



Joint Statement on the Launch of the Color of Water Directory

November, 2022

Our silence has been long and deep... we have always been spoken for. Or we have been spoken to... Today, we are taking back our narrative telling our story.
–Toni Morrison, *Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, 1993*

As community water leaders, knowledge keepers, and professionals, we recognize the challenges that weigh heavy on our peoples as well as the solutions being pioneered by community leaders across the country. Decades of disinvestment and racist development practices by government agencies have put safe water and sanitation out of reach for millions of people in the United States, including communities of color, lower-income people, tribal communities, and others. Since water challenges impact communities of color first and worse, a more equitable water future requires meaningful participation of people of color in setting the water agenda.

People from Flint, Jackson, Detroit, Milwaukee, California's Central Valley, the Texas colonias, the Navajo Nation, the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, and others have experienced first-hand the impacts of environmental racism. Millions face the impacts of failing infrastructure, rising and unaffordable water bills, backed up toilets, and flooded neighborhoods and basements. These families often have to rely on bottled water because of toxic taps, if they even have running water. On top of that, frontline communities everywhere bear the brunt of pollution and destruction of important and even sacred waterways. Many of these inequities are being exacerbated by climate change and unsustainable water use. While not enough to meet the need, federal infrastructure spending coupled with environmental justice programs like Justice40, will deliver billions to improve the nation's drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. Relief is coming, but trust is crumbling.

Money alone will not fix it all, and there is a real risk that new spending will just perpetuate existing inequities, flowing to white and wealthy areas with the most political power. To prevent this, we need to acknowledge the racist roots of current challenges, and heed the expertise of water leaders of color. Community knowledge is key for building development projects that are responsive to community needs and create local jobs. Now is the time to turn the tide on whose needs and expertise are elevated in the press and policy agendas.



It's time to support the thought leadership of water champions who bring first-hand experience dealing with water challenges, environmental injustices, climate resiliency, and policy advocacy; champions who are developing and proposing community-based solutions everywhere. In this call, we stress the urgency of action to change long-standing narratives that exclude and silence our communities:

- **We call on decision makers to make targeted investments prioritizing impacted communities.** Water challenges require prompt solutions but we can't let the urgency of the situation lead to "business as usual" infrastructure spending - that will only perpetuate inequities. We have to take time and set priorities to really be effective and equitable and change the status quo. For example, money for lead pipe replacement should go to states that have the most lead pipes and not the [other way around](#).
- **We call for journalists to write differently about water.** We invite media partners to better understand and acknowledge the complex social and cultural dimensions of water issues. We encourage writers, photographers, videographers, and TV hosts to center the voices and expertise of community members and build capacities to be in relationships with them and avoid extractive journalism. For example, Queen Quet's experience working with journalists in a [trusted setting](#) illustrates how the intent behind the story really matters.

Together, we recognize the unique and intrinsic social, spiritual, cultural, ecological, and economic value of water and its essential role and relevance in all aspects of our lives and communities. It is due to this shared heritage that we join together to elevate our voices in camaraderie, as experts, spokespeople, mediators, elders, speakers, faith leaders and stewards. Let's bring perspectives from Indigenous knowledge, affordable housing, land and forest management, urban planning, public health, food and farming, and others to paint a holistic picture of water. Only together can we change the narrative around water.

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The [Color of Water](#) initiative aims to resource journalists and decision makers with water experts from diverse backgrounds and build capacity for these spokespeople to build and elevate their voices. The new Color of Water [directory](#) features an online directory that makes it easier to connect directly with water experts of color.

color of water | a water hub project

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