

The People's JUSTICE40+ Community Benefit Playbook



The Community Benefit Plan





THE COMMUNITY BENEFIT PLAN

Within the last four years, several federal spending bills—the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)—were passed by Congress to respond to a public health crisis, rebuild the nation's economy, address our aging infrastructure, and combat climate change. While most of the funding from ARPA has already been spent or allocated, funding from IIJA and IRA is still available to address community needs. A great deal of these funds involve newly established programs and funding opportunities; however, a substantial portion provides additional money for existing programs. Aside from this funding, state and local governments also receive financial assistance every year from the federal government.

Considering the purpose of the Justice40 Initiative and the amount of funding opportunities available through ARPA, IIJA, IRA, and federal financial assistance, this is an opportune moment to influence systemic change in the way federal programs are implemented and to ensure benefits from new and existing programs are reaching communities that have been historically underserved and overburdened for decades by environmental and climate hazards. Communities need to be thinking about how the intent of Justice40 can be applied to all public sector spending—Justice100—in the future.

To harness all of the above-mentioned funds to address community concerns, communities can develop a Community Benefit Plan that outlines community needs and priorities, identifies community projects to address those needs and priorities, and calls on government officials to fund community projects through the federal, state, and local government funding opportunities available to them.





Community Benefit Plans share foundational language with community benefit agreements and community workforce agreements, but go a step further in centering community voices and leadership. These plans are:

- community-driven and developed;
- rooted in equity principles and values;
- focused on the needs and priorities of under-resourced communities; and
- a process or tool to build or deepen a multi-stakeholder table that includes community, labor, businesses, and government officials.



10 REASONS WHY CREATING A COMMUNITY BENEFIT PLAN IS CRITICAL:

Reason #1: Justice40 translates into a lot of federal funding opportunities.

The Justice40 Initiative requires 40% of overall benefits of federal investments in climate change, clean energy and energy efficiency, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, workforce development, remediation and reduction of legacy pollution, and critical clean water infrastructure benefit disadvantaged communities. Because IIJA and IRA will make a substantial investment in these Justice40 investment categories over the next ten years, it's imperative that communities have positioned themselves to ensure that IIJA and IRA funding opportunities have a direct and tangible impact on their communities.

Reason #2: Justice40 benefits are intended for underserved and overburdened communities.

The Justice40 Initiative establishes a clear baseline target (and accountability metric) for public investments to address the needs of disadvantaged communities ravaged by a legacy of environmental racism, climate vulnerabilities, economic exclusion and discrimination, health disparities, and other impacts of an extractive economy.

Reason #3: The definition of “overall benefits” is still murky and needs community input.

Justice40 makes a murky distinction between 40% of funding and 40% of the overall benefits of such investments going to disadvantaged communities. This important distinction is a point of contention among advocates and federal, state and local government officials. At the state and local level, a “benefit” could be interpreted to mean many things and may not translate into 40% of direct investments. A Community Benefit Plan is necessary to define what a “benefit” means for your community. Without it, the “benefit” is not likely to mean direct investments in community priorities.

Reason #4: States can define a “benefit” in harmful ways.

State and local governments do not have a strong track record of engaging communities in investment and project planning and may rely on their own priorities. For example, this article from the Brookings Institute—[How equity isn't built into the infrastructure bill—and ways to fix it](#)—shows how some states have used federal stimulus funding in ways that adversely affected communities. If IIJA and IRA are implemented in a manner that's business as usual, community priorities are likely to be given short shrift due to a variety of factors, including state and local governments' backlog of infrastructure needs; the pressure for “shovel ready” projects; narrowly prescribed use of funds and eligible applicants; and limited government relationships, experience, and capacity to engage in an authentic community planning process.



10 REASONS WHY CREATING A COMMUNITY BENEFIT PLAN IS CRITICAL:

Reason #6: Community voices must inform public spending processes.

Guidance for how state and local governments implement the Justice40 Initiative is still being developed on a program by program basis. We expect that the guidance will not be very prescriptive about how to achieve Justice40 outcomes. Local governments, state agencies, utilities, and other government entities will probably have a great deal of latitude to define their Justice40 targets. Federal guidance will most likely be limited to reporting on how disadvantaged communities benefited from the program in order to comply with the Justice40 Initiative; however, guidance for procedural equity—ensuring that low income, rural, Black, Indigenous, people of color, frontline, and fenceline communities are authentically engaged in decision making and implementation—is uncertain. Not only do we need to advocate for investments, we must also democratize the process and systems for investing in communities.

Reason #7: Community efforts to influence Justice40 investments serve broader justice goals.

Justice40 is good, but Justice100 should be the goal for IJJA, IRA, and all government funding. In other words, all investments should be screened for equity and inclusion targets.

Reason #8: Communities must define their own priorities.

Optimizing the intent of Justice40 and the goal of Justice100 requires community members to proactively define their own priorities for these funds and to hold state and local officials accountable in how they implement the funding. It is imperative that community advocates take the initiative and use their agency to develop their own Community Benefit Plan.

Reason #9: Assets exist that can help you.

Many low-income and under-resourced communities have engaged in a substantial amount of organizing and planning and have developed useful capacities and assets. These communities have formed coalitions with others whose environmental, climate, and economic justice interests align with their own. Leveraging these assets will help you jumpstart your organizing efforts.

Reason #10: Now is the time to act.

If not now, when? Enormous opportunity and significant government funding exists right now to benefit your community, but your voice and initiative is required to make sure it actually addresses your community's priorities. The People's Justice40+ Community Benefit Playbook has been developed with these reasons in mind—to help you develop your own Community Benefit Plan.