



# Catalyzing Implementation of Clean Energy Programs

*Reflections on the Impact  
of Philanthropic Support for  
Communities*

May 2024





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# Introduction

Philanthropic organizations have played a key role in catalyzing implementation of historic climate investments from the Inflation Reduction Act and other federal funding. Following the passage of key legislation, the nation's philanthropies, including community foundations and pooled funds, met the moment, mobilizing to support efforts to ensure that these investments were implemented effectively and equitably. This report highlights philanthropic efforts to leverage federal funding, providing a snapshot of ways that philanthropy has stepped up to support communities as they access and benefit from transformative clean energy investments.

# Overview of Philanthropic Investments



**Over \$2B in philanthropic commitments** since IRA's passage



**Over 130 national and community foundations** actively participating in implementation of federal funds

## The Impact of Shared Investments

*Against the backdrop of historic federal funding for climate, infrastructure, and workforce development, philanthropy recognized a need for collaborative investment to scale impact and meet the moment. The initiatives BuildUS, Invest in Our Future, and The Families and Workers Fund were formed to coordinate cross-sectoral efforts and strategically deploy philanthropic resources to help communities maximize the potential of this legislation. Together, these efforts focus on transforming the economy, realizing clean energy and climate goals, supporting workers, and increasing equity for underserved communities.*

### BuildUS

**BuildUS** has a vision to grow a fairer economy, stronger democracy, and cleaner energy future that advance widely held prosperity through successful implementation of ARPA, BIL, CHIPS, and IRA. BuildUS's grantees are working to make sure workers, communities, and unions benefit from electric vehicle and clean energy manufacturing supply chain investments across the country with a focus on southern communities. BuildUS is also supporting model community coalitions to scale building retrofits, solarization, and community benefit agreements through stronger labor and community partnerships.

- ▶ **\$50 million mobilized from economic justice funders.**
- ▶ **\$24 million deployed since the fund's launch in September 2023.**

"Workers and communities now have the opportunity to build an economy that works better for everyone."

*-Justin Maxson, Executive Director at BuildUS*

## Families and Workers Fund

The Families and Workers Fund's Powering Climate and Infrastructure Careers Initiative was launched in recognition of recent, unprecedented federal investments. This pooled fund initiative supports scalable, inclusive workforce training; efforts to improve job quality; and government capacity and delivery, helping to connect people in underinvested communities to uplifting careers in clean energy and the economy of the future.

- ▶ **Up to \$50 million in grant funding will be committed to projects across the United States and Tribal Nations as part of the broader \$125 million pooled fund initiative. \$19+ million in complementary grants made to date.**

"The passage of historic federal legislation has played a pivotal role in fostering collaboration and inspiring bold action within the philanthropic community to accelerate a clean energy future."

*-Rachel Korberg, Executive Director at Families and Workers Fund*

## Invest in Our Future

Invest in Our Future supports philanthropic organizations to mobilize funds to ensure that unprecedented federal clean energy investments strengthen communities across the country, reduce pollution, and transform our economy.

- ▶ **\$85.5 million in grants administered to 80+ organizations since Invest in Our Future's inception.**
- ▶ **43% of Invest in Our Future's grantmaking provided benefits to workers and underserved communities in 2023.**

"Increased collaboration within climate philanthropy has expanded aligned funding and shared strategy development. As a result, funders are better equipped to provide time-sensitive technical assistance, catalyze new work to rapidly site and permit clean energy projects and scale funding for organizations at the cutting edge of community-led clean energy implementation."

*-Peter Colavito, Executive Director at Invest in Our Future*



# 500/1500 Challenge

In early 2024, *Invest in Our Future (IOF)* and the *What Works Plus (WW+)* funder collaborative launched the 500/1500 Challenge to further implementation of federal climate and clean energy investments. The two-part challenge aims to raise awareness about projects, increase coordination among key entities, and support communities across the country to learn about, access, and implement funds.

## Challenge Impact: By the Numbers

**Communities in all 50 states**, in addition to D.C. and Puerto Rico, have received philanthropic investments counted in the 500/1500 Challenge

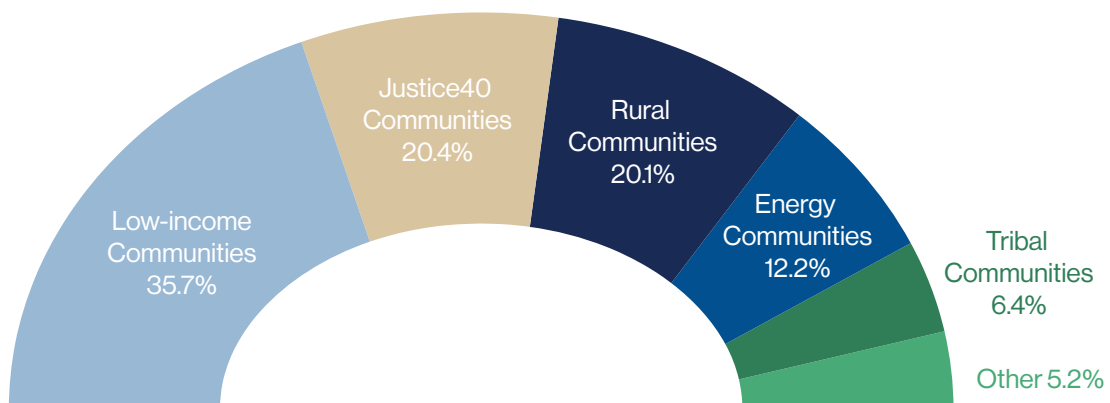
The Challenge tracked over  
**\$219M**  
in grantmaking

There were **1,552/500** education and awareness activities identified in places and **1,888/1500** activities to stand up projects

The Challenge was designed to track **500 philanthropically-funded education and awareness activities in cities, counties, regions, states, and tribal nations** across the country.

**Place Spotlight:** With support from the Hewlett Foundation, the nonprofit organization **UndauntedK12** led a state-wide campaign in Wisconsin to build awareness of the Inflation Reduction Act's clean energy programs, particularly for the state's schools. Through webinars, conferences, and 1:1 engagement, UndauntedK12 was able to meet with hundreds of civic, governmental, and educational leaders across Wisconsin to discuss federal programs relevant to local schools.

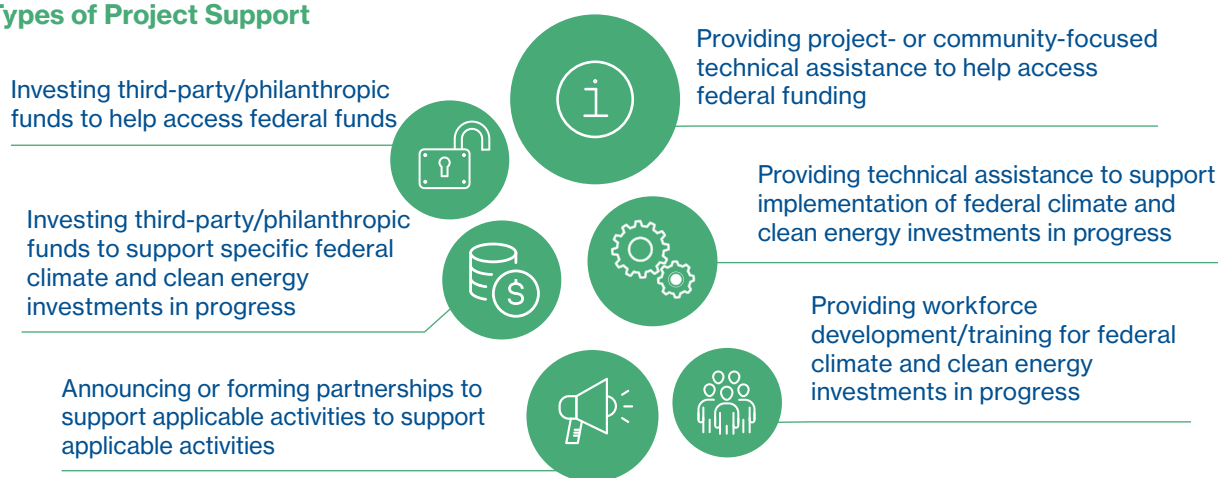
### Communities Supported By Education & Awareness Efforts



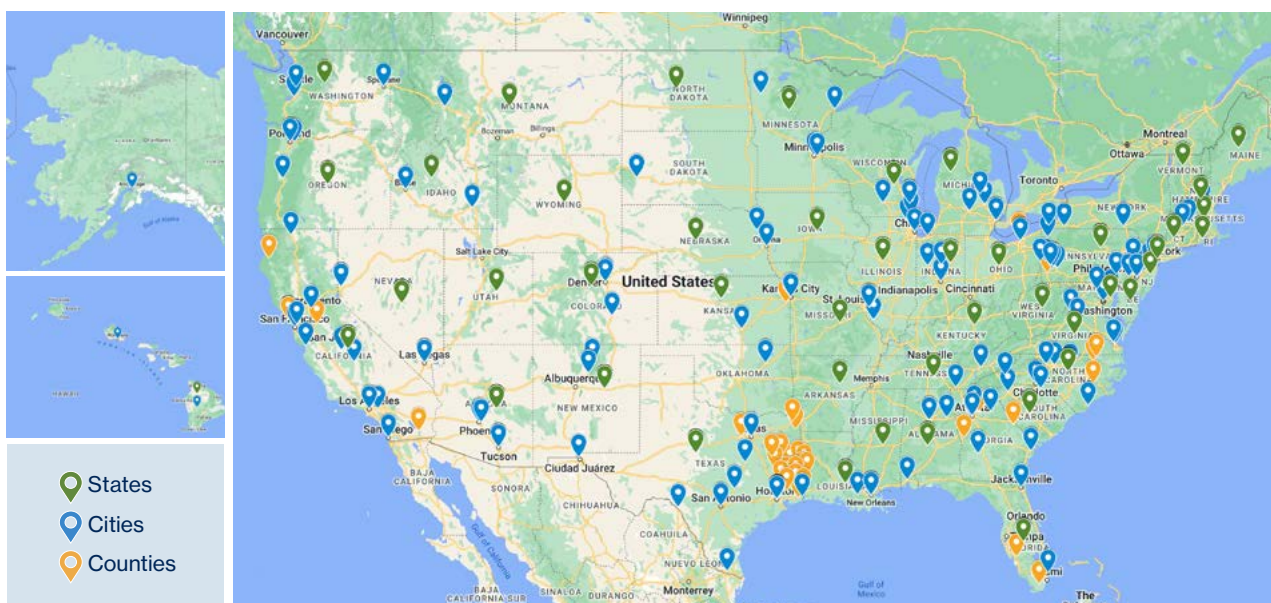
The Challenge also identified **1500 efforts** supported by philanthropy to stand up and implement projects (e.g., technical assistance, gap/match funding, and workforce development).

**Project Spotlight:** Through support from McKnight Foundation, **Minnesota’s Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs)** provided technical assistance to clean energy projects for the state’s farmers, businesses, schools, local governments, and residents. CERTs also provided free resources to Minnesotans about IRA’s opportunities, including information about heat pumps, weatherization, how to access tax credits and rebates, and more. With an additional focus on BIPOC and underserved communities, over 900 CERT “ambassadors” across Minnesota were able to share IRA information and resources with their local communities.

### Types of Project Support



### 500 Places Challenge Map



To view an interactive version of the map with more detail, please click [here](#).

# Spotlight on Community Collaborations

In July 2023, the **Bezos Earth Fund** announced \$400 million to enhance green spaces (e.g., parks, trees, community gardens, urban farms and urban trails) in underserved urban communities across the U.S. the **Greening American Cities** program also aims to make improvements in physical and mental health for residents while increasing community resilience to climate impacts. An initial \$50 million was allocated to projects in Albuquerque, Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Wilmington, Delaware.

In March 2024, **Bloomberg Philanthropies** launched **Bloomberg American Sustainable Cities**, a three-year, \$200-million initiative to help leaders of 25 U.S. cities leverage federal funds from the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to build low-carbon, resilient, and economically thriving communities. Building on the longtime leadership of U.S. cities to confront the crisis of climate change which disproportionately impacts disadvantaged communities, selected cities from across the U.S. will receive access to a Bloomberg Philanthropies-funded innovation team with expertise in data analysis, insight development, and project management to drive city progress on developing affordable energy-efficient housing, increasing access to clean energy, and investing in electric vehicles.

**Groundswell's SOUL Program** reduces energy bills through energy efficiency upgrades and enabling home repairs to high energy-burden households that serve as an investment in housing equity. To-date, SOUL has delivered more than \$1 million in energy efficiency and repairs directly to low- and moderate-income households. Program participants save an average of approximately \$500 per year, equivalent to a roughly 30% decrease in average energy burdens. Groundswell will seek to integrate SOUL with the **Southeast Rural Power Solar for All Program** (led by Groundswell), a regional community solar program serving 8 states and supported by a \$156 million EPA Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Solar for All award.





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**The Heinz Endowments** is making a \$10 million commitment over the next two years to help western Pennsylvania leverage federal funds from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and other legislation. The investment has supported the creation of the [Southwest PA Municipal Project Hub](#), which helps non-profits, municipalities, school districts, and redevelopment authorities in Southwestern Pennsylvania access IRA funding. The coordination hub also provides assistance with grant writing, project development, legal guidance, and communications support. To date, the Hub has provided direct support to schools, municipalities, and nonprofits, resulting in the submission of over 10 major federal grant proposals totaling over \$100 million in requested IRA funds.

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[America the Beautiful](#) (ABTC) is a public-private grant program designed to streamline grant funding opportunities from federal agencies and the private sector for new voluntary, large-scale conservation and restoration projects across public and private lands in the U.S.

Over the past two years, the **National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)** and **Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP)** has awarded \$75 million to Tribes through ABTC, working in partnership with the U.S. Department of the Interior through the Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the U.S. Department of Defense. Through its funding collaborative, Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) provided \$2.3 million in matching funds through its partnership with NFWF, effectively removing the match fund requirement for tribal applicants.

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In October 2023, [philanthropies provided \\$750,000 in matching funds](#) to the **United Mine Workers of America's Career Centers (UMWACC)** for the organization to train over 500 dislocated miners and others in southwestern Pennsylvania for new robotics industry careers. The philanthropic funding unlocked \$2.9 million in federal funding through a Build Back Better grant that will support coalfield communities affected by mine closures. Participating philanthropies included the Heinz Endowments, the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, the Just Transition Fund, and the Climate Jobs National Resource Center.

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In 2023, the **Center for Energy Workforce Development** and the **National Urban League** launched the [Urban Energy Jobs Program \(UEJP\)](#) to connect underrepresented individuals to a range of career readiness programs in the clean energy sector. The program was designed to support Apprenticeship Building America efforts launched by the Department of Labor and has been scaled through support from Breakthrough Energy.

Currently, the UEJP has supported creation of six Registered Apprenticeship programs throughout the U.S., including in Chicago, Houston, Louisville, New Orleans, and St. Louis. To date, over 300 people have successfully completed the program and over 90 program graduates have been hired.

*"The program opened my eyes to careers available to me right out of high school and influenced the beginning of my journey to entering into the construction/utility industries."*

*-Asianay Johnson, 2023 CONSTRUCT graduate*

# Reflections from Philanthropy

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“**Community Foundation Climate Collaborative (CFCC)** ensures our partners across the country are aware of opportunities, ready to apply, competitive in the application process, and ultimately contribute to landing meaningful, tangible climate benefits in the communities we serve. CFCC has supported members’ successful funding applications and created a robust, national learning network to share best practices in this rapidly evolving space.”

*-Community Foundation Climate Collaborative*

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“**Communities First** has continuously centered equity, organized with place-based funders, and offered insight directly from frontline leaders and movement groups. We have also coordinated with federal agencies to elevate emerging priorities, champion best practices, and encourage accountability standards that address the challenges of those disproportionately impacted by past underinvestment at scale. As a result, nearly 60% of [GGRF funds allocated to NCIF/CCIA recipients](#) incorporate [equity best practices](#), accounting for \$12 billion of the \$20 billion awarded.”

*-Communities First Fund*

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“When President Biden signed the most significant climate and clean energy bill in history, it was a moment for celebration and a call for action. Philanthropy heeded that call, mobilizing unprecedented resources to support the swift and effective implementation of the IRA, educating the public, and organizing leaders in the public and private sectors to seize the opportunities provided by the law. Philanthropy fueled a nationwide communications effort to tell the story of how the IRA creates good paying union jobs, lowers costs for consumers, and accelerates the transition to a clean energy economy. As communications efforts supported by philanthropy continue, more and more people will understand how climate action benefits communities, the economy, and their own pocketbooks. None of this would have happened without the leadership of President Biden and philanthropies across the country.”

*-Corridor Partners*

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“**Hewlett Foundation** has prioritized the implementation of recent federal climate laws such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, most of which passed with bipartisan support, because we know the important role the federal government can play in improving the life of its citizens. In this era of unparalleled federal investments, a window of opportunity presents itself to tackle the most pressing challenges of our time – ranging from the urgent climate crisis to restoring faith in our democracy and bridging the ever-widening wealth gap. However, achieving success demands more than mere optimism; it necessitates proactive efforts to ensure funding reaches the communities that need it most and achieves the scale of impact this

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moment requires. We are prioritizing efforts to collaborate with our philanthropic and public sector partners to ensure these investments can actually result in a flourishing future for our planet and people across the U.S.”

***-Hewlett Foundation***

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“The **McKnight Foundation** recognizes that we are at a pivotal moment for people and our planet. With unprecedented federal funding opportunities emerging, the coming years provide an incredible opportunity to set our nation on a new course toward a more prosperous, secure, and equitable future. The Midwest is at the heart of realizing this future. As a place-based funder, McKnight is deploying all of our resources to leverage federal funding and connect across philanthropy, regions, and sectors to center the Midwest as a global hub of equitable climate action. This includes deploying an additional \$100 million over the next five years from our endowment to invest directly in the Midwest’s clean energy transition as a catalyst for others to do the same.”


***-The McKnight Foundation***

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“**Omidyar Network** has been pleased to partner with other economic and climate justice funders, to further deepen collaboration and cooperation among the field. This has been a unique opportunity for philanthropy, the private sector, government, and local communities to come together to realize an economic transformation that will be seen and felt by all.”

***-Omidyar Network***





The information in this report was compiled by the What Works Plus collaborative, a philanthropic coordination hub to advance equity and climate resilience by supporting implementation of federal infrastructure, climate, and economic development funding. What Works Plus is a project of Freedman Consulting, LLC. The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views or position of Freedman Consulting, What Works Plus, its members, or clients.

Photos provided by Communities First Fund, Groundswell, and Native Americans in Philanthropy