

FRONTLINE RESOURCE INSTITUTE

2024-2029

STRATEGIC PLAN



A LETTER FROM FRI'S CONCEPTUAL COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

The Frontline Resource Institute (FRI, pronounced “free”) supports frontline communities working to advance environmental and climate justice. Over the past eighteen months, we—the members of the Conceptual Committee—have come together to design, support, and guide FRI’s development and strategy from 2024 to 2029.

The Conceptual Committee is a radical concept—a meaningful partnership between a mainstream environmental organization and frontline activists and advocates. Together, with support from Environmental Defense Fund’s Justice and Equity team and consultants from Metropolitan Group, the Conceptual Committee guided the priorities and strategy for this new institute. We are each so different, yet we have the same direction and purpose: to support frontline advocates as indispensable movement builders and changemakers for communities. As committee members, we brought our collective expertise and experience to position FRI as a valuable resource for frontline communities, and also a thoughtful collaborator within the broader environmental and climate justice movement that many of us formed.



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THE CONCEPTUAL COMMITTEE IS
A RADICAL CONCEPT—A
MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN A MAINSTREAM
ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATION
AND FRONTLINE ACTIVISTS AND
ADVOCATES.

”

THE POWER OF FRONTLINE ADVOCATES

FRI centers frontline voices. We recognize the skill and expertise of frontline advocates and Indigenous Peoples and organizations as powerful drivers of environmental solutions. Those on the frontline have the knowledge, expertise, and lived experience to lead. We know that alignment with environmental and climate justice principles and practice is how we must do all environmental work. FRI shifts power so that those who have been overlooked by mainstream environmentalism are the decision-makers. For decades, frontline advocates have been accomplishing work at the scale that matters—for families, neighbors, communities, and ecosystems. FRI will continually ask ourselves: “How do we think bigger so that frontline advocates can have a deeper and broader impact?”

THE MOMENT IN TIME

We created FRI during a momentous time shaped by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately harmed and devastated the lives of our family members, friends, children, and colleagues living in frontline communities. This time has also witnessed unprecedented funding and resources for environmental justice from the United States federal government and renewed focus and attention from philanthropy. The climate crisis is focusing the attention of nations on the transition to renewable and non-extractive systems. And yet, there is frustration with global and macro policies that overlook impacts to local communities and places dealing with threats to health and well-being, many of them caused by a legacy of environmental injustice and underinvestment. Even as frontline advocates are being resourced, others are fighting court decisions that disenfranchise their communities and Tribal nations. Other leaders are being killed for their advocacy work.

“
OUR STRATEGIC GOALS
FOCUS ON MOVEMENT
BUILDING, SHARED
LEARNING, TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE, AND FUNDING
AND DEVELOPMENT.
”



Image courtesy of Chantel Comardelle

OUR STRATEGY

Our strategic goals focus on **Movement Building, Shared Learning, Technical Assistance, and Funding and Development**. We designed FRI to be grounded in principled relationships and authentic collaborations, preserving the self-determination and agency of frontline advocates, organizations, and communities, as well as the sovereignty of Tribal nations. FRI also emphasizes systems-level solutions at the intersection of the environmental, human rights, racial, economic, and social justice movements.

Although our strategic plan covers five years, FRI will provide services to support frontline advocates in their ongoing endeavors for environmental and climate justice and community well-being. As a new organization, FRI's strategy also focuses on ensuring that we have **sustained funding** and **collaborative governance** in place to support frontline communities over the long term.

THE FUTURE

We are proud to have created a dedicated organization that in its short existence has already delivered resources and technical assistance for frontline groups. As political, economic, environmental, and technological changes accelerate, we won't slow down. FRI will continue to learn and grow as an authentic, transformational, transparent, and trusted resource, building power for and with frontline voices.



“
WE CONTINUALLY
ASK OURSELVES:
HOW CAN WE THINK
BIGGER?
”

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Frontline Resource Institute (FRI) was founded in 2021 to provide resources to frontline advocates and organizations. We seek to benefit communities that experience and struggle against the first and worst impacts of environmental harms and climate change. Guided by our Conceptual Committee of frontline leaders, we support just, equitable, and community-centered environmental and climate justice movements.

FRI positions frontline advocates as leaders for three reasons. First, the people closest to the problems are closest to the solutions. Frontline advocates represent communities with extraordinary strengths, talents, and expertise. Frontline leaders have advanced environmental and climate solutions that improve health and well-being on the local, national, and global scale. Secondly, collective action by frontline groups is essential. Collaboration and partnerships amplify best practices, reinforce values of equity and justice, and expand opportunities for progress. This is why **movement building** is fundamental to FRI's mission. Finally, frontline communities include millions of individuals in the United States and around the globe living in fragile circumstances. Frontline advocates work to help their communities not just survive but thrive. Frontline voices and leadership catalyze **transformation** to uplift human potential and build community.

Over the past two years, FRI has made substantial contributions that amplify the power of frontline advocates. Our first strategic plan sets a five-year course from 2024 to 2029 to further our mission and achieve our vision:

OUR MISSION

FRI provides the current and next generation of frontline advocates with the knowledge, technical assistance, funding access, and capacity-building support to make environmental and climate justice a reality for all.

OUR VISION

We envision a just, sustainable, and joyful future where frontline advocates are leaders, delivering environmental and climate justice for all.

Our strategic plan declares goals in four focus areas: **Movement Building**, **Shared Learning**, **Technical Assistance**, and **Funding Access and Development**. As a new organization, we also focus on two areas to build our financial sustainability and organizational culture: **FRI Funding and Development** and **FRI Governance**. By following our vision and fulfilling our purpose and potential, within five years:

FRI will be established as a well-resourced and well-trusted entity that builds alliances and provides technical and capacity-building support, focused on strengthening frontline advocates and the broader environmental and climate justice movements.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Our strategy encompasses six areas and goals, validated by a needs assessment of 13 grantees and more than 200 organizations.

| | FOCUS AREA | STRATEGIC GOALS | TRANSFORMATIONAL RESULT |
|----------------|---|--|--|
| EXTERNAL GOALS | MOVEMENT BUILDING <i>Keeping Frontline Communities Front and Center</i> | Connect people, policies, and practices through collective action to create transformative and durable well-being for frontline communities. | Frontline advocates are leaders of a strong, transformative, and victorious environmental and climate justice movement. |
| | SHARED LEARNING <i>Channeling Collective Wisdom</i> | Create opportunities for frontline advocates to learn alongside each other to amplify shared knowledge and cooperative action for environmental and climate justice. | Frontline advocates have increased knowledge, abilities, and skills to advance environmental and climate justice. Our work will nurture and channel the collective wisdom and consciousness of the environmental and climate justice movement. |
| | TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE <i>Building Frontline Capacity Through Knowledge</i> | Expand access to technical assistance, organizational and administrative capacity building, legal, and scientific support for frontline advocates. | Beneficiaries have increased capacities and capabilities to achieve environmental and climate justice in their communities, as well as at the state, regional, national, and international levels. |
| | FUNDING ACCESS AND DEVELOPMENT <i>Building Frontline Capacity Through Resources</i> | Increase access to resource development and funding opportunities for frontline advocates. | Frontline advocates have the necessary resources to build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future. |
| INTERNAL GOALS | FRI GOVERNANCE <i>Strengthening FRI as a Participatory Organization</i> | Develop an effective governance framework to move FRI toward becoming an independent nonprofit organization. | FRI becomes a freestanding institute that is valued and trusted by frontline advocates and the environmental and climate justice movement. |
| | FRI DEVELOPMENT <i>Endowing FRI to Provide Long-Term Benefits</i> | Secure durable and sustained funding and resources for FRI. | Frontline advocates rely on support from FRI over the long term. |



II. INTRODUCTION

FRI provides resources to frontline advocates and organizations to benefit communities that experience and struggle against the first and worst impacts of environmental harms and climate change. Guided by our Conceptual Committee of frontline leaders, we support just, equitable, and community-centered environmental and climate justice movements. Our first ever strategic plan guides our efforts from 2024 to 2029. Our strategy centers frontline advocates, emphasizes movement building, and aims for transformative impact.

CENTERING FRONTLINE ADVOCATES

Frontline communities experience the first and worst of environmental harms and climate risks. These communities are affected by loss, pollution, and other harms due to climate change, industry, and other intersecting societal inequities ([NAACP Guide to Transforming Crisis & Advancing Equity in the Disaster Continuum](#), [Climate Reality Project](#)). Frontline communities are broadly diverse, and every frontline community is different. They include, but are not limited to, frontline communities located in close proximity to a polluter or polluted site, communities affected by sensitive ecosystems, and communities located in sacrifice zones.

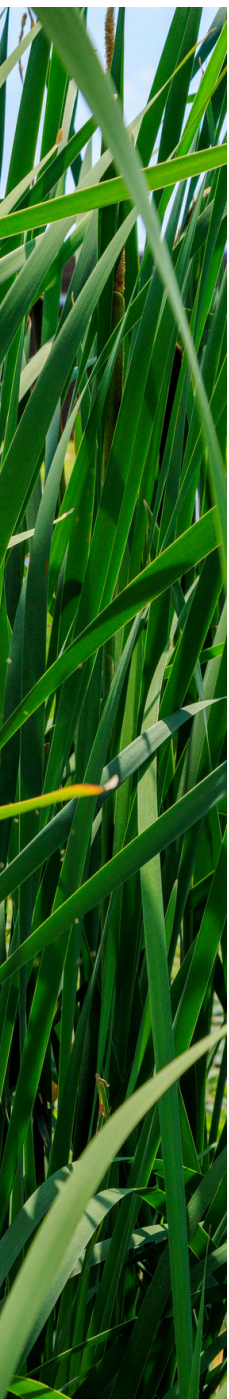
Frontline advocates create solutions for environmental and climate justice, while also fighting systems of oppression and discrimination based on race, income, gender and gender identity, age, physical ability, caste, indigeneity, and economic power. FRI seeks to support the sustainability and well-being of frontline communities and their advocates in the face of these systems.

FRI also acknowledges the expertise and creativity of the international community of frontline community-based organizations. Although FRI's five-year strategy primarily looks at the United States, we will also reach out to global audiences, particularly in our goals to support movement building and shared knowledge.

BUILDING THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

FRI sees the movement building that has been sustained since the early 1990s as the umbrella for all our efforts. The environmental and climate justice movements were formed by thousands of frontline activists striving for the well-being and health of their families, neighbors, and communities against environmental harms and disinvestment.

FRI will use our knowledge, connections, and platform so that frontline advocates and the needs, concerns, and solutions of frontline communities stay front and center as the environmental and climate justice movement accelerates and moves toward promise and progress.



Our goal is to achieve environmental and climate justice by creating new opportunities for common cause and shared humanity. We will continue to build bridges among previously siloed communities, sectors, and thought leaders. Through collective action, we will serve as a collaborator, convener, partner, and ally to support the achievement of power, justice, and self-determination for frontline communities and Indigenous peoples.

As more money and resources are available to address environmental justice, it is more important than ever to ensure that the concerns and proposed solutions of the frontline activists who launched and sustained the movement are not sidelined. Frontline voices must have a say in prioritizing the needs of people and communities who have withstood the most of environmental disparities, and in deciding the environmental and climate solutions that will positively impact their communities.

SEEKING TRANSFORMATION

FRI listened to and learned from the past and the present to create services that drive transformation in frontline communities. These efforts also aimed to transform the structural and systemic causes of these harms, which are rooted in historical and long-standing injustices within multiple social and economic domains—employment, housing, education, health care, transportation, public amenities, open space, and food access. Those on the frontline often have an intimate, personal understanding of the concerns of people and place as well as a broader systems perspective.

As an ally, FRI strives to transform systems, not just help people navigate broken systems. FRI also looks toward the future and at the potential of future generations to lead and protect Mother Earth.

We also believe that the ability of individuals to experience joy and live in safety is not a luxury, but part of the transformation that is needed. FRI will nurture the joy—great happiness and delight—that already exists within frontline communities while also upholding the right of every individual to have opportunities to experience and express joy. Uplifting joy is not blind to inflicted suffering and harm. Rather, joy is in direct opposition and resistance to the consequences wreaked by oppressive systems. Joy balances the painful difference between what is and what should be. And humor and seeking joy in experiences and companionship is how individuals working in difficult and often dangerous conditions, advocating for the well-being and lives of friends, neighbors, and families, get through tough times.

We also recognize that FRI itself will need to transform and evolve over time. We must adapt with the needs of frontline communities as they and the world change.





III. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

OUR VISION

We envision a just, sustainable, and joyful future where frontline advocates are leaders, delivering environmental and climate justice for all.

OUR MISSION

FRI provides the current and next generations of frontline advocates with the knowledge, relationships, technical assistance, funding access, and capacity-building support to make environmental justice a reality for all.

OUR DIRECT BENEFICIARIES

Our work will directly support three major categories of frontline advocates: **frontline community-based organizations**, **Indigenous Peoples and Tribal nations**, and **youth and students**.

- **FRONTLINE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS:** A frontline community-based organization (CBO) is either a local, state, or Indigenous (not part of a Tribal government) nonprofit organization, unincorporated group, or small for-profit business that represents and/or supports a specific frontline community and its residents and stakeholders. Frontline CBOs also represent or serve a particular population from many communities and geographic areas, but which face shared experiences of environmental injustice and climate challenges. FRI also provides limited support to international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that support frontline communities. We strive to increase our support for international frontline NGOs as we grow and will progress along the lines of relationship and trust building to do so in alignment with our international partners.
- **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND TRIBAL NATIONS:** FRI adopts the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People ([UNDRIP](#)). FRI supports the original peoples in North America and those Indigenous Peoples of other countries.
- **YOUTH AND STUDENTS:** FRI adopts the United Nations definition of youth as persons between the ages of roughly 18 to 35. We will serve younger or older individuals depending on the need and potential impact. FRI also serves to educate students in middle school, high school, and college.

OUR ULTIMATE BENEFICIARIES

Through this work, we aim to support our ultimate beneficiaries:

- **FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES:** These communities experience the first and worst of environmental harms and climate risks, and are affected by loss, pollution, and other harms due to climate change, industry, and other intersecting societal inequities ([NAACP Guide to Transforming Crisis & Advancing Equity in the Disaster Continuum](#), [Climate Reality Project](#)). Frontline communities are broadly diverse, and every frontline community is different. They include, but are not limited to, fenceline communities located in close proximity to a polluter or polluted site, communities affected by sensitive ecosystems, and communities located in sacrifice zones. Frontline communities, despite experiencing the first and worst impacts of climate change, are not just passive recipients of environmental harms. These communities are actively and collectively resisting the systems of oppression that cause these harms, like racism, colonialism, patriarchy, assimilationism, and capitalism. FRI centers this active definition of frontline communities and seeks to support their sustainability and well-being in the face of these systems.
- **THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT:** FRI's work will benefit the broader environmental and climate justice movement. We will promote solutions and thought leadership that lead to structural and systemic change, in collaboration with other members of the movement, including frontline CBOs, Indigenous peoples, youth, academia, philanthropy, mainstream NGOs, and government.
- **ALL OUR LIVING AND NON-LIVING RELATIONS:** By supporting frontline communities, FRI will also advance sustainability to benefit people, Nature, and the many beings who are interconnected and interdependent as part of the web of life.

INTERNATIONAL BENEFICIARIES

In our first five years, FRI's work will primarily focus on communities and concerns in the U.S. while fostering partnerships and sharing knowledge as we can with international constituencies, especially youth leaders. FRI recognizes its positionality as a U.S. entity, and we seek to not replicate imperialistic, colonial, or paternalistic models when we provide international support. We instead commit to moving along the lines of trust-based relationships, serving as a supporter of existing efforts in the landscape of international climate justice work.



VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

SEVEN VALUES DEFINE FRI'S CORE BELIEFS AND GUIDE OUR WORK:

COMMUNITY

We are in solidarity with frontline communities and value their people, their leaders, and their advocates. We create opportunities for frontline advocates to connect, network, and build community with their peers, partners, and collaborators for collective problem solving and to advance radical solutions and decolonized wisdom.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

We align our work with the [Principles of Environmental Justice](#) and the [Jemez Principles](#) as we adapt to changing conditions. We create opportunities to evolve strategies for achieving environmental justice by centering the leadership and voices of frontline advocates in the environmental and climate justice movement.

EQUITY

We strive to shift power and resources to frontline advocates and individuals who have been overlooked by the mainstream environmental movement. We seek diversity and equity across all components of our work. We take care to uphold strong systems of accountability inside of FRI, modeling equitable practices for community building, movement building, and advocacy.

INTEGRITY

We engender a thoughtful and compassionate community deeply committed to celebrating each other and the Earth. We create a practice of self-reflection, embracing humility and transparency, in our work with frontline communities, advocates, and partners. We create avenues for receiving feedback to ensure accountability, transparency, and continued alignment with our values.

COLLABORATION

We provide time and space to support collaboration across multiple sectors on behalf of frontline communities. We embrace generative conflict for the purpose of strengthening meaningful, effective, and courageous collaboration. We welcome partnerships and embrace initiatives that emphasize peer learning, collective action, and networking.

POWER BUILDING

We are responsive to the needs and aspirations of frontline advocates, youth, coalitions, and networks to achieve environmental and climate justice wins. We center non-oppressive forms of power, lifting healing and health as the supporting pillars of power.

SELF-DETERMINATION

We respect the independence of frontline advocates and organizations to make decisions for their future. We support communities as they assert their right to control their lands, neighborhoods, resources, and assets. We follow the lead of organizations who apply their own agency to determine their needs, priorities, and strategies.

THEORY OF CHANGE

PROBLEM

Frontline communities experience the first and worst of environmental harms and climate shocks and are actively resisting the oppressive systems that cause these harms. However, the role of frontline advocates is not fully recognized and appreciated as fundamental to achieving environmental and climate benefits. Since they are often under-resourced and marginalized in the broader environmental landscape, their full potential for creating just, sustainable, and joyful communities is not always fully recognized.



Image courtesy of Shamyra Lavigne-Davey

OUTCOMES

FRI will achieve the following transformational results:

- 1** Frontline advocates are **leaders** of a strong, transformative, and victorious environmental and climate justice movement.
- 2** Frontline advocates have **increased knowledge, abilities, and skills to advance environmental and climate justice**. Our work will nurture and channel the collective wisdom and consciousness of the environmental and climate justice movement.
- 3** Frontline advocates have **increased capacities and capabilities to achieve environmental and climate justice** in their communities, as well as at the state, regional, national, and international levels.
- 4** Frontline advocates have the **necessary resources to build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future**.



STRATEGIC GOALS

To fulfill the outcomes of our theory of change, FRI will advance goals in four interconnected focus areas:

| FOCUS AREA | STRATEGIC GOAL |
|-------------------------|--|
| MOVEMENT BUILDING | Connect people, policies, and practices through collective action to create transformative and durable well-being for frontline communities. |
| SHARED LEARNING | Create opportunities for frontline advocates to learn alongside each other to amplify shared knowledge and cooperative action for environmental and climate justice. |
| TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE | Expand access to technical assistance, organizational and administrative capacity building, legal, and scientific support for frontline advocates. |
| FUNDING AND DEVELOPMENT | Increase access to resource development and funding opportunities for frontline advocates. |

We will also work toward two additional outcomes focused on our organization's sustainability. First, we intend for frontline advocates to be able to rely on support from FRI over the long term. Secondly, we aim for FRI to become a freestanding institute that is valued and trusted by frontline advocates and the environmental and climate justice movement. To accomplish these outcomes, FRI has two internal goals:

| FOCUS AREA | STRATEGIC GOAL |
|---------------------------|--|
| FRI GOVERNANCE | Develop an effective governance framework to move FRI toward becoming an independent nonprofit organization. |
| FRI FUNDING & DEVELOPMENT | Secure durable and sustained funding and resources for FRI. |

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In 2021, Environmental Defense Fund's (EDF) Senior Vice President for Justice and Equity held over 200 informal conversations with representatives from environmental justice organizations, the U.S. federal government, academia, foundations, large environmental NGOs, and more. One overarching theme emerged: the idea that capacity-building support was greatly needed for grassroots, community-based, frontline environmental justice organizations to prevail. The idea for FRI emerged from this small seed: that EDF could leverage its influence, fundraising prowess, and positionality in the environmental movement to support something created by and for frontline advocates. By doing so, EDF would provide the resources, space, and human capital for the work, while our Conceptual Committee (comprising environmental justice leaders) steered FRI's direction, strategy, and goals. FRI was designed to support environmental justice and frontline communities in having an unfiltered voice to affect change on issues critical to their communities. To this end and to achieve its full changemaking potential, FRI was always built with the goal of becoming its own freestanding entity.

EDF's support of FRI was also an effort to pursue equitable solutions to environmental challenges by matching words with actions. EDF acknowledges that it has operated within and benefited from systems that have provided it with opportunities not afforded to others. EDF also recognizes that a focus on solving environmental issues at the global and national levels can conflict with local environmental justice goals and concerns. Over its history, EDF has not consistently addressed the disproportionate environmental burden borne by marginalized communities, including communities of color. Through the creation of FRI with environmental justice partners, EDF has learned the importance of co-created and community-led solutions. We will listen to and learn from community experts.



In line with this philosophy, FRI's substantive work so far has been steered by our subcommittees comprising members of our Conceptual Committee with support from EDF staff and our consultant team from Metropolitan Group. FRI's direction and programming were greatly informed by a needs assessment that was conducted from October 2022 to March 2024. This research was undertaken to understand how organizations like FRI can provide resources for and better serve frontline communities. It also aimed to further overall understanding of the landscape of frontline and Tribal communities, the organizations that represent them, and their needs and priorities.

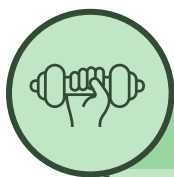
SETTING THE COURSE: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The needs assessment identified four key needs and priorities for frontline communities:

- **SHARED LEARNING AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING:** Shared learning, knowledge development, and relationship building were all acknowledged as key capacity building needs. These needs were expressed in three areas: networking, convening, and knowledge transfer; training and staff development; and open-source information.
- **FUNDING:** Unrestricted funding is in high demand from frontline organizations because it can help them cover costs for things like staffing, training, strategy development, physical space, paid time off, health insurance, and other infrastructure needs.
- **FULL-TIME STAFFING:** A well-rounded, well-supported team contributes to organizational capacity. Hiring new staff and putting in place support systems for existing staff were identified as key needs.
- **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, DATA ACCESS, AND RESEARCH:** Access to reliable data, trusted experts, and technical assistance emerged as priorities for frontline organizations. This includes hiring or having access to trusted people and resources that are knowledgeable in areas such as law and legal assistance, scientific expertise, policy, data access, and organizational management.

OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In its first 18 months of existence, FRI's accomplishments exceeded our wildest expectations, making significant progress in all four of our mission-focused priorities. FRI already has approximately 400 organizations and individuals connected to its network. FRI also built substantial partnerships to better serve and support frontline communities. Our partnerships fall into two main categories. The first involves working with organizations that can provide services and support to frontline organizations, including scientific, legal, fundraising, and grants management assistance. The second involves FRI itself acting as a resource and ally to frontline organizations.



MOVEMENT BUILDING

Recognizing the importance of youth engagement in climate action, FRI is partnering with the **Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA)** to extend and enhance their reach by leveraging our relationships and sharing content and scholarship. PACJA is working to build a bridge for advocacy exchange for young people aged 18 – 35-years-old in the global north and global south. One of their signature programs is the Nairobi Summer School for Climate Justice. In 2023, FRI delivered three training modules to hundreds of young climate leaders from 70 countries across the global south. The training covered topics such as the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S., climate change and health, and the history of environmental and climate justice. We also sponsored 10 Kenyan students to attend the alliance's summer school. This partnership continues to evolve: PACJA has invited FRI to serve on their planning committee and to be a partner in developing curriculum content for the summer school.



SHARED LEARNING

Launched in summer 2023, the [FRI Resource Hub](#) is a one-stop shop where frontline organizations can access vital resources in the pursuit of environmental and climate justice. In 2024, we will be working to expand the number and diversity of tools and resources offered in the resource hub. We will also continue to highlight one of the hub's resources each month in our FRIsource newsletter. In November 2023, our FRIsource featured resource was a [communications plan](#) created by a team of Columbia University students for the Jackson, Mississippi community through the Community and College Partners Program. The 54-page plan covers all forms of communication, from social media to radio and TV, and communities are encouraged to adapt and modify the plan to meet their unique needs.



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

One tool we are working to leverage is the [U.S. Climate Vulnerability Index \(CVI\)](#). The CVI is a new mapping tool developed by EDF and Texas A&M University that shows where climate action and effective solutions are most urgently needed. We envision using this tool to strengthen grant applications for frontline organizations and help funders focus their efforts on communities impacted first and worst by climate change. With this data at hand, communities have a tremendous opportunity to create compelling narratives. Data has the power to lend empirical evidence to experience in ways that strengthen the case for action; narrative has the power to infuse hard data with soul and bring it to life in ways that mobilize people to act. By leveraging CVI, words, images, and data can be combined in innovative, compelling narratives that advance community priorities and catalyze policymaking.



FUNDING ACCESS

In July 2022, FRI released two grant opportunities through our [Collective Action Fund](#) housed at the Tides Foundation. These grants were created to support frontline community organizations from across the United States and its territories to build capacity, develop organizational strategies, and advance environmental and climate justice. The inaugural cycle of grant funding was distributed via two tracks:

1) organizational strategy development grants of \$150,000 each; and 2) organizational capacity building and organizational durability grants of \$50,000 each. More than 300 organizations applied for funding. FRI provided grants to 13 organizations—four under Track 1 and nine under Track 2—for a total of \$1,050,000 in funds awarded. FRI's first grantee cohort represents nine U.S. states and territories, and the organizations work on issues ranging from air pollution and pesticide reform to food sovereignty.

FRI partnered with [Writing for Green](#) to provide grant writing training and coaching services to frontline organizations. Writing for Green has a proven track record in building grant writing capacity. In 2023, we partnered to provide grant writing training to our 13 grantees as well as train-the-trainer assistance to eight of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (TCTACs). FRI's partnership with Writing for Green is already making an impact. Over the past 18 months, the grant writing support FRI has provided to frontline organizations and other partners in the environmental and climate justice space has resulted in approximately \$138 million in funding for frontline organizations.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO BUILD ON OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED AS WE CONTINUE THE NEXT LEG OF OUR JOURNEY OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.

V. STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

MOVEMENT BUILDING

SUMMARY: We will serve as a collaborator, bridge, convener, partner, and ally to support the achievement of power, justice, and self-determination for frontline communities and Indigenous Peoples and nations in the U.S. and globally. Partnerships are key to expanding our movement building capacity. We will foster collaboration among our primary beneficiaries—frontline CBOs, youth and students, Indigenous Peoples and nations—in partnership with philanthropy, NGOs, federal and state government agencies, academic activists, and socially-responsible and vetted private companies. Our goal is to achieve environmental justice by serving and uplifting people, policies, and practices; creating new opportunities for common cause, shared humanity, and freedom; and building bridges between previously siloed communities, sectors, and thought leaders.



GOAL: Connect people, policies, and practices through collective action to create transformative and durable well-being for frontline communities.

OUTCOME (TRANSFORMATIONAL RESULT): Frontline advocates are centered and key drivers of a strong, transformative, and victorious environmental and climate justice movement.

PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES: Frontline CBOs, Indigenous Peoples and Nations, youth and students, and international beneficiaries.

OBJECTIVES

STORYTELLING

By the end of 2028, FRI has documented and shared the stories, successes, and histories of at least 50 frontline CBOs, in their words and on their terms.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

By the end of 2028, FRI has facilitated the data collection, analysis, and publication of at least five original justice-driven research deliverables aimed toward promoting systemic change in the environmental movement at large.

PARTNERSHIPS

By the end of 2028, FRI has fostered at least five unique, international partnerships to further FRI's reach and facilitate global youth movement building.

SHARED LEARNING

SUMMARY: FRI will continue to expand its resource hub of information, data, and education built for and by frontline advocates. We will elevate the broad and deep expertise possessed by frontline environmental and climate justice advocates and Indigenous Peoples who have lived experience and acquired knowledge, encouraging opportunities to learn from each other. We will focus on what frontline advocates want to document, learn, share, and accomplish, shortening the distance between frontline communities and decision-makers. Over the next five years, FRI has the potential not only to help frontline communities convert knowledge into actions to make positive changes in their communities, but also to support the environmental justice movement and its quest for systems transformation, promoting thriving places and people, while dismantling the root causes of environmental and climate harms.



GOAL: Create opportunities for frontline advocates to learn alongside each other to amplify shared knowledge and cooperative action for environmental and climate justice.

OUTCOME (TRANSFORMATIONAL RESULT): Frontline advocates have increased knowledge, abilities, and skills to advance environmental and climate justice. Our work will nurture and channel the collective wisdom and consciousness of the environmental and climate justice movement.

PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES: Frontline CBOs, Indigenous Peoples and Nations, youth and students, and international beneficiaries.

OBJECTIVES

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING | By the end of 2027, FRI has reached at least 500 frontline CBOs with shared learning, networking, and relationship building programs, events, and content. |
| NETWORK ENGAGEMENT | By 2027, FRI has expanded its network to 1,000 engaged frontline CBOs across the globe, using multiple communication vehicles and media platforms. |
| DATA | By 2028, FRI has increased access to user-friendly environmental and climate information for 400 frontline CBOs. |
| YOUTH LEARNING | By the end of 2028, FRI has facilitated knowledge sharing and networking for at least 500 youth representing frontline communities. |

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

SUMMARY: FRI will focus on filling gaps in technical assistance available to smaller grassroots and grassroots organizations. FRI will continue to provide data, information, and scientific support to sustain their work, growth, and knowledge building. FRI will also help frontline organizations build capacity through training and resources related to organizational capacity, information technology, fiscal management systems, and social entrepreneurship. When appropriate, FRI will work to leverage the expertise of trained EDF staff in technical assistance programming. FRI will also partner as needed with other organizations—specifically those who have demonstrated equitable and community-driven processes—to increase access to technical assistance by frontline advocates.



GOAL: Expand access to technical assistance, organizational and administrative capacity building, legal, and scientific support for frontline advocates.

OUTCOME (TRANSFORMATIONAL RESULT): Frontline advocates have increased capacities and capabilities to achieve environmental and climate justice in their communities, as well as at the state, regional, national, and international levels.

PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES: FRI members (by request and within our capacity and partnerships); Frontline CBOs or individuals trying to solve a specific problem in an impacted community

OBJECTIVES

ACCESSIBILITY

By 2028, FRI has increased technical assistance accessibility for 200 frontline CBOs, either directly through training and technical assistance, or indirectly through our technical assistance partners.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PILOTS

By 2028, FRI has developed a memorandum of understanding for technical assistance agreements with frontline organizations and has piloted a technical assistance program, leveraging EDF staff expertise, with 20 CBOs.

FUNDING ACCESS AND DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY: Frontline organizations rarely receive the critical general operating support they need to build their organizational capacity. In the United States, an unprecedented wave of federal funding is coming out for environmental and climate justice work, but many organizations do not have the familiarity, experience, or systems in place to successfully apply for billions of earmarked federal grant funding. Over the next five years, FRI will focus on increasing the access of frontline organizations to pursue and obtain funding from government, philanthropy, and the private sector. Our work will continue to build on our partnership with [Writing for Green](#), providing innovative grant writing training. Additionally, we will continue to build on our work with other partners, focused on developing tools that equitably employ artificial intelligence to connect frontline organizations with grant opportunities and support them through the application process.



Image courtesy of Shamyra Lavigne-Davey

GOAL: Increase access to resource development and funding opportunities for frontline advocates.

OUTCOME (TRANSFORMATIONAL RESULT): Frontline advocates have the necessary resources to build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future.

PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES: Frontline CBOs, Indigenous Peoples and Nations, and youth and students. For the first five years, FRI will focus on domestic beneficiaries in the United States.

OBJECTIVES

GRANT TRAININGS

By 2028, FRI has supported grant-related trainings for 75 frontline CBOs, either directly or indirectly through our partners.

GRANTMAKING

FRI may distribute grant funding to groups or advocates based on specific programmatic needs and objectives.

GRANT SUPPORT

By 2028, FRI has supported 50 frontline CBOs in grant processes resulting in successful funding awards, either directly or indirectly through our partners.

FRI GOVERNANCE

SUMMARY: Within five years, FRI will establish itself as an independent 501c3. Our aspiration is to create a freestanding institute valued by frontline advocates and actors within the environmental and climate justice movement. We will continue to be guided by a participatory governance structure and organizational culture grounded in collaboration and consensus-based decision-making. Our short-term priority is to create a governing board with members anchored in our values. We will pursue an ambitious fundraising plan that can ensure that FRI has full-time staff and the infrastructure and accountability systems to advance our mission in partnership with our board and our beneficiaries.



GOAL: Establish a strong and effective organization aligned with our core values.

OUTCOME (TRANSFORMATIONAL RESULT): FRI becomes a freestanding institute that is valued and trusted by frontline advocates and the environmental and climate justice movement. FRI will offer a model for a radical and innovative governance structure rooted in participation and collaboration.

OBJECTIVES

BOARD DEVELOPMENT

By the end of 2025, FRI has developed a governing board with clear responsibilities and guiding principles to support FRI.

STAFFING

By 2028, FRI will be fully staffed to achieve its stated vision and mission.

SYSTEMS

By 2028, FRI has developed robust mechanisms and tools for staff, board, and overall organizational accountability to meet the needs and priorities of frontline communities.

ORGANIZATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

By 2029, FRI will be an independent 501c3, including a governing board and full-time staff to actualize FRI's strategic plan.

FRI FUNDING AND DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY: Support for frontline organizations will require sustained, long-term funding. FRI will expand its funding base by leveraging a wider pool of funding sources (e.g., federal, philanthropic, B-Corp values aligned businesses) and multiple streams of income aligned with our values. Ultimately, FRI will seek an endowment that will provide the independence to support priorities identified by our beneficiaries—FRI advocates, youth and students, and Indigenous Peoples and nations—rather than conform to the funding priorities of outside donors, however well-intentioned.



Image courtesy of Chantel Comardelle

GOAL: Secure durable and sustained funding and resources for FRI.

OUTCOME (TRANSFORMATIONAL RESULT): Frontline advocates can rely on FRI to provide support over the long term.

OBJECTIVES

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

By 2025, FRI has developed a plan for organizational development to drive fundraising.

SUSTAINED FUNDING

By 2028, FRI has established an endowment, alongside a diversified set of funding streams, to support its operation, mission, and vision.

TO FOLLOW OUR PROGRESS TOWARDS THESE GOALS, CONNECT WITH US ON THESE PLATFORMS:



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