

FUTURE PERFECT

Want to fight climate change effectively? Here's where to donate your money.

These are 11 of the most high-impact, cost-effective, evidence-based organizations. You may not have heard of them.

By Sigal Samuel and Rachel DuRose | Updated Nov 27, 2023, 2:30pm EST



Christina Animashaun/Vox

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If you're reading this, chances are you care a lot about fighting **climate change**, and that's great. The climate emergency threatens all of humanity. And although

Finding the best ways to do good.

the world has started to make **some progress** on it, our global response is still extremely lacking.

The trouble is, it can be genuinely hard to figure out how to direct your money wisely if you want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There's a glut of environmental organizations out there — but how do you know which are the most impactful?

To help, here's a list of 11 of the most high-impact, cost-effective, and evidence-based organizations. We're not including bigger-name groups, such as the Environmental Defense Fund, the Nature Conservancy, or the Natural Resources Defense Council, because most big organizations are already relatively well-funded.

The groups we list below seem to be doing something especially promising in the light of criteria that matter for effectiveness: importance, tractability, and neglectedness.

Important targets for change are ones that drive a big portion of global emissions. Tractable problems are ones where we can actually make progress right now. And neglected problems are ones that aren't already getting a big influx of cash from other sources like the government or **philanthropy**, and could really use money from smaller donors.

Founders Pledge, an organization that guides entrepreneurs committed to donating a portion of their proceeds to effective charities, and Giving Green, a climate charity evaluator, used these criteria to assess climate organizations. Their research informed the list below. As in the **Founders Pledge** and **Giving Green** recommendations, we've chosen to look at groups focused on mitigation (tackling the root causes of climate change by reducing emissions) rather than adaptation (decreasing the suffering from the impacts of climate change). Both are important, but the focus here is preventing further catastrophe.

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Arguably the best move is to donate not to an individual charity, but to a fund — like the **Founders Pledge Climate Change Fund** or the **Giving Green Fund**. Experts at those groups pool together donor money and give it out to the charities they deem most effective, right when extra funding is most needed. That can mean making time-sensitive

grants to promote the writing of an important report, or stepping in when a charity becomes acutely funding-constrained.

Most importantly, donating to a fund means you can give to opportunities that small individual donors normally can't give to — like the work in China that Founders Pledge is incubating, for instance. That's appealing because some countries are philanthropically neglected even though they're high-emitting. Funneling money to projects there, rather than in the US, may be a way for you to supercharge your impact.

That said, some of us like to be able to decide exactly which charity our money ends up with — maybe because we have especially high confidence in one or two charities relative to the others — rather than letting experts split the cash over a range of different groups.

With that in mind, we're listing below the individual organizations where your money is likely to have an exceptionally positive impact.

1) Clean Air Task Force

What it does: The **Clean Air Task Force** is a US-based non-governmental organization that has been working to reduce **air pollution** since its founding in 1996. It led a successful campaign to reduce the pollution caused by coal-fired power plants in the US, helped limit the US power sector's CO2 emissions, and helped establish regulations of diesel, shipping, and methane emissions. CATF also advocates for the adoption of neglected low- and zero-carbon technologies, from **advanced nuclear power** to **super-hot rock geothermal energy**.

Why you should consider donating: In addition to its seriously impressive record of success and the high quality of its research, CATF does well on the neglectedness criterion: It often concentrates on targeting emissions sources that are neglected by other environmental organizations, and on scaling up deployment of technologies that are crucial for decarbonization, yet passed over by NGOs and governments. For example, it was one of the **first** major environmental groups to publicly campaign against overlooked superpollutants like methane.

More recently, CATF has **been expanding** beyond the US to operate in Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere. **This is crucial:** About 35 percent of climate philanthropy goes to the US and about 10 percent to Europe, which together represent only about 15 percent of

future emissions, according to Founders Pledge. This is part of why Founders Pledge is supporting CATF's efforts to globalize and recommends giving to that organization.

You can donate to CATF [here](#).

2) Carbon180

What it does: This environmental nonprofit has a simple but radical goal: accelerating the development of carbon removal technologies that would take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and lock it away for hundreds of years or more. It works toward that goal of carbon removal (or “negative emissions”) through policy advocacy on Capitol Hill. The approach has reaped dividends with the passage of legislation — like the **Inflation Reduction Act** and the **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act** — that included billions in research and development for carbon removal.

Why you should consider donating: **Scientists agree** that we'll need some deployment of carbon-removal technologies to keep the planet habitable. **Carbon removal generally has been underfunded**, in part because the tech is pretty new, though it's been catching up fast. Carbon180 can play an important role by **investing in entrepreneurs**, by **boosting public awareness** of carbon removal as necessary tech, and especially by **advocating** for more federal and state support. Since a lot of the momentum for carbon removal has come from the tech community, there's been a focus on offsets and private investment, leaving government advocacy somewhat underprovided. So it makes sense for impact-minded donors to focus on a policy advocacy group like Carbon180.

You can donate to Carbon180 [here](#).

3) TerraPraxis

What it does: TerraPraxis is a UK-based nonprofit aiming to find innovative ways to meet the globe's growing energy needs, with a special focus on advanced nuclear power, which is neglected in the climate funding landscape. **The data shows** that nuclear power is safer than you might think. It's a **clean energy** source that's already been scaled up fast to decarbonize electricity systems in countries like Sweden and France; going forward, it could help ensure that people in developing countries have enough energy to meet their needs.

Why you should consider donating: TerraPraxis is a relatively young organization, but in just three years, it has helped catalyze a solution to the tricky conundrum of **how to deal**

with the many coal plants that were built recently and probably won't be shut down anytime soon: Why not repower them with emissions-free heat sources? TerraPraxis is now leading a global **REPOWER Consortium** of governments, industry, and nonprofits that are dedicated to that solution.

You can donate to TerraPraxis [here](#).

4) Future Cleantech Architects

What it does: This Germany-based organization is also pretty young. Its aim is to promote innovation in Europe's hard-to-decarbonize sectors by running key programs in, for example, zero-carbon fuels, industry, and carbon removal technologies.

Why you should consider donating: You might be wondering if this kind of innovation really meets the "neglectedness" criterion — don't we already have a lot of innovation? In the US, yes. But in Europe, this kind of organization is much rarer. And according to Founders Pledge, it's already exceeded expectations at improving the European climate policy response. Most notably, it has helped shape key legislation at the EU level and advised policymakers on how to get the most bang for their buck when supporting research and development for clean energy tech.

You can donate to Future Cleantech Architects [here](#).

5) Good Energy Collective

What it does: Good Energy Collective does outreach to US communities and politicians to help build broad support for advanced nuclear power, which, remember, is neglected in the climate funding landscape.

Why you should consider donating: It's fantastic that wind and solar power have gotten cheap, but they can't do the job alone. We need other clean energy sources. That's why Giving Green recommends the Good Energy Collective, noting, "A new era of low-carbon 'advanced' nuclear reactors promises a safer, cheaper, and more scalable complement to renewable energy than traditional nuclear power."

You can donate to the Good Energy Collective [here](#).

6) Good Food Institute

What it does: The Good Food Institute works to make alternative proteins (think plant-based burgers) competitive with conventional proteins like beef, which could help reduce livestock consumption. It engages in scientific research, industry partnerships, and government advocacy that improves the odds of alternative proteins going mainstream.

Why you should consider donating: Raising animals for meat is responsible for at least 10 percent of global emissions. These animals belch the superpollutant methane. Plus, we humans tend to deforest a lot of land for them to graze on, even though we all know the world needs more trees, not less. Yet there hasn't been very much government effort to substantially cut agricultural emissions. Giving Green recommends the Good Food Institute because of its potential to help with that.

You can donate to the Good Food Institute [here](#).

7) Industrious Labs

What it does: This is a newish organization with one clear goal: helping global “heavy industry” — think steel and cement — go green. Through advocacy, **Industrious Labs** pushes corporations to make low-carbon commitments, and pushes governments to make sure that regulations and public funding are in place to accelerate the transition.

Why you should consider donating: Steel and cement are “can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em” kind of industries. We need them to build, yet they account for one-third of greenhouse gas emissions. And these industries are bizarrely neglected by both government and philanthropy. Helping them go green could make a big difference, which is why Giving Green recommends Industrious Labs.

You can donate to Industrious Labs [here](#).

8) DEPLOY/US

What it does: This nonpartisan nonprofit works with American conservatives — yes, you read that right — to enact decarbonization policies, with the goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. DEPLOY/US partners with philanthropic, business, military, faith, youth, policy, and grassroots organizations to shape a decarbonization strategy and generate policy change.

Why you should consider donating: In case you haven't heard of the **eco-right**, it's important to know that there are genuine right-of-center climate groups that want to build

support for decarbonization based on conservative principles. These groups have a crucial role to play; they can weaken political polarization around climate and increase Republican support for bold decarbonization policies, which would be especially important if Republicans take the presidency in 2024. But right now, these groups are incredibly underfunded. Founders Pledge recommends donating to DEPLOY/US because it's uniquely positioned to insulate climate policy against the shifting winds of politics.

You can donate to DEPLOY/US [here](#).

9) Energy for Growth Hub

What it does: Founded by **Todd Moss** in 2013, Energy for Growth Hub aims to make electricity reliable and affordable for everyone. The organization hopes to end energy poverty through climate-friendly solutions.

Why you should consider donating: While Energy for Growth Hub is not a strictly climate-focused organization — ending energy poverty is its main goal — it's still a leader in the clean energy space. The organization will use your donation to fund projects that produce insight for companies and policymakers on how to create the energy-rich, climate-friendly future they're dreaming of.

You can donate to Energy for Growth Hub [here](#).

10) Project InnerSpace

What it does: This US-based nonprofit hopes to unlock the power of heat — geothermal energy — lying beneath the Earth's surface. Launched in 2022, Project InnerSpace seeks to expand global access to carbon-free heat and electricity, particularly to populations in the Global South. The organization maps geothermal resources and identifies geothermal projects in need of further funding.

Why you should consider donating: Most geothermal power plants are located in places where geothermal energy is close to the Earth's surface. Project InnerSpace will use your donation to better map geothermal energy hot spots and to drive geothermal energy costs down.

You can donate to Project InnerSpace [here](#).

11) Opportunity Green

What it does: Opportunity Green aims to cut aviation and maritime shipping emissions through targeted regulation and policy initiatives. The UK-based nonprofit was founded in 2021, and since then has aimed to encourage private sector adoption of clean energy alternatives.

Why you should consider donating: As a newer organization, Opportunity Green is still growing and could use your donation to increase its staff, including bringing on senior lawyers who can help fight for its proposed policy initiatives.

You can donate to Opportunity Green [here](#).

You can also donate to grassroots climate activism

The past several years have seen an explosion of grassroots activism groups focused on climate — from Greta Thunberg’s **Fridays for Future** to the **Sunrise Movement** to **Extinction Rebellion**. Activism is an important piece of the climate puzzle; it can help change public opinion and policy, including by shifting the **Overton window**, the range of policies that seem possible.

Social change is not an exact science, and the challenges in measuring a social movement’s effectiveness are **well documented**. While it would be helpful to have more concrete data on the impact of activist groups, it may also be shortsighted to ignore movement-building for that reason.

Bill McKibben, co-founder of **350.org**, **told Vox** that building the climate movement is crucial because although we’ve already got some good mitigation solutions, we’re not deploying them fast enough. “That’s the ongoing power of the fossil fuel industry at work. The only way to break that power and change the politics of climate is to build a countervailing power,” he said in 2019. “Our job — and it’s the key job — is to change the zeitgeist, people’s sense of what’s normal and natural and obvious. If we do that, all else will follow.”

Of course, some activist groups are more effective than others. And broadly speaking, US climate activist groups are in a better funding situation than they were a couple years ago.

In 2020, Giving Green recommended giving to Sunrise Movement Education Fund — the 501(c3) arm of Sunrise — which was highly effective leading up to the 2020 US elections and helped influence the Biden administration’s climate plan. However, Giving Green

stopped recommending the organization in 2021, for a few reasons. One was that Sunrise is better funded than it used to be. Another was that post-2020, Sunrise didn't play a key role in pushing for new climate bills.

“Overall, our take on grassroots activism is that it has huge potential to be cost-effective, and we indeed think that grassroots movements like Sunrise have had really meaningful effects in the past. I think that without Sunrise, there is no IRA,” Dan Stein, the director of Giving Green, told me last year, referring to the Inflation Reduction Act. But, he added, “It takes a unique combination of timing, organization, and connection to policy to have an impactful grassroots movement.”

One umbrella charity that's more bullish on the ongoing impact of activism is the **Climate Emergency Fund**. It was founded in 2019 with the goal of quickly regrating money to groups engaged in climate protest around the globe. Its founders **believe that street protest** is crucially important to climate politics and neglected in environmental philanthropy. Grantees include Just Stop Oil, the group that made international headlines for **throwing soup** on a protected, glassed-in Van Gogh painting, and Extinction Rebellion, an activist movement that uses **nonviolent civil disobedience** like filling the streets and blocking intersections to demand that governments do more on climate.

If you're skeptical that street protest can make a difference, consider **Harvard political scientist Erica Chenoweth's research**. She's found that if you want to achieve systemic social change, you need to mobilize **3.5 percent** of the population, a finding that helped inspire Extinction Rebellion. And more recent **research** from the nonprofit Social Change Lab suggests that, in the past, groups like Sunrise and Extinction Rebellion may have cost-effectively helped to win policy changes (in the US and UK, respectively) that avert carbon emissions.

But the words “in the past” are doing a lot of work here: While early-stage social movement incubation might be cost-effective, it's unclear whether it's as cost-effective to give to an activist group once it's already achieved national attention. The same research **notes** that in countries with existing high levels of climate concern, broadly trying to increase that concern may be less effective than in previous years; now, it might be more promising to focus on climate advocacy in countries with much lower baseline support for this issue.



Police officers arrest an Extinction Rebellion activist on October 8, 2019, in London. | Alberto Pezzali/NurPhoto via Getty Images

Aside from donating, there are many other ways you can help

There are plenty of ways to use your skills to tackle the climate emergency. And many don't cost a cent.

If you're a writer or artist, you can use your talents to convey a message that will resonate with people. If you're a religious leader, you can give a sermon about climate and run a collection drive to support one of the groups above. If you're a teacher, you can discuss this issue with your students, who may influence their parents. If you're a good talker, you can go out canvassing for a politician you believe will make the right choices on climate.

If you're, well, any human being, you can consume less. You can reduce your energy use, **how much stuff you buy**, and **how much meat you consume**. Individual action alone won't move the needle much — real change on the part of governments and corporations is key — but your actions can influence others and ripple out to shift social norms, and keep you feeling motivated rather than resigned to climate despair.

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You can, of course, also volunteer with an activist group and put your body in the street to nonviolently disrupt business as usual and demand change.

The point is that activism comes in many forms. It's worth taking some time to think about which one (or ones) will allow you, with your unique capacities and constraints, to have the biggest positive impact. But at the end of the day, don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good: It's best to pick something that seems doable and get to work.

Update, November 27, 2023, 2:30 pm ET: This story was originally published on December 2, 2019, and has been updated annually.

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