

Climate Regrantors Speak Up: How They're Responding to Trump

Michael Kavate | May 15, 2025



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What's next for climate philanthropy? That's the question I have been trying to ask climate funders since early this year.

I have attempted to get on the phone with legacy foundations, billionaire-backed operations, the nation's largest green groups and some of the largest regrantors in the world. But as I [wrote last month](#), very few are willing to say anything right now, and those that do often ask for anonymity.

But there is one exception, one category of funders who have spoken with me frequently and on the record: small- and mid-sized intermediary funds. These



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hands of front-line communities. Neither wholly grantmakers nor grantees, these entities often serve as a conduit between funders and the field.

The intermediaries I spoke with see several strategic shifts and funding trends emerging in response to the onset of the second Trump administration, from a move to state and local work, to efforts to build bridges across differences. Most report that their own funding has remained stable and say they feel a sense of responsibility to grantees amid the firehose of administration actions.

“We in philanthropy have real culpability for the financial pain that these organizations are feeling — because we encouraged them to get into the game of applying for federal grants, we encouraged them to staff up to leverage that funding,” said Josh Ewing, director of the intermediary Rural Climate Partnership. “Now, a lot of them are facing some real cash flow crises, and in some cases, the threat of going under.”

Many expressed concern that philanthropy is putting up minimal defenses in the face of the Trump administration’s efforts to roll back climate progress, and its mounting attacks on front-line leaders and organizations. Several urged a more proactive approach, going beyond mere defense.

“It is an intentional tactic to distract groups, to always keep us on the defense, to keep us on our toes, to try to silo groups, to create competition,” said Eva Hernandez, executive director of the regrantor Mosaic. “We know that in order to be successful, we have to be investing in the offensive piece. We have to still be building state and local strategies.”

The new administration’s actions are driving strategic shifts

A second, dramatically more aggressive and far-reaching Trump administration has driven a variety of new or expanded strategies among the groups I spoke with.

The team at [Communities First Fund](#) highlighted a shift to state- and local-level work, initially galvanized by the passage of the IRA and other legislation by Congress during the Biden administration.

“In this moment, what we see is opportunities” at the state and local level, said Stephanie Gidigbi Jenkins, vice president of strategy. “We’ve got 38 governors up for re-election and the majority of them are term limited.”

As during the first Trump term, funders and national nonprofits have aimed to shift focus to state and local efforts — though with Trump back in the White House, [even already-committed state and local climate funding](#) isn’t secure.

The Communities First Fund — whose backers include [Laurene Powell Jobs’ Waverley Street Foundation](#) and [Steve and Connie Ballmer’s philanthropy](#), the [Ballmer Group](#) — will sunset at the end of this year, as it had long planned to do. Before it shuts, it will be issuing \$2 million through its Movement CARE Fund



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([applications](#) due by Friday, May 16), which will issue dozens of grants of up to \$25,000 to grassroots environmental justice groups.

Another intermediary, Mosaic, a [participatory](#) grantmaking initiative [launched](#) in 2020, has recently reviewed nearly 1,000 requests for funds — or what it calls “concept notes.” Drawn from an open call that closed in early March, the requests give it a wide-spectrum look at how the field is responding to the moment. As a mark of demand, the number of submissions exceeded prior calls by more than 50%.

“There’s a lot of appetite for this work of building bridges across difference, which is really the overarching frame that we’re investing in this year,” said Eva Hernandez, executive director.

Mosaic is focused on [supporting](#) environmental movement infrastructure. But this funding cycle, it chose to name “democracy” as part of its grantmaking strategy for the first time, reflecting that bridge-building frame.

“What we were hearing was that that is what this moment required,” Hernandez said. “We want to explicitly pull out and support that work to really bridge between the environmental climate movement and democracy.”

The initiative is now reviewing 60 full applications from finalists, with final awards to be announced in mid-July. It has already begun to share key takeaways from its applicant pool with other funders, and will share more later this summer, along with passing along strong proposals to other funders in its network.

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Funding is flowing, but not enough to meet the moment

While the groups I spoke to are pursuing various strategies, most said support from their backers is steady.

The Fund to Build Grassroots Power, which issued two years’ worth of its typical funding last year totaling \$10.1 million, but aims to do a smaller bonus round this summer, said support remains strong. “Our funders are doubling down,” said Executive Director Denise Padín Collazo.

The participatory grantmaking fund supports the grantees of four national networks: Climate Justice Alliance, the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum

(coordinated by WE ACT for Environmental Justice), the People's Action Institute, and PowerSwitch Action (formerly Partnership for Working Families).

Its backers include [Waverley](#) and the [Freedom Together Foundation \(formerly JPB Foundation\)](#), which are both in the process of renewing their funding, according to Collazo. The fund also recently received a \$25,000 individual donation — its first-ever gift from a new fundraising campaign targeting major donors. She said now is a good time to launch such initiatives.

“Everyone in the ecosystem needs to take new steps and take small steps,” she said. “There’s no one thing that’s going to be the be-all and end-all.”

The Honnold Foundation is also seeing continued support from its base of individual and corporate supporters, at least for now. While it was created by climber Alex Honnold, the organization functions as an intermediary, with its founder covering core operations and staffing, or about 10% of its total funding.

“We’ve seen organizations want to step up and fund more because they see ... the pulling back of funding,” said Emily Teitsworth, executive director.

Where’s philanthropy? No ‘Trump bump,’ few speaking up

A lack of pullback is, however, not the same as mounting a proportionate response to what has transpired over the Trump administration’s first 100 days. Multiple people said that they had expected, or at least hoped, to see more endowed philanthropies up their funding in recent months.

“People were anticipating some kind of a ‘Trump bump,’” Mosaic’s Hernandez said. “And they just didn’t see that. Absolutely not at the scale, or even close to the level, that we saw in 2016 — much less at the scale that this moment really calls for.”

Ewing of the Rural Climate Partnership — which was one of the few foundations [that publicly issued emergency grantmaking](#) earlier this year, through a fund it runs with the regrantor Regenerative Agriculture Foundation — suggested that while philanthropy may not be able to replace federal funding for things like solar panels, those projects’ personnel costs are much lower.

“But there was a very small amount of money going to the people factor, to the human resources,” he said. “If we can step up as philanthropy, we can preserve a lot of that human capital and not have to rebuild it all over again in the future.”

Many were disappointed that more of the sector’s most powerful actors have been so passive amid a barrage of executive orders, policy changes and budget cuts.

“When the foundations and the funders with the least to lose, in a lot of ways, are silent, it does have a chilling effect on intermediaries and nonprofits in the space,

who have the most to lose in terms of funding and support by speaking out,” said Teitsworth at the Honnold Foundation.

The surprise should be not what the Trump administration has carried out, said Gidigbi Jenkins and Helen Chin, who is president and co-director of the Communities First Fund, since many of the moves were laid out in Project 2025, but that the administration is actually following through.

Chin noted the attacks may tempt foundations with broader portfolios to attempt to downplay or hide their climate- and DEI-related work, in a way that intermediaries and nonprofits that are squarely focused on those topics cannot. But she does not believe that is a winning strategy for this era-defining fight.

“Philanthropy actually has a responsibility to be far more vocal,” said Chin, who previously spent 13 years at the [Surdna Foundation](#). “You see some philanthropy just sort of shifting direction altogether so that they are less vulnerable. That’s not a good look. That’s not helping anyone.”

“The question is: Are you waiting for your turn, or are you standing up?” she said. Are you “being the entity that pushes back, or waiting for them to come get you? Because they’re coming.”

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