



**JUST
TRANSITION/
TRANSITION
TO JUSTICE:**

**POWER,
POLICY AND
POSSIBILITIES**

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This work would not have been possible without our interviewees, who generously gave their time and insight; they are all listed in Appendix 1 of the report and so we do not repeat their names here. More importantly, this work – and the possibility of a transition to justice in our economy and our environment – would not be possible without the inspiring work they all do to build a more sustainable and more equitable world. We hope that we have done them justice in the pages that follow, capturing their insights, strategies, and sense of both challenge and hope in the work ahead.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in a world in transformation and transition. As we address the central challenges of our time – a heating planet, an unequal economy, and persistent racial injustice – it is key to weave together our strategies to achieve a more sustainable and equitable society. One frequently described path to do so is “just transition” – a strategy to shift away from fossil fuels to a low-carbon future while protecting fossil fuel communities and workers, as well as communities who have historically suffered from the pollution from those industries.

What we suggest in this report is that just transition is one part of a larger “transition to justice” – that is, an effort to not just address the damage from a needed change in our energy systems but an attempt to center economic, racial, and social equity as we refashion our nation’s approach to both climate and the economy. This large holistic vision requires not just a commitment to policy but an emphasis on power.

By this, we do not mean whether our energy is clean or dirty – although this is part of the picture – but rather whether key policies are community-based and community-serving or corporate-driven and business-sponsored. Too often, approaches to just transition can sound like a policy list of wise technocratic arguments– but while better policy benefits from solid research, it is often the result of building community power *and* reducing the influence of bad actors.

In doing this work of policy and politics, states matter: federal policy can set important nationwide standards but many federal programs depend upon state implementation, and states are also important because state level experimentation can inform national policy. Moreover, the most ambitious and creative movements and organizing efforts are often found at the state level – and such robust state organizing and movement infrastructure can be key to guarding against inequities.



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one part of a larger
“transition to justice”**

This report looks at this process of power building for just transition in four states: California, Kentucky, Louisiana, and New York. We combine an analysis of the pillars of just transition – strong governmental support, dedicated funding streams, diverse coalitions, and economic diversification – with an analysis of how to change power at a state level that focuses on the conditions that impact possibilities, the community-level capabilities that facilitate effective voice, and the arenas in which power is contested.

In the research, we relied on both quantitative data and a series of interviews with key leaders working for just transition in the respective states. From these conversations we heard six key priorities for a just transition, including: 1) supporting the workers of industries in transition; 2) sustaining investment in communities impacted by transition or by extractive industries; 3) improving enforcement of existing regulations; 4) funding new energy development through taxes or fines on fossil fuel companies; 5) embracing community-driven planning and decision-making; and 6) including broad social healing and restoration as a necessary part of the process.

The respective case studies reveal a range of nuances, including the challenges faced in supposedly progressive California, the need to understand resistance as tied to culture and not just politics in Kentucky, the difficulties in tackling the petrochemical industry in Louisiana, and the power of coalition politics in New York. While the main body of the report offers much detail, the key takeaways from our cross state-level analysis are as follows:

1. ***Understand that just transition will look different in different places.*** Head-long rushes to a green economy are a difficult sell in places long reliant of fossil fuel employment. Stressing local voices and local benefits is most effective.
2. ***Focus on culture as well as policy.*** Work is a lived experience; as one organizer put it, a transition can be “worse than losing a source of income. It just leaves you hopeless.” Taking culture seriously and with respect is key.
3. ***Build relationships that can last.*** Short-term coalitions based on transactional alliances can easily be derailed. It is also key to reach out to administrators who will implement change. Take the time to build strong relationships.
4. ***Advance progressive change by shifting policy and politics.*** Policy wins are important, but the more fundamental task is to shift the balance of power toward disenfranchised communities. This can occur far from the immediate policy fights.

5. **Build broad-based coalitions for better results.** One of the long-term benefits of short-term campaigns can be people learning from others in different places with different experiences. Keep an eye on breadth as well as reach.
6. **Forge coalitions from the ground-up to bridge divides and cement bonds.** Outside interests coming into a state or region without centering and engaging local organizations and advocates cannot build a lasting coalition. Start ground-up.
7. **Complement legislative initiatives with administrative changes, executive actions, and lawsuits.** Policy wins make headlines but change depends on implementation – and that requires administrative action and sometimes legal action. Campaign wins are more than passing policy.
8. **Focus on building power and not just changing policy.** In the long-run, what sustains a policy change is an effective base of community power that can hold decision-makers accountable. Stay focused on power building.
9. **Consider states as laboratories for advancing equity and building power.** While national change is necessary, it is important to create change with immediate local benefits. States allow for experimentation with both policy and power.
10. **Invest in long-term community-based efforts with fewer restrictions.** For a broad “transition to justice,” we need community-based organizations with deep benches and the ability to adjust to changing conditions. Funders should invest accordingly.

Ultimately, the fight for a just transition is a fight for justice. And, while we know it will be hard and long, the stories we heard showed how advocates and organizers, often in the face of great odds, come together and force the change that makes people’s lives better. Building upon these efforts through supporting organizing, coalition building, and empowering communities is the blueprint for advancing a just transition. Through these channels, we can transition from a dirty polluting past to a just and healthy future.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world in transformation and transition. An overriding concern for our times is the inevitable shift away from fossil fuels to a low-carbon future – and how to make this both rapid and equitable. To ensure such a “just transition” in the move to a low-carbon future, we need to understand not just the policies but the politics needed to protect fossil fuel communities and workers, as well as workers and communities historically excluded from the fossil fuel economy.

But this is not the only crisis we face. Despite good news on vaccinations in the United States and several other countries, we remain in the midst of a global health crisis and a deep economic recession that has scarred many even as some have thrived. It has become clear that not only are we transitioning away from fossil fuels, we are also transitioning to a post-COVID world. This transition is quicker and more immediate than the energy transition but there are lessons that can be learned from and applied to both.

The first is that justice matters. As we have seen with the COVID crisis, there are valleys of inequality in our society and when we are hit with a tsunami – be it from a pandemic or a major economic transformation – it is those families and communities in the lowlands that will be hit the quickest and the hardest. The way to avoid this is to prioritize equity and this requires that we go beyond the usual rhetoric of “just transition” – which can sometimes sound like addressing the damage from a needed change in our energy systems – and instead center economic, racial, and social equity as we refashion our nation’s approach to both climate and the economy.



States are also important because state level experimentation can inform national policy.

The second is that states matter. Federal policy can set important nationwide standards but many federal programs depend upon state implementation, something made obvious by the disparate state-level performance in either containing COVID or administering vaccines. Monitoring state action is particularly impactful in states with conservative governments that are not interested in ambitious climate policy, reducing inequality, or even prioritizing public health. On the flip side, states are also important because state level experimentation can inform national policy. Moreover, the most ambitious and creative movements and organizing efforts are often found at the state level – and such robust state organizing and movement infrastructure can be key to guarding against inequities.

The third lesson is that power matters. By this we do not mean whether our energy is clean or dirty – although this is part of the picture – but rather whether key policies are community-based and community-serving or corporate-driven and business-sponsored. Policy is necessary but not sufficient for change. Policies must be coupled with both building power and reducing power – that is, limiting the influence of bad actors. To address the threats to public health from both COVID and the broader climate crisis, power must be built at scale – at the local, state, and national levels – to advance ambitious and equitable policies while the power of the fossil fuel industry and other retrograde interests must be reduced.

As we face the challenges from the climate crisis and the COVID-crisis, it is clear that we are past the point of incremental reform. We need solutions that match the magnitude of both global warming and widespread injustice. We clearly need to move past fossil fuels but we also need a “transition to justice” where we fully accept that centering equity will lead to better and more sustainable systems. This means stretching our analytical horizons beyond energy technicalities to look at the constellation of organizing activity that will be needed to generate that future. To advance ambitious policies that address the scale of the crises we face, we need to understand how power is constituted, contested, and commanded.



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ROADMAP FOR THIS REPORT

To more fully understand what is needed for this sort of just transition and how it can be actualized at the state level, in this report we stitch together two strands of previous research. The first, captured in our co-authored report, *A Roadmap to an Equitable Low-Carbon Future: Four Pillars for a Just Transition*, involves a framework for developing just transition policies; we stressed there that the four pillars were strong governmental support, dedicated funding streams, strong and diverse coalitions, and economic diversification.

Strong governmental support is needed to meet the immediate needs of workers and communities facing a power plant, mine, or other closure by providing wage, benefit, housing support, and revenue replacement. Strong governmental support is also needed to plan for and implement long-term transformation of fossil fuel regions. Dedicated funding streams are needed to provide steady and robust financing of transition programs and support for workers and communities. Strong and diverse coalitions are needed to build a broad base of power and to ensure a diversity of interests are represented. Finally, economic diversification is needed to bring new industries into former fossil fuel regions to diversify economic opportunity and prevent communities being dependent upon only one industry.



2017 DC Climate March, 2017

Source: Wiki image, Photographer: Mark Dixon, Pittsburgh, PA

Pillars of a Just Transition	Short-term Elements	Long-term Elements
Strong Governmental Support	Policies that provide immediate support to communities and workers negatively impacted by plant and mine closures	Policies that restructure local economies and transform former fossil fuels sites
Dedicated Funding Streams	Address short-term needs, such as wage replacement or replacing lost tax revenue when a plant shuts down	Invest in long-term needs, such as seeding new business development and funding long-term training and retraining programs
Strong, Diverse Coalitions	Consider how tactical alliances around key immediate issues can be shaped with an eye toward more permanent alliances between community, labor, and others	Maintain interests— particularly workers and communities— working together on transition plans that addresses the needs of directly impacted stakeholders and also scale up to more ambitious policies
Economic Diversification	Create vision for the economy that re-imagines local “just economies” free of fossil fuel infrastructure	Implementation of community visioning with particular focus on moving away from reliance on single industry and centering racial, economic, and environmental equity

The second strand for our analysis came from an analytical frame developed in an earlier report co-authored by one of us, *Changing States: A Framework for Progressive Governance*. In that work, we sought to explicitly understand the terrain and possibilities for progressive governance at the state level, one of the key issues in this effort. That framework focused on three main dimensions of power building: 1) The conditions (i.e., demographic, economic, political, and geographic) that create the context for social change efforts; 2) The capacities (i.e., organizational breadth and depth, networks and alliances, leadership ladders and lattices, and resource bases) for building power toward governance; and 3) The arenas (i.e., electoral, legislative, judicial, administrative, corporate, and communications) in which power is contested as progressive efforts for change are being waged, won, implemented, and protected.

Combined together, this blended analysis provides both an idea of what policies are needed to advance a just transition and, crucially, a power building pathway by which these policies can be achieved and defended at the state level. Policy is sometimes thought about in the absence of a consideration of power or scale; policy-making is made to seem like a technocratic affair in which expert testimony and well-designed instruments will win the day. But this ignores the political economy of change. After all, research had told us for a long time that raising the minimum wage was a good idea; however it wasn't till there was a "Fight for \$15" that good policy was boosted by strong organizing. And notably, it was a series of local and state victories that is now making possible a national consideration of raising the minimum wage.

Taken together, the *what*, *how*, and *where* of just transition addresses the reality that policy development and power building must go hand in hand, and that this often bubbles up from local and state efforts. In this report, we cannot cover all locales and so instead chose to focus on the intersections of policy and power in California, Kentucky, Louisiana, and New York.

The specific states were chosen to present a spectrum of climate policies from very ambitious (California and New York) to almost non-existent (Kentucky and Louisiana). California, Kentucky, and Louisiana are extractive states and the comparison of California to Kentucky and Louisiana is instructive, as well as unexpected. California and New York are also large states that can show how state regulations can drive change, including California's shift away from combustion engines and toward electric vehicles, and New York's procurement of offshore wind, which is both the largest in the country and also includes strong labor provisions. Kentucky and Louisiana are instructive for understanding how to advance progressive policies in more challenging environments.



Taken together, the *what*, *how*, and *where* of just transition addresses the reality that policy development and power building must go hand in hand, and that this often bubbles up from local and state efforts.

To understand the political and economic context of each state, we compiled state profiles that gave us an overview of the economic, demographic, and political conditions in each state.¹ To ground reality beyond data and statistics, this background research was enhanced with expert interviews with policy advocates, organizers, and government administrators. A list of interviewees is presented in Appendix 1 and the set of questions we asked presented in Appendix 2. This report and analysis would not have been possible without our interviewees giving generously of their time and insights.

The report opens with a discussion of what is meant by “just transition” and what is needed to advance a just transition. Then, it presents a more in-depth explanation of the *Changing States* analysis and the conditions, arenas, and capacities needed for change. Next, we present case studies of each state that provide a brief socio-economic overview, then apply our framework to consider the terrain for viable progressive change and understand the state experiences with regard to power building and movement mobilization. The final section looks across all four states to see what cross-state lessons can be learned.

Understanding how to advance a just transition does not mean it will be easy and we do not mean to suggest so. Very powerful interests will work very hard to ensure nothing fundamentally changes. But, what we learned through this research is that even in the face of great opposition, people and communities can win progressive change. It may take years and it is undeniably difficult, but when community power is built, policies and practices that protect communities from environmental harms, advance ambitious climate efforts, and provide support for workers can become a reality.

¹ We draw on this detailed state profiles in the state case studies below. Unless otherwise cited, the state-level data on the industry level is sourced from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). All analysis related to demographic and economic data is taken from USC ERI analysis of: IPUMS USA; U.S. Census Bureau; Woods & Poole Economics, Inc; GeoLytics, Inc; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; and U.S. EPA National Air Toxics Assessment. The full state briefs can be found at: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/eri/just-transition-state-briefs/>

DEFINING “JUST TRANSITION”

The idea of just transition was first introduced by the late labor leader Tony Mazzocchi in the 1970s. Mazzocchi argued for a “Superfund for Workers” that could support workers as they transition out of toxic industries (Leopold 2007). Shortly thereafter, environmental justice advocates also posited ideas of just transition that expanded the idea to include support for communities who bear the pollution burden from a fossil fuel economy but have been largely shut out of the economic benefits and fossil fuel jobs (Cha, Wander, and Pastor 2020). Since that time, the term has become more mainstream, particularly as social and economic concerns become more integrated into climate policy. The Green New Deal resolution, for instance, explicitly calls for a just transition and includes provisions for direct investment in and support for communities and workers experiencing transition (Ocasio-Cortez 2019).

In understanding what policies are necessary to advance a just transition, we began our interviews by asking interviewees to describe what they meant by “just transition.” What we found was not only regional differences, but also a difference in visions of just transition that ranged from protecting fossil fuel workers and communities to more transformative goals that look to transition away from deep structural inequality to a more equitable society and economy.

Indeed, one of the most significant findings from our interviews was opposition to the term “just transition” – and not just from proponents of the continued use of fossil fuels. The opposition to the term stemmed from a concern that the term was too vague and did not have a uniform and universal understanding that can bring more people into the fold. There was a sense that it had become popular with those steeped in the jargon, such as policy elites, and created separation from those that are actually experiencing transition. Along these lines, the term was also seen as too academic and unable to describe community concerns.

Advocates worried less about the concept and more about the terminology, specifically about the tendency of terminology to replace the need to address the stark realities of organizing or power building. As one interviewee stated:

I could go out to the street or I could go to Walmart, I could stop 25 people. None of them would know what Just Transition means. You stop anybody and ask them what War on Coal means. They know that. It's like, man, progressives tend to hide what they're doing, and then create a language that's only for the cognoscenti, and I think that what we've done, you know, everybody goes through a transition, right? You're getting a divorce, it's a transition. You lose your job, it's a transition. We know this terminology. The whole idea of a Just Transition meaning fair, more equitable, thoughtful, green – none of that really resonates ... And so it's basically a language made up by elites for elites to keep regular people out of the debate.

The long history of workers being displaced without any consideration or support adds to the opposition to the term. One too many empty promises of a just transition has created deep distrust and opposition to the term. The view among some workers when they hear just transition, as explained by an interviewee, is that:

[P]eople use this term with the idea of a nod towards the labor force as opposed to a concrete plan of here's how I'm going to get it done. And I think part of the problem in labor is people have heard that so often for so many years that they now are at the point where they're saying yeah, don't say that phrase ... Tell me what you actually mean. Because I hear that and then I hear me losing my job and then I don't hear anything else.”

Yet, other interviewees thought it was useful to have a term that unified struggles and acted as a shorthand when talking to decision-makers, with the understanding that socialization and organizing needed to be done for communities to feel ownership over the term. And, within the idea of ownership is a need for new narratives and complex stories to dispel long-standing myths of regions like Appalachia that have been painted as regressive and backward.

...the story of Appalachia has been one that is very inaccurate and is often false and misleading about who the people are and what the region really is about. And we really feel strongly that in order to have a just transition, we have to not only tell new and different stories and more complex stories to get people in the region onboard with this transition, but also to show that this place isn't what you think it is. So that's important to us.

With the understanding that just transition can mean different things to different people, additional questions arose: What does just transition look like? What are we transitioning into? From there, two main definitions of just transition emerged- one that saw just transition as a transition into a clean energy economy and another that saw just transition as more transformative where just transition is a transition to a more overall just society.

In the *transition to a clean energy economy*, just transition focuses on the immediate need to provide jobs for displaced fossil fuel workers and new industries for reliant communities, as fossil fuel activity declines. Even in the narrowest terms, focusing on the fossil fuel transition means every sector and segment of society will be impacted from electrifying appliances and vehicles to addressing utility and gas station closures to the impact losing those tax bases has on local communities. But transitioning to solar and wind energy, in and of itself, is not a just transition; rather, what is needed is equitable distribution of the benefits of both clean energy and the clean energy economy. This requires that all communities, particularly historically burdened communities, 1) have access to affordable clean energy and especially access to cleaner air as the result of reducing reliance on fossil fuel; 2) have access to the good, high quality jobs created by the clean energy economy; and 3) be shielded, if lower income, from any higher energy costs that might result from the transition.



Source: Wiki image, Photographer: Lollie-Pop

For the California Central Valley, which is home to oil and gas extraction and substantial agricultural activity, a just transition is not just for fossil fuel workers but also for farmworkers. While just transition discussions are largely focused on fossil fuel workers, advocates interviewed in the Central Valley see farmworkers as part of the effort for a just transition, as, “agriculture itself is very extractive, relies on fossil fuels, and it is a really extractive industry.” Moreover, there is an understanding that other industries are likely to face transition due to a changing climate and regions that have undergone an unjust transition, such as the loss of the timber industry in Northern California, should be included in discussions of just transition.

Articulating *just transition as a more transformative ideal* expands the definition of just transition to include transition away from poorly funded educational systems, away from depriving communities of resources, and away from a racially unjust system to a system that is built around the needs of communities, particularly those that have borne the burdens of the fossil fuel economy. This transformative idea of just transition, as offered by an interviewee, recognizes that any one individual is, “impacted by climate, by increasing prices, by jobs losses, by the health impacts of the pandemic,” and holistic solutions that address multiple concerns are needed because individuals face multiple challenges. Included in this definition of just transition are living wages, universal health care access, reforming policing practices, rural broadband access, and reinvestment in public education. Several interviewees discussed how a just transition invokes a more human-rights approach where the rights of all people, such as the right to live a fulfilling life free of exploitation, are respected and protected.

We think of this not simply as a “just transition” but also as a “transition to justice” in the sense of centering racial, economic, and environment equity in all policy arenas. This also has implications for process: Underscoring this sort of definition of just transition is the need for an inclusive process that centers those directly impacted by transition and those that have borne the historic burden of the fossil fuel economy. *How* just transition policies develop is integral to whether the transition is just.

ACHIEVING A JUST TRANSITION

Similar to differing definitions of a just transition, interviewees also had differing ideas of what is needed to move from fossil fuel reliance and social inequality to a more inclusive and sustainable economy. When considering what is needed for a just transition, six main priorities stood out in our interviews: 1) supporting the workers of industries in transition, 2) sustaining investment in communities impacted by transition or by extractive industries, 3) improving enforcement of existing regulations, 4) funding new energy development through taxes or fines on fossil fuel companies, 5) embracing community-driven planning and decision-making, and 6) understanding just transition as part of a process of broad social healing and restoration.

Six priorities for a just transition:

- 1. Support the workers of industries in transition;**
- 2. Sustain investment in communities impacted by transition or by extractive industries;**
- 3. Improve enforcement of existing regulations;**
- 4. Fund new energy development through taxes or fines on fossil fuel companies;**
- 5. Embrace community-driven planning and decision-making; and**
- 6. Stress the need for broad social healing and restoration;**

To support fossil fuel workers through the energy transition, many of our interviews called for creating high-paying union jobs with good benefits and pensions. Most often interviewees cited income replacement, healthcare coverage, pensions, unemployment support, retraining, and relocation support as necessary policies to get there. Enacting policies that support workers is the essence of just transition policy in a narrower vision of just transition. Interviewees explained that supporting workers throughout transition was critical to building new industries. As one interviewee explained:

We need policies that are going to support people now in the sort of immediate transition period, as well as policy [...] that's a little more long-term. [...] Well, in order to do that there is a lot of work that has to be done so that these communities can sustain a new economy, and the quality of life that people will want in order to be able to participate in whatever that new economy is."

Consistent, dependable investment in communities, especially those that have borne the brunt of extractive industries, is another critical part of just transition. Communities cannot afford to lose the tax revenue that results from shutting down fossil fuel plants, nor the job losses. Sustained funding for revenue replacement prevents cuts to public goods and local services. One organizer in Kentucky spoke to this reality as their community faced the decline of coal: "A lot of tax revenue that local governments got was from coal severance tax. And because that has been declining pretty precipitously in recent years, local governments have really been struggling to keep the lights on even and provide essential services like EMT and fire."

Without tax revenue to sustain basic services, communities reliant upon taxes from fossil fuel industries will need consistent investment streams. These investments could be used to help build local green infrastructure. As another Kentucky interviewee stated, "there's insufficient predictability of both funding and financing to promote the new sectors around clean energy and climate change."

Investment also provides an opportunity to rehabilitate communities that have been harmed by extractive industries. In places like Louisiana and California, fossil fuel infrastructure is often sited in communities of color, who bear the brunt of the pollution and health impacts but also lose jobs and tax revenue when plants close. Many of our interviewees saw the need to prioritize these communities for investment. This aspect of just transition, as explained by an interviewee, focuses on "redistributing these resources in a way that creates [...] living wage jobs and opportunities for people of color and women of color." Beyond repairing harm, there was a call for helping to grow and sustain renewable and regenerative industries that could replace the old carbon intensive ones.

Several interviewees made clear *that better enforcement of existing regulations* and funding for existing programs would provide a good starting point for transition. An organizer in Louisiana pointed to an existing program with the Louisiana Office of Workforce Development that provides reimbursement to companies for training workers in new skills. This program, they said, could be used to begin transitioning some workers in the fossil fuel industry immediately. Several interviewees cited the power of state energy utilities in forestalling energy transition, explaining that better regulation could compel these utilities to prioritize renewable energy. A leader in Kentucky told us that a lot of their work is holding the state accountable for enforcing mine safety regulations that protect workers and communities.

Interviewees also emphasized that *just transition must be funded in part from taxes and fines on polluting and extractive industries*. “We’ve got to make polluters pay. I think that’s number one,” said one California interviewee. Shifting the cost burden to polluting industries would not only raise revenue to provide sustainable funding for just transition policies and rehabilitate communities that have borne the brunt of fossil fuel production but also reduce the economic power of extractive industries and make those that pollute neighborhoods responsible for clean-up.

Democratic decision-making, community control, and bottom-up planning are also central to a just transition. Many of our interviews stressed the importance of building community. They wanted workers and communities to enact their vision of the future, rather than allow outside forces to determine it for them. One interviewee explained that part of just transition “is not trying to replace all the jobs, but rather to create the kinds of communities that people want to live in, because if the amenities are right, and if the communities are sound, then people will want to live there, and they’ll bring opportunity with them.”

Strategies to ensure such decision-making ranges from sustained, intentional public engagement to community control over new industries. One community leader stressed that “money and resources and a lot of thought needs to be put into how to make sure that the communities



Beyond repairing harm, there was a call for helping to grow and sustain renewable and regenerative industries that could replace the old carbon intensive ones.

that are suffering are the ones who are being listened to.” Community control is especially important for marginalized communities, who are often the ones who have seen the worst impacts of the fossil fuel economy. Many of these communities harbor deep skepticism about energy and economic transition, and one organizer told us that just transition “would [not] stand a chance without it starting on the ground.” Community involvement and democratic decision-making were critical not just to ensure communities were included, but to ensure that just transition could be actualized.

Some of our interviewees stressed *healing and regeneration as central elements of a more transformative vision* of just transition. In particular, interviewees emphasized addressing and repairing the deep societal inequities that have kept communities marginalized and overburdened. A Louisiana community leader summarized this viewpoint:

We’ve got to have healing, we’ve got to bring in culture [...] we are going to have to fix and redesign all at the same time our social infrastructure. We are going to have to learn and build not just from the ruins of disaster but in anticipation of what else is coming. [...] And I think we’re going to need policies around democracy, believe it or not. I mean we are seeing not just climate crisis, not health crisis, we’re seeing a crisis of our democracy.

One organizer saw the energy transition as only one part of a transition away from an extractive economy. “There’s other aspects of the extractive economy,” they said, that takes “land, labor, or people’s freedom as a resource, extracting away from that community, extracting the community’s collective wealth [...] and moving that into, you know, privatized industries or investors.” Fossil fuel energy production is just one part of an economy built on extraction of wealth, labor, and power from communities.

A just transition, therefore, requires more transformative changes, including building a new economy that is regenerative and life-sustaining beyond. With an eye towards the accelerating climate crisis, a desire was expressed for a politics centered around human needs and public goods. As another organizer put it, just transition is “not just for workers, not just for affected communities, but for literally every person.”

What is needed for a just transition ranges in scale and scope depending on whether it addresses the immediate material need or whether it advances a more transformative vision. At a minimum, a just transition enables workers and communities to weather economic changes while creating the conditions for new equitable and resilient local economies. Building upon that, sustained investment and economic support for workers and communities, democratic planning and decision-making, and addressing historic injustices puts us on the path towards a more holistically just society.

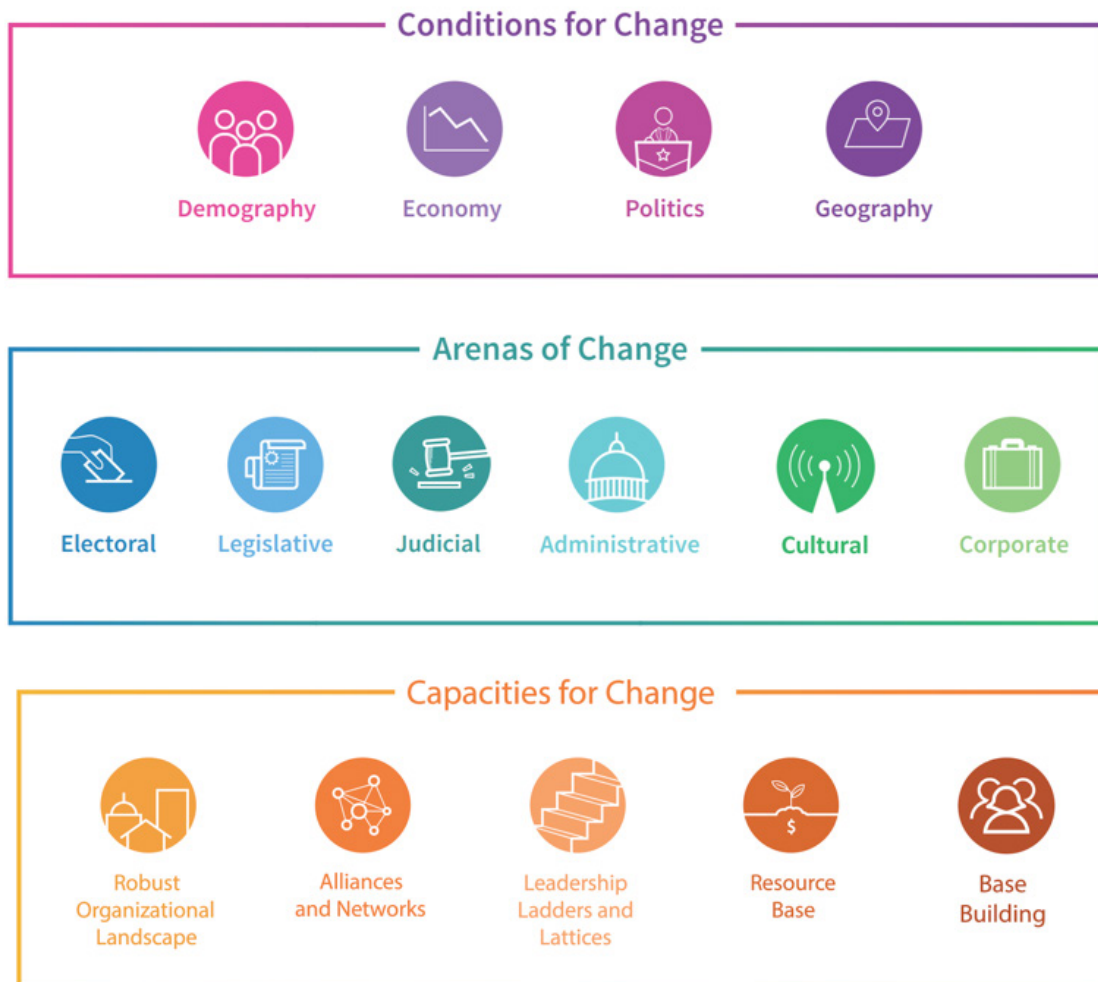
STATES, POWER, AND POLICY

While there are themes that connect just transition struggles across regions and states, the message that was most clear is that just transition will look different in every case and every place. *The Changing States* framework developed by the USC Equity Research Institute provides a way to understand the possibilities for accomplishing a just transition in different states. The framework is a tool that aims to explain the full scope of factors that lead to changes in state governance —by any party, though the research grew out of an interest in understanding how to build racial justice centered progressive governance. It seeks to move away from a simplistic belief that one political figure (e.g., a governor) wields all the power and towards an expansive definition that more accurately reflects what it takes to govern states in new ways. And it helps us to understand how just transition is happening differently in these four states; it is not a cookie cutter process and is heavily determined by the historical, cultural, contextual, political, economic, and power landscape of a state.

The *Changing States* framework looks at power building through three dimensions. The first dimension is conditions—the demographic, economic, political, and geographic aspects—that create the context for social change efforts. For example, from the 1980s to the turn of the century, California became majority people of color, its economy fundamentally shifted, and the Bay Area became the center of gravity in the nation for innovation —setting new conditions for state-level political possibilities with regard to both equity and the environment.

The second dimension is *capacities*—the movement building strategies for building power to take advantage of those condition. This involves a robust organizational landscape, alliances and networks, leadership ladders and lattices, and the resource base. This is traditionally the territory of social movement building —the work to build power and push policy systems in a new direction.

The third dimension is the decision-making *arenas*—the electoral, legislative, judicial, administrative, corporate, and cultural arenas in which power is contested and policy and practices are set. Here we can better understand governance, itself, including at the level of ideology and framing as well as in the implementation of policy victories.



In the case studies that follow, we reflect on how conditions, capacities, and arenas interact to create the playing field for the struggle for a just transition at the state level. Our goal here is not a technocratic comparison of “just transition” policies; thus, we spend little time debating the nuances of particular incentives or requirements. Rather we are interested in laying out the context for and challenges to passing and implementing just transition policies in California, Kentucky, Louisiana, and New York.

As will be seen, we do not consider every condition, capacity, or arena for each of the four state; instead, we lift up the most relevant ones that are either opportunities or barriers to power building for a just transition. Ultimately, we hope this will help funders, movement organizers, and everyone committed to addressing climate change determine how best to invest time, energy, and money in grassroots and other efforts to create what we have called a broader “transition to justice.”

STATES, POWER AND POLICY: **California**



California’s reputation as an environmental leader is based on being first in the nation on many environmental standards, such as auto emissions control and greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets. Less discussed is the state’s role as one of the leading oil and gas producers in the nation. Advocates, in particular the environmental justice movement, have pushed to make climate policy both more protective and more equitable – and have several significant wins that show their ability to integrate equity into emissions reductions.

Context

California leads the nation in adopting ambitious climate policy. In 2006, the state passed the Global Warming Solutions, which aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.² Since that time, the greenhouse gas emissions reduction target has increased to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. The state’s initial renewable portfolio standard (RPS), which requires a certain percentage of electricity retail sales to be renewable energy, was initially set at 20 percent by 2017 and increased in 2018 to 60 percent by 2030 with a 100 percent carbon free mandate by 2045. California successfully reduced emissions below 1990 levels in 2018 (CARB 2018).

Despite these ambitious policies and the state’s reputation for environmental progress, the state has a mixed record on climate and environmental justice. The keystone of California’s climate policy is the establishment of a cap and trade program. The state’s cap and trade program was established as the vehicle by which the state would meet its ambitious climate targets. Under this program, the amount of greenhouse gas emissions is capped and the allowed emissions are divided into tradable permits. The permits are auctioned off and the revenue collected into the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), which supports programs that reduce greenhouse gas emissions (California Air Resources Board n.d.)³

² Legislative bills numbers: The Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32), greenhouse gas emissions reduction target increase (SB 350), RPS (SB 1078), 100 percent carbon free mandate by 2045 (SB 100).

³ In 2012, the legislature passed a bill requiring that 25 percent of GGRF investments benefit disadvantaged communities, and 10 percent are located directly within disadvantaged communities (SB 535). The direct investment requirement has increased to 35 percent, although the actual amount invested in disadvantaged communities is more than 35 percent (Air Resources Board 2019).

These policies help establish California’s reputation as a leader in climate policy. As one interviewee stated:

I will say that one of the benefits of California, though, is that so much of our climate policy is already baked into our system. So, the Cap and Trade Program, the Low-Carbon Fuel Standard, the clean energy goals are all part of the system, and, so, you can’t actually do any development without thinking of those things, and... I think that’s what’s allowing us to even keep moving forward.

While California’s cap and trade program has created a revenue flow that is providing investment to disadvantaged communities, the program itself is controversial among organizations and leaders whose central focus is environmental justice. Indeed, a set of environmental justice organizations filed suit to stop the program on several grounds, including that community members were excluded from public participation, that cap and trade excluded key industries, such as agriculture and industry, and that the Air Resources Board failed to properly investigate other alternatives to cap and trade (Takade 2013). While the lawsuit was unsuccessful, recent research shows that the concerns of environmental justice communities may have been well-founded: after the implementation of cap and trade, emissions in the state have decreased overall but the benefit has not been fully felt in the communities bearing the brunt of the pollution burden (Cushing et al. 2018).⁴



Despite these ambitious policies and the state’s reputation for environmental progress, the state has a mixed record on climate and environmental justice.

⁴ Part of the issue is that offset credits can be used to meet compliance obligation. Directly reducing emissions located in disadvantaged communities and limiting out of state offset projects would address this disparity.

A parallel set of contradictions between the promise of progress and the perils of current reality is evident in the state's overall energy portfolio. Though California leads the nation in renewable energy production, 43.4 percent of in-state electricity generation comes from natural gas. California is one of the top crude oil producing regions in the country and nearly two-thirds of households in the state use natural gas for heating (Energy Information Administration n.d.). Although on the decline, oil and gas drilling and use remains prevalent. The share of establishments that are in fossil fuel (FF) industries decreased from 0.80 percent in 2001 to 0.56 percent in 2018.⁵ The share of total employment that is in FF industries also decreased, from 1.05 percent in 2001 to 0.71 percent in 2018. However the average annual pay among FF industries, already significantly higher than that across all industries, increased, with some fluctuation during the period, from \$87,948 to \$108,978. These numbers indicate that while FF industries may be declining, their economic and employment contribution remains significant. The state's reputation versus the lived experience of communities led one interviewee to suggest:

"We talk a lot about California as a climate leader. We talk a lot about, you know, California is paving the way, but when it comes down to it what are we really doing in our own backyard, and especially in communities in inland California? That's not really happening. For example, the state is putting millions, and millions, and millions of dollars into the production of bio-methane and biogas, which only perpetuates our reliance on natural gas, but does nothing for climate and local air pollution and benefits to communities where dairies are located, because that's what there – you know, dairy digesters, they're then creating biogas and bio-methane, injecting that into the pipeline, which then continues our reliance on natural gas."

Another disconnect is the political balance within the state. With a super majority, Democrats hold substantial power in the state legislature and the interests of the more conservative inland communities are under-represented. While the split causes tensions within the state, the Democratic supermajority means that partisanship has less bearing on legislative outcomes. However, there is also a split within the Democratic majority between more conservative Democratic legislators, that do not take on oil and gas interest, and more progressive legislators. As a result, even a Democratic supermajority was unable to pass a state-wide fracking ban although the Governor, under pressure in part because of a pending recall, declared that the executive had the power to implement such a ban starting in 2024 (Hubler 2021; Willon 2021).

⁵ As noted earlier, state-level data on industrial composition, demographics, and other matters are, unless otherwise cited, taken from background state profiles constructed using data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), IPUMS USA; U.S. Census Bureau; Woods & Poole Economics, Inc; GeoLytics, Inc; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; and U.S. EPA National Air Toxics Assessment. The data in this section can be found in the California state brief: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/eri/just-transition-state-briefs/>

Analysis

In an effort to address the conditions that exist in California, just transition proponents have narrowed in on a few key arenas and strategies. To get the state closer to a transition away from extractive economies, advocates have focused their energy in the legislative, administrative, and judicial arenas. Among many strategies, organizing has emerged as a particularly impactful method to advancing change in the expansive state.

Legislative Arena

Interviewees underscored that both the oil and gas industry and industrial agriculture influence the legislature and are powerful forces that organizers must contend with. The COVID-19 pandemic, in some ways, has decreased access to decision makers. Although hearings and legislative activities have moved online, those that have direct access to decision makers are able to increase their influence because they directly communicate through text or other private channels of communication rather than open hearings where legislators are able to hear from a broader spectrum of voices.

Other interviewees mentioned the lack of public accountability and the difficulty of participating in democratic processes. One shared that “it took us forever to track down the e-mail addresses of the Economic Recovery Taskforce at the state level just to send our letter in. Like, it took me like half an hour to find one e-mail address, which is just not okay.”⁶ This particular example illustrates how the state takes steps in the right direction, but then makes them inaccessible to the people whose efforts contributed to these successes.

Administrative Arena

Agencies, where the bulk of administrative arena work occurs, are particularly powerful in California. The California Air Resources Board (CARB) and other state agencies were identified as important in climate and just transition policy. As one interviewee detailed, the rule making coming from CARB has significant impact on clean transportation, clean goods, and regulation of other source pollution that drives climate policy. CARB was also tasked with implementing AB 32, the result of which is the state’s cap and trade program. The power of agency action means they can be drivers of just transition policy but they can also hinder an equitable and just transition.

Several interviews detailed examples where state agencies did not engage or address local concerns, including one example where the barrier in a fight for access to clean drinking water was the local water agency. At the same time, developing a strong working relationship with agencies allowed advocates to meet regularly with staff and administrators and build trust necessary to work through disagreements and challenges.

⁶ Technically, the Task Force was an executive-level effort but we present it here as an example of difficulty engaging with elected bodies.

Another challenge is incomplete data. California does not have well developed and coordinated regional economic infrastructure and also lacks an economic development agency, both of which are common in other states. The under-developed regional planning means that regional data is hard to come by, including important metrics, such as major industries within a region and the workforce characteristics. This is an obstacle to just transition planning as it is difficult to understand the geography of the skills of the existing workforce, what industries need to be transitioned, and which could be expanded, etc.

Judicial Arena

The use of the judicial arena can be mixed, as when the lawsuit to stop cap and trade failed. But, it can also act on behalf of communities. When the City of Fresno bypassed environmental reviews for company proposals involving large warehouse facilities, a lawsuit was brought on behalf of communities who would bear the environmental impact of the development project. The community effort was greatly bolstered when the attorney general intervened on behalf of the community.

Community Organizing Capacity

Organizing in California, and everywhere, is fundamental to building the power needed to push for change. Organizing has also been difficult to resource. As one interviewee stated, “I think that in general organizing and base-building work has been so historically under-resourced and I think that it is part of changing the relations of power in a really dramatic way. You know there’s no shortcut around that. There’s no set of online organizing or any of those things that can replace the actual local organizing and base building.”



March-Rally for Freedom and Democracy, 2021

Source: Wiki image, Photographer: Becker1999, Grove City, OH

The fight for an oil and gas drilling setback ordinance in Arvin, California highlights the vital role that organizing plays in advancing progressive change. The Arvin case study also highlights how organizing cannot stop when the policy is adopted, it must continue through implementation and beyond. As detailed to us by an interviewee (condensed and edited for clarity):

Case Study: Arvin, California

Arvin's got about maybe 20,000 people. It's in the Southern San Joaquin Valley. It's at the base of the grapevine, so a lot of the pollution in the Valley also kind of gets captured there, so it traditionally has some of the worst air in the country in that small community.

And residents have been for years and years and years concerned because they have been seeing the number of oil wells coming closer to the community. Some abandoned underground wells had actually begun to – well, abandoned. Turns out they weren't that abandoned and they started to leak waste gas and it went into people's homes and they had to be evacuated. The county Department of Public Health completely abdicated the responsibility. It left it up to the oil company to decide what the testing was going to be, what the remediation was going to be.

That caused a huge uproar and increased the number of people that were concerned about the oil industry in the community and also just about good governance in the city council. And there was a councilman, Jose Gurrola, a young guy in his early twenties, who wanted to run for mayor. He was on the city council. He had a vision for Arvin as like can we as a small city do more renewable energy, can we electrify our fleets, can we do something to reduce our local pollution and be more sustainable? As a city councilman he proposed an oil and gas ordinance that would update the health and safety protections of the existing ordinance and create more of a stronger permitting process for oil and gas drilling. And that ordinance failed on a vote of three to two or something when he was a city councilman.

(Jose Gurrola won the Mayoral election) and then along with him came in a wave of young Latina city council people. And they were very supportive of the vision, they were equally excited about new opportunities for Arvin and not just doing

Case Study: Arvin, California *continued*

the same old things that had always been done. But even with that, it still took a lot of letter-writing, attending city council meetings. It took really straight-up harassing the city attorney.

We began to realize that we all were focused on the decision-makers, like the elected officials. They don't run the city. The clerk at the city council runs the city, the attorney runs the city, the city manager runs the city. The board or the city council are like they're just voting on what gets put in front of them. But if it's not in front of them they don't vote on it. So we had to do a lot of organizing, harassment, shaming...

We just ticked all the boxes and then eventually the mayor just looked at the attorney and said when am I getting my ordinance? This is enough. And then what had happened was even in the face of enormous pressure from the oil and gas industry, the city still went forward with the ordinance. Now it's not the best ordinance in the world but it was an example of success.

Making Change in Arvin

Electoral arena: Changed city leadership. Electoral organizing brought in a new mayor and new city council members that resulted in the change in electoral leadership needed to pass oil and gas setback ordinance.

Legislative arena: First local oil and gas setback ordinance in an active drilling region. The legislation banned oil and gas drilling within 300 feet of residential or commercially zoned areas.

Community organizing capacity: Continued pressure on officials, including elected officials and the city attorney, to ensure the legislation passed and was implemented.

Without organizing, including electoral organizing, the Arvin ordinance would never have passed. The Arvin example also shows how organizing continues past the legislative victories. Similar to what interviewees discussed about what is needed for a just transition, implementation and enforcement are crucial to ensure legislation actually addresses community need. As remarked, it may not be the best ordinance but for a small town to be able to stand up to the power oil industry shows how powerful organizing can be.

STATES, POWER AND POLICY: **Kentucky**



Located in the heart of Appalachia, Kentucky has a complicated history with extractive economies, particularly coal mining. It was once central to the coal industry, but also central to miners rising up against coal companies and fighting for something better. The state is no stranger to confrontation between striking coal miners and private security or local law enforcement. We find examples of this as far back as 1931 in Harlan County and as recent as 2019 when miners blocked coal trains in the aftermath of a sudden mine closure and layoffs. While workers and the communities who back them have risen up against coal companies, coal mining remains deeply ingrained in the culture and economy, which is reflected in the relative lack of state-level climate action.

Kentucky has had some positive economic growth over the past 40 years. The average employment level across all industries, for example, has significantly increased from 2001 to 2018. But the state has still trailed behind the national average in other respects. The share of establishments that are in fossil fuel (FF) industries decreased from 3.4 percent in 2001 to 2.4 percent in 2018. Notably, of these industries, one of the smallest was mining, contrary to the state's strong association with a dominant mining sector. During the same 2001 to 2018 time period, mining was also one of the industries that shrunk the most. In less than two decades, the industry has shrunk by half. The share of FF industries in employment across all industries decreased from 3.1 percent in 2001 to 1.9 percent in 2018, while the average annual pay among FF industries became more lucrative; growing from \$63,047 to \$73,406. The trend has been relatively the same with FF industries trend outpacing that of all industries.⁷

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the reliance on coal, Kentucky has been resistant to progressive climate policy. There is no Renewable Portfolio Standard or renewable energy generation or consumption required; there are also no energy efficiency standards.

⁷ As noted earlier, state-level data on industrial composition, demographics, and other matters are, unless otherwise cited, taken from background state profiles constructed using data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), IPUMS USA; U.S. Census Bureau; Woods & Poole Economics, Inc; GeoLytics, Inc; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; and U.S. EPA National Air Toxics Assessment. The data in this section can be found in the California state brief: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/eri/just-transition-state-briefs/>

In addition to the absence of renewable energy and energy efficiency efforts, the state legislature is known to be generally hostile to climate policy with several resolutions adopted in opposition to federal climate action, such as the Clean Power Plan and the EPA’s ability to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.⁸

Context

So how does community tackle those conditions and push for a transition away from fossil fuels and into renewable energy? Interviewees suggested that one way was to highlight how the challenging general conditions faced by Kentuckians are a result of a century of dependence on the coal industry—a dependence that increasingly fails to deliver benefits. Across the state, there are fundamental needs that need to be addressed but are being ignored and funds provided by the coal severance tax are insufficient. Interviewees discussed how some counties, like Martin County, have poor water systems and others have struggled to provide other necessities like electricity and emergency services.

The state also has a history of poverty both in income levels and in investment for the state itself—especially given the recent “collapse” of coal. However, the collapse of coal, while concerning without a transition to something else, has opened doors for conversations about economic diversification that pushes state leaders to think beyond coal and create other job opportunities that invest in local ideas.



Kentucky River with Smokestack Pollution

Source: Wiki image, Photographer: Navin75

⁸ The state’s House energy chair is a strong climate change denier (Van Velzer 2020). As chair of the Natural Resources and Energy committee, he has the ability to choose which bills are heard and which are given priority. Kentucky leadership also notably opposed the Clean Power Plan and any attempts to regulate carbon emissions (Barton 2015).

Interviewees went on to share the fact that large plots of land are owned by coal or people linked to the coal industry that do not pay “nearly the amount that they should pay in taxes,” which depleted Kentucky’s general infrastructure funding that should go to good schools, roads, and water systems. Despite declining coal production and jobs, coal still seems to wield power in the Kentucky legislature.

In addition to economic impacts of coal, there are severe health consequences. For instance, some former coal miners are now disabled or living with black lung disease due to their work—an issue that is so severe that many of the former miners are now represented by Appalachian Citizens Law Center. Interviewees also shared that coal corporations are, in reality, largely responsible for the climate change experienced throughout the state. Climate conditions, they mentioned, include more frequent flooding, droughts, and extreme heat, especially in predominantly Black neighborhoods like in Louisville, which leads to worse health outcomes. Interviewees shared that the state is known to have high levels of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, diabetes, and a number of other chronic health conditions. However, in effort to advance positive change, other interviewees offered that we shift focus away from the coal industry as a whole to help bring in support from those residents still culturally tied to it.

Analysis

While all this would seem to suggest limited scope for pushing for a just transition in Kentucky, local organizers prefer to suggest that the history, people, and politics of a particular place simply give rise to different opportunities and different strategies. One of the most important of these has to do with cultural and legislative arenas; we also consider coalitional and community organizing capacity.



To advance a just transition in Kentucky, there needs to be a conscious effort in the communications arena to address the identity cultivated by the legacy of the coal industry.

Culture and Communications

To advance a just transition in Kentucky, there needs to be a conscious effort in the communications arena to address the identity cultivated by the legacy of the coal industry. More specifically, there must be an effort to demonstrate how a just transition will not threaten that identity, but instead make the state stronger for all. According to interviewees, the pride connected with coal is something to be harnessed and not erased by transition. Many residents today still remember how coal mined in eastern Kentucky famously served the nation's needs in both World Wars and was also heavily relied upon to build industrial cities. Additionally, they shared that coal cultivated useful skills and an honorable work ethic amongst many Kentuckians that should be utilized in transition, rather than ignored.

The national narrative about Kentuckians lacks acknowledgement of the complexity within the state and borders upon insulting to those with legacies of coal mining who are seeing this cultural marker disappear before their eyes. One interviewee said that for some Kentuckians, “[I]t’s hard to say to them you can’t do this anymore. That’s like it’s an affront to who they are as people and who they are as a community. And it’s really harsh, and it’s a hard reality to grab a hold of...this legacy is to be appreciated. You know, people – these people are to be appreciated.”

These narratives, interviewees mentioned, need to honor the history of Kentuckians and coal in order to acquire the buy-in necessary for a just transition. The relationship between residents and coal exemplifies that achieving a just transition requires taking the time to acknowledge the worries and concerns of people on the ground who may have a difficult time seeing the benefits of transition. As briefly mentioned above, one interviewee shared that this could be accomplished by diverting blame away from the coal industry and focusing on the particular practice, policy, or even person that is creating detrimental environmental or economic impacts. This type of specificity could seem less threatening to the identities of those most tied to the coal industry and really coal culture.



“[I]t’s hard to say to them you can’t do this anymore. That’s like it’s an affront to who they are as people and who they are as a community. And it’s really harsh, and it’s a hard reality to grab a hold of...this legacy is to be appreciated. You know, people – these people are to be appreciated.”

Legislative Arena

Local elected officials also play a key role in just transition policies, especially in parts of Kentucky where the support from local leadership is essential to spreading clear information about renewable energy and related policies. They also have more influence on local budgets that residents are likely to notice. Some local leaders amplified their impact by pushing just transition policies and reaching people in their own communities as trusted messengers. In pockets of the state, just transition as a concept is gaining familiarity because of local-level work, which we go into detail below when discussing the organizing capacity across the state.

At the state level, there are few examples of progress as the statewide legislative arena in Kentucky still seems to be greatly influenced by coal interests. Organizers report finding it difficult to schedule state representatives without getting hurried out of the room. Interviewees say that the legislature has held back from using their power to undo systemic injustices that exist in energy policy—specifically net metering, state tax policies, and state energy policies.

Also something to consider in the legislative arena is that the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the long-existent battle for extensive broadband connection. As it exists now, adequate computers and high-speed internet are expensive and sparse in some places. Interviewees were adamant that access to affordable and widely available broadband services almost serves as a prerequisite to making change. Not only does this cultivate an environment where residents are disconnected from one another's experiences, but it also creates barriers to education in the time of COVID-19 where residents were told to stay home and adapt without the tools to do so. Accessible and affordable broadband will be a necessary resource if the state ever wishes to reach meaningful and successful transition, thus it needs committed support from the legislature.

Networks and Coalition Capacity

Across Kentucky there is a strong core of nonprofit organizations, such as Mountain Associated for Community Economic Development (MACED), Appalachian Citizens' Law Center (ACLC), and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC), who have a focus on just transition. According to interviewees, organizations with common visions have figured out a way to work together. Collaborations range from loose support of each other's campaigns and events to fully co-planning conferences together. In Kentucky, there arose a need for organizations to collaborate on behalf of coal miners and the consequences they endure as a result of their work. There is also a growing coalition called Reclaiming Appalachia, which focuses on advocacy for miners experiencing black lung and taking advantage of the Reclaim Act with abandoned mines.

Though collaboration amongst like-minded organizations has been effective, there are aspects that can be strengthened moving forward. The following capacity was introduced in Kentucky but could easily apply across the nation: just transition coalitions need to be bringing in new and emerging organizations. Some of these newer organizations are youth-led, queer-led, and people of color-led. Some interviewees identified this as a key goal, but building relationships takes time, effort, and trust-building with more established and potentially more culturally conservative groups doing this work.

As part of this effort to remain in coalition with others, organizations shared that they have also had to revisit their just transition framework to ensure that it also works for newer groups with specific and important concerns. As one interviewee shared, in coalition spaces they, “[J]ust learn so much about just transition, but also about organizing, and about race, and about gender, and about different frameworks for understanding this work. And I just see that those relationships and networks as kind of central to our ability to breathe into the future something better.”

Community Organizing Capacity

As mentioned previously, engaging and empowering residents in Kentucky is essential in pushing forward just transition policies and programs. Thus, community organizing is also essential. One organizing effort was led by local members of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) in Berea, Kentucky. The City of Berea is small—home to under 15,000 residents—and best known for Berea College (City of Berea n.d.). Residents there were able to create a municipally owned utility. After learning of the benefits such a utility could bring to the city, local KFTC members were determined to get this done on their own. According to an interviewee, Berea residents raised the money, wrote the grants, and transformed their vision for their community into a reality.



“I just see that those relationships and networks as kind of central to our ability to breathe into the future something better.”

Case Study: Kentucky

MUNICIPALLY OWNED UTILITIES WORK FOR COMMUNITIES

As the example from Berea, KY shows us, creating local solutions is possible. However, we now look to another example of a municipally owned utility that exhibits how the battle for local and better energy solutions does not stop there.

In 2015, the Benham, KY local utility—Benham Power Board—was made aware of just how much Benham residents were using in electricity compared to residents in other parts of the state. As a city originally founded as a coal camp for miners, houses are nearing a century old and require the highest average monthly amount of electricity in the state (Mountain Association 2019). Kentucky, a small town of 500 people in far southeastern Kentucky, is frequently featured in the news for its leadership in building a new energy. While many of those features highlight the paradox of the solar-powered Kentucky Coal Museum located in Benham (see this recent CNN video from summer 2019).

To address the issue of both high energy usage and high electricity bills, the Board worked closely with community leaders to dramatically reduce the use and financial burden of electricity on Benham residents. Members and organizers from two of our interviewee organizations, MACED and KFTC, alongside Christian Outreach for Appalachian People, Appalshop, and Harlan Community Foundation helped organize the BenhamSaves program. It provides funds for in-home energy upgrades upfront that residents pay back over the course of 15 years using the savings made from previously high energy bills. Thus, the program saves residents money and energy (Benham Power Board 2015).

Both local leadership and Benham members of the community organizations that helped create the program have been quoted praising the innovative and thoughtful solution that the community was able to achieve for their needs, as well as in effort to reduce energy usage in the small town (Abbott 2019).

The importance of an authentic engagement with community is clear for those in Kentucky who desire better energy sources. This is highlighted by another example offered by our interviewees. An organization was going to take an old refinery and reuse it to create a biodiesel plant in West Louisville. While they thought the idea was great, there had been mounting frustration from within the community about any kind of plant in their area, leading the community to protest outside the plant and eventually succeed in keeping the plant out of their community. The organization pressing for the biodiesel plant had never consulted with the community and thus did not have their support—showing that the disconnect between organizations and community can be detrimental to progress.

In Kentucky, it is becoming apparent that changing policies will require changing legislators and that means more community members need to be involved in the electoral process and requiring meaningful political education. Across the state, for example, there are people running for the state legislature on anti-EPA regulation platforms and messages like this gain popularity. This highlights the need to bring in community to uncover the ways that they are being misled, which requires engaging those who have been historically excluded from participating in politics to fight for a better future that serves their needs. A current obstacle, however, is the urban-rural divide. According to interviewees, this issue needs to be addressed in a way that does not solely invite one rural-based organization for representation. They suggested that the whole environmental justice movement in the state could benefit from engaging a bigger segment of the community, particularly from in rural areas.

One last piece that must be considered for organizing residents in support of transition is focusing on Kentuckians and their desires. The issue some interviewees have begun to see is that the focus of just transition efforts needs to shift from an external focus of raising awareness and funds to an internal focus of what people on the ground think and need. One interviewee mentioned that advocates throughout the state have thought long and hard about what is necessary for a transition and have spent a great deal of time raising awareness.

The issue now is building power and capacity amongst Kentucky residents to fight for that change. The interviewee shared:

“We have spent many years trying to figure out what...are we shifting it to? And I feel like we’re now at this point where we kinda have it figured out, but we lack a lot of the capacity, both financially and just, you know, people capacity to implement it in a way that I feel like could be really impactful and really powerful and, you know, a really broad communications and narrative strategy and policy strategy too that would really focus more internal to the region to get local people more involved in this than external to the region, which I feel like we’ve focused a lot of our effort on necessarily because we were trying to raise the money and we were trying to raise the awareness at a national level. But I think now, you know, our efforts really need to turn more inward and think about how do we meet people in the region where they are and then bring them into this and bring them along with us instead of just recreating this extractive model of taking a lot from them without listening and without trying to help them do what they wanna do.”



“Our efforts really need to turn more inward and think about how do we meet people in the region where they are and then bring them into this and bring them along with us instead of just recreating this extractive model of taking a lot from them without listening and without trying to help them do what they wanna do.”



Louisiana has been on the frontlines of facing the impacts climate change for decades. The state is vulnerable to sea-level rise and hurricanes and faces rapidly increasing risk from inland flooding and extreme heat. Despite its obvious vulnerabilities, Louisiana has few statewide policies to address climate change. This is partly because fossil fuel production and consumption remain important industries, though the sectors are less dominant now than at any point in the past 80 years. Indeed, the state has not set concrete targets for renewable energy generation or use, and state lawmakers actively oppose attempts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions at the state or federal level.

Louisiana’s only climate change-focused policy is its Coastal Master Plan, a robust adaptation effort to restore parts of the state’s coastal marshes to buffer communities against the rising Gulf. The plan does not address greenhouse gas emissions or drilling, though, and seems to accept the inevitability of the climate crisis rather than address the forces leading to dislocation. Meanwhile, Louisiana has invested in some energy efficiency and renewable energy programs over the last decade, but none have received sufficient long-term funding.

Louisiana also faces stark economic inequalities. Nearly 20 percent of Louisiana residents live below the federal poverty line, and rates vary substantially across racial and ethnic groups.⁹ While the poverty rate has decreased for most groups since 1990, the state has seen a three percentage-point increase in Latino families living below the poverty line since 1990. While Louisiana’s unemployment rate has generally mirrored that of the country, nine percent of Black workers were unemployed, double the rate of all other races except for Native Americans (six percent).

⁹ Sixteen percent of white families lived in poverty in 2017 compared to 24 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander families, 35percent for Latino families, and 43 percent for Black families. The data in this section can be found in the Louisiana state brief: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/eri/just-transition-state-briefs/>

Though its contribution is waning, the fossil fuel industry is an important part of the state’s economy. Our interviewees consistently referred to the political and economic power that the industry wields in the state. Oil and gas companies were the backbone of Louisiana’s economy for the better part of the 20th century, and the industry has held enormous cultural and political presence. Fossil fuels delivered high-paying jobs to rural areas, employing so many people across south Louisiana that many simply referred to their employer as “The Company.” (Theriot 2014). This cultural power persists today, and was cited consistently as a major hurdle to the transition to renewable energy.

The fossil fuel industry makes up a significant portion of the economy. As of 2019, 4 percent of establishments and 5.5 percent of jobs in the state are in fossil fuel industries, even higher than in Kentucky. Louisiana’s fossil fuel sector fluctuates along with the price of oil, and employment numbers follow. The industry employed about 1.5 million people in 2006 and job growth has climbed steadily since 2010. Wages in the fossil fuel industry are, on average, more than double those in other industries. In 2019, the average worker in the sector made nearly \$100,000 annually, compared to just under \$50,000 in other industries. Wages in the sector have also grown by 25 percent in the last two decades, while wages in other sectors have seen only 8 percent growth. Because of this, the sector makes up nearly 10 percent of the state’s annual pay. However, total wages have fallen across the sector, and few industries have experienced net wage growth since 2015.



Shrimp boats, outfitted with oil boom, line the docks near Leeville, LA

Source: Wiki image, Photographer: USEPA Environmental-Protection-Agency

Louisiana’s relatively low wages, high unemployment rate, and shrinking fossil fuel sector mean that workers and the state’s economy would benefit from a more robust low-carbon economy. However, the economic and political weight of the fossil fuel industry, in addition to its high wages, complicate the path to just transition. Political demands for climate action and just transition are growing in some areas of the state, most aggressively in New Orleans. Recent alliances of progressive groups advocating for a Renewable Portfolio Standard, fighting against a new natural gas plant in a majority Black neighborhood, and organizing for a Green New Deal across the Gulf South region exemplify this growing constituency.

Context

Louisiana faces dire risks from sea-level rise, tropical storms, increased inland rainfall, and extreme heat. Since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the state has taken steps to address its vulnerability to climate-driven coastal flooding, but statewide policies for other impacts do not exist. Sea-level rise and storm surge are the most significant, and most widely publicized, threats to Louisiana. The state has already lost nearly 2,000 square miles from its coast since 1932 due to land subsidence, flood control infrastructure, and fossil fuel extraction, and without action it is projected to lose another 4,000 square miles by 2070 (Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority n.d.).

Subsidence and the erosion of coastal wetlands have worsened flooding from tropical storms, making coastal communities uniquely vulnerable to climate change. At the same time, the state’s petrochemical and oil and gas sectors continue to emit vast amounts of carbon while digging pipelines through coastal wetlands. As one interviewee noted, “we’re not only losing our land because of sea-level rise from climate change, we’re also losing our land from subsidence as a result of industries that are also exacerbating climate change [...] what they’re doing is killing us all.”



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Louisiana interviewees consistently cited the state’s long histories of white supremacy, racism, Indigenous land theft, and extraction as context for why there needs to be a just transition. As one organizer explained: “we’re seeing a convergence of systemic racism, [the] legacy of racism, [the] urgency and reality of climate change all coming together in a way that is unique to the rest of the nation.”

Many of the coastal residents most at risk are members of Indigenous communities, who were violently driven to the coast during white settler expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries. The industrial makeup of the state’s economy and the power of fossil fuel sectors are also part of the legacy of slavery and white supremacy. One interview noted that Cancer Alley, the stretch of the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, has some of the highest rates of cancer in the country, a disproportionate number of petrochemical plants, and a high percentage of Black residents. It is “a carryover from slavery in Louisiana. [...] what you’re really looking at are industrial facilities that are on the sites of former slave plantations, and some of them have retained the names of those slave plantations as part of their chemical facility names.”

The fossil fuel industry’s influence in state government enables oil, gas, and petrochemical companies to profit off of low regulation and favorable tax incentives. Most fossil fuel and petrochemical companies pay almost no property tax on their facilities.¹⁰ However, state and local general funds still depend on the meager revenue from these reduced property taxes. The state is one of the top states for oil and gas production, and coastal parishes derive much of their revenue from the fossil fuel industry. As one interviewee summarized, “we’re dependent on [...] oil and gas as an industry that helps to pay for everything from schools to healthcare in Louisiana. In general [...] our economy is tied to the burning of carbon.”



“we’re seeing a convergence of systemic racism, [the] legacy of racism, [the] urgency and reality of climate change all coming together in a way that is unique to the rest of the nation.”

¹⁰ In 2017, local governments in Louisiana gave 43 percent of their property tax revenue to corporations, and school districts gave away \$720 million (Together Louisiana n.d.).

Covid-19 has caused major disruptions to fossil fuel companies in Louisiana. The Louisiana Oil and Gas Association (LOGA), the industry's main trade group, reported that consistently low oil prices pose an immediate threat to as many as 23,000 jobs in the industry (Hyer 2020). By August 2020, Louisiana had lost 7,100 jobs in the oil and gas extraction (NAICS 211 and 213), about 21percent of jobs in the industry (Dismukes and Upton Jr. 2020), though another analysis pegged industry job loss at 10,300 (31percent) through August (Energy Workforce and Technology Council 2020).

Interviewees expressed hope that this precipitous decline could provide an opening to push for a just transition. "We could be transitioning workers from oil and gas into renewable energy, and it turns out the oil and gas industry is laying people off. You don't even have to compete. This is a moment. You do not even have to convince people to leave their job and come to this other opportunity. You can just say, do you want to work? That's all you have to say," one leader said. In a hopeful sign, the state's governor established a task force to coordinate commercial leasing proposals for offshore wind energy in early November 2020 (Governor Edwards 2020).

Analysis

Achieving just transition in Louisiana will require addressing the many conditions described above. The immediate effects of the climate crisis and COVID-19 coupled with the lasting impacts of slavery, white supremacy, and settler-colonial violence complicate organizing for just transition. Planning and policy decisions regularly exclude people of color. Black residents in Cancer Alley, for instance, suffer the effects of political decisions made centuries ago that designated their communities as industrial zones. They are still fighting the consequences of land use policies based on white supremacy. There are, however, avenues and strategies for transition.

Culture and Communications

In Louisiana, interviewees shared that changing the cultural and popular image of extractive industries will be necessary to have residents acknowledge the incredible climate danger these industries pose to the state. Transition from fossil fuels will likely require a massive communications campaign that is years long, paid for by penalties against corporations, and popularized through the media so that the public embraces the change. In addition to revealing the harms of fossil fuel industries, communications campaigns must also provide tangible and realistic alternatives to fossil fuel energy. This is particularly important given that interviewees shared that there seems to be a cultural acceptance that the only types of effective power are oil and gas and little knowledge about what else is possible.

In fighting back against fossil fuel industrial expansion and new state subsidies for polluting companies, organizers pointed to success using messaging that prioritizes taking care of others and avoiding high-risk, dangerous careers, especially in areas where “climate change” has negative connotations. This message, they shared, emphasizes a new economy that is safer and better for everyone’s health. In discussing the need for renewable energy development, organizers pushing for residential solar energy used the language of self-preservation, self-ownership, and personal power to persuade skeptics. Due to the high wages and relatively consistent employment in fossil fuel industries, job growth that could come from renewable energy development and just transition policies must be highlighted.

Legislative Arena

Several interviewees shared that their conservative state legislature has often been a hindrance to policies that would enable a just transition. Local municipalities might pass progressive policies that are subsequently preempted or struck down by state government. This statewide versus local dynamic requires organizers to use a mix of strategies that focus on identifying and engaging the right stakeholders and challenging state preemption.

To some organizers, companies seem to use the legislature as their staff, which interviewees see as a threat to democratic decision-making. While environmental damage and extractive practices are often wrought by private companies, their actions are supplemented by decision-makers in other arenas, such as the legislative arena, thus this arena is a specific focus for many organizers trying to make a change.

Administrative Arena

In many places across the nation, the COVID-19 pandemic led to virtual meetings that have made administrative bodies more accessible to the public. In Louisiana, it became easier to get residents engaged with the Louisiana Public Service Commission, for example. These meetings were previously attended by a high earning, demographically homogeneous group, but now community members are more able to provide public comment and advocate for their needs in front of decision-makers. According to interviewees, this has influenced the commission in ways that allow it to be of better service to the community.

Community Organizing Capacity

Louisiana has a deep history of progressive organizing for labor rights and environmental justice. For example, community labor leaders like Elenora Peete founded the Black- and women-led Domestic Workers Union in the 1920s, and Father Louis J. Twomey, a Jesuit priest, organized for racial justice and workers' rights in the 1960s. Black communities in Cancer Alley have been fighting the expansion of the petrochemical industry since the 1970s. Indigenous communities like the United Houma Nation have been engaged in anti-colonial and anti-extraction struggles for centuries. After Hurricane Katrina, community organizations began working in marginalized communities. The New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice and the Congress of Day Laborers, for example, have been organizing for labor and environmental justice for over a decade.

One area where interviewees see an opportunity for improvement is statewide, coordinated movement infrastructure for labor. "Organized labor is a huge gap," one interviewee shared. We don't have that. There's very little unionization in terms of bigger, more traditional unions." Decades of attacks on Louisiana workers' right to unionize, including passage of a right-to-work law in 1976, have led to a sharp decline in union membership across the state. The breaking of the United Teachers of New Orleans during the school privatization movement after Hurricane Katrina and the history of racism in the state's labor movement, which has locked Black workers out of work in many sectors, have also been important factors in the decline.

Organizing in Louisiana, like in many places, has been most fruitful when relational organizing is used to bring in community. Interviewees shared that they often start with community members who voice their needs, such as not wanting any more pollution, then they lay out their demands and begin bringing in support from groups that can help them to make their demands a reality. This type of coalition-building, driven by the community, is the most effective.

Networks and Coalitions Capacity

Many interviewees shared that organizers are able to collaborate in different ways. In New Orleans, for example, organizations have been able to build coalitions that push the New Orleans City Council towards progressive policies. Some organizations have learned, however, that the statewide landscape is very different from the local level. Working within the strong networks already organized by faith-based organizations has proved successful at the state level.

New Orleans has seen coalitions pushing for better energy policy and opened up conversations about just transition. Interviewees cited the fight in opposition to a new natural gas-fired power plant and the organizing for a Renewable Portfolio Standard in New Orleans as key moments in recent power building.

A coalition of organizations called Energy Future New Orleans took shape to fight a proposed power plant in a working-class Black neighborhood. The group built on this infrastructure to advocate for a renewable portfolio standard (RPS). As one interviewee related:

Case Study: Louisiana

In New Orleans, we were trying to get a RPS passed for ten years. We'd been trying at the state level, too, but even in New Orleans it was a challenge.

In the past four or five years, people have become a lot more engaged in organizing, especially in New Orleans. A lot of it came together around a natural gas plant that the utility, Entergy, had proposed in a majority-Black neighborhood. The plant was totally unnecessary—we didn't need a new gas plant to meet our expected energy demands for the next 40 years. The location was a really bad choice too: the plant would've been built in one of the fastest-sinking parts of the city, which is already high-risk flood hazard area. So a lot

of people were against the plant for a variety of reasons, and the coalition we'd been building through the RPS fight helped us fight the gas plant.

For one, we were able to have a lot of people attend the public meetings and provide comment. Because we had people there, we were able to find out that Entergy had hired actors to portray local residents and speak in favor of the plant. We were able to uncover these underhanded tactics, and then pointed out to members of the City Council that Entergy was not acting in our best interests. So that gave us a foot in the door to present our own solution: the RPS. We got 30 organizations in the city to sign on in support, and a year later the Council opened a docket to consider an RPS. Then, in March 2020, the Council committed to moving New Orleans to 100 percent emissions-free power by 2040. That was a huge win. It's taken us about a decade, and it's not perfect. But we were able to show the Council that Entergy was not doing its job, to challenge the Council to do theirs, and to demonstrate that we would hold them accountable if they didn't.

The gas plant and RPS fights also forced a local conversation about the city's dependence on fossil fuels. We changed the discussion from being anti-gas plant to pro-clean energy future. Residents came out and said that, not only do we not want this plant, we would rather just shift away from fossil fuels to energy that is safe and affordable.

Making Change in New Orleans

Legislative arena- Turned a fight against a gas plant into a proposal for a Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS).

Base building- Increased organizing against stopping the plant presented an opportunity to engage a broader base in advocacy for an RPS.

Cultural arena- Changed the discussion from a negative (stopping a gas plant) to a positive (expanding renewable energy production).

The New Orleans RPS example shows how coalitions built around legislative fights can spark larger conversations and create cultural changes. By shifting the fight against the gas plant to a movement for an RPS, New Orleans organizers grew their coalition and changed the conversation among the city's residents. People want to fight in support of something, rather than simply against something, another interviewee told us. "Of late [...] there's more resonance, there's more building and growing in terms of coalition and organizing to not just fight something, but to support something."

Another alliance of organizations is fighting for a better future on a regional level. Gulf South for a Green New Deal united disparate groups behind a campaign for a Green New Deal specifically tailored to the needs of the Gulf South (the region along the Gulf Coast between Texas and Florida). Central to their message is a just transition for workers across the Gulf Coast. The Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy has been integral in building, shaping, and organizing around these demands, and those efforts have built power across a region that historically has not been united. As one interviewee told us, "my definition of a win now is watching power be built, being able to see power built. [...] For the first time a hundred groups plus across five states said, 'I'm gonna be in charge of my own destiny. I'm going to put down what I want to see. I'm not going to wait for somebody to give it to me. We're gonna declare what we want and we're gonna move it together. And that is power building. [...] We're building a movement. We're not building a piece of policy."



New York passed the nation’s most ambitious climate policy with the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). The coalition pushing the CLCPA, NY Renews, includes over 100 organizations from across the state. With a strong upstate/downstate divide, bringing together groups across the state is a substantial organizing effort. Along with Climate Job NY, a labor-led climate effort, New York is leading the nation in adopting strong climate policy that also includes significant equity and quality job creation provisions.

Context

In 2019, NY Governor Andrew Cuomo signed into law the groundbreaking Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which set the state on the most ambitious path to carbon neutrality. The CLCPA also requires 40 percent of clean energy funds to be invested in disadvantaged communities. The Act also sets up two bodies: the Climate Action Council (CAC) and a permanent Environmental Justice Advisory Board (EJAB). The CAC will come up with a scoping plan for reducing emissions within two years and then revisit the plan every five years thereafter.

The Environmental Justice Advisory Board, whose members are appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders, will develop a model environmental justice policy for state agencies.

The EJAB was established in a separate law and the adoption of the CLCPA hinged on the EJAB being established. The CLCPA and the strong environmental justice provisions are the work of the coalition NY Renews.

¹¹ The CLCPA sets targets of 100 percent net carbon neutral, economy wide, by 2050 and 70 percent renewable electricity by 2030 and 100 percent carbon free electricity by 2040.

¹² Once the policy is adopted by the state, each agency will have six months to come up with its own policy. In the absence of developing their own policy, the agency will have to comply with the Advisory Board policy.

A parallel effort to CLCPA is Climate Jobs NY, (CJNY) a labor-led advocacy effort to implement a strong job creation platform and also substantially reduce greenhouse gas emission. While NY Renewables is a broad coalition, CJNY is a coalition of labor unions.¹³ The first policy victory was the Clean Climate Careers Initiative, where Gov. Cuomo, in partnership with CJNY and Cornell University’s Worker Institute, pledged in June 2017 to create 40,000 climate jobs. This announcement was followed in March 2018 with an announcement of the single largest state commitment to renewable energy through a \$1.4 Billion investment in 26 large-scale renewable energy projects across New York, all of which will require contractors to pay prevailing wages, which is determined by the state and higher than the minimum wage. In January 2019, Gov. Cuomo announced the largest procurement of offshore wind- 9 GW by 2030, with a requirement for a Project Labor Agreement.



ALIGN NY, one of the founding members of NY Renewables, at an action for climate justice

Source: Image from NY Renewables Twitter

¹³ Climate Jobs NY grew out of the report *Reversing Inequality Combating Climate Change: A Climate Jobs Program for New York State* from the Worker Institute at Cornell University. The data in this section can be found in the New York state brief: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/eri/just-transition-state-briefs/>

The policy initiatives linking jobs to climate action are an important component for just transition as compared to all the industries, wages in the fossil fuel industries are substantially higher. The average annual pay peaked in these industries in 2012 at \$100,000 and decreased to approximately \$90,000 in 2015 and remained there. The average annual pay, during this same time period, has been between \$78,000 and \$100,000. Conversely, the range is much narrower for non-fossil fuel industries ranging between \$65,000 and \$75,000. However, the fossil fuel industries' share of all industries total wages has decreased from an all-time high just above 1 percent to just below 0.40 percent in 2018.

This data suggests that although earnings in fossil fuel industries are higher, there is a range of average pay among sectors and in many cases, employment levels have decreased over time. Only in two sectors is annual pay growing: fossil fuel electric power generation sector and gasoline stations (above past levels). Although this is true in the fossil fuel electric power generation sector, the employment level has also decreased largely from around 30,000 in 2001 to 1,890 in 2018.

New York has been highly impacted by Covid-19—becoming the epicenter of the virus in the US with above 10,000 deaths. It is estimated that about 1.2 million New Yorkers lost jobs during this time period, accompanying this is a record number of unemployment claims. It is projected that New York City's unemployment rate could hover around 20-30 percent.



Members of NY Renews at the New York State Capitol

Source: Image from NY Renews Twitter

Although all New Yorkers have been impacted at this time, the pandemic has exacerbated inequality and unevenly impacted people of color and immigrant communities. In line with business closures and job loss during the pandemic, \$7.4 billion of tax revenues is projected to be lost through June 2021 in NYC alone.

The next stage of climate policy for the NY Renews coalition is Just Transition legislation paid for by a carbon pollution fee. The revenue from the fee would be invested in grant funding for disadvantaged communities, supporting workers and communities impacted by transition away from coal, oil, and gas, and energy rebates for low-income New Yorkers.

Analysis

In New York, organizers have reached meaningful change over the years--analyzing the arenas in which they worked and capacities they utilized is key to understanding how to inch toward just transition.

Legislative Arena

Governor Cuomo's role in both the CLCPA and the Clean Climate Careers Initiative is no coincidence. New York's Governor holds more power than most states and his role in both these initiatives highlights how that power is used. Organizers interviewed often mentioned the need to maintain relationships with the governor's office in order to push them forward toward progressive climate policy. This, one interviewee mentioned, includes holding the office accountable for the decisions they make.

In the Climate Jobs work, the Governor was in a re-election race and the political moment aligned with the labor movement, "stepping out and using its political power," in addition to working with other advocacy groups and, as a result, the push for offshore wind moved very quickly. For the NY Renews coalition, the advocacy push was longer and more intense. Part of the coalition's tactics was to show up in large numbers to meetings with the Governor's office to underscore the strength of the coalition. As detailed below, the deep organizing was combined with an electoral strategy to strategically flip seats. Electoral organizations embarked on an effort to replace some senators with more progressive members in order to move the needle on progressive policy measure that had been stalled by the senate. The result was a change in the senate power and the CLCPA passed through. However, tensions arose with a delay by the Governor in signing the legislation into law.

Administrative Arena

Implementation became a pertinent issue for organizers after finally winning the New York’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). One interviewee noted that the administrative arena became a focus because:

[I]t’s a little bit more challenging because it’s not just all of these new processes that we were able to set up for accountability and transparency, but also all of these different local battles, all of these different energy proceedings, all of these new regulations, and it’s a very, very complex energy landscape here in New York. And so, you know, it’s also challenging to thread the needle between all of those different battles and making sure that, in every single conversation, whether we’re fighting a local power plant or fighting a rate case or fighting a pipeline, making sure that we’re using the CLCPA framework and the climate equity screens and EJ and frontline protections that we included in there across all of these different battles.

In their description, this interviewee shared the difficulty between ensuring that statewide accountability measures were set in place correctly and ensuring those same measures make sense on the local level.

Community Organizing Capacity

In New York, organizers have recognized the importance of different strategies to support organizing. There is an important place for research, policy development, and labor participation given their wide base and connection to the issue all to advance organizing strategies. A fundamental capacity for community members is to be educated and engaged in the work. Interviewees shared that many of their successes couldn’t have happened if a community wasn’t informed on the issues, plugged into organizations doing the work, and aware of their civil disobedience liberties at demonstrations. And, organizing and community engagement must be a long-term commitment. As one interviewee told us, “when we make a commitment to a member group or a neighborhood, we’re looking at a ten-year commitment plus. I mean, you can’t get rid of us.”



“when we make a commitment to a member group or a neighborhood, we’re looking at a ten-year commitment plus. I mean, you can’t get rid of us.”

In addition to political organizing, cross-state organizing is critical in New York as there is often a divide between New York City and the rest of the state. The focus on and dominance of New York City creates a narrative that, “keeps playing and playing over and over again of ‘we are the forgotten people, we are the disposable people, nobody gives a shit about’” parts of the state outside of NYC. Understanding this dynamic is crucial to passing progressive legislation. Understanding not just the differences between upstate and downstate priorities but how, “these issues interconnect with each other and how we can support each other’s priorities,” are important for statewide campaigns.

Networks and Coalition Capacity

In addition to the many ways that New York organizations have collaborated in effort to reach their shared goals, the fight for offshore wind in New York, in particular, was largely influenced by the right mix of organizations pushing for the issue. According to organizers, the New York Governor and his administration supported the issue after this group of well-connected and influential organizations had made the decision “politically expedient.” But, like other just transition focused coalitions, New York groups have to do double duty: address the consequences of extractive economies and push forward their visions of something better. Organizers share that it has been an enormous fight, but it is one informed by strategy where organizations focusing on climate and others focusing on labor come together to use their collective political power at both state and local levels.



400 of the NY Renews coalition took over the New York State Capitol to demand the passage of the Climate & Community Protection Act.

Source: Image from NY Renews Twitter

Case Study: New York

Members of the NY Renews coalition shared how their vision of coalition building and organizing is instrumental to the winning the CLCPA:

We're an alliance ourselves, and all of our member organizations are also part of a coalition. Each member participates in different ways, in whatever they can bring, whatever capacity they have to contribute to it. So that's at the New York City level. And then as a coalition as a whole, I would say one of the opportunities which I guess can also be a challenge is that there's so many different types of geographies in New York State. You know, the priorities of somebody living in a more rural community upstate is very different than what we're experiencing here in Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, Queens. And it's important to learn from each other and understand how these issues interconnect with each other and how we can support each other's priorities. And so that's definitely one of the benefits as well as just connecting across different cities.

New York Renews is a different coalition, and each one has their own dynamics. I think one thing just I'm very conscious of at the moment in terms of that is, you know, we're in a moment now where, as we kind of were when we were approaching the CLCPA's launch, the CCPA's launch, where we're trying to figure out who we are and how we're doing this work together. It's easier for a single organization to set its priorities and figure out how to approach something. It's much more challenging for a coalition to figure out what we're doing together. And so I think we work really, really well as a coalition when we have very clear shared goals. We're going to pass this bill. It's a little harder when the world is really complicated at the moment, figuring out how we all balance really complex demands on our time and commitments and figuring out how we strategically move forward our shared goals.

Case Study: New York *continued*

I think when we were all very focused on the CLCPA, it was a little bit – I don't want to say easy because it was not easy to pass the bill. It took us four years, but we had, like, a point that we were all working toward, and so now in the implementation, it's a little bit more challenging because it's not just all of these new processes that we were able to set up for accountability and transparency, but also all of these different local battles, all of these different energy proceedings, all of these new regulations, and it's a very, very complex energy landscape here in New York. And so, you know, it's also challenging to thread the needle between all of those different battles and making sure that, in every single conversation, whether we're fighting a local power plant or fighting a rate case or fighting a pipeline, making sure that we're using the CLCPA framework and the climate equity screens and EJ and frontline protections that we included in there across all of these different battles.

By aligning on vision and values, the coalition was able to learn from each other, as well as build the power necessary to pass the CLCPA. This example also shows, as in Arvin, the need to continue organizing past the point of a legislative win to ensure implementation and accountability.

LEARNING FROM (AND ACROSS) THE STATES

While our states have different profiles and power dynamics, there are lessons that can be learned across the states that are important to just transition advocacy going forward.

Ten Key Takeaways from Across States

1. **Understand that just transition will look different in different places**
2. **Focus on culture as well as policy**
3. **Build relationships that can last**
4. **Advance progressive change by shifting policy and politics**
5. **Build broad-based coalitions for better results**
6. **Forge coalitions from the ground-up to bridge divides and cement bonds**
7. **Complement legislative initiatives with administrative changes, executive actions, and lawsuits**
8. **Focus on building power and not just changing policy**
9. **Consider states as laboratories for advancing equity and building power**
10. **Invest in long-term community-based efforts with fewer restrictions**

Understand that just transition will look different in different places

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to just transition, and strategies will differ based on local, regional, and state context. Engaging and centering local knowledge can help ensure that just transition efforts address both the specific contextual challenges as well as crafting policies that are appropriate to meet the contextual challenges. Advocating broadly for renewable energy development, for example, is a good, general campaign but the jobs that are being lost in Kentucky are not likely to be replaced by jobs in solar and/or wind industries not just because of policy but geographic appropriateness.

The regions in which fossil fuel jobs are lost are not necessarily the best regions for solar and wind resources. States with recently large extractive industrial sectors such as Louisiana and Kentucky will approach just transition with unique priorities and on a different timeline from New York and California. These states must contend with the cultural power of energy production in their approaches to energy transition. Our interviewees tied this to a broader approach to organizing around just transition, focusing on bottom-up community building and education.

Focus on culture as well as policy

States where fossil fuel extraction has recently comprised a relatively large portion of the economy have powerful cultural attachments to those industries. In Kentucky and Louisiana, interviewees pointed out that these practices were deeply tied to identity. “Coal mining’s more of a cultural activity than a way of earning a living,” said a Kentucky organizer. “It’s the way – what we remember who we are. It’s the way we talk about what we used to do, and that’s true in lots of rural communities that are facing these transitions: logging, farming, oilfield work, you know? It’s this part of the experience that our work has become kind of a cultural representation of who we are.”

Despite its economic decline, coal mining still defines identities in some parts of Kentucky. Transitioning away from coal mining and “the culture that’s grown up around that” would be “worse than losing a source of income. It just leaves you hopeless.” For these communities, losing the connection to coal translates to loss of history and identity, and of a culturally significant practice. An organizer in Louisiana saw education about these industries as an important component to just transition. “We’re going to need spaces where folks actually digest the impact of the extractive economy, including petrochemicals, where they actually assess the impact and the consequences.” In Louisiana, communities have vastly different understandings of fossil fuel extraction. Just transition will require a fuller history of these industries and practices.

While Kentucky and Louisiana are the obvious examples, the rural/urban divide in California and New York means that there are populations that are more aligned with their counterparts in Kentucky and Louisiana. Narrative change is needed everywhere.



There is no one-size-fits-all approach to just transition, and strategies will differ based on local, regional, and state context.

Build relationships that can last

In California, advocates have found it useful to build relationships with key administrative agencies. Interviewees mentioned that decision makers to connect with are leaders at the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), the California Resources Board, the California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM), among others. Local government, such as county commissioners, are also very important to engage and build relationships. The benefit that these relationships bring to the table is consistent access to important decision makers that often hold responsibilities such as regulation or implementation power. Interviewees shared that these connections are helpful for a just transition because it makes it that much more likely that administrative agency leadership actually respond—even if not always positively—to attempts to hold them accountable to their communities.

Similar to creating relationships with decision makers to build the influence of an organization, Kentucky organizations have networked with one another as a result of pushing similar efforts for residents suffering the consequences of fossil fuel industries. One interviewee shared that in the thick of pushing for the Reclaim Act—which advocates for the release of more funds from abandoned mines—resulted in much more coordination amongst the organizations advocating for the bill. Organizations found that they shared other goals that are important to Kentuckians who are dealing with serious health consequences due to prolonged coal mining.

Sometimes creating relationships with those in power is not enough. In New York, it was actually changing the makeup of those decision makers—in this case, the state’s Senate—that was a win in the fight for just transition. As an interviewee shared, the Senate’s unwillingness to work with organizers on progressive bills meant there had to be a, “dramatic change in the power structures within the State Senate.” This became the tactic to getting more progressive members into the Senate. This then allowed New York organizers to push for progressive bills and see them move through both the State Assembly and Senate.

Advance progressive change by shifting policy and politics

It is true that for many issue areas policy wins are just one—very important—piece of the puzzle. Creating change often requires other forms of success that go beyond policy making and help to fundamentally alter the balance of power in the political realm. For example, in effort to reach a just transition in the states we’ve discussed, movements have overturned harmful decisions, tackled current impacts of their existing systems, have cultivated lasting relationships, and have engaged unlikely community members to further grow the support for transition.

Wins that go beyond policy include battles against dirty tactics taken by energy corporations. This was the case in New Orleans, Louisiana when gas utility company, Entergy, proposed a new gas plant. The plant was proposed to the New Orleans City Council with the help of paid actors who posed as residents in support of the new plant. Interviewees shared that this tactic served to drown out the real and large opposition that existed amongst residents. They continued on to state that actors were told to show up to the City Council early to take as many seats as possible—leaving very few to residents. In this instance, the courts revealed to be a supportive battleground for keeping the New Orleans gas plant from moving forward given that this tactic violated residents’ ability to attend and provide comment. When the New Orleans City Council had approved the gas plant, organizers were able to show and convince a district court that there had been a violation in the proposal and vote, which then voided the council’s vote.

Build broad-based coalitions for better results

Coalitions can be built within a state for a specific campaign, such as the NY Renews coalition, across regions, such as the coalition building done across Appalachia, and across the country, such as the networking done between different fossil fuel areas across the county in Alaska, Richmond, CA, and eastern Kentucky. Among these varying coalition configurations is a common thread of people learning from others in different places with different experiences.



Creating change often requires other forms of success that go beyond policy making and help to fundamentally alter the balance of power in the political realm.

Listening across people, places, and experiences makes clear where there are coalescing interests and where there are limitations. This type of organizing allows for trust to be built and a coalescence around common goals and tactics. "...it's important to learn from each other and understand how these issues interconnect with each other and how we can support each other's priorities." Coalitions can also be built to couple local understanding and federal advocacy organizing. Local or regional coalitions that partner with DC advocacy efforts, for instance, can be grounded in community while also looking for opportunities to advance their interests at the federal level.

The breadth of the NY Renews coalition gave it the power to push back against an attempt to limit the effectiveness of the bill. Over a hundred groups across five Gulf states were able to come together and put together a shared vision, where for the first time, "I'm gonna be in charge of my own destiny... We're gonna declare what we want and we're gonna agree to move it together. And that is power building."

Forge coalitions from the ground-up to bridge divides and cement bonds

How the coalition comes together is integral to how powerful the coalition is. Outside interests coming into a state or region without centering and engaging local organizations and advocates cannot build a lasting coalition. Rather, grounding efforts in existing community leaders and efforts creates a foundation from which a strong, lasting coalition can be built. Grounding efforts locally also allows for the people and organizations to be pulled in that would not necessarily be obvious to outsiders and use tactics that are more targeted and effective, such as understanding which state legislator would be a more moveable target and understanding where power is held.

Grounding coalitions locally, rather than outside interests coming in, can more easily and lastingly build trust between people, who may otherwise be at odds with each other. Power is built when forces that would never work together, or are even would be at odds with each other, come together. In California, when labor unions began to reach out to environmental groups there was surprise and hesitancy, which was



“I’m gonna be in charge of my own destiny... We’re gonna declare what we want and we’re gonna agree to move it together. And that is power building.”

able to be overcome when it was clear that there were areas of common interest, such as zero emission infrastructure and building electrification. Working together leads to environmental groups advocating for job quality and workforce concerns and labor unions advocating for environmental measures, which then negates the ability of the opposition to frame debates as jobs or the environment. For a just transition, this type of cross-interest advocacy and power building is necessary to ensure workers' and community needs are met.

Complement legislative initiatives with administrative changes, executive actions, and lawsuits

The arenas analysis reveals where power can be built and where policy wins can happen. Just transition is complicated and complex, where every available arena must be used to advance policy and efforts that ensure the integration of social and economic concerns in climate policy. Advocates in New York regularly mention that the Governor and Governor's office are particularly powerful and can greenlight big projects, such as the nation's largest offshore wind procurement, which will also be built with a project-labor agreement. The benefit to a powerful Governor is that when the interests align, substantial policies can be won. The downside is that the Governor can easily derail efforts, as Governor Cuomo threatened to do when he withheld signing the landmark climate legislation until the last minute.

Several interviewees across the states see agencies and administrative bodies as places where just transition efforts can advance. Rule-making and agency directives can drive significant policy efforts. In California, the Air Resources Board and its rule-making authority has a substantial impact on how the state transitions away from polluting industries, such as zero emissions rules. Harnessing the state Attorneys General to advocate and intervene on behalf of advocacy efforts can wield the power of the office in favor of the people against polluting interests, such as when the Attorney General intervened on behalf of the community organizations suing the city of Fresno for approving a large development facility without an environmental review.

The Deep South Center for Environmental Justice looks to the international legal arena to advance environmental justice. International judgments may not have standing in the U.S. but can push a meaningful narrative. For instance, the Center submitted a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on behalf of the residents of Mossville, which were exposed to 14 toxic industrial facilities. The petition required a demonstration that there was no remedy for environmental racism in the U.S. These efforts argue that the U.S. legal system is unable to protect communities from environmental racism, which can lead to campaigns to meaningful reform of the legal system.

Focus on building power and not just changing policy

Power building as part of legislative campaigns is fundamental to winning. However, power building can be a goal, in and of itself, even in the absence of a policy campaign. Building power through organizing and creating coalitions can manifest the conditions necessary to change elected bodies. In New York, the power built through the NY Renews coalition was then channeled into an electoral strategy that flipped key seats and opened the door for progressive legislation. But, a focus only on the legislation and not on broader power building would have failed, as it did for the years before the CCLPA passed.

For states with conservative and obstructive legislators, focusing on building power is a necessary step and results in wins outside of legislation. In the south, organizing across states and communities helped develop a shared identity as the Gulf Coast. The shared identity brings advocates from the five states- Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas — to create visions like the Gulf South for a Green New Deal, which is particularly important as the federal Green New Deal did not address concerns specific to the south, as detailed by an interviewee. The aligned Gulf South effort coordinates state-level policy so that the campaigns are parallel and can address two or three states at a time. Building the cross-state movement leads to better coordination across the region and more power to advance change.

Consider states as laboratories for advancing equity and building power

As discussed earlier, one of the main lessons of this research is that just transition will look different in each place. States have long been considered as laboratories of democracy but they should also be considered as laboratories for equity. While there is a clear role for federal efforts, especially financial support and setting minimum standards and regulations, states should be given opportunities to experiment with ideas and policies that best suit each specific instance rather than a top-down, one-size fits all approach.



Power building can be a goal, in and of itself, even in the absence of a policy campaign.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, Kentucky saw a surge in farmer's markets and local small-scale agriculture to help reduce food insecurity. There were also larger-scale agricultural efforts, like hemp production or cattle farming on former surface mine sites.

Other states used community-based organization's infrastructure and local knowledge to target delivery of drinking water and supplies to those in need. These efforts were able to address local conditions that would be hard to capture by those outside of the states and community, and they served to build longer-lasting community power.

Invest in long-term community-based efforts with fewer restrictions

Funding structures should expand what efforts qualify for funding, support operational funding, and commit to multi-year support. Organizing and coalition building leads to big progressive wins, as evidenced in California and New York, but these efforts take time and need significant, sustained funding. Specific campaigns more easily attract philanthropy support but organizations that run these campaigns need operational funding, not just programmatic funding. Restrictive grant money can leave organizations with little to no support to develop new programs or experiment with new organizing tactics. Moreover, changing narratives and cultures, identified as important to just transition efforts, can be hard to measure in the metrics often required for grant reporting. This work can also take years and requires steady funding.

In addition to expanding what gets funded, funders should expand *who* gets funded. The vast majority of climate funding goes to established organizations. Just 1.3 percent of climate dollars are given to environmental justice groups led by people of color (Climate Donors of Color Network n.d.). This disparity led to the creation of the Donors of Color Network to launch an effort specifically targeted towards climate funding. The Climate Funders Justice Pledge calls on the top 40 climate funders to commit to increasing funding to power building organizations led by people of color by at least 30 percent in two years. As of April 2021, 16 foundations, including four of the top 40 climate funders, have signed the pledge with several more in conversation to do so. This type of targeted investment is crucial to supporting the on-the-ground organizing and power building necessary for the wins highlighted in this report and beyond.

A TRANSITION TO JUSTICE

While the need to take action on climate change is pressing, urgency should not be used as excuse for pushing aside equity. We have moved past the point of addressing the climate crisis through narrow, technocratic policies. We need bold, ambitious climate policy that meets the challenge of emissions reduction and centers workers, communities, and justice. And as this report highlights, centering equity is not just a moral right, it can lead to stronger coalitions and big wins.

States matter both for policy implementation and for power building. As just transition will look different in every place, states should lead the way in developing and implementing transition support with meaningful engagement from directly-impacted stakeholders. Workers in fossil fuel industries know best what skills are transferrable and what retraining is most appropriate. Communities bearing the legacy of fossil fuel pollution and facing an uncertain economic future if those industries disappear are best suited to chart out their low-carbon future. More effective policy will emerge when local voices are fully incorporated.

More effective politics will result as well. Power building also differs by state, given the wide configuration of economic interests, social conditions, and capacities of movement actors to enact change. A sharp focus on local experimentation – and what can be learned to shift national politics – is important. After all, policy does not exist in a technocratic vacuum. A good idea without power to advance it is just an intellectual exercise.



Power building and politics without a commitment to justice can lead to neglect at best and oppression and exploitation at worst.

Likewise, power building and politics without a commitment to justice can lead to neglect at best and oppression and exploitation at worst. A focus on equity and inclusion in both process and outcomes is key. This expands the ranges of where politics must take place: The power to hold agencies and administrators as well as companies accountable for proper implementation of new rules is as important as legislative wins. This implies that contestation will take place across multiple realms – and so building solidarity and expanding coalitions is fundamental.

Ultimately, the fight for a just transition is a fight for justice. And, while we know it will be hard and long, the stories we heard showed how advocates and organizers, often in the face of great odds, come together and force the change that makes people’s lives better. Building upon these efforts through supporting organizing, coalition building, and empowering communities is the blueprint for advancing a just transition. Through these channels, we can transition from a dirty polluting past to a just and healthy future.



**Ultimately, the fight
for a just transition
is a fight for justice.**

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APPENDIX 1:

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

We list organizational affiliations at time of interviews in 2020 and for identification purposes only.

California

- Sonrisa Cooper, Community Program Development Manager, Greenlining Institute
- Veronica Eady, Assistant Executive Officer for Environmental Justice, California Air Resources Board
- Caroline Farrell, Executive Director, The Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment
- Veronica Garibay, Co-Executive Director and Co-Founder, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
- Kate Gordon, Director and Senior Advisor on Climate Change, California Governor's Office of Planning and Research
- Jennifer Kropke, Attorney, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 11 and the National Electrical Contractors Association Los Angeles Labor Management Cooperation Committee
- Nayamin Martinez, Executive Director, Central California Environmental Justice Network
- Alvaro Sanchez, Director of Environmental Equity, Greenlining Institute
- Mad Stano, Program Director, California Environmental Justice Alliance
- Miya Yoshitani, Executive Director, Asian Pacific Environmental Network

Kentucky

- Lisa Abbott, Deputy Organizing Director for Just Transition, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
- Ivy Brashear, Appalachian Transition Director, Mountain Association for Community Economic Development
- Mary Cromer, Deputy Director, Appalachian Citizens' Law Center
- Dee Davis, President, Center for Rural Strategies
- Tom FitzGerald, Director, Kentucky Resources Council
- Stephanie Randolph, Deputy Director, Cassiopeia Foundation (formerly known as blue moon fund)
- Martin Richards, Executive Director, Community Farm Alliance
- Rebecca Shelton, Coordinator of Policy and Organizing, Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Louisiana

- Logan Burke, Executive Director, Alliance for Affordable Energy
- Monique Harden, Assistant Director of Law and Policy, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice
- Jacob Horwitz, Acting Field Director, Global Labor Justice-International Labor Rights Forum
- Andy Kowalczyk, Chair of Just Transition Group, 350 New Orleans
- Jane Patton, Senior Campaigner - Environmental Health Program, Center for International Environmental Law
- Colette Pichon Battle, Executive Director, Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy
- Monique Verdin, Member, Another Gulf is Possible and citizen of the United Houma Nation

New York

- Stephan Edel, Coalition Coordinator, NY Renews
- Mike Fishman, Executive Director and President, Climate Jobs National Resource Center
- Annel Hernandez, Associate Director, New York City Environmental Justice Alliance
- Rebecca Newbury, Executive Director, The Clean Air Coalition of Western New York
- Adrien Salazar, Senior Campaign Strategist for Climate Equity, Dēmos
- Maritza Silva- Farrell, Executive Director, the Alliance for a Greater New York
- Lara Skinner, Executive Director, the Worker Institute at Cornell University's Industrial and Labor Relations School

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

1. Could you please tell us a bit about yourself, your organization, and how long you have been working / living in <insert state>?
 - a. What is your primary community base? (i.e. EJ, workers, communities of color, etc.)
2. What challenges face your community(ies) that you are trying to address—particularly around climate change and fossil fuels? For example, is there a plant that is closing?
 - a. What do you see as being the underlying causes of those conditions?

JUST TRANSITION POLICIES

3. What does “just transition” mean to you?
4. What policies or practices do you think are needed for a just transition?
5. Are there openings or opportunities to advance a JT in your state? If so, what does that look like?
6. How has this changed since the COVID crisis?

WHERE POWER BUILDING HAPPENS

7. Can you tell us about a win, i.e. successful organizing campaign, legislative victory, etc.?
8. Who are the key decision makers and/or what are the key decision-making entities and institutions you need to influence to achieve your vision for a just transition?
9. What structures and practices exist in <insert state> that are conducive to building power to achieve a just transition?
 - a. What structures and practices block such work? Why? What is needed to eliminate those barriers?

WHAT POWER BUILDING TAKES

10. What capacities are necessary to build power to achieve a just transition, and why? Organizationally? Ecosystem-wide?
11. What does it take to develop and sustain these capacities?
12. Describe the power-building ecosystem in your state. In terms of the capacities you described, where are you strong? Where are you weak/need support?
13. What are your recommendations for funders in supporting this work?

CONCLUSION

14. Anything else you would like to add, or questions we should have asked?
15. What other resources could we draw on for this project?
16. Who else would you recommend we speak to?