



AMERICAN CLIMATE  
LEADERSHIP AWARDS

## GreenRoots

[greenrootschelsea.org](http://greenrootschelsea.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 2022 by ecoAmerica.

### OVERVIEW

“Implementing Resident-Led Frontline Climate Justice Solutions While Achieving a Just Recovery from COVID-19.” In 2016, Massachusetts received a failing grade for siting toxic facilities next to neighborhoods of color; Chelsea and East Boston live this reality daily. Environmental and structural racism and classism led us to be among the hardest hit by COVID-19 in the nation. As frontline environmental justice (EJ) communities, climate impacts compound our challenges. We’re fighting back to achieve climate justice through improved health and reduced environmental assaults. Across all our program areas, we work to dismantle environmental racism.

GreenRoots co-convenes the MA Environmental Justice Roundtable which has come together to advance legislative and policy priorities to advance environmental justice and civil rights. One of the bills we’ve written and are advocating for would change the way energy generating facilities (e.g. power plants, compressor stations, etc.) would be sited. It would have environmental justice restrictions and would reconstitute the make-up of the state permitting board, which right now includes no community or EJ representation, but rather is mostly energy sector representatives. In the history of the Energy Facility Siting Board, it has never denied the permits of an energy production facility no matter how dirty nor how close to sensitive populations. With the Siting Reform legislation, that process would be much more democratic and responsive to environmental justice concerns.

### STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

#### 1. Build the Base: Engage and Empower the Community

Grassroots movements are what change power structures. GreenRoots is committed to fostering deep and meaningful relationships with community members so that together, we are a fierce, dedicated movement of people working to achieve environmental justice (EJ), racial justice, language justice and climate justice. To do so, we knock doors, host bi-lingual community meetings and events, share meals, celebrate the wins, grieve the losses, build networks, relationships and power in the community.



## 2. Learn Side by Side, Value Lived Experience

Our approach to creating social change is rooted in intersectionality, equity, and understanding that social change must reflect the needs voiced by the most impacted residents across the spectrums of ethnicity, race, gender and gender expression, income level, immigration status, age, and languages spoken. We appreciate and value lived experience; make room for the residents most impacted to lead; ensure they are engaged in meaningful ways and have equal access to information and decision-making.

## 3. Fighting the Bad, Building the Good

GreenRoots works towards a just recovery from reliance on fossil fuels. We fight archaic, polluting industries in our EJ neighborhoods such as diesel power plants, ethanol freight trains, electrical substations. We build towards the new world we envision by promoting renewable energy, prioritizing energy democracy through microgrids and local energy policy, and ensuring energy efficiency is accessible by all. We work with technical and legal partners, advocate with decision-makers, organize, march, and speak out. We won't back down.

## 4. Demand Justice

In each and every campaign we carry out, we are not shy about demanding justice, putting decision-makers in the hot seat and calling out historically racist systems that continue to fail people. An example of this is our Title VI Civil Rights Complaints filed against federal agencies for the failure of governmental bodies to provide equitable access to "public" permitting processes to an environmental justice community. We will never stop demanding justice.

## 5. Fight Systems that Oppress

It's extremely evident that our current systems of structure oppress the most vulnerable. We've fought locally, statewide and at the federal level for civil rights, language justice, toxics siting reform, and environmental justice. While we won't win every victory, we model the change we want to see in the world. Our staff and board are representative of the communities we serve; and we center language justice while empowering immigrants, POC, youth and LGBTQ+ community.

## 6. Partner with Experts, but Community Calls the Shots

The solutions must come from the ground up and the real experts are those most impacted by EJ and the climate crisis. We also know we're much more powerful when partnering with lawyers, energy experts, licensed site professionals, architects, engineers or researchers. While this expertise is welcomed and necessary, the decision-making process must be entirely led and directed by the community. We win when our stories are not extracted but rather they are shaping climate/environmental policy.



## 7. Use Data to Drive Advocacy and Policy Wins

GreenRoots has showcased our public health statistics, environmental burdens and high COVID-19 infection rates not to victimize ourselves, rather to highlight and denounce the structural systems and policies that harm environmental justice communities. Utilizing this data, we have called for more public attention and garnered support for our efforts including statewide environmental justice legislation; local policy and zoning initiatives and to see greater funding invested in our communities to reverse generations of harm.

## 8. Take Risks / Make Big Asks

When our community was being devastated by the pandemic, a significant air quality violation was occurring on a state-funded construction project in Chelsea. Dust particles coated people's homes and lungs, increasing risk of serious illness from COVID-19. Rather than accepting this reality, we demanded an immediate halt on construction; we called the media and demanded action. Those risky demands resulted in major investments towards air quality, including the first ever state-funded air monitor in Chelsea.

## 9. Be Creative and Engaging

To stay fresh and relevant, we often change our outreach and engagement strategies. While we remain steadfast in our commitment to door-knocking, 1:1 engagement and community events, we've also launched "Caminatas Verdes" — community walks, a local radio show, videos, texts, social media posts and more. We've done everything from having live salsa bands, community boating events, protests, rallies, to pop-up parks and more. We've even hosted goats at one of our events!

## 10. While the Work is Important, Relationships Are the Heart of the Movement

Campaigns have been won and lost. Power plants have been prevented; salt piles have expanded. In the end, it's relationships that can and should last. That is how a community is built. Whether it is recognizing a birthday; bringing food for a family grieving; getting groceries for those quarantining; giving someone a hug or an acknowledgement; shoveling out elders during a blizzard; helping with childcare; community is what connects us and allows us to remain resilient.

GreenRoots is an ACLA 2022 Finalist. For more information and replication guides, go to [ecoAmerica.org](https://ecoAmerica.org).

