



AMERICAN CLIMATE
LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Philly Thrive

phillythrive.org

This guide offers a successful and stepwise model for you to replicate in your community. It is part of a series featuring the award-winning programs from the finalists of the American Climate Leadership Awards 2021 by ecoAmerica.

PURPOSE

Join together across race, class, gender, ability, and generation to run strategic campaigns, to win a just transition of community and planet-destroying fossil fuel infrastructure.

Through collective decision making led by residents at the fenceline of environmental injustice and the frontlines of genuine solutions, and through non-violent direct action and creative storytelling you can win a permanent closure of the oil refinery in your neighborhood.

DESCRIPTION

In 2015, Philly Thrive’s organizers conducted an extensive listening campaign, talking to hundreds of Philadelphians about environmental justice. It became clear from this door knocking that the PES refinery was a key worry for residents and a key space to contest for power and resident-led decision making.

Our organizers, with experience running grassroots campaigns for environmental justice, knew that winning against the PES refinery was possible if we came together and ran strategic campaigns. We began in 2015 with a successful campaign to prevent the PES refinery’s expansion, and ultimately won the permanent closure of the refinery in 2020.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Philly Thrive’s multi-racial cross-class base builds power to (1) shift the media narrative in favor of our planet and communities, and (2) advance strategic demands that decisionmakers uplift and take action on at a city and state level (air/water regulators, city council members, state reps, and corporation leaders).

GOALS

1. Ensure there is no fossil fuel expansion in our city.
2. Win a permanent and equitable transition of the East Coast's largest oil refinery, repairing 154 years of violence by achieving a complete clean up of the land, dignified jobs & investment in surrounding neighborhoods, and a permanent seat at the table for residents most impacted by the land's former uses.
3. Advance bold policies for a green economy in the USA's poorest big city, tackling the twin problems of climate change and inequality.

PRIMARY
COMPONENTS
OR ACTIVITIES

1. **Basebuilding:** Over the last five years, Philly Thrive has built a robust base of active member-leaders, supporters, and allies — all taking action to win environmental justice. Our basebuilding relies on traditional organizing tactics: canvassing and tabling at community events, 1:1 relationship building, and peer recruitment.
2. **Leadership development:** Philly Thrive is deeply focused on developing the leadership of impacted residents. We host trainings and also provide significant 1:1 support and skill-building through work in our action circles. We support members to attend outside workshops, honing their leadership in policy development, fundraising, facilitation, healing justice and more.
3. **Collective study:** We do robust collective study — learning together about the legacy of pollution on the refinery land (recent teach-ins have focused on benzene, MBTE, and lead contamination), routes to win community benefits and reparations, and Green Recovery policies we want to win in Philadelphia.
4. **Non-violent direct action and storytelling:** Examples of direct actions we held to win the closure of the PES refinery abound: a die-in at the closed door NYC auction of the former refinery land, a 10-hour encampment and teach-in at the refinery site, an occupation of land long-dominated by fossil fuels, powering solar power, and sharing our vision for the future.
5. **Community support:** Our tech justice circle has refurbished dozens of used computers and phones, and provided extensive training to our members, to ensure we can stay connected during the pandemic. Our mutual aid circle has coordinated the drop-offs of thousands of food boxes this year.

IMPACT & OUTCOMES

Philly Thrive has also fundamentally changed the media narrative around fossil fuel infrastructure in the city of Philadelphia. Prior to 2019, news articles routinely discussed the refinery without discussing health impacts and communities living nearby. In dozens of articles, radio stories, and TV coverage, from 2019-2020, the voices of residents were uplifted and centered. A culmination of this work was a 7000 word article in the NYT Magazine, focused on 3 Black women who have led Philly Thrive's organizing. This article brought national awareness to environmental racism, and to the power of grassroots movements for environmental and climate justice.

We won a tangible win for justice-focused climate action and for our communities. Prior to its shuttering in June 2019, and its sale and final closure in June 2020, the PES refinery processed over 330,000 barrels of crude oil a day (about 14 million gallons), and was responsible for over 50% of toxic air emissions in Philadelphia. Through our organizing, we closed this facility, moving towards healing for our communities and planet.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

- 1. Gather info:** Develop an understanding of the issue (through personal stories and data). Hold conversations with community residents to hear their stories, and learn from previous organizing that has happened (successes and challenges).
- 2. Build relationships:** Slowly build trust-based relationships across lines of race, class, and generation. This is the bread and butter of our organizing, and the ongoing work of building a strong movement.
- 3. Create a structure that empowers leadership:** Philly Thrive organizes in action circles, groups of 3-10 members empowered to move forward critical pieces of our organizing. We have found that this leaderful structure helps us win, and develops leadership of impacted residents. Our current core circles focus on 1) campaign: 6 sub-circles for our different goals, 2) membership/basebuilding, and 3) resourcing: mutual aid and grassroots fundraising. We also have circles focused on youth programming, our community garden, gun violence prevention, women's support, and more.
- 4. Collectively develop strategic campaigns:** Philly Thrive runs campaigns with specific goals and timelines — this allows us to put pressure on decision makers and win our demands. We collectively develop these campaigns through group conversations and 1:1 work. We have found that scaling up campaigns over time is most effective; our first campaign focused specifically on preventing the refinery expansion. Our current campaign (building on 5+ years of spadework) works to reclaim residents' rightful place at the center of planning and decisions, restore health and safety, win reinvestment through jobs and community benefits.

- 5. Run and win campaigns:** Philly Thrive uses non-violent direct action to keep pressure on decision makers — throughout history, civil disobedience and storytelling have been the backbone of work for social change, and we continue in that legacy. We use art (memorial boards commemorating lives lost to pollution, banners with clear demands, etc.), and storytelling (sharing personal stories of the refinery), and performance (die-ins, risking arrest) to get media coverage and advance our narrative.
- 6. Evaluate campaigns and launch next campaigns:** For each campaign, we have long-term goals and short-term metrics — “we’ll know if we’re winning if...”. After each campaign, or phase of long-term campaigns, we evaluate these goals and learn from our successes and growth areas.
- 7. Rest:** Philly Thrive is led by many disabled and chronically ill leaders. Rest is integral to the work we do, and we have begun holding organization-wide breaks in July and December.