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IT'S TIME FOR A CLIMATE CHANGE OF MIND

# Securing a Safe, Just, and Climate-Ready Future for Florida

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# Introduction and summary

The effects of climate change and their inequitable distribution have become part of the daily fabric of life in Florida. Increasingly intense extreme heat threatens public health and air quality, and more powerful hurricanes threaten human life and infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> Recurrent flooding from sea level rise has become a widely known characteristic of the state, damaging homes, disrupting commutes, threatening water quality, and interfering with tourism.<sup>2</sup> Much like the recent health and economic consequences of COVID-19, the impacts of climate-fueled extreme weather and pollution are universal experiences in Florida that disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color, which have the fewest resources to reduce these risks or recover from lost wages, higher energy bills, costly medical emergencies, or property damage. Moreover, the government's responses to both the pandemic and extreme weather and pollution tend to favor wealthier, whiter communities.<sup>3</sup>

As evidenced by the COVID-19 health and economic crises, which have been subject to politicization and led many states to struggle with massive budget shortfalls, Florida cannot rely solely on federal support and funding to mount an adequate response to the climate crises.<sup>4</sup> President Joe Biden's economic relief plan and "Build Back Better" agenda, while promising for the state, are not sufficient to meet the specific needs of individual Florida localities when it comes to building climate-ready communities and infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> Instead, as the climate crisis worsens and accelerates the state's socioeconomic disparities, Florida must establish a reliable source of funding to combat it.

In order to address the inextricably linked issues of economic inequality, environmental racism, and climate change, Florida must heavily invest in equitable climate infrastructure and clean energy. Economic recovery for Florida will require state and local leaders to confront historic health, economic, and environmental disparities that heighten residents' vulnerability to more extreme weather, sea level rise, and other public health threats. Specifically, state and local leaders should look



to the Equitable and Just National Climate Platform and invest in clean energy, clean transportation, and climate resiliency.<sup>6</sup> These policies must include:

- Reducing pollution and its cumulative health impacts, which include cancer, asthma, and other respiratory conditions that can increase residents' susceptibility to infectious diseases such as COVID-19
- Investing in future-ready infrastructure and flood protections for every community in Florida
- Investing in energy-saving programs to reduce bills for low-income families who face a high energy cost burden while struggling to make ends meet
- Investing in affordable and clean transportation options that reduce pollution and increase access to economic opportunity
- Funding the build-out of zero-emission energy sources, such as commercial-scale and distributed solar power
- Creating good, equitably available jobs with family-sustaining wages to support the economic recovery

To protect Floridians from—and prepare them for—increasingly destructive extreme weather impacts, the Center for American Progress and the CLEO Institute recommend that state leaders create a Florida Future Fund.<sup>7</sup> Through both public and private investment, the fund would provide municipal, county, and regional funding opportunities for flood protections, resiliency, and clean energy and transportation projects. For every \$1 invested in building resilient communities and infrastructure, \$6 are saved in future climate change-induced costs, including from economic disruptions, property damage, public health crises, and deaths caused by extreme weather disasters.<sup>8</sup>

Investing in a future-ready society will not only save lives and help Florida avoid the devastating impacts that extreme weather has on families but also add jobs in the state. According to a recent study by the American Flood Coalition and Johns Hopkins University, a \$1 billion investment in stronger infrastructure and flood protections could create up to 40,000 jobs in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Considering the severe inequities of climate impacts and access to clean energy and transportation in Florida, CAP and CLEO recommend that at least 60 percent of investments through the Florida Future Fund go directly to the state's low-income communities, communities of color, and front-line communities.

# Background on systemic environmental racism in Florida

Communities of color and low-income areas in Florida are disproportionately exposed to extreme climate threats, and they are more often located in or near flood-prone areas, heat islands, or toxic waste sites.<sup>10</sup> These same communities are often overburdened by disproportionately high levels of air and water pollution from the transportation sector and nearby power plants. Events such as more intense heat waves, more powerful and devastating hurricanes, rising sea level, and other modes of climate change-driven extreme weather already have disproportionately negative impacts on low-income communities and communities of color, which are more likely to have less climate-resilient infrastructure and fewer resources to finance and manage household evacuations and recovery.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, these communities receive less investment from the federal and state governments to rebuild their communities following a disaster, much less enough to rebuild with the intent to withstand the next one.<sup>12</sup> In addition, many of Florida's outdoor workers, including those in the agriculture and construction sectors, live in low-income communities or communities of color and face significant health risks with the rising number of extreme heat days.<sup>13</sup> Thus, extreme weather events have tended to worsen economic and health disparities in the state, and as the impacts of climate change worsen, these burdens will grow heavier.<sup>14</sup> Like much of the country, Florida has a long history of systemic and environmental racism that persists to this day.

## The effects of environmental racism in Miami

In Miami, the difference in air quality between two neighboring communities can quite literally be seen from the sky. Images of the Allapattah neighborhood, for example, show the distinct lack of trees and green space in the low-income, primarily Black and brown community. The lack of trees begets higher ground-level temperatures and a greater amount of direct sunlight, which in turn allows for higher ground-level ozone levels. Ground-level ozone, which reduces air quality, is produced by pollutants from vehicle tailpipe emissions, among other sources. Vehicle tailpipe emissions, particularly from heavy-duty vehicles, are present in higher concentrations in low-income communities and communities of color across the country as a result of the ongoing effects of historical racist practices, such as highway citing and redlining.<sup>15</sup> Hotter, sunnier conditions encourage higher levels of the chemical reaction that produces ozone, which is associated with impaired lung function, higher rates of asthma, and other negative health outcomes.<sup>16</sup> Fewer trees also means less shade as people walk to schools, places of business, and public transit in the scorching summer heat of South Florida. Recent studies have shown a correlation between lack of shade and extreme heat and violent crime.<sup>17</sup> In comparison, a bird's-eye view of Coconut Grove, a community close to Allapattah, reflects an affluent area filled with large trees lining the roads. Coconut Grove has lower ground-level air pollution and higher quality of life than lower-income areas of Miami such as Allapattah.

Infrastructure across the state is particularly vulnerable to a future of increasingly damaging extreme weather events. In Florida's last state report from the American Society of Civil Engineers, the state received a C grade.<sup>18</sup> Aging and generally inadequate infrastructure has left communities vulnerable to more damaging extreme weather and sea level rise. Unfortunately, the state faces a wide infrastructure investment gap, leaving these needs unmet. Based on insured losses, among U.S. coastal states, Florida's coastal properties have been the most vulnerable to hurricanes, and a report commissioned by the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact found that if the region does not make investments to adapt to climate change impacts, the cost of damages could exceed \$38 billion by 2070.<sup>19</sup> Many communities in the state are in immediate need of flood and extreme weather protections, as well as better weatherization of homes and updated building codes, to ensure that there is a baseline of resiliency in the built environment.

In addition to ensuring that communities can adapt to more extreme weather, the world must reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by midcentury in order to avoid the worse consequences of climate change.<sup>20</sup> Florida—which is disproportionately affected by hurricanes and sea level rise—is also the fourth-largest energy-consuming state in the United States and third-largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions, and the state suffers from large energy burdens on low-income households despite energy rates that are lower than the national average.<sup>21</sup> Florida has enormous potential to deploy the renewable energy resources needed to build clean, healthy communities. Despite this, low-income communities and communities of color have been denied affordable access to clean energy and energy efficiency—an injustice that has resulted in higher costs relative to income, greater levels of indoor air pollution, increased vulnerability to heat, and bigger barriers to Florida’s potential as a national leader in renewable energy. Climate-ready infrastructure in the state of Florida must include equitable and accessible clean energy to reduce the emissions driving climate change and lower energy costs for financially overburdened communities.

# Now is the time for action in Florida

The COVID-19 pandemic's devastating economic and health impacts have deepened the historic socioeconomic and environmental inequities in Florida communities—inequities that will continue to be compounded by the worsening impacts of climate change. Sea level rise, which is already resulting in decreasing livability, threatens to drive families from their communities from both preemptive climate gentrification and literal neighborhood flooding and will only continue to ravage the state.<sup>22</sup> Increasingly hot summers, exacerbated by a changing climate and the loss of air conditioning from power outages, further threaten vulnerable households and workers as well as the elderly, who make up more than 20 percent of Florida's population.<sup>23</sup> Hurricane activity in the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico continues to increase year by year, leaving Floridians increasingly vulnerable as disaster protections and policies fail to keep pace.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, social distancing protocols from the ongoing pandemic will slow Florida's hurricane response times and make electricity repairs more expensive.<sup>25</sup> As state and local coffers dry up due to the coronavirus-induced economic contraction, Florida state leaders must create an actionable plan to build back from the potential devastation of these events in confluence.

With more people forced to stay home to protect themselves during the pandemic, the resulting increase in residential utility prices has left Florida families who have the ability to work from home with higher energy bills,<sup>26</sup> even as massive job losses have left many struggling to make ends meet. Summer heat waves, expected to become more frequent and longer in duration as a result of climate change, have also increased utility prices and the energy burden in the state over the years.<sup>27</sup> Ensuring reliable funding for the deployment of energy-efficient electric appliances and the build-out of low-cost solar power would help increase Floridians' economic security and quality of life in the long term.

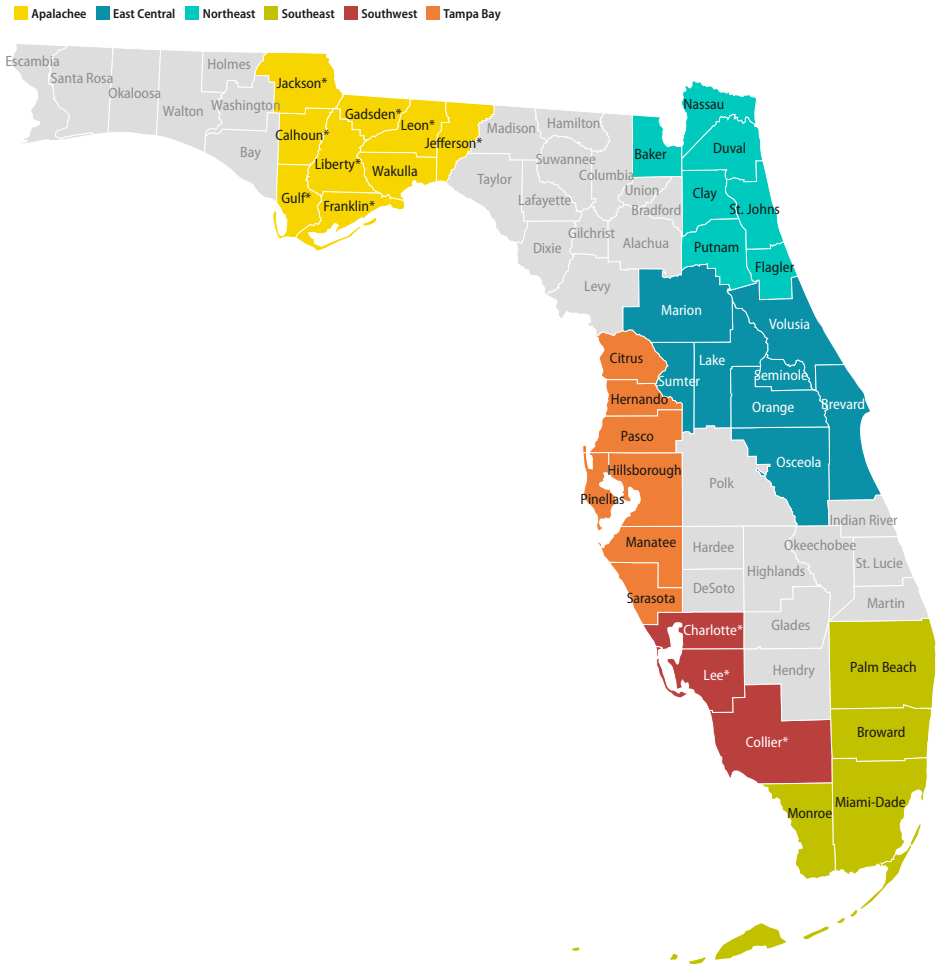
Over the past few years, local governments in the state have been signaling the need for greater climate action and support. Local governments recognize that the communities they serve are on the front lines of more extreme weather events and sea level rise and need future-ready infrastructure and protections. However, they need reliable sources of funding to implement solutions to climate and energy issues that



are often locality-specific. For example, some local governments that recognize the threat of sea level rise serve cities such as Miami and Tampa that are among Florida’s biggest tourist destinations. With these two tourist hubs becoming increasingly compromised by sea level rise and destruction from hurricanes, Florida could stand to lose annual revenue from tourism—the state’s biggest industry—beyond what has already been lost during the COVID-19 crisis, further contracting its ability to invest in climate protections.

Given the lack of action on climate change at the state level in Florida, almost 200 local governments have come together in six regional climate change compacts—four of which are formalized, with two pending—to adapt and build resiliency to present and future climate impacts and, importantly, to reduce the greenhouse gas pollution that is driving the problem. (see Figure 1)

**FIGURE 1**  
**Florida's regional climate collaboratives**  
Existing and forming collaboratives, by county



Source: The counties within Florida's regional climate collaboratives were determined from information provided by the Nature Conservancy in Florida, on file with author.

At the federal level, policymakers are rallying around the concept of a national climate bank to deliver investment in clean energy infrastructure that will create lasting economic recovery and address climate change. A substantial portion of its funding would be explicitly dedicated to disadvantaged communities. This idea is similar to the State Future Fund advocated by CAP and CLEO—but instead of a state fund, this is a national fund that would provide resources to state and local governments to invest in clean energy, transportation, and flood protections, as well as prioritize investments in underserved communities.<sup>28</sup> In early February, a bill that would establish a national clean energy and sustainability accelerator was reintroduced in the U.S. House of Representatives.<sup>29</sup> The bill capitalizes the accelerator at \$100 billion and earmarks 40 percent of all investment for communities disproportionately affected by environmental pollution or climate change impacts or communities reliant on a fossil fuel-based industry for jobs and economic activity. The national climate bank could fund projects such as renewable energy generation, energy efficiency, industrial decarbonization, natural solutions aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions, clean transportation projects, and climate-resilient infrastructure. The growing recognition at the federal level of the need for climate-resilient infrastructure and renewable energy, especially for front-line communities, means Florida must have a robust, forward-looking, and equitable process in place to properly take advantage of future funding, with state support, to build safe and healthy communities.

At the same time, Florida has seen a trickle of forward-looking climate action. The state Legislature, for example, recently passed a strong piece of bipartisan climate legislation, and state leaders have introduced multiple pieces of bipartisan mitigation and adaptation legislation, indicating growing political will for action. As communities and grassroots organizations continue to push for climate protections, and as consensus builds around the problem and its solutions at the state level, Florida will need a reliable source of funding to ensure adequate and equitable implementation.

### **Bipartisan mitigation and adaptation legislation in the Florida Legislature**

- Sea level impactation projection bill introduced by state Rep. Vance Aloupis (R) and state Sen. Jose Javier Rodriguez (D)<sup>30</sup>
- Creation of a chief resilience officer role within the governor's office<sup>31</sup>
- Climate resiliency investments resolution introduced by state Sen. Gary Farmer (D)<sup>32</sup>

Despite these promising developments, instead of responding to the asks of local governments and communities in the midst of an escalating crisis, the Florida Legislature recently introduced a number of regressive bills that would preempt state and local action on climate change—including by retroactively rendering past climate initiatives illegal. Bills H.B. 17 and S.B. 856, respectively, “prohibit ... the adoption and enforcement of ... state and regional programs to regulate greenhouse gas emissions” and “preempt ... to the state the regulation of the construction of energy infrastructure.”<sup>33</sup> These two bills and the reasoning behind their introduction move Florida two steps back at a time when it should be expanding and supporting local and regional initiatives to combat the climate crisis and engaging in the creative and community-oriented ways necessary to ensure effective, locality-specific action.

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## The Resilient Florida initiative

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) unveiled the Resilient Florida initiative in February, which would be housed in the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) managed by the governor’s office.<sup>34</sup> The proposed initiative aims to fund public works projects that defend against the impacts of flooding, extreme weather, and sea level rise. Thankfully, beyond typical flood and storm protections, the initiative specifies that resilient transportation and housing are eligible for financing.

The initiative will use revenues from the state documentary stamp tax to pay for the debt service on \$1 billion in bonds for eligible projects over four years and be paired with a new nonprofit private entity, the Resiliency Florida Financing Corp., which will handle the financing. The nonprofit financing entity is not involved in project selection, which is dictated by the FDEP component. Notably, this initiative will support the Florida Forever fund—a conservation and land acquisition fund typically funded by state appropriations—by providing funding to the Division of State Lands within the FDEP for land acquisition projects on Florida Forever’s priority list.

While a promising first step toward funding some of Florida’s climate-related needs, the Resilient Florida initiative is not enough in light of the state’s extreme vulnerability to the climate crisis; the need for massive new investment in climate-resilient infrastructure and communities; and the imperative for independent, nongovernmental funding and project selection criteria insulated from political

winds and the powerful private sector interests in the state. The initiative includes a governance board made up of high-level politicians appointed by the governor and, notably, has no community, grassroots, or science and engineering representation. Furthermore, it avoids explicitly acknowledging climate change and does not include carbon and other pollution reductions as a project eligibility criterion. Without firstly acknowledging what is causing a changing climate—human reliance on the burning of fossil fuels—Resilient Florida can only be a partial solution at best and does not come close to addressing the critical needs of Florida’s communities and businesses.

Lastly, the governor’s proposed initiative does not earmark funding for low-income, climate-vulnerable, or front-line communities, which will surely be left behind without a strong, tangible effort from state leaders to give priority to assessing and financing their needs. While \$1 billion is a considerable commitment, the fact that the Resilient Florida initiative spreads that commitment over four years means the amount falls far short of the state’s needs. For example, elevating half of the roads in Monroe County alone to avoid flooding from sea level rise is projected to cost \$1.8 billion.<sup>35</sup>

Despite widespread recognition of the problem, state and local governments cannot confront the public health and economic consequences of more extreme weather and sea level rise alone, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Local governments’ budgets have been drained to provide critical COVID-19 emergency services and relief, while state revenue has dwindled as a result of the 34 percent drop in tourism, and residents and other businesses have seen their own incomes decrease. What is more, political actors in the state continue to usurp regional, county, and municipal attempts to plan for future concerns. To address the vast needs that are still unmet across the state, direct investment in future-ready infrastructure and funding for other proposed mitigation and adaptation policies can be supported in part by an ambitious state green bank with an eye toward mitigation and equity—the Florida Future Fund advocated by CAP and CLEO. The fund would help fill the missing pieces of and act as a complement to Resilient Florida, ensuring that all communities in the state have access to clean and reliable energy and transportation and are protected from the worst impacts of a changing climate.

# The Florida Future Fund would support the creation of future-ready communities

As regional climate compacts have begun to signal the need for equitable and bold climate action, access to reliable financing options has never been more necessary. State green banks have been proliferating throughout the country to significant success, and Florida can and should be a nationwide leader in financing its path to a clean and equitable future.<sup>36</sup> Ensuring the state's economic recovery and future disaster readiness means, in part, making direct investments in pollution-reducing, job-creating programs and infrastructure.

A Florida Future Fund would use a blend of public, private, and philanthropic investments to support equitable transportation and clean energy infrastructure projects, flood and storm protections, and community livability improvements. To simultaneously decarbonize and improve transportation options in the state, the fund would provide financial support to upgrade and link regional transportation services, modernize public transit systems, install electric vehicle charging stations, deploy electric buses, and build bike and pedestrian paths. The fund would also strengthen energy security and affordability by building smart grids, community solar projects, and large-scale renewable energy generation facilities; upgrading the power grid; and supporting energy efficiency improvements. Lastly, the fund would improve neighborhood livability and safety by building new parks, expanding the urban tree canopy, and protecting coasts and natural areas—including wetlands and the Everglades—that help shield residents, businesses, and farms from floods and storm surges. These investments would safeguard water and air quality, reduce heat and flood risks, and support Florida's strong agricultural, outdoor recreation, and tourism economies.



**TABLE 1**  
**Types of projects and funding entities the Florida Future Fund would support**

Transportation	Clean energy	Natural climate solutions and community livability
Expand and connect transit	Expand residential and commercial energy-efficiency solutions	Expand community tree canopies
Electrify public bus fleets	Build out community solar	Restore and protect wetlands
Build out electric vehicle infrastructure	Fund rooftop solar installations	Restore and protect coasts
Create bike share programs	Fund utility scale solar projects	Restore and protect forests
Expand bike and pedestrian lanes	Build out microgrids, smart grids, and energy storage	Establish curbside plantings for urban drainage
Improve transit accessibility and safety		

Source: Author.

Support for projects through the Florida Future Fund should consist of low-interest or interest-free loans, loan guarantees, direct investments and grants, and other financing products. Most importantly, the fund should focus on directing at least 60 percent of investments toward improving the economic security, health, and quality of life of low-income communities, communities of color, immigrant communities, and Indigenous communities.

The Florida Future Fund would have internal governance focused on equitable funding distribution throughout the state to meet this 60 percent goal. It should ensure a transparent review process; clear metrics to meet social, environmental, and economic goals; and an investment plan formed by a strong stakeholder engagement process that is focused on meeting community needs and priorities. Any state bank investing in communities must ensure affordability; implement anti-displacement measures through strong, equitable project eligibility criteria for funds; and institute robust metrics tracking and assessment for funding projects. Furthermore, designating 60 percent of the funds for communities that most need future-ready infrastructure requires a strong community engagement process and pipeline. A community advisory board representing low-income communities, communities of color, immigrant communities, and Indigenous communities as well as municipalities across the state would ensure that community needs are prioritized in the project selection process.

To ensure a diverse mix of public, private, and community leadership, Florida state leaders should consider the following representation model for a Florida Future Fund board:

- Two private sector representatives from Florida’s community banks, development sector, or investment sector who can speak to encouraging a nimble flow of capital
- At least two community advocates from low-income rural and urban areas who can ensure that projects are designed and implemented equitably, matching communities’ needs and priorities
- One clean energy and one clean transportation expert, both of whom can knowledgeably speak to the pace and change of innovation and low- and zero-emissions technologies in each sector
- One expert on sea level rise, flooding, and the extreme weather threats facing Florida’s communities and infrastructure

In addition to offering financial products to local governments and communities, the Florida Future Fund should use a rigorous process to determine and earmark funding for several existing state entities—both nongovernmental and governmental—that already fund equitable, future-ready infrastructure and clean energy in Florida communities, with an emphasis on projects affecting vulnerable and historically marginalized communities and those that have a science-backed definition of resiliency. These entities could include the Solar and Energy Loan Fund, Florida Forever, and the Florida Department of Transportation’s State Infrastructure Bank. While these programs have made critical investments in land conservation, coastal protections, water, and energy and transportation resiliency, this has not been enough. The state needs more resources to protect communities and the state and local economies from increasingly severe storms, sea level rise, extreme heat, and flooding—and the Florida Future Fund is intended to help fill these current investment gaps.

To establish, capitalize, and secure continuing revenue, the Florida Future Fund should maintain diverse funding options to avoid overreliance on any given source. As shown in the text box below, it should consider a mix of capitalization and continuing revenue sources to ensure reliable, long-term investment visions.

## Sources of capitalization and continuing revenue for the Florida Future Fund

- **State appropriations.** The Florida Future Fund can receive annual appropriations through a partnership with the state government. It should not rely solely on appropriations, however, given their political nature and subjectivity to a different political landscape each year.
- **State bonds.** Florida should issue state bonds, similar to the Connecticut Green Bank's Green Liberty Bonds, that would in part support the Florida Future Fund.<sup>37</sup>
- **Documentary stamp tax.** The state should implement a minor expansion of its revenue collected from the documentary stamps tax placed on real estate transactions, which is how the Florida Forever program was initially supported.<sup>38</sup> Gov. DeSantis' proposed new Resilient Florida initiative would also be funded this way.
- **Systems benefit charge.** The state should add a small future-ready surcharge to electricity bills to fund the Florida Future Fund. The fund should not, however, heavily rely on revenues from household fees, and the state should keep these surcharges minimal and exempt low-income households. State policymakers should strongly consider equity and seek public feedback when deciding between a fixed or volumetric-based system benefits charge.
- **Philanthropy.** The fund should seek foundation grants or private donations, seizing the opportunity to secure resources that are not subject to the politics surrounding tax revenue, appropriations, or bond issuance.
- **Cost sharing with municipalities.** Florida should require a 20 percent project cost share from local governments, which would go toward the Florida Future Fund.
- **Private funding.** The Florida Future Fund should use private capital from utility companies or capital raised by other investment banks. Well-designed and equitable public-private partnerships between the fund and electric utilities could help leverage limited public resources to improve the state's energy security and expand renewable energy generation capacity. The fund should be careful not to allow private funding to distract from the central goal of investing in low- to moderate-income communities.
- **Federal funding.** The fund should seek out and use federal loans and grant programs. For example, the nonprofit energy finance company Michigan Saves was awarded money by the state of Michigan after it won a \$30 million state Department of Energy grant to create an energy efficiency market.<sup>39</sup> In addition, with the increasing support for a national climate bank or clean energy and sustainability accelerator described above, the Florida Future Fund could take advantage of federal funds if such an entity were established.

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## A new state bank should have strong accountability measures

Strong accountability and transparency are essential guardrails for robust fiscal oversight and assurance that the projects meet the fund's goals and deliver real benefits to communities. These measures would also help ensure that the majority of funding is continuously prioritized for historically marginalized and front-line communities. As a mission-driven organization, the Florida Future Fund would ideally exist as a private nonprofit, nongovernmental entity—with a strong partnership with the state—in order to maintain its independence and safeguard from shifting political headwinds.<sup>40</sup> This is especially critical given that climate change denial remains strong in Florida and across its government and politics. Several states have successfully established climate funds or banks as nonprofit private entities, such as the New York Energy Efficiency Corp., Montgomery County Green Bank in Maryland, and Nevada Clean Energy Fund.<sup>41</sup>

It is critical to design the fund in a way that ensures that low- and moderate-income communities benefit and are not actively harmed through, for example, gentrification from community investment that results in residents being priced out of their own communities. Requiring strong accountability, reporting, evaluation, and oversight mechanisms will be essential to this end. The Florida Future Fund should only provide funds to projects that deliver substantial community benefits and fill the service gaps that communities have identified as priorities through stakeholder engagement, such as energy efficiency improvements, pollution reduction, expanded tree canopy and building of parks, clean transportation and energy, and good jobs, among others. The fund should establish a continuous pipeline of engagement with communities, community-led organizations, and grassroots entities to ensure their substantive direction and input into the project development and selection process.

Applicants for funding should be required to demonstrate that they will provide benefits that communities need and are requesting—such as job creation, energy bill savings, and pollution reduction—and to report those metrics annually. For transparency, the Florida Future Fund should make a publicly available annual report that will be shared with the governor and the Florida Legislature. Project benefits and Florida Future Fund investments should also be evaluated annually by an independent reviewer.

Given the affordable and workforce housing shortages and the rising cost of living in the state, the Florida Future Fund should also establish criteria to ensure that project developers work with local officials and community leaders to design and implement anti-displacement strategies.<sup>42</sup> These strategies should seek to reduce the risk of longtime residents being displaced from their communities as neighborhood improvements and desirability drive up rents and increase the value of homes. Environmental gentrification is already a growing problem in Florida due to climate change impacts and must not be further encouraged and exacerbated by community investments that do not offer safeguards to retain historical populations.<sup>43</sup>

If the Florida Future Fund were to be placed within the governor's office or another area within the state government, these safeguards would become necessary in order to protect against political interference or private interests that deviate from the fund's critical mission to serve Florida communities. Furthermore, government accountability measures will look different from those for a nonprofit entity, and annual independent review will be especially critical.



# Conclusion

Much like the impacts of COVID-19, the impacts of climate-fueled extreme weather and pollution are universal experiences in Florida that disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color. Environmental and economic justice is integral to the fight against the current coronavirus and climate crises, as well as the government's response to future crises. The state of Florida, now more than ever, is in immediate need of future-ready community development and infrastructure projects that will limit the damages from extreme weather and flooding, lower local air pollution, cut energy bills for households and businesses, and improve economic mobility. The Florida Future Fund offers state leaders a forward-thinking and equitable approach to modernizing the critical infrastructure needed to support the state's economy, address historic inequities, and help communities better prepare for the future as the climate crisis accelerates.

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The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

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As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

## Our Approach

We develop new policy ideas, challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate. With policy teams in major issue areas, American Progress can think creatively at the cross-section of traditional boundaries to develop ideas for policymakers that lead to real change. By employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, we move our ideas aggressively in the national policy debate.

