

Barriers to Equity Within Environmental Justice and Climate Justice Grant Programs

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ABSTRACT

In 2020, Connecticut undertook a statewide engagement process via the Governor’s Council on Climate Change (GC3) to develop priorities for climate change mitigation and adaptation, especially from an equity approach. A priority action from the GC3 process called for grants to fund participation by community-based organizations and nongovernmental organizations to increase representation from communities that have been marginalized. This is similar to efforts from other states and the federal government to direct funds to historically excluded groups to redress inequities or to financially support their participation and sharing of their expertise in these processes. While the programs have the intent to address inequity, often the grantmaking mechanisms can make it harder for marginalized groups to participate in the grant process, nullifying the grant’s intent. This review of environmental justice and climate justice grant programs offers insight to grantmakers on embedding equity into the grant process and, ideally, achieving their intent.

INTRODUCTION

The summer of 2020 was marked by a deep social and political reckoning with injustice in multiple forms across the United States, spurred by police violence and larger patterns of racial inequity; in the years since, academic and governmental institutions have increased efforts beyond “business as usual” to embed equity and environmental justice more deeply into processes, policies, and programs. This is especially true for efforts in communities that have been marginalized because of race, color, national origin, religion, disability, or socioeconomic status. During the protests of 2020 against racial injustice and violence, Connecticut was simultaneously working to advance climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation with an equity lens through the Governor’s Council on Climate Change (GC3). This combination of timing and events demanded that climate-related efforts prioritize equity, not as a stand-alone goal or program, but integrated into any climate actions and programs.

In January 2021, the GC3 released “Taking Action on Climate Change and Building a More Resilient Connecticut for All: Phase 1 Report: Near-Term Actions” (Governor’s Council on Climate Change, 2021). The Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Working Group was a stand-alone committee as well as a reviewer of the actions developed by each working group. The EEJ Working Group incorporated several principles of equity including distributive equity, procedural equity, contextual equity, and corrective equity. Of the four types of equity

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prioritized by the GC3, distributive equity and procedural equity hold the most immediate relevance for grantmakers. Grantmakers must design both the process of grantmaking (such as the application instructions, forms, and requirements) and the outcome of grantmaking (such as the selection of grantees and distribution of funds) in order to meet equity goals. Ashley (2014, p. 689) distinguishes between distributive (“outcome of the process”) and procedural (“processes by which social decisions are made”) justice.¹

Scholars and practitioners have distinguished equity and justice as separate, although related, concepts. Equity is the “equal and fair distribution of opportunities, resources, and environments free from climate hazards and risks regardless of individual/group identity or background” (Chu & Cannon, 2021, p. 87). Justice is “recognition that minority groups are structurally vulnerable and intergenerationally disadvantaged in terms of their cultural, political, and socioeconomic rights” (Chu & Cannon, 2021, p. 87). The scope of this article limits exploration of these differences except that procedural and distributive components in a climate change context have been more deeply explored as justice instead of equity. Historically disadvantaged groups have been made more vulnerable to climate change impacts as well as denied opportunities for resources that would increase their adaptive capacity to respond to climate change. Brandstedt and Brölde (2019) describe “pure procedural climate justice” as an approach by which “fair procedures must be worked out without any preconceptions about just outcomes” (p. 790); in other words, outcomes are not identified as just by virtue of meeting specific preconceived distributive goals, but by emerging from a fair process. Distributive climate justice includes: “(1) identifying the goods and ills that are being distributed; (2) identifying the entities between whom they are to be distributed; and (3) identifying the most appropriate mode of distribution as well as what this is based on (e.g., status, need, merit, rights or ascriptive and social identities)” (Newell et al., 2021, p. 5). From a funding and grant-making perspective, distributive equity and justice should be incorporated into the procedural design and not serve as an independent or separate effort. For these reasons, our analysis here focuses on these two principles (procedural and distributive), although further research on contextual and corrective equity in the context of climate planning and action would certainly be valuable.

While international negotiations continue on climate change mitigation and adaptation, localities and their partners, such as ICLEI and EcoAdapt as national examples, continue to push for action closer to home. Climate justice efforts, for adaptation in particular, often focus on local scales of action, from neighborhoods to municipalities and potentially state levels (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). Across the United States, localities have differing levels of authorities over important climate change mechanisms such as land use, siting of infrastructure, and transportation. This creates an interscalar tension that requires constant negotiation and careful action to embed climate justice. Newell et al. (2021) call out the “local trap” (Brown & Purcell, 2005), as transformative climate justice cannot presume independence between the local, state, and international scales; despite that tension, the machinations of adaptation planning must account for local priorities. In fact, climate justice can be an “explanatory tool... [to] better explain the relationships at different scales that co-create and maintain injustice” since “meaningful climate justice addresses complex issues across space, place, and scale” (Sultana, 2022, p. 119). Increasing adaptive capacity through climate justice goals such as increased participation, increased representation through recognitional justice

¹ Please review the above-mentioned GC3 report for further descriptions of contextual and corrective equity.

(Newell et al., 2021), and enhanced social capital will increase resilience outside of brick-and-mortar adaptation measures. To address several components of equity, a priority recommendation from the EEJ Working Group was:

Develop and identify funding for a community engagement strategy to inform the 2021 GC3 planning process and implementation, including support in the form of grants for partnering community-based, non-governmental organizations to design the community engagement process, receive training, and co-develop recommendations to ensure meaningful input and equitable approaches to mitigation and adaptation. Both public and private funding should be pursued. (Governor's Council on Climate Change, 2021)

In response to this recommendation, the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) allocated funds from the state's Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative cap-and-trade program to the Connecticut Institute for Resilience & Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) at the University of Connecticut to create a pilot Climate & Equity Grant Program. It was important to DEEP and CIRCA that the grant program be designed with limited barriers to participation. To address equity in the *grantmaking* part of the program, we reviewed other U.S.-based grant programs with environmental and climate resilience and/or justice goals. The review used a distributive equity, procedural equity, and climate justice lens to identify common barriers to community-based organizations being able to access, apply, and deploy grant funds. While the grant program achieves a priority of the GC3, this careful grant design seeks to meet the spirit of the program as well.

To that end, we were guided by Mohnot et al.'s (2019) previous work on incorporating equity into climate resilience programs, as well as Myrick et al.'s (2018) and GrantCraft's (2007) previous work on how grantmakers can enact specific values through grant programs. Additionally, research conducted on administrative burdens (Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Moynihan et al., 2015, 2016), in particular Herd and Moynihan's (2018) framework, identifies learning costs, compliance costs, and psychological costs as three specific categories of administrative burdens faced by those seeking to access government benefits. Although much of the literature on administrative burdens focuses on health care and social welfare access, we expect similar conditions in nonprofit grant seeking, as labor resources and expertise are key determinants for success in grant acquisition and other fundraising (Giving Compass, 2021; Rumbul, 2013; Suárez, 2011; Yi, 2010).

While the geospatial distribution of the grants is a consideration in the selection of final grantees, the ability of historically disadvantaged communities to participate and utilize the grants depends first on an equitable application process. Our review of other grant programs with goals related to environmental and climate resilience and/or justice includes common program characteristics and potential barriers to equity within the grantmaking process. We conclude with recommendations for funders to address these barriers and potential next steps for grantmaking as a tool for equity for governmental and academic contexts. Ideally, at the conclusion of the grant program, we will be able to provide additional reflections on the grant program's performance and its service to marginalized populations.

REVIEW METHODS

Ten grant programs were reviewed. Each program had goals related to climate resilience planning, climate justice, and/or environmental justice. We assessed each program for structural or administrative barriers that hinder access to these financial resources, that is, procedural

justice. The program selection process included the following criteria: variety of funding sources; explicit mention of equity and/or justice within the program materials; and relevance to the GC3’s goals for the upcoming Climate & Equity Grant Program in Connecticut. Four of the programs reviewed are administered by state government agencies, two are administered by the federal U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, two are administered by nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations, one is administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and one is administered by a regional planning council. Grant program names and sources are listed in Table 1.

Program websites, lists of previous grantees, and past or present requests for applications (RFAs), if available, were reviewed for each program. The following characteristics were assessed: 1) program goals (specified through program websites or RFAs); 2) eligibility of applicants; 3) range of grant amounts; 4) match funding requirements; 5) letters of support requirements; 6) award notification schedule; 7) funding structure (how the grant funds are distributed or received); 8) evaluation criteria for application review; 9) timeframe; 10) grantee deliverables; and 11) presence of language related to equity goals (on the program website, RFA, or other associated program documents). These characteristics were selected for study due to multiple considerations, such as the degree of work expected from the applicant/grantee to fulfill program requirements, relevance to the authors’ goal of assessing equity within environmental and climate justice funding programs, and availability of information on program websites and in RFAs. Manual coding was used to record and organize the information available on each grant program according to the categories in Table 2. The

Table 1. Grant Programs Reviewed

Grant Program Name	Grantor	Acronym
Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Planning Grant Program	Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs	MA
Community Resilience Partnership Community Action Grant Program	Maine Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future	ME
Transformative Climate Communities Planning Grant Program	California Strategic Growth Council	CA
Environmental Justice Community Impact Grant Program	New York Department of Environmental Conservation	NY
Environmental Justice Small Grants Program	Environmental Protection Agency	EPA-SG
Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Cooperative Agreement Program	Environmental Protection Agency	EPA-CPS
Climate Action and Racial Equity Grant Program	Minneapolis Foundation	MF
Climate Justice for All Project Grants	The Climate Reality Project	CRP
Community Climate Resilience Grant Competition	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments	NOAA
Accelerating Climate Resiliency Grant Program	Massachusetts Metropolitan Area Planning Council	MAPC

Table 2. Manual Coding Categories for Grant Program Review

Program Characteristic	Categories for Coding
Program goals* *More than one code may apply.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Climate mitigation or emissions reduction ● Climate adaptation ● Resilience ● Assessment/evaluation of vulnerabilities or risks ● Local or community levels of action ● Regional levels of action ● Equity or justice ● Partnerships or collaboration ● Public health ● Economy ● Preparation for additional future funding
Eligibility of applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Municipalities and/or tribes are eligible. ● Nonprofit organizations are eligible. ● Eligibility varies by round or is a combination of the above.
Range of grant amounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Minimum grant award offered by each category of funding entity (federal, state, foundation, planning council). ● Maximum grant award offered by each category of funding entity (federal, state, foundation, planning council).
Match funding requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes, match funding is required. ● No, match funding is not required. ● RFA does not specify.
Letters of support requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes, letters of support are required. ● No, letters of support are not required. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Although not required, letters of support are encouraged. ○ Letters of support are neither required nor encouraged. ● RFA does not specify.
Award notification schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RFA provides a specific timeframe to indicate when notification is expected (if yes, note number of weeks/months). ● RFA does not specify.
Funding structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding will be provided upfront. ● Funding will be provided as reimbursement. ● RFA does not specify.
Evaluation criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RFA includes a scoring rubric with at least one scoring element explicitly referring to equity or justice. ● RFA includes a scoring rubric with no scoring elements explicitly referring to equity or justice. ● RFA does not include a scoring rubric.

Table 2. (continued)

Program Characteristic	Categories for Coding
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFA provides a specific timeframe to indicate the length of the grant period (if yes, note number of months/years). • RFA does not specify.
Grantee deliverables* *More than one code may apply.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final report expected. • No final report expected. • Progress report (midterm or quarterly) expected. • No progress report (midterm or quarterly) expected. • Deliverable(s) expected other than a report.
Presence of language related to equity goals* *More than one code may apply.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFA or associated grant program materials explicitly reference equity or justice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Referenced briefly (single reference appearing in only one section of the document). ◦ Referenced throughout (multiple references appearing in multiple sections of the document). • RFA or associated grant program materials make no explicit reference to equity or justice. • RFA or associated grant program materials refer to a mapping tool for identifying environmental justice (EJ) populations. • RFA or associated grant program materials make no references to any mapping tools for identifying EJ populations.

Note. RFA = request for application.

coding within each row was inductive (developed during the review process rather than preset).

OBSERVATIONS

Observed commonalities across grant programs for these characteristics are listed in Table 3, along with several notable characteristics unique to specific programs.

BARRIERS TO EQUITY IN GRANT PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Multiple program characteristics that potentially create barriers for applicants from under-resourced organizations and populations were observed in the grant programs reviewed. In several cases, barriers relate to the amount of time and/or labor required from the applicant, tipping the scales in favor of applicants with enough staff to meet these requirements. In other cases, observed barriers relate to how equity goals are described and/or evaluated within the listed grant programs. Table 4 indicates potential barriers to equity we identified in the grant program reviewed, with grant program acronyms indicating which programs included each observed characteristic.

Table 3. Observed Commonalities Across Grant Programs

Characteristics	Observed Commonalities	
Program goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assessing climate vulnerability ● Increasing community resilience ● Reducing emissions ● Fostering local/community solutions ● Advancing climate equity ● Building collaborative partnerships and/or regional coordination ● Preparing communities for future implementation grant applications ● Addressing public health concerns 	
Eligibility	Two programs are limited to municipalities and tribes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MA ● ME
	Four programs are limited to nonprofit organizations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MF ● CRP ● NY ● NOAA ● Of these, two (CRP; NY) require and one (MF) prioritizes projects where the applicant organization is at least 50%-led by members of the affected population
	Four programs vary by round or include combinations of the above:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EPA-SG ● EPA-CPS ● MAPC ● CA
Range of grant amounts	The minimum grant award of any program reviewed was \$2,500, while the maximum award was \$300,000.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The state programs reviewed ranged from \$5,000 to \$300,000. ● The federal programs reviewed ranged from \$25,000 to \$200,000. ● The foundation programs reviewed ranged from \$2,500 to \$50,000. ● The planning council program reviewed had no minimum listed and a maximum of \$125,000.
Match fund requirements	Of the programs reviewed, the majority do not require any form of match funding or leverage from applicants. Exceptions to this include a requirement of municipal staff time for the MA program and match funding of 10–20% for actions that are not on a pre-issued list for the ME program. One program (NOAA) does not specify whether match is required.	
Letters of support	Generally encouraged, rarely required.	
Notification schedule	Range: 2 weeks–3 months after application submission deadlines. Most programs notify applicants 1–3 months after application submission deadlines.	

Table 3. (continued)

Characteristics	Observed Commonalities
Funding structure	Three programs provide grant awards upfront: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MA ● CRP ● EPA-CPS
	Three programs are reimbursement-based: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MAPC ● CA ● NY
	Four programs do not specify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ME ● MF ● EPA-SG ● NOAA
Evaluation criteria	Six programs include scoring rubrics (possible total of 100) in the RFA; four of these (*) have equity components included in the rubric: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ME* ● MF* ● EPA-SG* ● CA ● EPA-CPS* ● NY
	Four programs describe evaluation criteria but do not include scoring rubrics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CRP ● MAPC ● MA ● NOAA
Timeframe	Range: 8 months–3 years, with grant periods of 1–2 years most common among the programs reviewed.
Grantee deliverables	All programs require a final report or product after the grant period. All but one (MF) require progress reports during the grant period (quarterly or midterm). Other deliverables include completed plans, case studies with lessons learned, lists of next steps, blog posts, and workshop attendance.
Presence of equity language in RFA	Most programs have at least some equity-related language in the RFA, although some have only vague or perfunctory references.
	Seven programs rely at least somewhat on a mapping tool to indicate environmental justice populations; of these, two (*) rely almost exclusively on the map: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MA ● MF ● EPA-SG ● EPA-CPS ● MAPC ● CA* ● NY*
	One program included an equity toolkit among the provided resources for applicants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MA

Table 3. (continued)

Characteristics	Observed Commonalities	
Other notable features unique to specific programs	Community Liaison Model, in which applicant municipalities include paid advisors from climate-vulnerable communities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MA
	Requirement for projects to relate to “gathering or transferring information or advancing awareness”:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA-SG • EPA-CPS
	Weekly “office hours” for applicants:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRP
	Requirement to participate in a “Resilience Community of Practice,” including peer-to-peer networking opportunities and workshops during the grant period:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAPC

Note. See Table 1 for program descriptions and abbreviations. RFA = request for application.

Barriers related to burdensome application requirements (whether of time, labor, or technology) were most common, with eight of the reviewed programs having application characteristics that require significant administrative effort from the applicant. In several cases these potentially burdensome features were intentional requirements of the grant application (similar to the “compliance costs” within Herd & Moynihan’s [2018] framework), while in others the potential burden comes from a lack of clarity in the RFA and the subsequent likelihood that applicants will need to spend time seeking clarification or else will be discouraged from applying altogether (similar to the “learning costs” within Herd & Moynihan’s [2018] framework). These characteristics are particularly problematic for programs that seek to make grants to nonprofit organizations with limited resources or staff. It should be noted that the later stages of grant award administration after an applicant has successfully obtained a grant may also present burdens for nonprofit staff, particularly if an organization has little prior history managing grants, although this is difficult to evaluate from application materials alone.

Four of the reviewed programs included barriers related to substance rather than style—including whether or not existing environmental and climate disparities were effectively acknowledged and incorporated into program goals, application narratives, and evaluation criteria. These barriers to equity may not overburden the applicant during the application stage, but rather become pertinent during the evaluation and award stages of the grantmaking process. Rigid parameters for indicating whether or not the proposed project “counts” toward an equity goal, such as an overreliance on mappable boundaries to the exclusion of other options for applicants to present the social context of their project, are one such example observed in two of the programs reviewed. In contrast, questions that encourage applicants to describe their thinking and practice surrounding equity issues, rather than an “in or out” designation or a preassigned analytical framework, are more likely to produce valuable and innovative answers (GrantCraft, 2007). Of course, even inclusive and equity-focused application questions will not be enough to ensure equitable funding decisions if the evaluation criteria do not incorporate these same values.

Table 4. Potential Barriers to Equity in Reviewed Grant Programs

Characteristic	Potential Barrier to Equity	Observed in:
Reimbursement-based funding structures	This funding structure—commonly used by government agency grantors—limits the applicant pool to organizations with the capacity to expend funds on upfront costs and wait for reimbursement, thereby excluding applicants with tighter budgets (Bettis & Pepin, 2019).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MAPC ● CA ● NY
Overly long RFAs or guidance documents	Excessively long guidance documents (for example, the 155-page program guidelines associated with the fiscal year 2021–2022 round of the CA program) require larger time investments from applicants before and during the application process, posing a hurdle to organizations with limited or no paid staff time. Onerous reporting requirements during the grant period create a similar burden (Bettis & Pepin, 2019).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CA
Failure to specify when applicants can expect to hear a decision	Insufficient information about the expected decision timeline makes it difficult for applicants to plan their activities and can cause delays in organization operations and in seeking alternative funding streams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ME ● NY
Long waiting periods before notification and/or between notification and receipt of funds	These practices create longer delays before funds reach grantees and may lead to uncertainty for organization operations. Long wait times may also be perceived as a failure to be responsive or respectful of the applicant’s time (Myrick et al., 2018).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CA ● EPA-SG ● EPA-CPS
Failure to specify the funding structure	Insufficient information about the expected funding structure and/or expected amount of match makes it difficult for applicants to plan their activities and may create additional time burdens due to the need to seek clarification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ME ● MF ● EPA-SG ● NOAA
Reliance solely on an environmental justice map without addressing equity considerations in the application narrative	Map-based criteria for equity considerations may be limited by data availability and scale, and require some level of familiarity with operating interactive maps. Equity considerations that are not well-captured by the map and applicants who are not comfortable with using online maps may be overlooked if the application does not include additional opportunities for description.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CA ● NY
Failure to explicitly include equity considerations in the scoring rubric	Mismatches between stated equity goals and the application evaluation criteria will result in undervaluing equity components of proposed projects. Applicants may treat equity goals as optional or secondary if they are not reflected in the scoring formula (Mohnot et al., 2019). The ultimate distribution of funds determined by these evaluations will therefore fail to meet Myrick et al.’s (2018) goal of “consistent, effective, values-driven practices.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CA ● NY <p>The following programs did not have a scoring rubric at all:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NOAA ● MAPC ● MA

Table 4. (continued)

Characteristic	Potential Barrier to Equity	Observed in:
Ambiguous language	Vague or overly general language hinders clarity about program goals and about how well applicants meet these goals. Mohnot et al. (2019), for example, point out that “vulnerable communities” in the context of climate change could refer to wealthy coastal communities subject to sea level risk, or to socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in noncoastal areas—distinctly different populations with distinctly different needs. GrantCraft (2007) notes the tendency for grantors to shy away from an explicit racial equity lens, instead remaining “above the fray” of potentially fraught conversations. In addition to potentially creating confusion for applicants and creating additional time burdens due to the need to seek clarification, this lack of clarity is likely to extend to application evaluators as well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NOAA ● NY ● ME
Shapefile or KMZ requirements	Application components that require specialized software to create (such as geospatial data files) pose an obstacle for applicants without access to such software.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CA

Note. See Table 1 for program descriptions and abbreviations. RFA = request for application.

The function and format of the application portals for the reviewed programs were not included in the scope of this inventory, as these typically require log-in credentials and are only active during an open application round. However, the application form itself—whether submitted through an online portal or another format—is another potential pitfall. Prior research from the #FixTheForm² team at Grant Advisor identified “technical time-wasters” in grant applications through a survey that reached 500 respondents from grant-seeking organizations across nine countries (Aanestad & Solomons, 2021). Common time-wasters are shown in Figure 1, with the top two complaints of not being able to see the full application ahead of time and the time taken disproportionate to funding amount awarded—each appearing close to 400 times within the #FixTheForm survey responses (Aanestad & Solomons, 2021).

Direct interviews with program administrators or grant recipients were also beyond the scope of this inventory, but would be a useful avenue of future research to determine the extent to which the barriers identified above are considered burdensome by applicants. Further research on burdens facing grantseekers within the environmental justice and climate justice fields specifically is likewise still needed in order to identify ways in which these grantseekers may differ from the health care and social welfare applicants more commonly discussed within the literature on administrative burdens (Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Moynihan et al., 2015,

² More information about #FixTheForm can be found at <https://blog.grantadvisor.org/why-we-need-to-fixtheform/>.

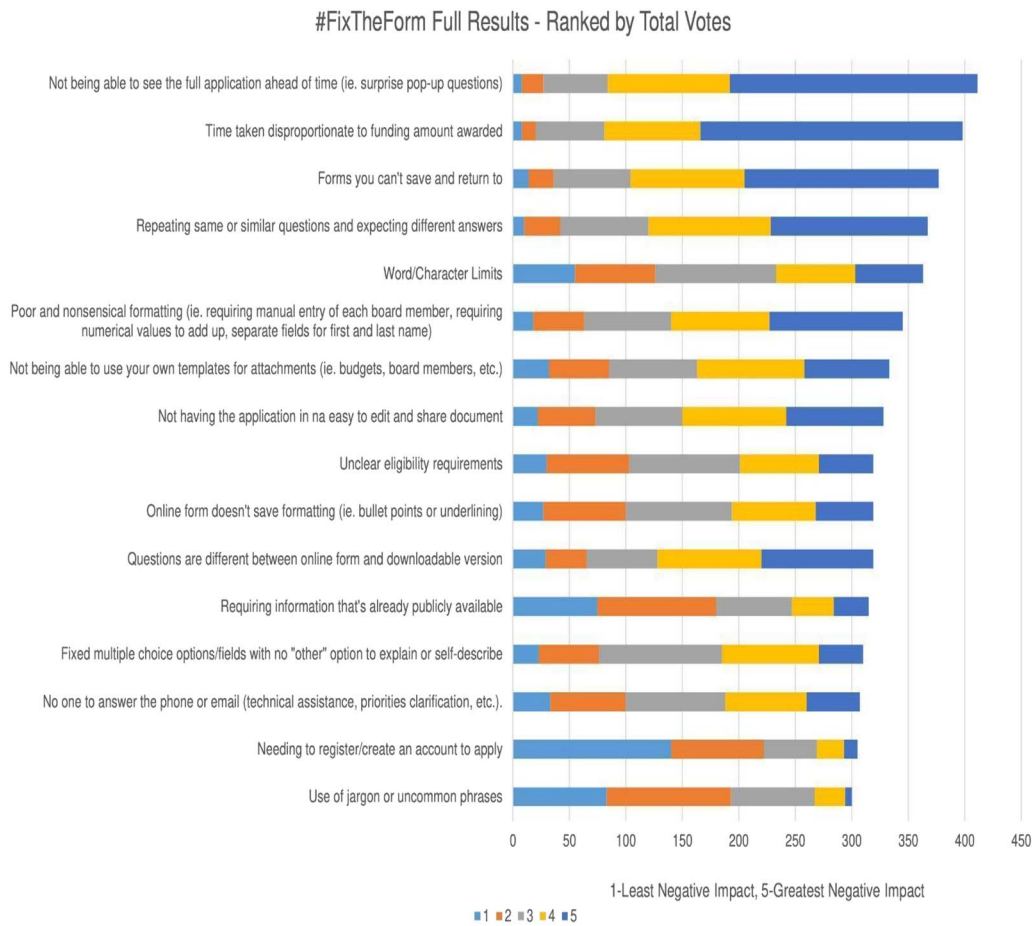


Figure 1. Common “technical time-wasters” identified by #FixTheForm survey project (Aanestad & Solomons, 2021). Image copyright: Grant Advisor, 2021. Image used with permission.

2016). In particular, while the administrative burdens identified within the grant programs discussed above fall largely into Herd and Moynihan’s (2018) categories of learning costs and compliance costs, interviews with grant applicants and grant recipients could also shed light on possible psychological costs (Herd & Moynihan, 2018) associated with applying for such grant programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

In Table 5 we offer suggested best practices for funding agencies to consider as they develop and implement funding programs. These recommendations are based upon our review of observed barriers presented above as well as previous literature on administrative burden (Herd & Moynihan, 2018), “technical time-wasters” (Aanestad & Solomons, 2021), factors for nonprofit success in grant seeking (Giving Compass, 2021; Rumbul, 2013; Suárez, 2011; Yi, 2010), and the principles of procedural and distributive equity that shape the goals of the GC3 (Governor’s Council on Climate Change, 2021)

Table 5. Suggested Practices to Advance Opportunities for Equity in Grantmaking

Program Characteristics	Suggested Best Practices
Request for application (RFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly articulate the equity goals of the grant program and the organization offering the grants. • Clearly state the types of applicants that are eligible, the types of projects that will be funded, the funding structure, the grant amount, the expected deliverables, how applications will be evaluated, and how soon applicants can expect to hear back. • Keep the RFA succinct and jargon-free. • Include a scoring rubric in the RFA with clear descriptions of the evaluation criteria, including at least one scored component where equity is explicitly discussed. The evaluation criteria should be clearly connected to the articulated goals of the grant program. • Include definitions for terms such as “vulnerable communities” that can have multiple meanings.
Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review all 16 complaints highlighted by the #FixTheForm project and ensure that grant submission portals and application forms do not feature these “technical time-wasters” (Aanestad & Solomons, 2021). • Provide the application in a format that can be viewed in its entirety and saved as a draft. • Keep the application relatively short to minimize the time burden on applicants. Some time burden is inevitable and will depend on the specific circumstances of the grantmaking entity and the proposed project; in general, grant makers should seek to ensure that the level of funding provided by a grant program is proportional to the work required of applicants (Aanestad & Solomons, 2021). • Ensure that the questions on the application are directly related to the evaluation criteria. • If the applicants are not themselves from the community affected by the grant project proposal, applicants should be asked to describe how the affected community has been engaged in developing the grant application and how input from the community has or will be meaningfully incorporated into the goals and activities of the proposed project (including fair compensation for the time spent providing input). • Collect demographic information about applicant organization leadership as part of the application, both for prioritizing BIPOC-led organizations in each round and for tracking year-to-year grantmaking progress over time in accordance with the Climate Funders Justice Pledge (Donors of Color Network, n.d.). • Ensure that the application does not require special technology or a large number of attachments.
Funding structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct payments awarded in advance (as opposed to reimbursements). • No match requirement.
Other grantmaker responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise the grant opportunity through multiple outlets instead of relying only on potential applicants finding it themselves. • Provide applicants with assistance such as FAQ web pages and “office hours.” • Award decisions should be made by a diverse review panel, with transparency about the affiliations and/or credentials of the panel members as well as the decision-making process. • Regularly report on how grant funds have been distributed. • Use a third-party survey tool to collect applicant feedback after the process to identify areas for improvement.

CONCLUSION

This review of existing environmental justice and climate justice grant programs offers insights for the future endeavors of the Connecticut GC3, particularly the launch of the Climate & Equity Grant Program. It is also our intent that it will inform other grantmakers seeking to reduce the barriers to participation in their funding programs. The first recommendation by the Financing and Funding Adaptation and Resilience Working Group of the GC3 is to direct at least 40% of all adaptation and resilience funding toward historically disadvantaged communities. While other funding entities may differ in exact percentages, metrics, or goals, all grantmakers seeking to distribute funds according to equity principles must ensure that their funding processes are accessible to these communities. Burdensome application requirements and underdeveloped (or undefined) conceptions of equity and justice are evidently still present in many of the reviewed grant programs, despite their purported goals of advancing environmental and/or climate justice.

As new funding programs to increase equity and justice in climate and other environmental programs grow, it will be imperative for program managers to evaluate how well their programs are meeting these goals, especially in the context of the community they intend to support. Multidisciplinary evaluations across adaptation planning, evaluation, and environmental justice are needed to develop ongoing reviews and corresponding adjustments. Geospatial and social science research partnerships could examine if the emerging mapping tools for identification of historically disadvantaged and climate vulnerable populations and any programs reach the intended communities and if the design and deployment of the programs achieve the goals of distributive and procedural equity and justice. Although this review focuses primarily on financial assistance through grantmaking, it is worth mentioning that technical assistance will also be needed for the interpretation of scientific information in the climate and environmental context. Evaluations of grant programs should be shared broadly as practice documents to inform and improve grantmaking processes and identify best practices for advancing equity. Similar interdisciplinary teams may also develop cross-case methodologies to guide researchers in their assessments and inform grant programs in other locations. The cross-cases could review different affected populations, historical and ongoing injustices, and economic context. Evaluation can be an onerous task but presents an opportunity for trust-building, accountability, and reflective practice. It is our hope that this review can inform and support emerging equity programs, in both practice and mission.

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