

# WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE? HOW DO WE WORK TOWARDS IT?

Climate justice can be a big concept and a complex thing to work towards. In the simplest sense, climate justice can be understood as responding to and preparing for climate change in a way that takes care of communities and Country and leaves no one behind.

If we want to understand climate justice and work towards it more thoroughly there's a lot more to consider. Kylie Wrigley (a researcher) and Sarah Davies (an illustrator) have developed an illustration to explain what organising for climate justice is all about. This is somewhat place-based and specific to the Country we work on but we think it can be useful for any organisation or community working for climate justice.

The illustration depicts Danggalang, the paper daisy or everlasting flower that blooms in vast arrays of pink, white, orange and yellow on Noongar country during the Djilba and Kambarang seasons. The flowers thrive in sandy soils that aren't very nutrient-rich and last for a long time when dried, much like climate justice activists and advocates in Western Australia. The conditions we work in aren't so favourable to transformative change and social justice, but we persevere anyway and create something beautiful when we flourish together.

The middle of the flower should be the foundation of how we do things – we aim to be critical, transformative, and care-full. The top layer of petals describes climate justice in terms and slogans that people who are active in working towards decolonisation and structural change, First Nations justice, disability justice, social and environmental justice might recognise. The next layer describes 7 dimensions of climate justice. And the final layer holds who climate justice is for – current and future generations of all living things – not just people, but Country too.



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*A visual illustration of a critical climate justice praxis inspired by multi-layered and overlapping paper daisy (everlasting) petals. Artwork by Sarah Davies and Kylie Wrigley.*

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## FOUNDATIONS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE:

- Critical climate justice - concerned with systems of power and oppression, such as colonialism, capitalism and ableism, sexism and patriarchy, racism and white supremacy. These systems intersect with climate change resulting in some communities and places experiencing climate injustices first, most, and often. Critical climate justice calls for solidarity, recognising that no one is free until we are all free from harm and discrimination.
- Transformative climate justice - seeks to dismantle systems and structures of oppression and remake new structures that are fair, just, and equitable through sustained collective action. Transformative climate justice is also about personal and collective transformations people must go through to become aware of structural injustice and how it affects them and/or how they are complicit in.
- Care-full climate justice - practices ethics of care to heal, repair, and sustain good relationships between people and Country and between people and people. Care-full climate justice is about being respectful of different cultures and worldviews, and creating conditions where all people can safely and meaningfully participate in a fair and just society.



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## Climate Justice Foundations

## Reflective questions for individuals, groups, and organisations

### Critical

Concerned with systems of power and oppression and calls for solidarity

What kinds of privilege and oppression do we personally experience? What kinds of privilege and oppression do we get told about or observe?

Who's ways of knowing, being, and doing have been historically marginalised and how can they be centred in climate justice discussions and decision-making?

How do people in privileged positions come up with excuses to avoid justice-oriented work or appropriate justice-oriented work and what can be done about this?

### Transformative

seeks to dismantle systems of oppression and remake new structures.

How might cultural and institutional arrangements that we assume are natural and necessary reproduce or continue systems of domination, violence and inequity?

How can we resist or subvert these structures and what alternative arrangements are available that we can normalise and reinforce through policy and practice?

How will we know (and who will know) opportunities to deepen climate justice?

### Care-full

practices ethics of care, healing, repairing, restoring and sustaining good relations.

How do we practice and prioritise care for place and community, including for those we do not belong to?

What is our duty of care to each other and how do we safeguard from harm and exploitation?

Who has care roles (groups and individuals)? How are they recognised or valued, and where are they absent?

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## DIMENSIONS OF CLIMATE JUSTICE

There are multiple dimensions (or pillars) of climate justice which help us to understand climate justice issues from all angles, ensuring more holistic and full action. Researchers often discuss these dimensions in relation to policy and research work. We have reinterpreted each 'dimension' and redefined them for communities and organisations.

The table below defines each dimension of climate justice and offers reflective questions for organisations and communities to think about and respond to. The questions aren't meant to have simple answers or actions. They might be a bit uncomfortable and that's good because they should inspire deep and continuing reflection! Responding to all the structural injustice that are linked to climate change is not going to be easy. It requires a lot of UNlearning and UNdoing as well as REMaking systems and structures and repairing and maintaining relationships and connections.

| Dimension of climate justice | What they mean for communities and organisations   | Reflective questions for communities and organisations:   |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Recognitional</b>         | Acknowledges and respect different intersectional identities, lived experiences, worldviews, and values.   | What/whose ways of knowing, being and doing are recognised, valued and prioritised, and why?  |
| <b>Truth-telling</b>         | Acknowledges the structural and systemic root causes of climate and intersecting eco-social crises, the parties who have been complicit or beneficiaries of them, and their violent effects on historically and ongoingly marginalised groups. | Whose aren't, and why? (Consider identities, worldviews, values, lived experiences, expertise, etc).<br><br>How are different identities, knowledges, and livelihoods threatened by climate change and intersecting crises? |

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| Dimension of climate justice  | What they mean for communities and organisations   | Reflective questions for communities and organisations:  |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Recognitional</b><br/>continued</p> <p><i>Truth-telling</i></p> |  | <p>How and from where do we source resources, capacity, credibility and influence? (Consider volunteers, donors, funders, representatives, etc.)</p> <p>How, if at all, are these tied to systems of oppression, such as racial capitalism, colonisation, and ableism?</p>   |
| <p><b>Distributive</b></p> <p><i>Solidarity, not charity</i></p>      | <p>Addresses the unfair distribution of climate change impacts, burdens and benefits (spatially and temporally).</p> <p>Ensures equitable (re)distribution of resources among the movement to meet current and future needs of groups wanting self-determination and greater capacity.</p> | <p>How do most impacted communities experience burdens and risks associated with climate change and climate activism? (Consider physical, social and well-being impacts, opportunity costs, safety and legal risks, etc).</p> <p>How, if at all, do our campaigns, programs or projects benefit or serve communities disproportionately affected or burdened by climate change?</p> <p>How can power, resources and capacity be more equitably (re)distributed through the movement? (Consider funding and remuneration models, mutual aid etc.)</p> <p>What are frontline communities asking for? How should the resources of more powerful groups be (re)directed (Consider geographic distribution nationally and internationally).</p> |

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| Dimension of climate justice   | What they mean for communities and organisations  | Reflective questions for communities and organisations:  |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Procedural</b></p> <p><i>Nothing about us without us</i></p> <p><i>Movement from margins to centre</i></p> | <p>Ensures that communities most impacted by climate change and climate politics are central to decision-making and have opportunities to participate in the movement on their terms.</p>             | <p>Who is involved in our group and alliances, and who is left out?</p> <p>How do/don't our processes and activities enable equitable, accessible and safe participation?</p> <p>How and by whom are our activities and processes designed, and how, if at all, do they consider different ways of knowing, being, and doing?</p> <p>In what instances do we speak about another group without their input? Why or why isn't this appropriate?</p>             |
| <p><b>Restorative &amp; reparative</b></p> <p><i>Collective liberation</i></p>                                   | <p>Acknowledge historical responsibility within and between countries and within and between climate movement groups.</p> <p>Advocates in solidarity to right and redress past and ongoing wrongs</p> | <p>How do we prioritise which wrongs/inequalities or rights/needs are addressed?</p> <p>How do racism, ableism, sexism, ageism, and other intersecting ideologies based on power hierarchies and discrimination affect who/what we prioritise, value and recognise?</p> <p>How does the institutionalisation and organisation of power, resources and capacity affect marginalised activists and groups?</p> <p>How are conflicts identified and resolved?</p> |

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|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Temporal</b></p> <p><i>Pace of trust</i></p>                                   | <p>Recognises the rights of future generations, including the interconnected rights of humans and ecosystems. Allows for different temporal needs.</p> <p>Acts in the interests of past, present and future generations.</p> | <p>What are the long-term consequences of the justice-based work we do/don't do today?</p> <p>How do activists' and groups' different time needs and priorities influence our processes and activities? (Consider, for example, Indigenous and disabled communities).</p> <p>How, if at all, are we nurturing the next generation of activists/advocates?</p> <p>Are young people safe and supported in the movement?</p> <p>Are their values, preferences and agency recognised?</p>                          |
| <p><b>Relational</b></p> <p><i>Right relations</i></p> <p><i>Collective care</i></p> | <p>Practices empathy, care and responsibility for greater solidarity across humans and more-than-humans.</p> <p>Practices empathy, care and responsibility for greater solidarity across humans and more-than-humans.</p>    | <p>How are the relationships within our group and with other groups/actors?</p> <p>Is there space for proximity, collaboration, dialogue, trust-building and accountability?</p> <p>How are our relationships with place(s) and more-than-humans?</p> <p>How do/will we demonstrate care for the concerns, preferences and needs of the places/communities we work with?</p> <p>Whose labour or knowledge builds and maintains relationships and connections?</p> <p>How are they acknowledged and valued?</p> |



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We recommend to use these foundations, dimensions, and questions to continually reflect on how our work enacts climate justice and how we can deepen climate justice in the specific contexts and communities we work in. We suggest that other groups and organisations can repeatedly use these questions to enhance and deepen climate justice efforts. The climate justice framework offers reflective questions instead of recommendations for several reasons.

First, climate justice actions need to be place and community-based because every place, community and person experiences the world and climate change differently. Climate justice actions need to be responsive to and co-created by community and place based voices who are experts in their own context and lives. Of course, there is much we can learn from the experiences and expertise of other places and organisations but they should never overshadow the Lived Experience communities whose voices have been silenced, solutions ignored, and needs neglected.

Second, action and learning is more transformative and profound when people realise issues for themselves through a process of collective reflection, sharing stories, and respectful dialogue. It is vital that a diverse group of people come together to reflect on the questions above and co-design responses to them. The questions above should be revisited and continually asked as a group so that climate justice can be accountable and deepened over time.

Third, although action is important, it's important to make the time for reflection too. This is about more than evaluation or strategic reviews. When organisations and groups prioritise time for honest and vulnerable reflection there is also an opportunity to build and deepen trusting, understanding, empathetic relationships with each other. The quality of our relationships are imperative to how we motivate, sustain and build care-full climate justice.



*This document/resource is based on a partnership between CJU and Kylie Wrigley's PhD research at Edith Cowan University's Centre for People Place and Planet.*