Award Map.

**Implications.** CNCA is now focusing on addressing the following gaps to achieving the long-term climate goals of cities around the world:

- **Address financial barriers for all.** More accessible and equitable financing mechanisms are needed, especially for low-income communities, small businesses, and marginalized groups. Developing incentives like grants and low-interest loans is critical to support global adoption of sustainable practices.
- **Standardize concepts as much as possible across regions.** Standardization and regional integration are always the goal, but CNCA takes a realistic approach to its funded work: parse out the transferable pieces, and don't wait for everyone to be on the same exact page or working within the exact same constraints. Scale concepts, and let the individual communities work out the nuances. At the end of the day, cities are systems of systems. They contain the same basic components no matter where they are in the world. Link up across regions as much as possible.
- **Do more of what is working to decarbonize systems.** Expanding infrastructure for technologies like carbon drawdown, zero-emission freight, and renewable energy is crucial. More investment is needed in facilities like carbon capture, EV charging, and waste-to-energy systems.
- **Push governance towards more flexibility.** Cities need adaptable policies and messaging to keep pace with emerging technologies and social realities. Efforts to build capacity in local governments, businesses, and communities must embrace the fact that the only constant is change. No win or loss can ever be considered permanent. The goal is to ever evolve civic society towards sustainability. Transformation is a long game.

### Appendix 3. The Equitable Transportation Fund Case Study

**Value Proposition.** *To stop the inequities and environmental harm caused by the U.S. transportation system.* Though this sector is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, it is typically ignored by philanthropy and city sustainability offices. The Equitable Transportation Fund (ETF) fills a critical gap by:

- Directing capital to grassroots organizations advocating for equitable, clean mobility solutions.
- Supporting systemic reforms at local, state, and national levels to prioritize public transit, electrification, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.
- Providing flexible, trust-based funding to communities left out of transportation decision-making.

**Designing for Impact.** ETF primarily operates as a pooled fund to support mobility advocates, enabling systemic transportation transformation through grassroots efforts. Since its inception in 2020, ETF has granted over **\$2 million to 42 mobility advocacy organizations, leveraging an additional \$3.58 million in funds—a 133.79% return on investment.** ETF works within the broader policy landscape, aligning with strategic frameworks like the [Shared Mobility 2030 Action Agenda](#). Grantees are found [here](#).

- **The Clean RIDES Network (CRN)** is an initiative of ETF that has granted **\$905,000 to 22 mobility advocate groups** in 7 states (California, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, and Pennsylvania). They are working together to change how governors, legislature, and Departments of Transportation (DOTs) spend transportation funding. Thus far, CRN has:
  - Accelerated policy and funding shifts toward clean transportation at the state level.
  - Supported grassroots mobilization, with Pennsylvania securing \$153 million in state funds for transit and Minnesota passing a landmark climate accountability law.
  - Integrated equity, branding, and governance strategies across state initiatives.
  - Developed 7 internal State Campaign Plans.

While ETF asks grantees to signal their own community priorities, it tracks the big picture of legislative changes on account of this work. Work spanning everything from to e-bike libraries (Northeast Transportation Connections), sidewalk accessibility mapping (Front and Center), and fareless transit pilots (Move LA) can feel un-strategic when looked at individually. However, when exemplified collectively, grantees like Transportation Alternatives and BikeWalkKC have mobilized thousands of residents, built durable coalitions, and launched community-led redesign campaigns that have led to legislative wins like transit funding increases, climate accountability laws, and congestion pricing work.

**Lessons.** While ETF grantees do the work at the community-scale, ETF tracks what is working:

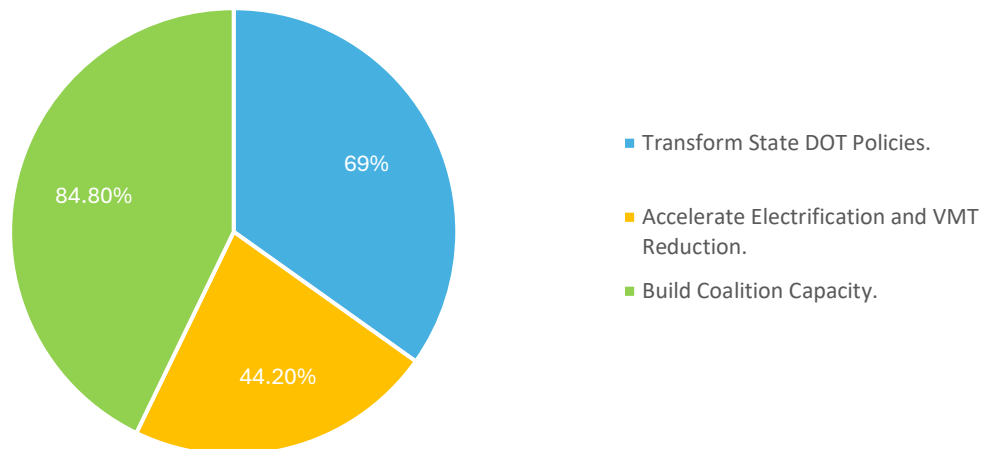
- **Community engagement is key.** Effective campaigns are resident-led. Our Streets Minneapolis showed how aligning with community voices drives agency responses.
- **Storytelling enhances advocacy.** Transportation Alternatives gathered personal stories that shaped local transit safety and Open Streets programs.
- **Flexibility in funding leads to success.** ETF's trust-based approach enabled groups like Futurewise and Payne-Phalen Community Council to scale efforts and leverage millions in new funding.

- **Strategic partnerships matter.** Groups like Active Transportation Alliance built alliances with 12 community organizations to drive regional collaboration.
- **Balancing government collaboration and accountability is key.** Grantees like Riders Alliance and Detroit People’s Platform challenge decision-makers while working within systems.

**Performance Metrics.** The ETF evaluates the impacts of awarded grants through metrics that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. They are designed to provide investment direction for future ETF Request for Proposals (RFPs) by showing progress toward the 3 priority areas shown in Figure 1. Within all goal and priority areas, grantees use ETF funds to:

- Support advocacy, especially those with leadership from priority communities.
- Advance just and clean transportation solutions at the local, State and Federal levels.

These metrics capture a variety of data points that are used to tell multiple story lines of impact. Measurement is based on annual assessment of portfolio data collected during final grant reporting.



**Figure 1. Percent of Funded Projects Classed Against ETF Goals.**

**Implications.** Expanding ETF’s funding base increases the scope of support for grantees. Current priorities include:

- **Change State Department of Transportation (DOT) Policies.** Transform DOT policies and planning to account for transportation’s impact on health, climate, and community.
  - *Note: This new executive order has brought States under scrutiny, complicating this item.*
- **Accelerate Electrification and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Reduction.** Accelerate the implementation of transit, electrification, and active transportation.
- **Build Coalition Capacity.** Build and sustain the capacity of local, regional, and national advocates to advance holistic transportation policies at all levels of governance.
- **Build the Field.** Continue to be a convener, actively sharing resources so that grantees and funders can see the continuous thread of strategy and support. The fund ensures that resources are always available to practitioners even if sites like the federal DOT go dark.

## Appendix 4. Partners for Places Case Study

**Value Proposition.** To enhance local capacity to build equitable and sustainable communities in the United States and Canada. This network provides matching funding opportunities to support the **planning and implementation of urban sustainability and green stormwater infrastructure projects.**

**Designing for Impact.** To achieve this goal, Partners for Places (P4P) offers competitive funding opportunities. The General Fund supports the spreading of local Equitable Climate Action (ECA) and / or Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) practices; and advancing of opportunities for local government, frontline communities, and place-based funders to build trusting partnerships and develop projects together. This request for proposals (RFP) is open once per year and refined with input from the Selection Committee and Governance Committee. In the past, P4P has also offered the following opportunities:

- **P4P Equity Initiative Grants** were awarded to test how to help local governments build capacity to center equity in their sustainability work and institutionalize equity principles in climate work.
- **P4P Mini Grants** supported the building of collaborative partnerships between 2020 and 2022, so that relationships between applying partners could be strengthened as they built their work plans.
- **Federal Funding Proposal Assistance** opportunity was extended to past grantees (Grant Rounds 17 – 19) so that they could connect and align around an application for federal infrastructure funding that advanced equitable climate action and stormwater projects.



Figure 1. Partners for Places Award Map.

**Investment Summary.** P4P has funded **209 awards** since 2012, totaling **\$11,855,155 USD** investment (Figure 1). P4P projects have **leveraged an additional \$107,195,579<sup>13</sup>** to support continuing work.

<sup>13</sup> Leverage figures are updated as feedback is received from grantees. The following awards contribute to the leveraged funds total: Round 7 - Indianapolis, IN (\$50M), Round 2 - Cleveland, OH (\$5M), and Round 17 - Chicago, IL (\$20M), collectively totaling \$75M in leveraged funds. Without these 3 highly leveraged grantees, the leveraged amount since 2012 would be \$39M.

- **2012 – 2024 P4P investments:**
  - 154 General P4P awards (Rounds 1 - 21) - \$10,526,829
  - 32 P4P Mini Grant awards (Rounds 1 - 5) - \$354,645
  - 12 Federal Funding Proposal Assistance awards - \$357,700
  - 11 P4P Equity Initiative awards (Rounds 1 - 2) - \$615,981
- **Impact Metrics:**
  - 16.9% of all P4P awards support Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI).
  - 84.2% of closed projects prioritize the resilience needs of frontline communities.
  - 86.9% of closed projects report that their relationships with partners are strengthened.
  - 88.5% of awards focus on the process of community alignment around common goals.

**Lessons.** P4P is a learning fund, constantly adjusting based on grantee and committee findings:

- **Peer learning effectively spreads practices.** Regular convening of grantee cohorts advances the field of sustainability by allowing space for conversations that influence the applications of equity concepts and work in various communities.
- **Seeding collaborations pays long-term dividends to communities.** Collaboration between local funders, community-based organizations, and local governments unlocks funding for communities long after the seed grants that initially gather these partners are spent.
- **Equity-focused investments address complex challenges.** Tackling climate, water, and equity challenges through collaborative efforts in underserved communities is the most impactful place to start when the goal is to ultimately make entire cities and regions more climate resilient.
- **Adapt and evolve to meet changing needs.** Programs must remain responsive to fluctuating needs, particularly around project management and organizational transitions, to refine and improve future support services.

**Implications.** P4P is going through a recapitalization campaign now. Current priorities are to:

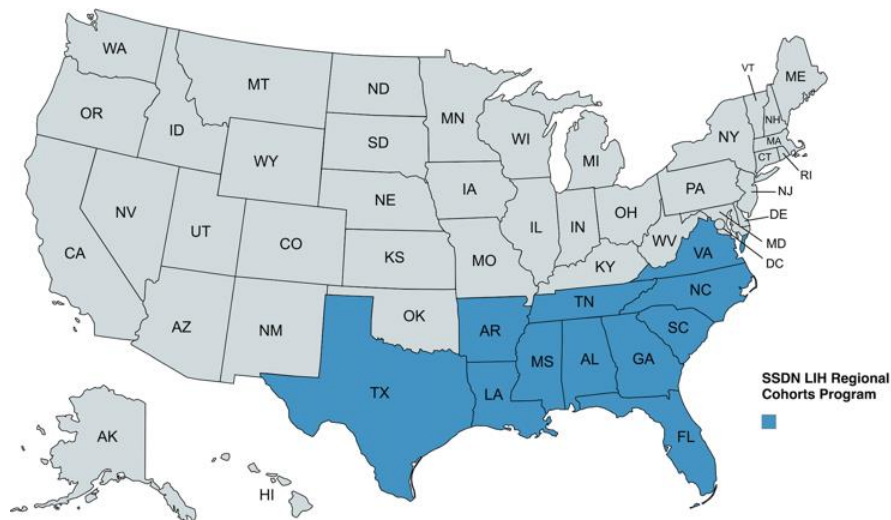
- **Strengthen local partnerships for impact.** Prioritize building lasting collaborations between local governments, community organizations, and funders to drive sustainable, community-driven solutions with technical support and resources.
- **Support climate solutions in rural and small-town America.** Focus on empowering rural and small communities to address climate challenges by providing funding, technical assistance, and tailored solutions to help them implement effective sustainability projects.
- **Build inclusive green economies.** Promote equitable investments in workforce development, clean energy, and water infrastructure, creating economic opportunities in climate-resilient industries for historically excluded communities.
- **Unlock public funding for community needs.** Help communities access and utilize local, state, and federal funds by providing technical assistance, grant-writing support, and strategic guidance to ensure effective and equitable use of public resources.

## Appendix 5. The Southeast Sustainability Directors Network Case Study

**Value Proposition.** To provide **technical assistance (TA) to local governments and community partners as they accessed 2023-24 federal funding opportunities for climate projects.** The **Local Infrastructure Hub (LIH)** Regional Cohorts program bridged a gap for Southeast organizations and municipalities that lacked the resources or expertise to apply for and manage federal grants (Figure 1).

**Designing for specific impact.** This fund was built to enhance capacity building supported collaboration between local governments and community partners as they aligned with federal funding priorities by:

- Supporting applications to federal funding programs like the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Community Change Grant, and USDOT Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Grant.
- Strengthening partnerships between municipalities and community-based organizations.
- Providing technical assistance, grant writing, and project management support to enhance competitiveness for federal grants.
- Building capacity for grantees to continue applying for and managing federal funds independently.
- Facilitating connections with technical assistance providers and subject matter experts to strengthen proposals.



**Figure 1. SSDN LIH Program Served Communities in the Highlighted Regions.**

**Proof of concept.** It worked. Of the \$1,161,000 provided in 39 TA agreements, 64% of grantees won their targeted federal funding:

- The **Georgia BRIGHT Communities Coalition** applied for EPA’s Solar for All program and won **\$156M** to deliver energy savings, jobs and business growth to disadvantaged communities statewide.
- The cities of **Decatur, Atlanta and Savannah, GA** were awarded a **\$500,000** Energy Futures Grant from the DOE to achieve clean energy and resilience goals.

- **Arkansas Coalition** of Local Stakeholders led by the Arkansas Advanced Energy Foundation applied for the EPA's Solar for All Program and were **awarded \$93.6M** to improve solar energy accessibility.
- **Solar United Neighbors** supported 22 EPA Solar for All applications and 2 applications to the Puerto Rico Energy Resilience Fund. They were **successful in securing over \$2.1 billion** in federal funding to support solar and resilience projects across multiple states.
- **Impact metrics:**
  - 92% reported formal commitments to equity.
  - 88% established new community partnerships.
  - 96% of partnerships will continue beyond the grant period.
  - 81% reported increased capacity to seek future federal funding.

**Lessons learned.** Like most learning programs, this model can be refined by acknowledging that:

- **Early project planning is critical.** Grantees who defined their project ideas early had more successful applications.
- **Regular communication with partners is essential.** Ongoing communication with community partners helped streamline application processes and strengthened submissions.
- **Grant writing capacity is limited.** Many grantees needed TA due to a lack of these capabilities.
- **Technical assistance is underutilized.** Those grantees who did not fully take advantage of their TA opportunities had a markedly lower success rate.
- **Time constraints affected application quality.** Coalition-led applications struggled with aligning multiple priorities, often leading to rushed or weaker submissions.

**Implications.** This fund concluded at the end of 2024. Communities are now trying to hold on to the funds they were awarded. Any future programs modeled after it should:

- **Allocate more funds for actual grant writing support** instead of leaving this to applicant teams.
- **Provide teams with project management coordination support**, not assuming that they are good at communicating with each other already at time of application.
- **Build staff positions into grant applications** to help the team when an award is made.
- **Enhance tracking and reporting** by improving systems for measuring long-term impacts beyond the grant period. Utilize a customer relationship management (CRM) software like Salesforce.
- **Strengthen partnerships** by ensuring that any TA provided is designed to foster independence via stronger relationships between local governments and community organizations. This will help to sustain collaboration beyond grant cycles.
- **Track grants once awarded** by requiring proof of federal application submission and a final report. Track overarching fund goal metrics from final grantee reports, as well as submission of the federal grant and whether the grantee was awarded or not to understand the effectiveness of this kind of fund programming.

## Appendix 6. The Urban Sustainability Directors Network Case Study

**Value Proposition.** *To create a healthier environment, economic prosperity, increased social equity, and shared best practices that accelerate the application of good ideas.* This US and Canada network of local government professionals supports member activities with the greatest amount of leverage and impact; therefore, **funding opportunities are constantly being added, tested, evaluated, and refined**, with an eye on the **long-term strategy of growing the field of urban sustainability.**

**Designing for Impact.** To achieve this goal, USDN is continuously offering evolved and competitive funding to members. Right now, USDN is hosting:

- **The Catalyst Fund**, currently supporting novel approaches to climate work, partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs - especially resourcing organizations doing impactful work who may soon lack federal support), and collaborations between members, across departments, and spanning jurisdictions.
  - This request for proposals (RFP) is offered quarterly and refined with input from the Catalyst Fund Selection Committee.
- Opportunities are sometimes offered to specific cities for specific purposes. For example, the **Mid-Sized Cities Lowenstein Fund** is supporting Cincinnati, OH; Baltimore, MD; Detroit, MI; Scottsdale, AZ as they use USDN's Resilience Hub framework to advance local Hub infrastructure. USDN's **Urban and Community Forestry Fund** is a pass-through from the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Inflation Reduction Act grant. This funding seeks to assist 39 U.S. communities as they enhance green spaces through community-driven forest management.

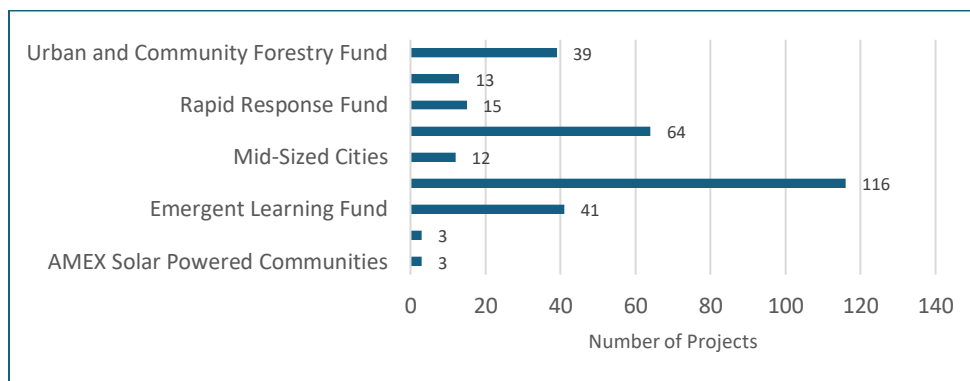
In the past, USDN has offered the following opportunities:

- **The American Express Solar Powered Communities Fund** (2023 - 2024) supported the installation of solar energy systems in low- and moderate- income communities in Phoenix, Salt Lake City, and Sydney, Australia. The purpose was to empower their efforts to support emissions reductions, energy efficiency, and climate change resilience for underrepresented communities through the installation of photovoltaic systems, and to share lessons for other cities to use.
- **The Emergent Learning Fund** (2022 - 2024) supported members with flexible resources to do their most pressing work. This opportunity nimbly moved investments into the hands of USDN members to support the field as it reinvented and equipped itself to best respond to climate emergencies in a post-pandemic world.
- **The Rapid Response Fund** (2020 - 2021) was designed to support innovation around the COVID crises to test new and more equitable community engagement methods and use virtual convenings to facilitate peer learning in the uncertain times of COVID.
- **The Innovation Fund** (2009 - 2020) supported USDN members to collaborate around the development and refinement of innovative ways to solve a problem, or to leverage a field-advancing opportunity. These innovations resulted in new policies, practices, tools, programs, and organizational models for widespread sharing and adoption.

- **The Peer Learning Exchange** (2013 - 2020) supported 1-to-1 or small group peer exchanges for members who wanted to meet in person with their peers to learn about and share lessons from one or more practices, policies, or programs that advance local sustainability goals.
- **The Special Projects Fund** (2011 – 2013) supported USDN members researching specific interests in a working group environment.

**Investment Summary.** USDN has funded **306 awards** since 2009, totaling **\$30,780,046 USD** investment. USDN projects have **leveraged an additional \$31,292,732 USD** to support continuing work (Figure 1).<sup>14</sup>

- **2009 – 2020 USDN Innovation Fund, Peer Learning Exchange, Rapid Response, and Special Projects** investments:
  - 116 Innovation Fund awards - \$5,507,075
  - 64 Peer Learning awards - \$352,584
  - 15 Rapid Response awards - \$202,242
  - 13 Special Projects awards - \$558,844
- **2022 – 2024 USDN** investments:
  - 41 Emergent Learning Fund awards - \$628,506
  - 39 Urban and Community Forestry awards - \$22,073,395
  - 12 Mid-Sized Cities Fund awards - \$633,000
  - 3 American Express Solar Powered Communities Fund awards - \$775,000
  - 3 Catalyst Fund awards - \$49,400



**Figure 1. USDN Awards by Fund Type.**

**Lessons.** As the oldest regranting mechanism featured in this study, USDN reaffirms 2 major lessons:

- **Flexible, unrestricted funding opportunities build long-term climate capacities.** Funding that prioritizes collaboration allows communities to address urgent climate challenges in a way that is responsive to their unique needs and circumstances. This kind of funding is most adept at gap-filling where other funding sources can't or won't. It acts as a launch point, spurring climate work to continue well beyond any given award.

<sup>14</sup> Includes the recent USDN Forestry awards for USFS. They do not impact the leverage number as this data is not being collected from these grantees.

- **Members have moved beyond rigid and prescriptive climate approaches.** They are using USDN’s flexible funding to exploring multilateral climate solutions tailored to local, metro, and regional contexts. They are avoiding repeating mistakes and creatively multiplying time and resources.

**Implications.** USDN has a history of finding a healthy balance between serving members with flexible funding streams and allowing various funders to also experiment with specific initiatives.

- USDN members **work at different levels and paces** to mitigate and adapt to climate change. USDN’s funding opportunities meet members where they are, to **ensure that innovation and scaling of climate work can happen regardless of whether a community is beginner or advanced.**
  - A large community can be in the beginning stages, and a small one can be advanced. Population size is less of a driver than State, Provincial, and local political leanings.
- Over a decade of investment has shown that **smaller awards greatly serve communities in the beginning to intermediate stages as they push past political opposition** to apply practices from their more advanced peers. Larger awards support more advanced communities as they gather with peers facing similar challenges and tackle chronic field obstacles together.
- **USDN’s niche in the climate field is to serve as both idea incubator and scaling mechanism** for climate work. Instead of trying to staff experts on all sustainability topics, its deep expertise lies in its ability to facilitate its membership in ways that enable them to do what needs to be done in advancing climate practice – whatever the context.
  - Nothing is better at facilitating this than the member funding mechanisms, where peers select the best ideas and approaches crowdsourced from the membership body.
  - By tapping countless member volunteer hours to test and refine climate approaches that their peers can then run with, USDN pushes members to drive the field forward despite external obstacles. The cycle is replicated again and again to grow the field (Figure 2).



Figure 2. USDN’s Field Building Pathway Rendered the City of Ft. Collins, CO.