

**A Vision for Sustainable and Just Societies:
The Stanford Cross-Campus Initiative for Environmental Justice**

Mission

Will Stanford address the most important, interconnected social justice and sustainability problems of our times? Human activities have reshaped the Earth's air, water, land, and life, often in irreversible ways through biological and cultural extinctions. Achieving sustainability requires attending to the deep divisions and disparities that persist within and across societies. Engaging with structural inequities regarding race, class, gender, and other social positions requires us to ask: Who has suffered the most along the path to our current planetary predicament? Whose future are we attempting to secure? How can we move forward without creating sacrifice zones in the Global South and within nearby inner city communities that undermine our broader sustainability efforts?

Such questions form the starting point for environmental justice research and action. True sustainability can only be achieved if it engages with the interconnected histories of structural inequities, racialized violence, and uneven impacts of environmental harms. This means starting with listening to the multitudes who have paid the price for prosperity among the few, taking into account the health, and hopes of communities all around the world. It also means partnering with the most affected communities and honoring their expertise as central to remedying past harms and shaping a sustainable future that better addresses their needs.

To be effective, environmental justice research must be woven into the fabric not only of the new school, but also of the university and into our relationships with our neighbors. EJ frameworks teach us how to engage directly and respectfully with Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) communities and other groups that have been marginalized. Stanford's environmental justice efforts cannot be siloed into a single department or center, institutionalizing the very marginalization that must be combatted. Instead, we offer our vision for a cross-campus initiative for environmental justice that also supports Stanford's IDEAL initiatives for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Building on current efforts, this proposal includes recommendations for supporting and developing 1) core EJ leadership, 2) curriculum development, 3) an EJ Clinic and learning community, 4) EJ faculty, 5) an EJ Advisory Board, and 6) mission-driven programs and projects that emerge through interdisciplinary collaborations. Stanford researchers, staff, and students have been laying the groundwork for a cross-campus EJ initiative for nearly a [decade](#). These efforts have recently coalesced into [the Stanford Environmental Justice Working Group](#) (EJWG), an intergenerational collective working to embed environmental justice into research, teaching, and community engagement. Our work attends to problems of structural inequity, systemic racism, and other noxious dynamics deeply connected to environmental problems, while building relationships with frontline communities who are leading some of our most

important sustainability solutions. Scaling up these efforts calls for intensified collaboration among natural scientists, engineers, social scientists and humanities scholars, which requires the resources and reach of a cross-campus initiative.

Knowledge Co-Production for Environmental Justice

We envision a cross-campus Stanford EJ Initiative forwarding reconciliation, restoration, and repair. We also envision an inclusive initiative supporting innovative interdisciplinary collaboration with scholars across the university, and frontline communities. Working from EJ values and principles as our foundation, we will convene and connect diverse EJ initiatives to transform Stanford's sustainability work. To facilitate collaboration with frontline communities, we will foster respectful academic-community partnerships through our EJ research and teaching. We will do so by centering community responses to environmental injustices, building long-term relationships with community partners, engaging with structural racism, and moving away from "parachute" research. Following an EJ approach, we will remain mindful of uneven power dynamics, carefully considering when to step up and when to step back in our collaborations, and find meaningful opportunities for benefit sharing with community partners.

Achieving sustainable and just societies requires research frameworks from biophysical sciences, social sciences and the humanities, as well as leveraging participatory research, citizen science, and decolonizing methodologies. Working from such interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary backgrounds, we will interrogate critical questions in sustainability that include:

- How can we engage with frontline communities that have borne the greatest brunt of climate impacts, land use change, resource overexploitation, and pollution, and who are developing leading solutions for community resilience and adaptation to the multiple drivers of global environmental change? How can we minimize future climate and other environmental change impacts on communities made vulnerable and marginalized by histories of intersectional racism?
- How can we better understand and identify alternatives to current human social and economic systems that have created and sustained inequitable power distributions and environmental harms primarily affecting communities of color and the Global South? How can we identify public policies that facilitate procedural and distributive justice for frontline communities?
- How can we ensure a [just transition](#) that centers the work and research of frontline communities as we move towards a decarbonized future?

In order to achieve positive, community-led solutions for environmental justice, we will work at the local, regional, and global scales. Key examples of current EJ research and teaching collaborations that we will build on include:

- Research partnerships for **eco-cultural restoration with Indigenous communities such as the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band**, with traditional territories south of Silicon Valley, can help restore Indigenous cultural burning, impart community resilience to catastrophic wildfires, protect sacred landscapes, and repair relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples despite historical legacies of colonial dispossession. (Collaborations with Stanford Students for Environmental and Racial Justice, Stanford Environmental Justice Working Group, the Stanford Educational Farm, and the Haas Center for Public Service.)
- Community-led oral history research that can **uncover the long history of toxic and radiological dumping in San Francisco's historically African-American Bayview neighborhood**, and simultaneously build a robust and fully open-access research infrastructure and public archive, potentially supporting community reparations for environmental harms. (Collaborations with the Department of History, Haas Center for Public Service, Stanford Sustainability Initiative, Center for Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity.)
- Community-based EJ research can help address **significant air pollution burdens in Stockton, California that are disproportionately affecting communities of color and low income groups**, with these communities exhibiting one of the highest childhood asthma rates in the state. Academic-community partnerships are supporting local leaders by analyzing air permits; identifying and mapping top emitters, pollutants, and changes in emissions; studying and mapping health impacts; and compiling resources on how residents can protect themselves and their families. (Collaborations with the Stanford Climate and Health at the School of Medicine, Earth Systems Masters Seminar, and Future Bay Initiative at Stanford, and the Northern California EJ Network.)
- EJ research and education efforts can enable **partnerships with Indigenous communities that are leading conversations for global mining justice with transitions to a green economy**, facilitating conversations about justice, fairness and human rights that arise with mineral sourcing for electric vehicles. Global supply chains connect Silicon Valley clean energy and battery storage initiatives to mining on Indigenous lands. This issue invites an EJ approach to community collaborations, materials research, and just transition policy development. (Collaborations with the Stanford Environmental Justice Working Group, Stanford Native American Cultural Center, and Stanford Center for Human Rights and International Justice.)

- Research that addresses **structural causes and the political economy of extreme air pollution in West African cities, which arise from policies originating in the Global North**. These problems are linked to uneven applications of regulatory standards and the practices of global fuel brokers, who maximize profits by mixing chemical waste streams from North America into petroleum feeds to create what they call “African quality fuels”. These practices occur on top of global markets that facilitate the exports of used vehicles from the Global North to the Global South, when these cars no longer meet environmental standards promulgated by developed countries. (Collaborations with the Department of History, Freeman Spogli Institute, Program on African Studies.)

In addition to EJ research collaborations, we envision this EJ initiative as a global convening space where a diverse range of extraordinary EJ scholars, practitioners, and advocates will come together across disciplines to collaborate in the development of EJ conferences and symposiums hosted by the initiative; collectively develop EJ curriculum and faculty trainings; provide residencies for EJ scholars and practitioners so that they can leverage Stanford resources; and convene innovative interdisciplinary and diverse collaborations that will spur sustainable and systemic social change and advance our understanding of environmental justice histories, frameworks and methodologies. We envision this initiative to be a global incubator of environmental justice scholarship and action, in collective pursuit of an equitable and just future.

Structure

Stanford’s Cross-Campus Initiative for Environmental Justice will work with existing units and new departments to forge a robust structure for collaboration in research, teaching, and outreach. We build on existing expertise, while synergizing with the current IDEAL Custer Hires in STEM, and proposing a crucial new set of faculty hires to accelerate the integration of EJ concerns across these domains.

Core Leadership

Two Faculty Co-Directors with substantially different expertise. (e.g., one from biophysical/climate sciences and one from the social sciences or humanities)

An **Executive Director** to oversee the day-to-day workings of the institute and coordinate its research collaborations across campus.

Associate Directors (staff) for Teaching and Community Engagement.

Managers (staff) for finance/fundraising, communications, and programming.

Curriculum Development

Support for developing a 21st century curriculum for environmental equity and sustainability at Stanford. This work includes supporting previously offered classes focused on environmental equity, as well as developing new courses and teaching modules. Our work will build towards a specialization in environmental equity offered through the new school of sustainability at Stanford. We will also lead workshops and training that expose more faculty to environmental equity issues, which can serve as a lens through which various disciplines approach their work. Workshops will support the integration of environmental justice pedagogy into existing syllabi and coursework.

EJ Clinic and Learning Community

Support for fostering community-engaged research on environmental equity and sustainability through the Environmental Justice Clinic and Learning Community. The Clinic will serve as an intellectual hub connecting environmental justice research and teaching across campus. Our team specializes in developing, incubating, and implementing research on environmental equity challenges in partnership with community leaders. We will advise students pursuing research on environmental equity issues, and connect undergraduate and graduate researchers across departments, including connections with the social sciences. Our Clinic will also support graduate fellowships for engaged research on environmental equity that will 1) enable graduate students to effectively bring EJ approaches into their dissertation research, 2) support campus leaders on DEI initiatives, and 3) educate our community on how to integrate critical EJ scholarship into our work.

Support for maximizing impact through long-term partnerships with diverse communities. This work would sustain long-term collaborations that center community voices within and outside of Stanford. This initiative will support the infrastructure needed to sustain academic-community relationships to meet real-world challenges, such as an ongoing research collaboration with the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment on participatory environmental monitoring in the San Joaquin Valley. In partnership with the Haas Center for Public Service, we will facilitate environmental equity connections between faculty, students and community partners through classes, research, and internships. This will involve lifting up environmental equity initiatives on campus, and ongoing EJ collaborations locally in East Palo Alto, and regionally. We will also host workshops for community leaders, and workshops designed by community members for the Stanford community. To maximize our impact, we will continue to build EJ collaborations with other universities in the region through the cross-institutional Northern California EJ Network of Community-Academic Partnerships, a network we helped to create. To advance a more diverse and inclusive community partnership approach to our sustainability efforts, our team will take a coalition approach. This will involve collaborating with interested departments, programs, and communities.

Support for a just communications strategy and regional network. This work involves teaching strategic EJ approaches to students, faculty, and community partners for more inclusive science communication that leverages equity framing. This work includes centering equity in our communications framing to provide an essential point of access for marginalized communities to engage with scientific communication, and also an important opportunity for scientific researchers and writers to become more accountable to disadvantaged communities. Viewing science communication through an equity lens asks communicators to not only frame science in ways that are salient to particular audiences, but it also asks communicators to attend to particular discriminatory historical practices that have targeted marginalized communities, and continue to do so through current scientific discourse. EJ strategies for equity framing include asking science communicators to 1) become aware of their own positionality and partial perspectives, 2) name sources of inequity that arise from uneven power relations, and 3) find intersections with initiatives that are rooted in the experiences of disadvantaged communities.

Faculty Needs

Faculty-in Residence Program. We propose a faculty-in-residence model, in which sabbatical-like faculty would join the initiative for a period of up to one academic year.

Cluster hire for new faculty. New blood accelerates transformation. We request 8-10 joint EJ faculty positions within the first five years of the new school. Each search would be carried out jointly with one or more departments, both within the new school and across the university. Establishing such partnerships will ensure that EJ concerns reach across Stanford's sustainability research and teaching. Faculty hires may include professorships in food justice, climate justice, just design and infrastructure, environmental humanities and racial justice, and more. As the new hires occur, faculty may be invited to join as affiliates and supporters of this cross-campus EJ initiative.

Advisory Board

The first iteration of this board would be staffed drawing upon Stanford's existing networks of EJ faculty, students, and community leaders. Over time, Stanford would likely want to add philanthropists, policymakers, and alumni to an advisory board.

Mission-Driven Programs and Projects

Mission-driven programs and projects will emerge from the synergies created by the Institute, and support long-term EJ partnerships with diverse communities to maximize social impact. Examples could include: Communities and Climate; Global Mining Justice; Air Pollution and Global Justice; EJ Communication for Social Impact.

For additional information, please see www.ejstanford.com.

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