



**THE HARBOUR**  
YOUTH CLIMATE SUPPORT SYSTEM

Conversations with 70 stakeholders:

# Climate Activist Attitudes & Perspectives on Funding Tied to Fossil Fuels

**AUGUST 2023**

A project of the Foundation for  
Environmental Stewardship



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to thank UNICEF Division of Communication for granting us permission to use the design format of its report, "The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in the Digital World."

Front Cover: An image of torsos including a group of people in conversation, with one person holding a coffee cup.

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The report and additional online content are available at

[www.theyouthharbour.org](http://www.theyouthharbour.org)

The Youth Harbour operates all throughout Turtle Island and is headquartered in the traditional territories of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

**For the purposes of this report, we refer to Turtle Island as "Canada"**

Conversations with 70 stakeholders

# Climate Activist Attitudes & Perspectives on Funding Tied to Fossil Fuels

BY THE YOUTH HARBOUR



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Image Description: A group of 7 youth in a coffee shop with books in the far wall, having a discussion.



## About Us

The Youth Harbour is the flagship project of the Foundation for Environmental Stewardship (FES). At The Youth Harbour, we pool philanthropic funds that we re-grant to youth-led climate movements throughout Canada, because youth are known to be the critical demographic that can foster the political will for climate solutions in Canada. Aside from financial assistance, we offer administrative and technical support to young climate leaders so they can get from starting their work to scaling their work. Since 2021 we have supported 31 organizations with \$626,100 funds across Canada and supported an additional 20 organizations with granting, administrative, or other types of networking support.

Our intended impact is to see that by 2030, the Canadian climate movement will be successfully implementing mitigation and adaptation strategies needed for a climate-resilient and fair Canada, through the influence and action of young leaders.

### **We operate under these principles:**

- 01. We are youth-led, youth-serving - always.**
- 02. We are in a climate crisis and we act like it.**
- 03. We aim to build relationships of trust and mutual respect.**
- 04. We are in pursuit of equitable and accessible programming.**
- 05. We take responsibility and act with reciprocity.**

**"We are not the movement itself, but we are accountable to it"**



## OUR GROUNDING TRUTHS

- 01. Climate change will have the greatest impact on the future of young people**, and with the most at stake and least ties to the status quo, youth have the most agency and motivation to create solutions that match the speed and scale of the climate crisis.
- 02. Youth organizing is impactful and innovative, especially in fostering the political will, culture shift, and societal change needed to enable the deployment of meaningful climate solutions.**
- 03. The nature of youth organizing is responsive, trust-based, and emergent and therefore the supports that enable youth action should complement the ways in which youth organize.**
- 04. Youth voices are essential to include and have represented in climate decision-making spaces, and thus youth must be meaningfully consulted as equal partners.**



A photograph of a protest or demonstration. In the foreground, a woman is wearing a blue face mask and a black t-shirt with a teal and red patterned vest. She is looking slightly to the left. In the background, other people are visible, some wearing masks, and there are colorful banners or flags. The scene is outdoors and appears to be a public gathering.

**Why is this such  
a "hot topic"?**

Image Description: Activists with masks protesting.

JULY 2023 REPORT

# Background

## Setting the context

The extraction, production, and consumption of fossil fuels are the primary contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, which accelerate global warming and climate change. The urgency to do everything we can to limit warming to 1.5 degrees has never been more apparent as wildfires, severe storms, extreme heat, and flooding ravage the Canadian and global landscape.

In the struggle to combat climate change and its disastrous consequences, grassroots and more institutional climate activists play a pivotal role in fostering political will, shaping policies, and championing sustainable practices.

To scale their work, many climate justice groups rely on funding to fulfill their crucial missions toward a climate-resilient and fair future. However, an increasingly contentious issue that has emerged in recent years revolves around the ethical

implications of climate organizations accepting financial support from companies directly implicated in fossil-fuel extraction. The climate sector finds itself entangled in a moral conundrum as it weighs the benefits of financial support of powerful players against the potential compromise of its integrity and commitment to climate action.

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## The purpose of this report

This report delves into the complexities surrounding the relationship between climate organizations and fossil fuel industry funding, exploring the moral dilemmas and ethical considerations involved. By investigating various case studies, scrutinizing the implications of such financial associations, and consulting with climate activists, we seek to shed light on the multifaceted issues faced by climate organizations in balancing their responsibilities to the movement with their financial sustainability.



Based on our consultations, we will aim to answer:

- **Why does the climate community refuse funding tied to fossil fuel extraction?**
- **What are the justifications for accepting funding from groups implicated in oil and gas?**
- **In what context is it “acceptable” for a climate organization to accept funds from companies tied to fossil fuel extraction?**

Towards the end of the report, we will provide recommendations for climate organizations that choose to accept money from sources tied to fossil fuels.

As the climate crisis continues to escalate, finding viable solutions demands transparency, integrity, and unwavering dedication. It is essential for climate organizations to navigate the ethical minefield thoughtfully, ensuring that their alliances and funding sources align unequivocally with their core principles and goals. This report serves as a call to engage in an open dialogue about the ethical considerations in climate advocacy, urging stakeholders to critically evaluate the trade-offs involved and to forge a path forward that preserves both environmental integrity and organizational independence.



A photograph of three young women sitting on the ground, looking down at their hands. They are wearing denim jeans and casual tops. The woman on the left is wearing a red and white striped shirt. The woman in the middle is wearing a light-colored, textured top. The woman on the right is wearing a light blue denim shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

# Methodology: Who we collected data from and how

Image Description: Three young women in denim sitting down and looking at their hands.

# Methodology

A glimpse into how we collected data for the purposes of this report.

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## Data Collection

Individual consultations were conducted to ensure that participants' perspectives were not influenced by their peers. Contributions were collected through various methods, including phone calls, virtual calls, emails, and voice notes.

In addition, we reviewed past consultation notes from The Youth Harbour's youth steering committee, which had been held in a group format of 9 participants.

**70 individual consultations were completed for the purposes of this report.**

Finally, we reviewed past articles, reports, and online literature to inform this report. You can find a list of these sources under "References".

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## Privacy Considerations

Before their consultation, individuals were informed that their viewpoints would be included in an external report. They were given the option to opt-out if they preferred to have their contributions considered only for internal decision-making within FES.

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, participants' names and affiliations are anonymized in this report as per their request.

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## Language of Consultations

Consultations were only conducted in English. We recognize that this report preferences Anglophone perspectives and may fail to meaningfully include the perspectives of Francophone communities and other groups with English as a second language.



# Demographic Data

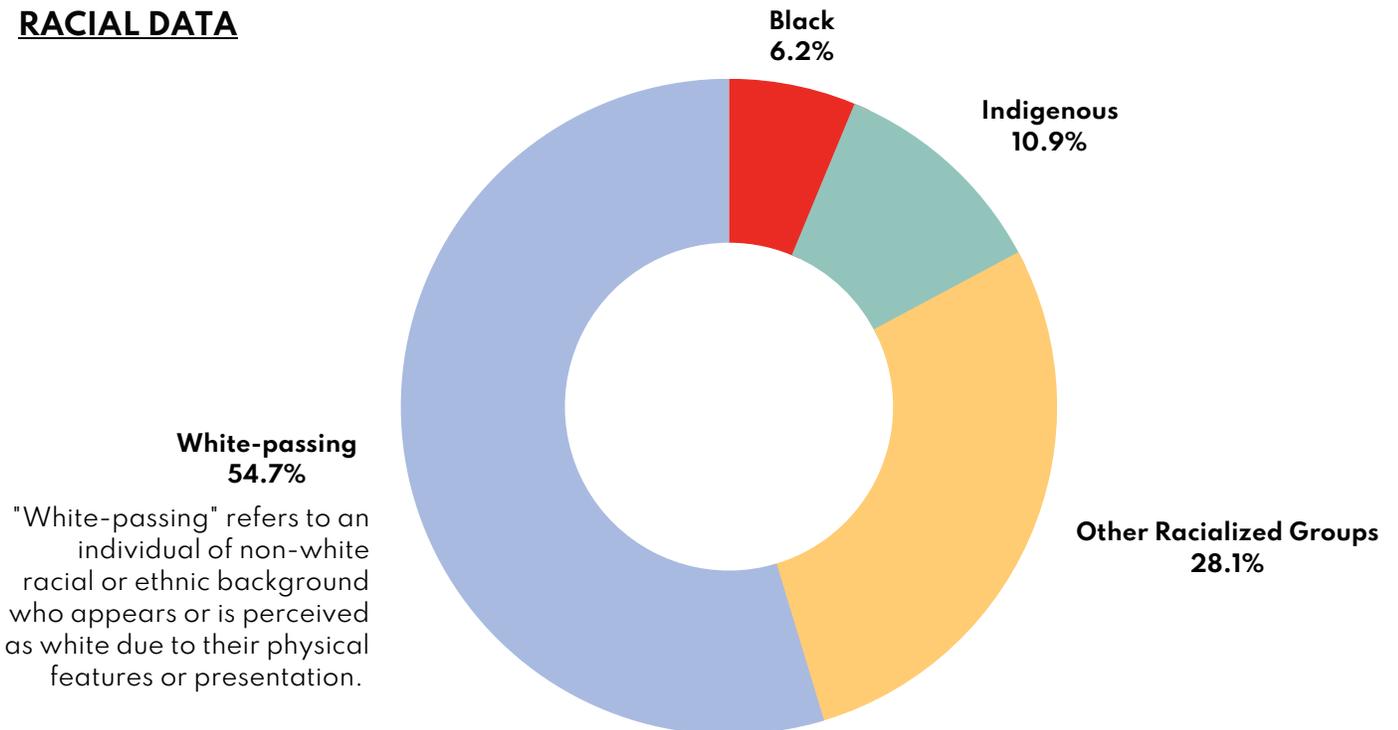
Recognizing the diverse opinions on this topic, we spoke to a wide range of people across different age categories, regional backgrounds, race, and placements within the spectrum of activism.

## AGE DATA



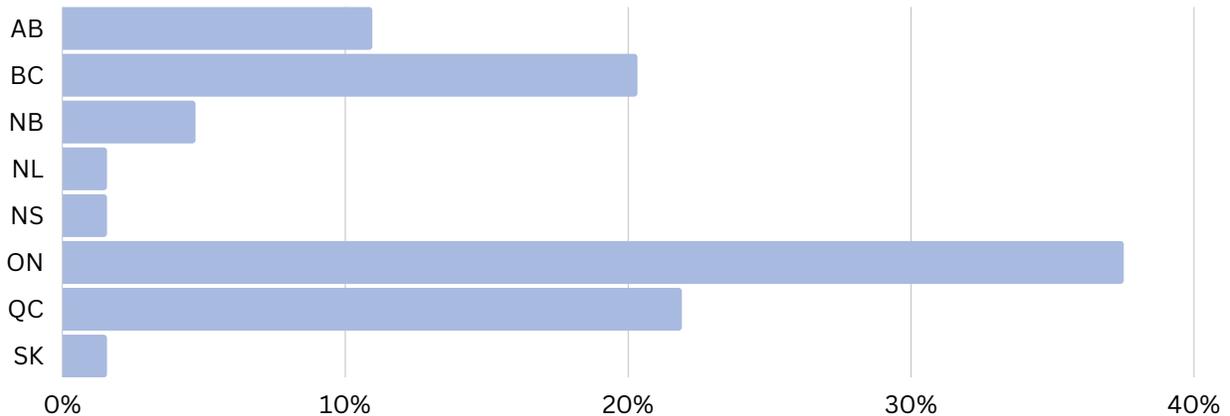
Despite youth being The Youth Harbour's main stakeholder, it was important for us to consider collecting data from elders, people that had just stepped over 30 and stepped out of the youth movement, and other ENGOs not led by youth. This is because these particular groups have experience, advice, and insight gathered through relationships and conversations over time.

## RACIAL DATA



Although we recognize that perceptions of accepting funds tied to fossil fuel funding may vary across equity-deserving groups, we did not collect this data on access needs, gender or sexual orientation, or neurodivergence for the sake of this report.

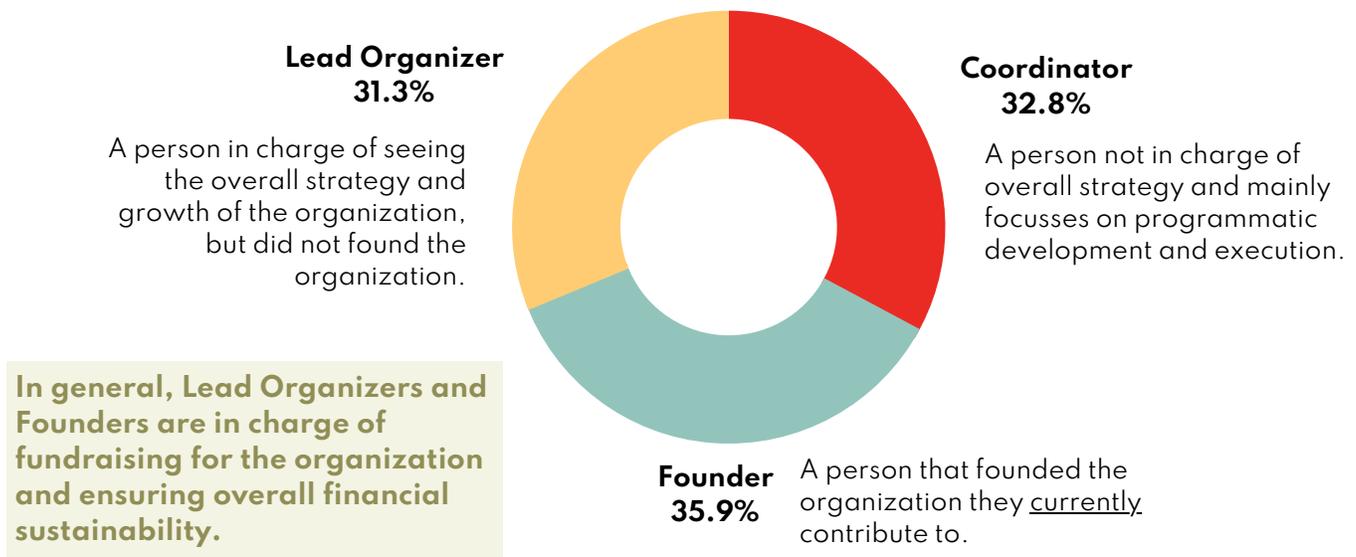


**REGIONAL DATA**

Due to time constraints, we were unable to engage with folks based in the Territory regions, including the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon, as well as Prince Edward Island and Manitoba.

**POSITIONALITY DATA**

**What type of position did respondents hold in their organization?**



**Does the respondent have a job that provides a stable income and/or has a primary job outside of their climate activism?**

**YES (45.31%)**



**NO (54.69%)**



A group of people are gathered around a wooden table in a meeting. In the center, a man with a large afro and glasses is smiling and looking at a document. To his left, a woman with curly hair is looking at a laptop. The table is cluttered with papers, laptops, and several iced coffee drinks. In the background, a chalkboard has some writing on it, including 'CATE', 'pire', 'ow your audience', and 'LL A STUKI'. The overall atmosphere is collaborative and professional.

# Understanding the data and trends

Image Description: People at a table conducting a meeting with laptops, papers, and beverages.

# What the numbers say

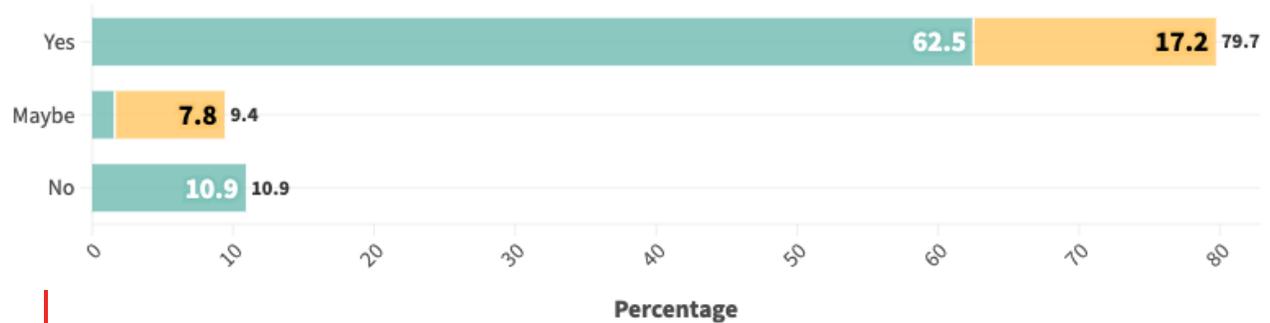
This section provides a high-level overview of the data collected through the consultations. Please note that the narrative component of this report will shed further nuance and insight into this data.

## "Are you supportive of climate organizations receiving money from sources explicitly tied to fossil fuel extraction?"

4/5 of respondents are supportive of accepting funding tied to fossil fuels

■ Youth ■ Non-Youth

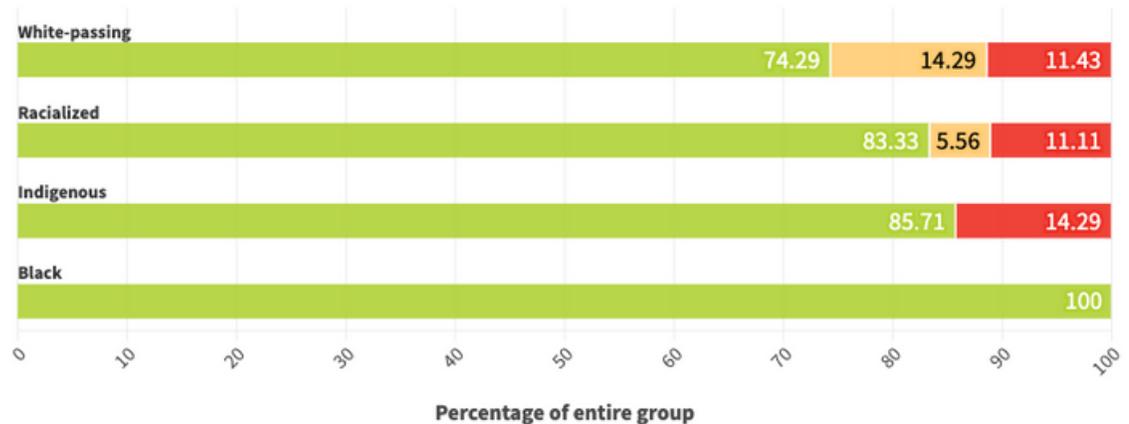
### Sentiment



\*Given there are no stipulations or grantee requirements from the funder in question.

### Proportion of support based on racial segments

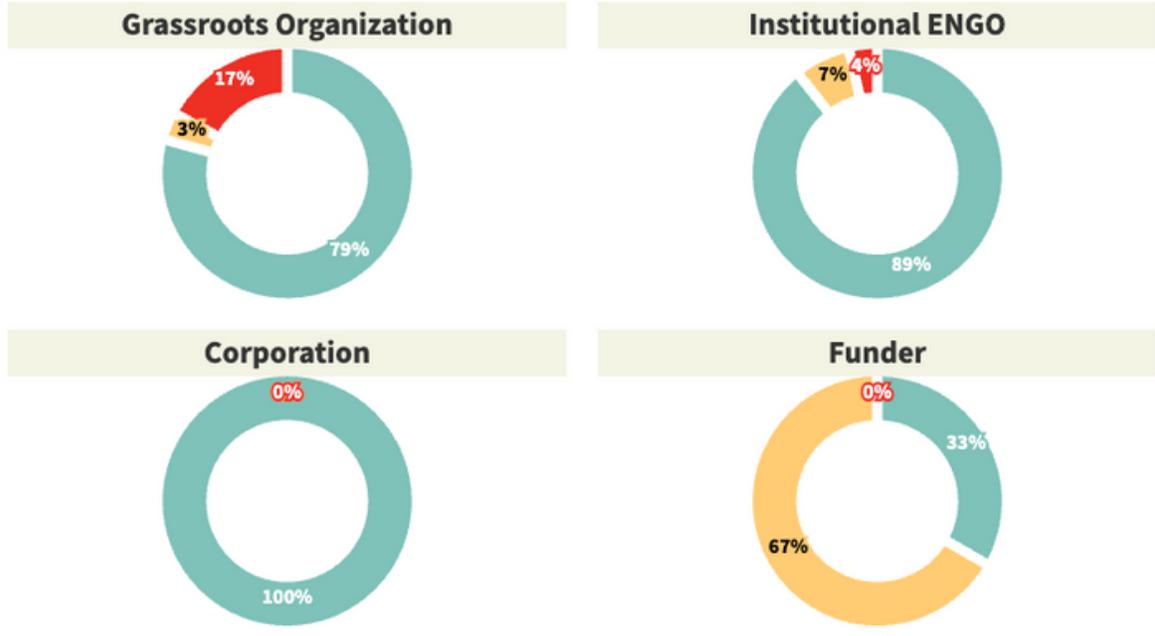
■ Yes ■ Maybe ■ No



### Support based on organization type

Understanding how different types of organizations working in climate activism view accepting funds from Big Oil

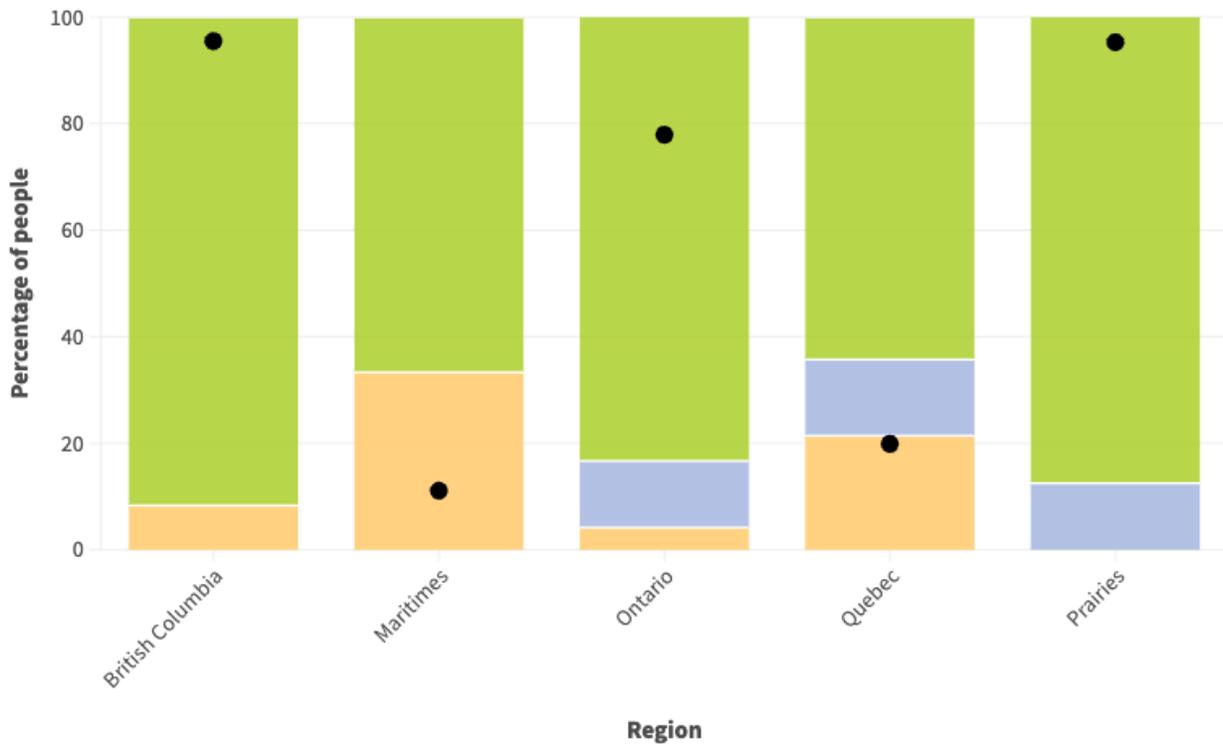
Supportive Undecided Unsupportive



### Level of Support per Region

Regional support to accept funding tied to fossil fuels from high support to low support.

Mean Weighted Support Level Low Support Medium Support High Support



A silhouette of a person wearing a hijab, standing in water during sunset. The person is facing right, and the background is a gradient of orange, red, and blue, suggesting a sunset over water.

Looking Closer, Part 1

# Why do activists refuse funds tied to fossil fuels?

Image Description: A person in a hijab standing in water during sunset.

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# 01

Activists are taking  
the "moral high  
ground"

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Youth climate work is politically driven, and many in the youth activist community refuse to be associated with hypocrisy by accepting funds from fossil fuel companies.

**One in three youth activists shared that the possibility of taking funds from Big Oil felt like a “betrayal of their values.”**

Here, these “values” relate to youths’ calls to action directed to decision-makers and power holders.

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**"Accepting the funding feels like a betrayal of our values"**

In most cases, "Big Oil" is viewed as a direct opponent to the efforts for a climate-just and resilient future. Consequently, accepting money from these companies is seen as hypocritical because they act as obstacles to significant advancements. This contradicts the goals of the movement, and receiving funding from Big Oil is interpreted as aligning with energy companies that uphold the current system, hindering meaningful change.

implicitly or explicitly. It is indisputable that there is a “big ick” when considering accepting funds from fossil fuel sources.

The discomfort comes from a feeling of contradicting one's values, working directly with the opponent, and being a hypocrite. Almost half of respondents noted some level of anxiety when thinking about accepting funds from Big Oil.

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**"Accepting the funding feels "icky" and causes me emotional distress."**

The “big ick” can be explained as any level of internal, mental, or emotional discomfort at the thought of taking money from sources tied to fossil fuels, whether

**0% of respondents**

fully supported taking funding from fossil fuel sources without any further moral justification or explanation of the terms and conditions.



Respondents that were diametrically opposed to accepting funds from fossil fuel sources explained that the thought of accepting funds from fossil sources led to extreme levels of mental distress and anxiety attacks for some.

In addition, Indigenous participants pointed out the “embarrassment” of accepting fossil fuel funding and sharing it with the elders that opposed fossil fuel infrastructure throughout their life. A common theme throughout the consultation was a feeling of “shame”.

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### **"We do not want to owe Big Oil anything."**

In connection with the previous point, many youth climate leaders strongly oppose owing any success, gratitude, or favours to fossil fuel companies that contribute to the climate crisis. They believe in embodying the future they envision today and being a shining example to the public that a fossil fuel free future is achievable. According to them, this goal cannot be achieved if they find themselves in a position of having to thank or depend on Big Oil in any way.

These ideas are linked to the concepts discussed in the book "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex" by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. The book emphasizes that foundations often use funds derived from profits made by exploiting labour. Corporations grow wealthy through worker exploitation, and they then use some of those profits to create foundations that provide "relief" to the same workers who suffer from corporate practices.

Furthermore, there is concern that accepting funds from Big Oil may inadvertently reinforce the need for resource extraction to support corporate foundations, which, in turn, provide support for climate organizing efforts. This creates a complex situation for organizers who advocate for the dismantling of groups that simultaneously support their operations through a reliance on the fossil fuel industry.

**Reviewing the data, the most common calls to action from youth include:**

- 1. Stopping fossil fuel expansion**
- 2. Divestment in fossil fuels**
- 3. Preserving Indigenous Rights**
- 4. Putting an end to fossil fuel subsidies in Canada**
- 5. Investment in renewable and clean technology**



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# 02

We cannot strengthen  
the fossil fuel  
industry's social  
license

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## "This is a form of greenwashing and impact washing"

The most common concern among respondents was the ability of fossil fuel companies to use the funding of climate initiatives as a means for greenwashing or impact washing.

As is a common practice for companies, corporate foundations work closely with marketing departments. Historically, corporate social responsibility initiatives are used as a tool for companies to shift generally negative attitudes about a company to more positive perceptions.

From the perspective of our respondents, it seems both counterintuitive and possibly deceitful that fossil fuel companies are spending billions of dollars on lobbying at federal and provincial levels while only contributing a fraction of that investment to climate justice initiatives. The ongoing acquisition of assets that worsen the climate crisis, strong advocacy for tar sands growth, and disregard for the rights of Indigenous Peoples raise doubts about the true intentions behind funding climate justice.

Given the magnitude of harm caused by Big Oil's actions, the funding allocated for climate initiatives appears insufficient and raises concerns that it may be more of a performative gesture and a marketing tool for the industry rather than a genuine moral commitment.

### What is greenwashing or impact washing?

Greenwashing and impact washing are deceptive practices used by companies and organizations to create a misleading impression of their environmental or social responsibility efforts. Organizations may use social responsibility initiatives and philanthropy to enhance their public image, even if their overall practices or business models do not genuinely contribute significantly to positive societal outcomes.



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**"We do not want to make Big Oil look good to society."**

Moreover, there are concerns that accepting funds from Big Oil could inadvertently bolster the fossil fuel industry's social license. When a climate organization allows itself to be influenced and funded by Big Oil, it effectively strengthens the social licenses of fossil fuel companies, enabling them to present themselves as "sustainable" and "climate-friendly" despite still contributing to the climate crisis. This contradicts the primary objectives of climate movements, which aim to discredit the fossil fuel industry and build political support for transformative change toward a climate-resilient future and away from the use of fossil fuels entirely.

**“Taking the money is not the problem, but it is how they report on what they do and how they utilize this initiative for their own marketing and being able to point to having Canadian partners on the ground. The main sticking point is their claim to leadership, and the concern is that we are giving them the social license as a contributor to the cause.”**



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# 03

Activists fear ties to Big Oil will delegitimize the movement

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In the past, fossil fuel organizations have used possible funding to influence climate messaging and censor organizations. Groups that we spoke to mentioned instances where Big Oil funders reached out to smaller organizations they represented in the hopes of influencing their messaging in exchange for a large sum of money.

**This narrative has become so commonplace that there is now an assumption that if an environmental or climate organization accepted funding from a fossil fuel company, the organization has compromised its values and let the “enemy” influence its communication strategy.**

However, no single participant could provide a specific example of a climate advocacy organization that has accepted funding under these conditions, although two wildlife conservation organizations were named. Nonetheless, the association with Big Oil presents a significant reputational risk for organizations.

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### **"I do not want to ruin my reputation"**

One participant, in particular, spoke about how they almost accepted funds from a fossil fuel company to fund a project, and they had concerns about how taking the funds could be detrimental to their overall social capital and legitimacy in the climate space, particularly because they were a newer player in the sector.

They went on to further explain:

“The rejection of the project was not due to a harsh moral judgment as part of a moral framework, but an emotional response to the discomfort of taking the money and the anxiety related to taking on a reputational risk.”

### **87% of respondents**

said they would be more comfortable if an intermediary organization accepted the funds from Big Oil, pooled the funding, and then re-granted the funds to climate advocacy groups rather than accepting it directly themselves.



In addition, many expressed concerns about the possibility of the following chain of events occurring:

1. **An intermediary accepts funds from a fossil fuel company.**
2. **The intermediary distributes the funds to multiple climate advocacy groups.**
3. **A journalist or influencer reports on the intermediary accepting funds from fossil fuel company to delegitimize the intermediary.**
4. **In turn, all groups supported by the intermediary lose legitimacy and integrity.**

To be "cancelled" and perceived as selling out within their community poses such a high risk to activists because reputation and trust within the movement is difficult to cultivate and the value is unquantifiable.

In our consultations, we found that even if Big Oil gave funds under no conditions, no influence, no stipulations, and no marketing requirements with proven and demonstrated "moral intent" that climate organizations still would not accept the money in fear that this will ruin their reputation.

By contrast, if organizations were assured that taking the money would not negatively impact the public perception of their organizations, then organizations were more willing to participate in greenwashing and marketing schemes since the perception is that Big Oil sustainability reporting is always illegitimate and misleading anyway.

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### **"Accepting money can delegitimize the work."**

There are real concerns about the potential delegitimization of the ongoing advocacy towards climate change if Big Oil money directly funds the work.

As one participant noted:

**"The theory of organizing is to threaten the bottom line of [fossil fuel companies], proving that there is a lack of political and societal support for their operations. It feels patronizing and delegitimizing that [fossil fuel companies] can plant funding to support the opposite of what their organization seeks to perpetuate. If we take the money and hurt them with it, we could be allowing them to delegitimize us."**





Looking Closer, Part 2

# Why should climate organizers accept funding tied to the fossil fuel industry?

Image Description: Three people sitting down, smiling, and looking at laptop screen.

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# 01

All money is tied to  
colonial and  
extractive legacies

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The sentiment expressed during our rounds of consultations revolves around the ethical complexities of funding sources for various initiatives in Canada. Participants suggest that no matter how grassroots an organization claims to be, the money they receive often originates from unsavoury practices, including capitalism, extraction, and colonial legacies. Even foundation funds and government support are not exempt, with foundation origins linked to the exploitation of natural resources and government funds stemming from oil and gas royalties. People contend that nearly all money in Canada is connected to oil and gas, and escaping this association seems impossible.

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**"Canada is a resource-extractive economy, and all money is colonial money, so you should just take it."**

Philanthropy is seen as a "wild and complex" realm because, while it may ideologically make sense to reject fossil fuel funding, practically speaking, it appears challenging due to the pervasive nature of such funding in Canadian society.

Canadian governments have a significant reliance on oil and gas revenue with substantial taxes and royalties generated from energy exports. Canada is one of the world's largest producers and exporters of oil, and its economy benefits from revenue generated by oil and gas exports.

In fact, "surging energy prices have propelled the taxes and royalties by public Canadian energy companies to around \$48 billion this year, a 200 percent year-over-year increase." This is expected to increase to \$64 billion in 2023. This dependency further complicates the issue, as it intertwines various sectors of the economy with the fossil fuel industry.

This dilemma prompts the question of how far one needs to trace the funding supply chain to identify its origins.

**The "all money is oil money" sentiment is particularly pervasive in prairie regions, as many social innovation programs simply would not be funded without investment from companies linked to fossil fuel extraction.**



It underscores the challenging task of navigating ethical funding choices, especially for organizations striving to create positive social change while grappling with the systemic entanglement of money and its unsavoury origins. However, considering “all money is oil money”, and since there’s “simply no escaping it” the funding should be taken and seen as a resource to simply steward the work in direct opposition to the source.

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**"The impact is more important than the source of funding."**

Expanding on the idea that all excessive wealth is linked to extractive practice, and therefore, money should be taken to use for better things, it was clear that participants were much more inclined to take the money as long as it was stewarded in an impactful way.

Many groups saw taking money from fossil fuel companies as a means to an end rather than the end itself, explaining that the funds are simply one of many sources. As long as the funds are used in a way that helps people along their journey do projects, build capacity, network with others, and cultivate systems change, then it is worth it.

In addition, it was hugely important to activists that it is not a fossil fuel company’s place to direct how funds should be allocated for impact, and there should be no pressure from them to “water down” the work.

**"We should not mind taking the money from companies so that we can take action against them. Past movements used to rob banks to fund their movements. What’s the difference between accepting funds from Big Oil and using it against them versus stealing it and doing the same thing? Taking this money could be used for a really impactful and well-planned operation."**



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# 02

Youth climate action  
is critically  
underfunded

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In Canada, youth movements are facing a significant funding challenge as there is limited financial support available to them.

**Internationally, only 0.76% of funding goes towards youth-led climate activism.**

(Cracknell, J., Desanlis, H., Méténier, N., & Williams, H, (2023, February 17). The case for funding youth-led climate initiatives. Climateworks Foundation.)

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**"Youth-led climate activism is not adequately funded, so we need to take what we can get."**

This scarcity of resources puts young activists in a difficult position, forcing them to choose between accepting whatever funding they can access to carry out their vital work or forgoing their efforts altogether.

While it is acknowledged that all money passes through the hands of people with potentially questionable ethics, the reality remains that funds are scarce, and much of the available money is tied to fossil fuel extraction.

Emergent organizations explained that the luxury of saying no to funding from oil and gas sources is not really an option. This was especially true for Black, Indigenous, and racialized groups signalling that privilege plays a part in an individual's ability to decline funding.

Therefore, some argue that if there are no conditions that dilute the essence of their work, it may be necessary for organizations to accept these funds.

**BIPOC participants were twice as likely to be supportive of accepting funds from fossil fuel companies over white-passing participants.**



**“There is so little money being circulated that it would be a huge loss for the movement not to take the money.”**

The key consideration here is whether the money can genuinely aid people in pursuing their projects, building capacity, fostering connections, and facilitating systemic change, allowing professionals to stand on their own.

As long as there is meaningful consultation involved, some believe it may be worthwhile to accept such funding. The urgency of the situation is emphasized by the realization that the funding available to circulate is minimal, and refusing these funds could result in a significant loss for the movement's progress and objectives.

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**"Fossil fuel companies owe it to the movement and society as a form of distributive justice"**

As a participant pointed out, “Why shouldn’t the funds be from the people that cause the most harm?” To decline the money would place the burden of funding the movement on the groups that have contributed the least to the climate crisis.

It makes sense to accept the funds from Big Oil as a form of distributive justice as long as it goes to meaningful causes with good impact.



### What is distributive justice?

Distributive justice is a concept in ethics and political philosophy concerned with fair and equitable resource distribution within society. It aims to address questions of how goods, opportunities, and burdens should be allocated among individuals and groups to minimize social inequality. Various theories propose principles like equal distribution, maximizing overall welfare, or ensuring fair benefits for the least advantaged.

Participants explain that if we want funds to be redistributed, then we need to accept all the funds tied to fossil fuel extraction. These funds should be particularly distributed to young people that can support a strong movement that does not contribute to the same cycle that requires the need for activism.

Some participants describe taking the money from Big Oil as “empowering” by accepting funds from them to threaten their bottom line. There’s something to be said about using this funding as a “reclamation” of power for the youth movement to transform things so youth do not have to be so reliant on fossil fuels in the first place.

Respondents also went so far as to view fossil fuel funding as a form of reparations as long as groups were not required to reciprocate with the funder in question. Considering the money, it can become a way of reparations to undo the harm of the work that Big Oil has put the climate movement and wider society through.

**A sentiment echoed by many:  
“F\*\*\* them, take the money.”**

**Many respondents expressed extreme distaste of fossil fuel companies. 100% of respondents that swore during their consultation were supportive of accepting fossil fuel funding.**



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# 03

We need to sustain  
the movement for  
action at any cost

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Participants acknowledged that some individuals still cling to the concept of "moral purity" within the climate movement, causing fear of rejection for those who don't conform. The discussion also touched upon the "directionalist" versus "destinationalist" paradigm.

Directionalists see any progress as positive if it moves society toward the intended destination, while destinationalists view progress as legitimate only if it fully embodies the desired destination itself. This difference in perspective creates tension among groups involved in the climate movement.

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**"Moral Stonewalling can impede the movement and can be a sign of virtue signalling."**

In the discussion, some participants believed that the refusal to engage with fossil fuel organizations might be seen as "moral stonewalling." This lack of compromise between different organizations, whose values do not align 100%, hinders progress by impeding collaboration and compromise. Some even viewed this tactic as performative and unhelpful virtue signalling.

There was a broader question about the "sacredness" of the climate movement's values, as some believed they should be open to challenge and discussion. They emphasized that the unwillingness to compromise on moral superiority over fossil fuel

**What is moral stonewalling?**

"Moral" pertains to principles of right and wrong, ethics, or values related to human behaviour. "Stonewalling" refers to the act of refusing to engage in communication or cooperation, often by maintaining silence or avoiding direct responses.

Combining these two terms, "moral stonewalling" could be understood as a situation in which an individual or a group refuses to engage in discussions, debates, or decision-making processes involving moral or ethical matters. This could happen for various reasons, such as a reluctance to confront difficult ethical dilemmas, a desire to maintain power or control, or a refusal to consider alternative moral viewpoints.



organizations could hinder progress and opportunities and excessive stonewalling are tactics utilized by the fossil fuel industry to ignore climate activist perspectives.

Overall, the key takeaway was that while preserving values is important, it's equally crucial to adapt and work towards a direction where those values can be realized in society. Striking a balance between ideals and practicality is essential for the progress of the climate movement.

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**"We are in a crisis, we need to take what we can get and move forward beyond in-fighting."**

Practically speaking, many participants felt that the climate movement should adapt to the realities of the world today, rather than sticking to an idealized and normative view of how things should be. One participant shared,

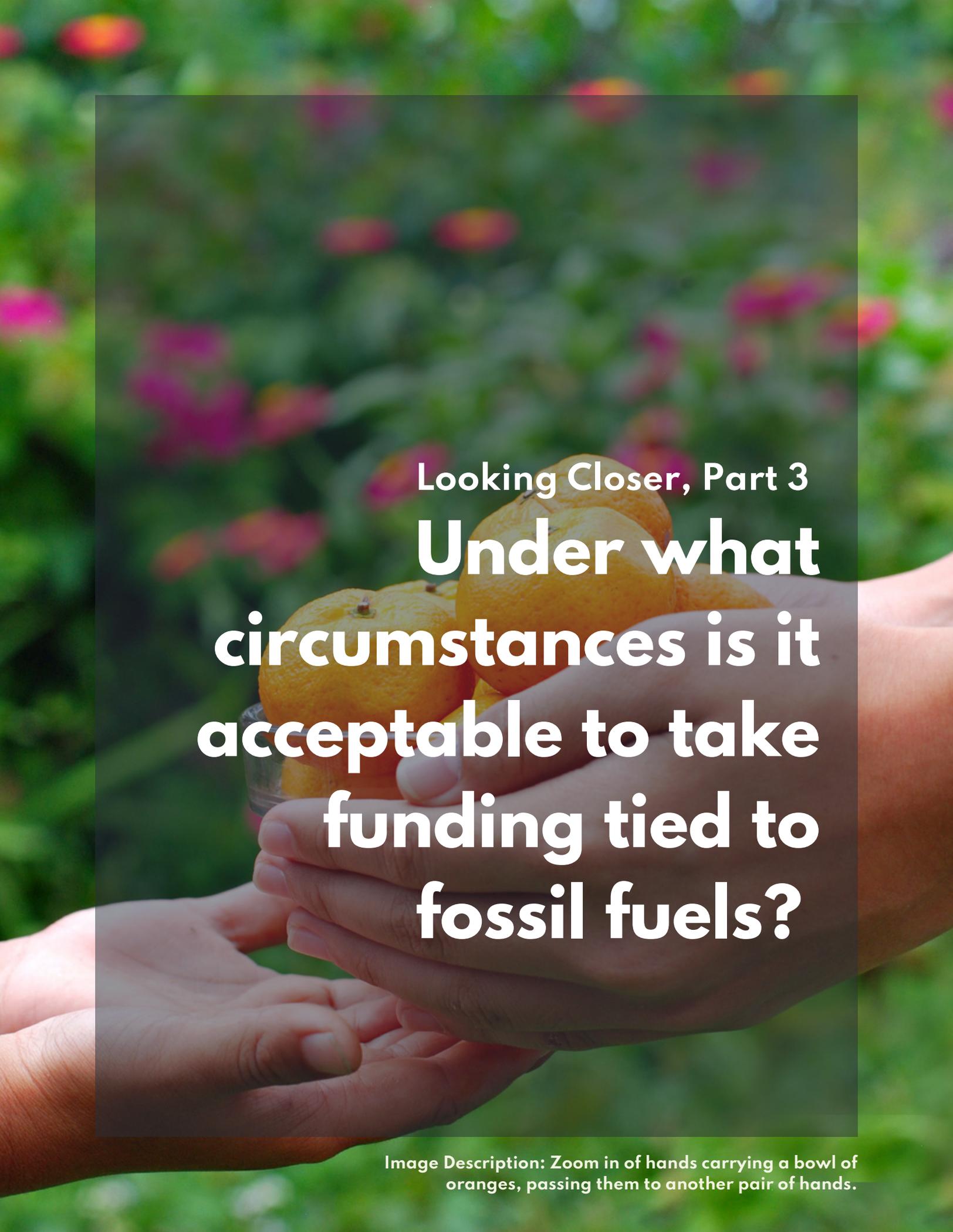
**"I get why people do not want the money, but we all live in this one system and the money can really help people in terms of getting that security and having that continuous funding to move forward."**

They highlighted the current focus on short-term solutions to climate change due to the difficulty in scaling more significant efforts, but they also stressed that relying solely on these "band-aid" solutions without meaningful preventive measures is inadequate.

Groups declining funding from major fossil fuel companies, justified under the guise of equity and justice, has hindered the development of real solutions that are appropriately scaled. Ultimately, this affects vulnerable communities disproportionately and the climate movement at large.

Almost squarely, it is the climate justice movement specifically that faces the issue, as some participants shared that in past social justice movements, this "philosophizing" about funding has not been as severe.





Looking Closer, Part 3

**Under what circumstances is it acceptable to take funding tied to fossil fuels?**

Image Description: Zoom in of hands carrying a bowl of oranges, passing them to another pair of hands.

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# 01

Ensure accountability  
and transparency

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## It's not black and white

The data shows that there is no widely agreed upon moral or financial justification to accept or decline funding from sources linked to fossil fuel extraction. The most important consideration for groups is to understand how their most direct stakeholders feel about the money and whether taking the money will have negative and unrecoverable impacts on these relationships.

This section explores the scenario under which an organization were to accept the funding, and the best practices and acceptable circumstances they would follow, as discussed by our respondents.

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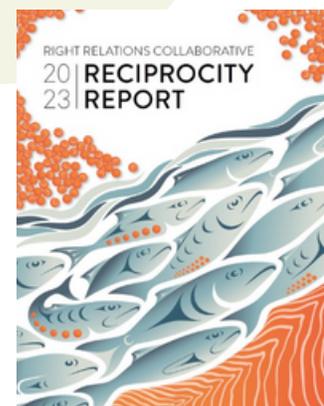
### Develop a clear framework for how the money will be spent.

Participants expressed significant concern about the potential impact of funding if the organization decided to accept it. They emphasized the importance of transparency in how the funds are used, the strategic outcomes they aim to achieve, and the final impact they have.

While this information does not necessarily have to be publicly available, participants stressed the need for the organization to make it easily accessible and readily available upon request.

### In Practice: Right Relation's Collaborative (the Auntie's Council's) Reciprocity Report

The report highlights ways in which funders can share their "money story" as first step to transforming for they work and walk with Indigenous Peoples.



### Create and enforce strong partnership principles

Share hardlines on what funding partnerships look like with your organization, and post them publicly so that organizations understand the nature of any funding agreements and get a glimpse into the “backstage” discussions.

### Keep the company accountable through evaluation and reporting measures.

Consulted groups emphasized the importance of accountability for organizations accepting funding from fossil fuel companies. They want these groups to have mechanisms in place to hold the funders accountable and the ability to cut ties if the funders engage in activities that hinder progress toward a climate-resilient future, such as acquiring coal companies or investing more in lobbying and fossil fuel expansion. This accountability framework should be publicly accessible, and the funded organizations should be responsible for enforcing it with their funders.

### In Practice: Student Energy's Public Principles

## STUDENT ENERGY

Student Energy has clear principles published on its website that outlines how it interacts with partners, engages with youth, and offers transparency.

### In Practice: Indigenous Climate Action's call for value alignment



**INDIGENOUS**  
CLIMATE ACTION

Indigenous Climate Action refused to accept funding from Aviva Insurance when it found out they were insuring fossil fuel infrastructure that directly impacted Indigenous lands.



**INDIGENOUS**  
CLIMATE ACTION

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Donate

**Indigenous Climate Action rejects \$150,000 award from Aviva Canada due to moral conflict with Aviva**



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# 02

Control the narrative  
and communication  
channels

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### Release a statement.

While some respondents preferred to keep fossil fuel funding discreet, over 90% of them suggested that groups accepting funding from Big Oil should release a public statement explaining their reasons for accepting the funds and how they plan to use them. This transparency is intended to prevent external journalists and influencers from controlling the narrative and delegitimizing the funded group's activities. Additionally, it allows people not associated with the organization to understand the rationale behind accepting the money.

**Within that statement, 65% of the groups recommended that the organization publicly denounce the activities of the fossil fuel company to demonstrate that taking the money is an act of resistance rather than alignment with fossil fuel activities within the youth climate movement.**

In addition, the group should prepare any statements in response to any “bad press” they could potentially receive.

### Maintain communication with stakeholders

To maintain positive relationships and manage reputational risks, organizations should maintain consistent and open communication with their stakeholders throughout the funding agreement. While it may be challenging to please everyone, transparency and trust-building are vital.

Before accepting fossil fuel funding, organizations should consult with their community to gather their input. Additionally, the utilization of funds should involve stakeholders through a participatory process to include their perspectives and ensure their voices are heard.

#### In Practice: FRIDA Fund releases a statement



The FRIDA fund, a feminist fund, received funding from Mackenzie Scott and in response released a statement called **"Money is Political"**



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# 03

Minimize contributing  
to Big Oil's positive  
social license

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### **Minimize marketing opportunities for Big Oil.**

Participants were divided into two groups, with 50% in favour of displaying the fossil fuel funder's logo on the website or marketing materials. Some organizations believed it is acceptable for transparency reasons, while the other 50% believed no logo, name, or signage should be used on the grantee's page.

**However, all participants agreed that the funder should not use their funding of the organization for publicity or marketing campaigns.**

Nonetheless, 75% of respondents were okay with the funding being mentioned in a sustainability report, as they didn't view such reports as an effective means to boost public support.

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### **Under no circumstances can Big Oil influence the organization's ability to dissent against Big Oil or censor organizations' messages**

All participants unanimously agreed that any degree of influence from a funder on programming, communication, and operations is completely unacceptable.

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### **Ensure that accepting the funds will not result in reliance or dependency on the funding.**

Participants expressed that funding from sources linked to fossil fuels should only be accepted if the organization can avoid becoming overly reliant on such funding. The concern was that dependence on fossil fuel funding could make the organization vulnerable to influence due to the desperation to sustain itself during financial challenges. Thus, participants emphasized the need to maintain financial independence to avoid compromising the organization's principles and objectives.



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# 04

Identify an  
intermediary to  
accept and disburse  
the funds

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The majority of organizations were hesitant to directly accept funding from companies or foundations directly involved in fossil fuels. Instead, they preferred to have a trusted intermediary receive the funding and then regrant it to their movements. This approach allowed them to be "one more step" removed from the fossil fuel industry, providing a sense of distance and ensuring they were not directly associated with such funding sources.

**Groups provided some suggestions for an intermediary body to accept funds:**

<p><b>Separate the funds into "dirty" and "clean" pools</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow groups to "choose" which pool of funding they accept money from.</li> <li>• Keep funds linked to fossil fuels in a separate bank account and/or use clear classification methods.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fund specific work based on community consultation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the community to choose how the money will be spent.</li> </ul>

However, the recommendations above are not perfect. For example, some groups' critiques of developing separate funds for "dirty" vs. "clean" funds is that there is a tendency to place funding from philanthropic foundations and government in the "clean"

pooled fund, when in reality these groups' wealth is also built on colonial practice, but is just a few steps removed in comparison to fossil fuel companies.



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In addition, there is already an apparent lack of consensus regarding whether the funding should be used for frontline activism. Many groups expressed that it would be preferable to use the money that Big Oil provide to advocate against them, but the groups that we interviewed who engage on these frontlines are the groups least likely to accept funding from fossil fuel companies.

Instead, these frontline activists suggest that these funds go towards different initiatives, such as training new communities for climate action, building capacity for more institutional groups, or even investing in job skills for net-zero communities across the country.

### **Consulting groups as an intermediary**

During our discussions, numerous organizations and individuals spoke positively about their strong connections with FES and The Youth Harbour. They appreciated FES's unique approach to consulting constituents transparently, setting it apart from other organizations. Even those with reservations about accepting fossil fuel funding expressed a preference for FES as a thoughtful and trustworthy partner if the funds were to be allocated elsewhere. The concern was that if a group such as FES declined the funding, the potential recipient might not handle it with the same level of transparency and inclusivity. In addition, they expressed that there are not many organizations that are willing to support more “controversial or radical” youth-led climate activism the way that FES does.





Conclusion

# Considerations for organizations receiving funds tied to fossil fuels

Image Description: Several people sitting on a picnic blanket with watermelon, flowers, and beverages.

Throughout our consultations, there was no one clear definitive answer to the question, "Should climate organizations accept money from funders tied to fossil fuel extraction?"

However, what was uncovered through this report are key ideas and considerations that organizations should reflect on when tackling this issue. Here, we are going to share our final takeaways and suggestions based on what we heard in our 70 consultations.

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## Key Takeaways

**01. As an organization, it is important to understand your own positionality and to what degree the decisions that you make will impact your stakeholders. In other words, who do you serve and would they be okay with it?**

Everyone plays a different role in the climate movement, and all roles are important given the scale of the climate crisis. Any organization considering taking funds tied to fossil fuels should consider who their community is and what is their threshold for accepting funding from Big Oil. For example, it is clear that BIPOC communities in prairie regions have a higher acceptance level for fossil fuel funding, yet more institutional players in Central Canada have lower support levels.

Do not assume you know what your stakeholders think. A transparent and participatory process of discussion is essential.

**02. If you do not have a good grasp of your organization's reputation among its constituents and do not have the capacity for a communications strategy, then do not take the money.**

Over 90% of respondents mentioned the importance of having a communications and risk management strategy in place if they were to accept the money. Ultimately, if your organization does not have the capacity to handle the potential backlash of accepting the money, then your most important asset - social capital - becomes threatened. Money can be raised, but social capital is seldomly restored.

It is also important to consider how much your constituents trust your organization. Many groups mentioned that an unknown organization



accepting funds from fossil fuel sources would be unacceptable if it was not for the trusted relationships they already have between organizations.

### **03. Consider whether or not your organization has the capacity to strategically take the money.**

Groups were widely supportive of developing a collective strategy to accept the funding and are interested in exploring the possibility of developing an accountability framework for corporate foundations that would like to provide funds to climate organizations. However, the monitoring, evaluation, and reporting required to keep companies accountable requires intensive labour and capacity.

### **04. The money belongs to the movement, so make sure that your organization has the capacity and reach to make an impact.**

Respondents viewed funds from Big Oil as a form of reparations and redistribution. The group accepting funds must have a clear strategy to utilize the funding, so that it is acceptable by the climate movement.

### **05. Ensure your organization has the capacity to handle rigorous reporting requirements for the movement, not the funder.**

Related to the point above, it will be important to communicate impact to the wider climate movement, allowing them to keep your organization accountable to what was promised to be delivered through the funding. The process should be participatory and include your constituents' perspectives.

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In conclusion, accepting funding from fossil fuel sources has raised moral concerns for climate organizations. We have heard different views from participants in this report. Some say we should be open and accountable about the funding we receive, while others worry about becoming too dependent on such money. It is essential to strike a balance and stay true to our principles and goals. Moreover, we must also consider how to hold all our funders in the climate movement accountable, especially when Canadian wealth is connected to fossil fuel extraction. By engaging in open discussions and finding ways to maintain financial independence, we can move towards a more sustainable future while ensuring transparency and integrity in our actions.



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**Thank you to all of the participants for volunteering their time to contribute to this report.**







This report serves as a piece of insight for the climate movement on how we can move forward to reach a climate-resilient future, rooted in the reality of how wealth is accumulated today and the colonial legacies it preserves.

We hope this is useful to your work in creating a more inclusive, fair, prosperous, and sustainable future.

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