

# Environmental Equity Project Examples

## CLIMATE

### Informing National Climate Investments for Environmental Justice

*Funders: Climate & Clean Energy Equity Fund and Heising-Simons Foundation*

As part of a national strategy to revitalize the American economy while addressing crucial issues like climate change and aging infrastructure, the Biden-Harris administration has set a goal of directing 40 percent of climate investment benefits to disadvantaged communities. We are identifying strengths and shortcomings of California's approach to climate investments for disadvantaged communities, to aid federal agencies in designing investment strategies that advance the administration's environmental, health, economic, and racial justice goals.

### Learning from Transformative Climate Communities

*Funder: Strategic Growth Council*

We are assessing progress and results of investments through the Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) program, one of the world's most holistic and equity-centered climate action programs driven by residents of historically disadvantaged communities. We focus on five TCC grants, totaling over \$160 million, in Fresno, Watts, Ontario, Northeast Valley Los Angeles, and Stockton. These investments are being evaluated along environmental, health, economic, and social justice dimensions and could serve as a national model.

### Measuring Heat Impacts to Design and Target Protective Policies

*Funder: Strategic Growth Council's Climate Change Research Program*

We are completing multiple studies that measure significant financial and health risks that extreme heat poses on vulnerable populations, including workers, low-income households, pregnant mothers and infants. We are also developing a tool to identify vulnerable populations and communities. Finally, we are supporting state action through a policy analysis revealing gaps in cohesive heat governance and funding opportunities.

## ENERGY

### Southern California Regional Energy Needs Assessment

*Funder: Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator*

We are supporting the Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator's Regional Energy Needs Assessment by analyzing geographic differences in per capita energy consumption, clean energy, greenhouse gas emissions intensity, and energy program adoption (e.g., solar and electric vehicles) for Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and Orange Counties, with a focus on assessing energy needs in disadvantaged communities.

### Grassroots Outreach to Connect Low-income Households with Clean Energy

*Funder: Liberty Hill Foundation*

We assessed the process and outcomes of emPOWER, a project connecting low-income households with energy efficiency, solar energy, electric transportation, and financial assistance programs through local community-based organizations. Our evaluation found that the campaign has been successful in reaching areas of L.A. County impacted by poverty and pollution, and offers potential as a replicable model.

## TRANSPORTATION

### Setting an Agenda for Equity-Centered Clean Transportation

*Funder: Los Angeles Business Council*

This study, led by our researchers and aided by a working group of community advocates, business leaders, and policymakers, links equity to the effectiveness of California's ambitious clean transportation goals. Key recommendations include targeting clean vehicles incentives towards moderate- and low-income drivers and ensuring public and private zero-emission fleets are first deployed to disadvantaged communities.

## **Designing Clean Vehicle Incentive Programs for Low-income Households**

*Funders: California Air Resources Board, the Strategic Growth Council and CalTrans*

Our recent studies have helped California improve clean transportation access for disadvantaged communities. Researchers surveyed low- and moderate-income households about their vehicle history and travel preferences and assessed how existing state incentive programs are helping lower-income households replace their polluting vehicle. The findings of these provide a roadmap for programs that can most effectively and equitably support transitions to clean transportation for lower income households.

## **URBAN GREENING**

### **Supporting Park Equity and Access in L.A. County and Across California**

*Funder: Resources Legacy Fund*

We are advancing the goal that every Californian has access to parks and green spaces through two innovative projects. Part of an initiative led by the Office of Governor Newsom, we are assessing an array of programs in California to increase park access and equity. The objective is to inform the state's actions to strengthen such programs. In L.A. County, residents demonstrated support for investing in local and regional parks by voting for Measure A. Now we are evaluating the Link program, a partnership of First 5 Los Angeles, local governments, residents, and community-based organizations providing technical assistance and other resources to expand park access through Measure A and other funding in park-poor communities.

### **Understanding the Needs of Diverse Park Users**

*Funder: U.S. National Park Service*

Researchers and volunteers with the Luskin Center for Innovation worked with the National Park Service to survey more than 4,000 visitors of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, the nation's largest urban national park. Results are informing how to meet the needs of a diverse array of users, for improved park equity and access in L.A. County and with broader implications for park planning throughout the state and nation.

## **WATER**

### **First-of-Its-Kind Needs Analysis for Drinking Water in California**

*Funder: California State Water Resources Control Board*

Supported by a \$3 million contract, this study identified a risk for failure among a significant portion of the state's drinking water systems. The report is the first comprehensive analysis of how clean water is provided in California, and it estimates how much it would actually cost to deliver safe water to every resident.

### **Keeping the Lights and Water On: COVID-19 and Utility Debt**

*Funder: Chan Zuckerberg Initiative*

We assessed household utility debt burden in Los Angeles and found that between 25% and 30% of all households face financial difficulties paying for the most essential services of water and electricity. Communities of color face the greatest utility debt burden, which highlight the deepening of racial and economic inequality during the pandemic. Our recommendations inform equitable, accessible, and targeted relief programs for low-income ratepayers during and after the pandemic.

**See more examples at: <https://innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/environmental-equity/>**

## **CONTACT**

**Gregory Pierce**, associate director ([gpierce@luskin.ucla.edu](mailto:gpierce@luskin.ucla.edu))

**Silvia R. González**, senior researcher ([sil.rgonzalez@ucla.edu](mailto:sil.rgonzalez@ucla.edu))