

Are More Climate Funders Ready to Fight Pipelines? Interest in Fossil Fuel Opposition Grows

Michael Kavate | December 1, 2025



CREDIT: DARREN J. BRADLEY/SHUTTERSTOCK

Before he became president of the Heinz Endowments in 2023, Chris DeCardy spent years working on the climate crisis, including nearly two decades as vice president of the space's second largest legacy funder, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and a stint as acting CEO of its biggest regrantor, ClimateWorks Foundation.



Receive our newsletter

youremail@domai

Sign up

Do more with ~~less~~ **MORE.**

More funds raised means more impact means more smiles.

bloomerang

LEARN MORE

“For most of my career,” said DeCardy, who has also served for years on the board of Climate Lead, the highly successful billionaire climate donor recruitment effort, “the way to address climate change was to look at the global or national level.” A great deal of effort went into crafting the right policies, incentives, regulations and subsidies. “And it was actually really important work.”

“But we are at an exactly different moment now,” he said. “If you’re going to build a durable buy-in from people in their communities about why this is so important, you’ve got to do that at the local level.”

DeCardy is far from alone in this assessment, and many climate funders have always put communities at the center of their grantmaking. Yet what makes Heinz’s local climate funding particularly fascinating right now is that it includes an approach once seen as too hot to touch: oil and gas infrastructure resistance, or what some call supply-side strategies. And these days, funder interest in such work seems to be rising.

The Pittsburgh grantmaker is not trying to pick fights; rather, DeCardy says it funds supply-side climate work as part of a community-oriented climate portfolio that aims to help residents and workers find their way in the new energy economy. About a quarter of Heinz’s annual grantmaking budget, which has averaged \$84 million over the past three years, is focused on supporting a transition to a clean energy economy, and these awards fall in that bucket.

The foundation has backed grassroots environmental nonprofits like [Protect PT](#), coalitions such as [Reimagine Appalachia](#) and think tanks like [Ohio River Valley Institute](#). One major focus has been supporting efforts to gather local data, such as funding cameras, meters and maps that allow Pittsburgh residents to see what is in the air they are breathing or what is happening at the oil and gas facilities around them.

That way, residents “know exactly what’s happening with the exploration, the extraction and development of [the] fossil fuel



Philanthropy Jobs

Check out our [Philanthropy Jobs Center](#) or click a job listing for more information.

Contract/Grant Manager

State Of Maine - Augusta, ME

Communications & Donor Stewardship Manager

Vital Communities - Hartford, VT

Grants Payment Manager/Senior Grants Payment Manager

Simons Foundation - New York, NY

Temporary Supervising Attorney, Immigrant Protection Unit

New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

- New York, NY

Finance & Grants Manager

Workforce Snohomish

- Everett, WA

industry, so they can actually track what the near-term public health impacts are that are happening in their lives,” said DeCardy. “Then they can organize as they see fit, to say, ‘Hey, this either needs to be done in a way that is cleaner and better for our community, or maybe it shouldn’t be in our community.’ And that’s what people at the local level deserve.”

Today, the \$2.2 billion grantmaker is an ally to some of the leading figures in fossil fuel resistance philanthropy. Among them is Katie Redford, the executive director of Equation Campaign, a regrantor [set up](#) by Rockefeller family members to fund front-line groups working to halt the construction of gas terminals and oil pipelines.

“Heinz Foundation is a really important funding partner for us in Appalachia and the Ohio River Valley,” said Redford, a past [IP op-ed](#) contributor. “They understand, like we do, you need both sides of the scissors, right?”

With the Trump administration apparently [determined](#) to return U.S. energy policy to the 1980s, and [opportunities](#) for national progress limited, some funders appear to be considering supporting grassroots fossil fuels opposition as a means of cutting through the tangle of business-as-usual interests preventing serious climate action.

At a time when some climate organizations are struggling financially, Redford and leaders of other organizations doing supply side work told me their backers are standing firm, with some even reporting more interest and rising funding, even if they have not seen a repeat of the “Trump bump” that followed the 2016 election.

This political moment also arrives amid both new evidence backing the kinds of strategies Heinz is supporting, and widening acceptance. A [report](#) this July by Redstone Strategy group, produced for the MacArthur Foundation, Marin Community Foundation and Equation Campaign, found the dollars spent per ton of greenhouse gas emissions via such approaches can be jaw-droppingly low, sometimes a few cents per ton.

Ecosystem Development Director
First Flight Venture Center
-
Durham County, NC

UNIV - Grants Administrator II - Grants And Contracts Accounting
Medical University Of South Carolina
- SC

Financial Grants Manager, Data For Health
Vital Strategies - New York, NY

Program Director, Community Investment And Partnerships
East Bay Community Foundation
- Oakland, CA

Grants & Contracts Administrator II
University Of Rochester
- Rochester, NY

Prize And Grant Associate
The Vilcek Foundation
- New York, NY

Donor Relations Coordinator
Food & Friends - Washington, DC

Grants Manager
Way Finders, Inc. - Springfield, MA

Senior Major Gifts Officer
University Of Massachusetts Boston
- Boston, MA

Development & Communications Associate

Some top funders have long since caught on: Backers of Equation Campaign and another top supply side regrantor, the [Plastic Solutions Fund](#), include some of the field's largest climate funders. And more and more grantmakers are open to a conversation with groups that, as Nicky Davies, executive director of the Plastic Solutions Fund puts it, push "the boundaries of traditional philanthropic norms."

"Over the last 10 years, the part of philanthropy that I've been engaged with has got a little bit less conservative and perhaps a little bit more comfortable with organizations like ours," she said.

'There are a number of funders that are now talking to us'

Since launching in 2017, the Plastic Solutions Fund has attracted [more than 25 backers](#), from major operations like Sequoia Climate Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies to niche players like Tundra Glacier Fund and Point Break Foundation. Over the past year, those funders' resolve has not wavered.

"Not one of them has come to us and said, 'we don't think you're relevant,'" Davies said. In fact, the fund has had "several new, very large opportunities" emerge recently, she said. "It looks like we're not just stable, but expanding."

At Equation Campaign, grantmaking this year is up more than 20% over 2024, with \$17.8 million committed, according to Redford. After its startup year in 2020, the fund [granted](#) around \$10 million annually its first couple of years, but pushed grantmaking to \$14.6 million last year. (Some of these figures include direct funding by partners.) "We would love to double that to \$30 million," she said.

Equation Campaign has the advantage of operating as what Redford calls a "no-cost intermediary." Its founders, Rebecca Rockefeller Lambert and Peter Gill Case, great-great grandchildren of Standard Oil founder John D. Rockefeller, have committed \$50 million to the 10-year campaign, which covers a significant portion of its grantmaking.

“Every dollar that comes in goes out the door because our principals cover the overhead,” which largely consists of its four-person team, Redford wrote by email. These days, its founding donors are no longer the biggest contributors to the organization’s yearly budget, Redford said.

Like the Plastic Solutions Fund, Equation Campaign’s supporters run the gamut, including legacy funders like MacArthur Foundation, billionaire-backed operations like Waverley Street Foundation and Freedom Together Foundation, and [smaller field leaders](#) like the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. The organization has about 10 institutional funders.

There are very few other dedicated supply-side funders or intermediaries in climate philanthropy, according to Davies and Redford. One of the few others is the long-running Funders Collaborative for Oil and Gas, a project of the Rockefeller Family Fund, whose board includes a wide range of family members, including Equation Campaign founder Peter Gill Case. A representative of the collaborative declined to comment.

Thus, it is hard to take the temperature of this space, particularly at a time when many organizations prefer to stay quiet. Yet I heard a similar tale of rising funder interest from a mid-sized organization whose work includes confrontational supply-side campaigns.

“We’re stable and growing,” said Todd Paglia, CEO of Stand.Earth, which runs a variety of campaigns to push corporate actors and other polluters to act. “There are a number of funders and funding associations and groups of funders — that have previously really steered with risk aversion as a priority — that are now talking to us.”

Granted, not every organization in this space is feeling the love. The executive director of one smaller, newer organization focused on fossil fuel movements, who was granted anonymity to speak candidly, said several foundations have ended their support since the election, and it’s been hard to find new backers. “It’s generally been, the first half of the year, a little bit harder to get funders’ ears on these issues,” they said.

‘The numbers are so clear’

When Katie Redford was getting Equation Campaign off the ground, she struggled to understand why so few funders were backing the kind of work her fund was created to support: place-based, community-led climate strategies and solutions.

“Why are people still spending \$100 million on a rocket or trying to invent their way out of it ... when these strategies work time and again?” she recalled thinking. “And what we were running into was, ‘can you measure it in terms of GHGs?’”

Potential funders wanted to know how many metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions the work had averted. Initially, she tried to make the case for the work’s other benefits: community empowerment, racial justice, supporting organizations led by Black, Indigenous and people of color leaders, etc. But it seemed to her that this approach caused funders to see the work as solely a diversity, equity and inclusion measure, not as a climate solution. So her team decided to learn the language of mainstream climate funders.

“We really wanted to make the GHG case for the community-led solutions, because every time we explained it in our terminology, it wasn’t translating,” she said.

Thus was born the report, “[Changing the Game: Community-based strategies and climate mitigation](#),” published this July. It analyzed 15 fossil fuel infrastructure opposition campaigns, state and local legislative successes and community-led renewable energy projects, and determined the cost of each per metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent. The average was well under \$1 per ton, with some projects costing as little as two or three cents per ton.

“I am a lawyer, I am not a math person, but I can look at those numbers, and again, scratch my head going, ‘Why are more people not doing supply side work?’ The numbers are so clear,” said Redford.

Related Inside Philanthropy Resources:

FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY

- [Climate Change Grants](#)
- [The Heinz Endowments](#)
- [ClimateWorks Foundation](#)

‘This is meeting everybody where they are’

At the Heinz Endowments headquarters in downtown Pittsburgh, Chris DeCardy can look out his office window at the Allegheny River, on whose banks, in 1869, H.J. Heinz founded the ketchup business that made the Heinz family extremely wealthy. That fortune filled the coffers of the organization that DeCardy now leads — and contributed to an industrial boom that polluted the nation’s air and rivers and enriched some while leaving others behind.

There was a time, after World War II, when residents of the city could not always [see](#) across their streets, let alone across Allegheny River, due to the era’s air pollution. At one point, the gloom was so thick downtown that street lights were turned on at midday. DeCardy told me one of the philanthropies that later merged to become the Heinz Endowments partnered back then with the business community to clean up the region’s air. He places its current funding — including those grantees whose work challenges oil and gas firms — into that longer history.

The foundation strives “to build a prosperity for the 21st century that actually takes advantage of all the innovation from the past, all of the grit and the commitment and community,” he said. “But also to make it work for everybody better than it did in the past, and to do it in a way that doesn’t leave a damaged environmental legacy.”

At a time when philanthropy across the United States and Europe is looking out its window at a planetary equivalent of post-war Pittsburgh, perhaps the history of Heinz can be instructive. Heinz and nearly every other foundation manage wealth whose creation helped drive our planet toward climate chaos. Yet to date, [Heinz is one of the few](#) to have taken up the challenge of cleaning up the mess, and is leaving no options off the table.

Granted, there is much more that could be asked of Heinz. The foundation did not spend a penny more than the 5% foundation

payout minimum between 2019 and 2023, even as its endowment's five-year investment performance hit 10.1%, according to FoundationIQ and Heinz's 990s. You also cannot find its name on some climate sector solidarity efforts like the long-running [Climate Funders Justice Pledge](#).

But DeCardy — who hails from the climate philanthropy establishment — and Heinz are modeling how a decades-old family foundation in a region with fossil fuels in its bloodstream can take a full-spectrum approach to the climate crisis, and not shy away from work that much of philanthropy once shunned. You can even hear that approach in how they talk about this work.

Some in this space, like Redford or Davies, embrace the label “supply-side” for these strategies, while others I spoke to dislike that framing — partly because some funders have long dismissed such approaches and advocated for ‘demand-side’ interventions — and prefer descriptive phrases like ‘fossil fuel infrastructure resistance.’ DeCardy sidesteps all such terms.

“It’s not really that we look at things like supply-side or demand-side, or look at either-ors in this,” he said. “For us, this is meeting everybody where they are.”

Michael Kavate covers climate philanthropy and billionaire donors. He [welcomes](#) feedback, disagreements, tips and requests.

Correction (12/2/25): Prior to the Heinz Endowments, Chris DeCardy worked for the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, not the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Featured



[Are More Climate Funders Ready to Fight Pipelines? Interest in Fossil Fuel Opposition Grows](#)

[Following COP30, Clues on Global Climate Giving](#)

Quick Links

[About Us](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[FAQ & Help](#)
[Terms of Use](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)

Become a Subscriber

Sign up for a single user or multi-user subscription.

Receive our newsletter

© 2025 - Inside Philanthropy