

Climate Justice 201: Toward a Just Transition

Purpose: In this session, learners will explore the economic roots of climate change and social inequity, and consider what kind of path could lead us from the world of today to a world that values the dignity of all living beings and natural systems.

Learning Objectives:

What skills, knowledge, and attitudes should learners take away from this session?

- Develop a shared understanding of “extractive economy” and how this economic model leads to climate change, social and economic inequity.
- Learn the six steps of the Just Transition Framework and explore what they could look like in practice as we organize to move our society beyond an extractive economy to a regenerative economy.

Achievement Objectives:

What tangible steps will learners will take to advance real or simulated campaign work?

- Consider what has held us back from stopping climate change so far.
- Develop equitable, regenerative visions for our communities and regions after a Just Transition.
- Come up with ideas for steps our movement could take to realize a Just Transition, using the Just Transition Framework.
- Consider how to do organizing / social change work differently in alignment with the Just Transition framework.

Materials

- Worksheet:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1P-AXcl9_Hec70Vh2vBpbClEaiySUwdoditkbtZJAJJS4/edit
- Instead of a chapter in the handbook, please [use this zine from Movement Generation](#). Invite participants to take this out of the side pocket of their folders to have with them during this session.
- 6 blank flipchart pages (for breakout groups to use during the Apply section)
- Costume supplies to help “Community Elders”

Time: 135 minutes (2 hrs 15 mins)

Normal = say out loud

Underlined = flipchart this!

Italics = trainer notes/instructions

Bold = key point

Preparing to Facilitate:

Facilitators of this content are encouraged to [watch this video about extractive economy](#), and read the [Just Transition Zine](#) developed by Movement Generation. For further learning, we recommend checking out [this recorded webinar by Mateo Nube of Movement Generation](#).

Anchor: The ANCHOR step invites learners to reflect on past experiences which relate to the learning of the session. (e.g. “Think back to a time when _____. What did that feel like?”)

1. What’s so tough about solving climate change? [15 min]

In 1987, Time magazine published a cover story saying if we didn’t change our ways, the planet would be destroyed by climate change. The next year, NASA scientist James Hansen testified before the US Congress to say the same thing.

- [Show Time magazine cover from 1987 about global warming.](#)

Consider these questions: if we’ve known about the causes and the dangerous consequences of climate change, why haven’t we already solved it? What makes cutting greenhouse gases so hard?

- Give 2 min for pair/share, then 5 mins for big group report out.
- Take answers from group and write them on flipchart. Some likely responses are: psychology (humans have a hard time acting on something so far away), greed (some people are making money off of it), politics (it became a politically contentious issue, and Republicans didn’t want to touch it.) Appreciate and validate each response.

All of these are true. Though today **we’re going to explore the idea that the reason we have climate change is embedded into the very foundation of our society; that climate change is the product of values, beliefs and structures that form the basis of our economy.**

Add: The ADD step introduces new information and tools for learners to consider.

2. What makes an economy? [10 min]

If possible, trainers are invited to show [this video up to 2:36](#). Otherwise, prepare flipcharts to go along with this brief lecturette:

- In order to explore the relationship between our economy and climate injustice, we first need to establish an understanding among us of what we even mean by the word “economy.” We’ll offer a definition in a second, but first, would anyone like to share: what comes to mind when you hear the word economy? *Take 2-3 responses.*
- Let’s break it down. “Eco” is derived from the Greek word “oikos” which means **home**. With that in mind “ecology” means knowledge of home. “Ecosystem” means the relationship between all the plants, animals and things that make up our home. And **“economy” means management of home**. So at its most basic, an economy is a way of managing our collective home, and all the people, places, organizations and resources that make it up.
- There are three basic pillars that make up any economy.
 - Resources: any economy needs resources. You need land, air, water, the living world around you.
 - Work: you need labor to combine with those resources to produce stuff.
 - Culture: like we talked about in Climate Justice 101, at the root of how we do everything is our culture. Culture is made up of beliefs, ideas and social rules that tell us what we can do with our time and labor, toward what ends, with the world around us.

- So... how does the dominant economy work? The one that we practice here in the US and export around the globe? **We call this economy the “extractive economy”**, and you’ll understand why in a minute.
 - **Resources:** **We get our resources by extracting them forcefully from the earth.** We dig up ore to make iron. We cut down trees to produce wood. We pump our fields full of chemical fertilizers to extract as many fruits, veggies and calories as possible. We extract from animals too: milk, flesh, blood and bones.
 - **Work:** **We treat labor as something to be extracted as well.** We don’t treat our labor as its own valuable resource which we can each apply to improve the wellbeing of ourselves and our communities. Instead, the vast majority of us are expected to give every ounce of our time and energy to jobs that put more money in the pockets of already wealthy people, and in many cases pay us less than what we need to survive. Just think about all the people in our families, communities and around the globe who work two or three jobs, often in dangerous, undignified conditions, six or seven days a week, for hours on end. In this way, **our economy extracts labor from people** the same way it extracts minerals and nutrients from the land. Imagine what we could do with just a slice of all that time and energy we spend each day just working to survive. How could we care for each other better? Care for our communities? What would we do with all our creativity and talents to make our lives and the world better?
 - **Culture:** **And in our culture, we tell a story that says we can have as much of as many things as we want.** That our societies can have endless and infinite growth. This culture ignores the obvious limits of our natural and human resources, and brushes aside the consequences that come from all these types of excessive, unending extraction.

3. Characteristics of an extractive economy [35 min]

Breakouts [15 min]

Find a group of three, review the handout on Characteristics of Extractive Economy and discuss the proposed questions. You have 15 minutes.

The Extractive Economy Characteristics

1. *Belief in an economy based on unlimited extraction of finite resources through activities like drilling, logging, and mining.*
2. *A system that hides the real cost and consequences of pollution to the public*
3. *Consumers of products have no connection to the land and labor used to make them*
4. *Communities with historically less structural power are disproportionately impacted*

Breakout discussion questions:

- *What impact does an economy with these characteristics have on climate change? On the natural world? On people?*
- *Who benefits from this type of economy? Who shoulders the burden? How so? Why is it this way?*

Big Group Dialogue [20 minutes]

What did you notice in your review of the four characteristics? What connections did you see between this type of economy and climate change, the natural world, and people? *Take 2-3 comments.*

Who benefits from this type of economy? Who bears the burdens?

- *Take comments, and invite dialogue around this point. Logical answers to the beneficiaries question include “white people” and “men”, however it will be important to bring in a class analysis as well if it is missed. Working class people are all being exploited for our labor.*
- *If it doesn't come up from the group, draw out the point that marginalized people shoulder the burden of this economic model. One very direct example of this how the water/land/air of marginalized communities is polluted by toxic industries and dangerous extraction projects. And furthermore, the jobs made available to marginalized communities are in the very industries that threaten the health and safety of these communities, trapping people in a dangerous bind.*
- *Mateo Nube of Movement Generation describes social inequity in this way as a form of ecological erosion. The same way humans have altered environments in ways that lead to some plants and animals thriving and others dying off, racism, sexism, and classism casts off and sacrifices the life and wellbeing of entire groups of people for the benefit of the privileged few. This quote from the Just Transition zine sums it up well: “What you do to the land, you do to the people and what you do to the people, you do to the land. This is why we cannot separate social equity from ecological restoration.”*

How is this system maintained? What keeps things the way they are?

- *If it doesn't come up from the group, this can be a good time to bring in the idea that tools like militarism and contrived racial divisions among other tactics are used to maintain complicity with this system. (For reference, see pg 12 -on militarism- and pg 11 -on white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, and individualism)*

What comes up for you as we discuss the extractive nature of our economy and its impacts? Check in with your body, how does it feel? What questions or reactions does it raise?

- *Possible follow-up questions:*
 - *In reflecting on our economy in this way, what does this discussion make you want to do?*
 - *Where is the path of this economic model leading us? What happens if we keep doing what we're doing?*

In this discussion, take responses from group and add your own observations in dialogue with them.

Remember: do not tell what you can ask; teach in dialogue. *If or when it feels appropriate, you may offer your own examples to highlight the interconnected injustices of this economic model, such as this one from the Just Transition Zine:*

“Rare-earth elements... are used in nearly every electronic device, from smart phones and blenders to laptops and electric cars. These hard-to-extract materials were primarily sourced from the Congo for decades, where the market for these minerals led to massive resource-driven conflict involving generations of child soldiers engaged in brutal war. The primary beneficiaries of this devastation are the financiers who profit off of the movement of money and the high-tech corporations whose materials are subsidized by death and destruction.”

4. What do we do about it? [10 mins]

There is good news. The extractive economy is a human invention. Certainly, it was spread by Europeans and forced upon marginalized people around the world, but it's important to remember still that it is a product of human imagination. And we, as imaginative, creative humans, can and must create its alternative. Our understanding about extractive economy and the path away from it comes largely from our friends at Movement Generation, a non-profit based in the San Francisco Bay Area.

As an alternative to extractive economy, Movement Generation proposes we move toward a “regenerative economy.” Based on those words alone, what would you imagine we would see in a regenerative economy? Consider again the three pillars of economy: resources, work, culture. How might a “regenerative economy” manage each pillar differently?

- *Take a few ideas. And contribute some images/ideas from your own vision in dialogue with learners.*
- *Movement Generation describes regenerative economy on pg. 14: Resources: regenerative resource use, Work: cooperative, Culture: centers care and an appreciation for the sacredness of life; with an overarching purpose of aligning our efforts toward ecological restoration, community resilience and social equity.*

The big question now is how do we get there. Is anyone else wondering that right now? It’s one thing to understand we have a problem, it’s another thing to bring about its solution. To answer this question, we turn again to the wisdom of our friends at Movement Generation. They paint a picture of a path from extraction to regeneration that they call “Just Transition.” (*Invite Sprogers to open the [Just Transition Zine](#) in their packet and read along as someone in the group reads the first two paragraphs out loud*):

“Just Transition is a framework for a fair shift to an economy that is ecologically sustainable, equitable and just for all its members. After centuries of global plunder, the profit-driven, growth-dependent, industrial economy is severely undermining the life support systems of the planet. An economy based on extracting from a finite system faster than the capacity of the system to regenerate will eventually come to an end—either through collapse or through our intentional re-organization. **Transition is inevitable. Justice is not.**”

“Just Transition strategies were first forged by labor unions and environmental justice groups who saw the need to phase out the industries that were harming workers, community health and the planet, while also providing just pathways for workers into new livelihoods. This original concept of Just Transition was rooted in building alliances between workers in polluting industries and fence-line and frontline communities. Building on that history, Just Transition to us represents a set of aligned strategies to transition whole communities toward thriving **regenerative** economies that provide dignified, productive and ecologically sustainable livelihoods that are governed directly by workers and communities.”

“Core to a Just Transition is deep democracy in which workers and communities have control over the decisions that affect their daily lives.” In other words, this transition needs to be built **by us, for us**. A just transition will not come about by an Elon Musk figure swooping in to save the day. It must start with us loving each other and loving our communities enough to build a better way forward **together**. (*Note: this paragraph is on a different page of the zine from the other two passages - so this part should be shared by a trainer with the group.*)

Time check: At the end of this activity, you should be 70 minutes (1 hr 10 mins) into the training.

-- Break [5 mins] --

Apply: The APPLY step invites learners to utilize the new information in a task, challenge, or focused conversation. (e.g. practice, application, case studies, compare, etc.)

5. Just Transition Framework [50 min]

Movement Generation offers 6 steps we can take to support a Just Transition in our communities and around the globe. You can think of these as forming a compass that points us in the right direction in our work to shift from an extractive, exploitative economy to one that honors the dignity and value of all living beings.

Here are the six steps. We'll say the steps together outloud. Repeat after me:

1. Stop the Bad
2. Build the New
3. Change the rules
4. Change the story.
5. Divest from **their** power
6. Invest in **our** power

Small Group activity [30 min]

We're going to explore these more with a small group activity.

- *Count off group to get them into **five** small groups. Call them each Group 1, Group 2, etc...*
- *Your task is this: Imagine it's the year 2100. Our movement has been successful at guiding our society along a Just Transition to a regenerative economy. Your group is going to take a closer look at 1-2 of the Just Transition steps, and explore how we as a society put that step into practice to get ourselves to this new world.*
- *Please follow the instructions in your [worksheet](#), which include **choosing a spokesperson** from your team. If it helps your group process, please feel free to use a flipchart page to document your ideas in words or pictures. We will post whatever you come up with around the room for the rest of Sprog to inspire us in the work we're doing.*
- *Group One, please follow the instructions for Step #1, Group Two, please follow the instructions for Step #2... Group Five, please follow the instructions for Steps 5 & 6.*
- *You have 30 minutes.*

Trainers are encouraged to join small groups or float around to help offer questions and ideas if/when groups get stumped. Generally though it will be important for the ideas to come from participants.

Report Out: Future Community Elder Storytime [20 min]

For this activity, each small group's spokesperson will be invited to come to the front of the room and take on the role of "future community elder" or "grandperson" 80 years in the future. The audience and trainers will take on the role of "future community youth." The premise is that these "future community elders" are sitting by a fireplace in the year 2100, surrounded by a crowd of young people who want to hear stories of what our society used to be like, and how we got from those dark days of the past to the regenerative, equitable society of 2100. The "grandpeople" will be asked a couple questions by a Trainer. The Trainer will then encourage the audience to ask follow up questions as time allows. All Trainers and Sprogers are encouraged to play along and react to what the "community elders" say the way they think a young person from the future would react to learning how things used to be.

Questions to ask Community Elders:

- *About the way things used to be: Oh dearest grandpeople, please tell us the story again of how things used to be in the dark days of our past. What was it like back then? How did people live?*
 - *Take 2-3 responses.*

- *About the transition:* That sounds terrible! I can't imagine ever living like that! So what happened? What did our people do to get us out of that mess and into today's world?
 - *Take a response from each grandperson so that the group hears reflections on each of the Just Transition steps.*
- *Open up for the group to ask questions of the community elders:* Does anyone else have a question for our community elders?

Note: To help the “community elders” get into their roles, trainers can consider providing costume pieces like canes, grey beards/mustaches, big glasses, or name tags that say “Grandperson ____.”

Away: The AWAY step invites learners to connect their new understanding to the real world context of their lives. (e.g. a personal action plan, commitment, projection into future, etc.)

6. Bringing it home [10 min]

Consider the Just Transition framework we explored today. And the visions you came up with for the world you could envision us moving toward if we commit to transitioning beyond the extractive economy of today to a regenerative economy. Take a second to reflect and journal about how all this makes you feel and what it makes you want to do or do differently.

Some questions to reflect on:

- What inspired you about this? What's challenging, scary or hard about it?
- What would it mean to practice the Just Transition Framework in your work? What might you do or do differently as a result?
- How do you want to bring these lessons home to the other people you organize with? How will you help them explore what is and what could be?

As a final resource, we want to encourage you to check out the handout in your packet called the [Leap Manifesto](#). This was developed by a diverse group of brilliant leaders in Canada as an answer to the question: What do we do about climate change? How do we respond equitably, effectively and with urgency? If you are someone who wants more detail on what a Just Transition could look like, especially from a policy perspective, this document really goes there. Please take a look when you have time.