

**SHIFTING
SYSTEMS
INITIATIVE**



Solutions for Scaling Impact

Shifting Systems:

Strengthening Countervailing Forces through Climate Philanthropy

Skoll World Forum

2025

ROCKEFELLER
Philanthropy
Advisors

Strengthening Countervailing Forces through Climate Philanthropy

An event of the Shifting Systems Initiative

April 3, 2025

On April 3, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisor's [Shifting Systems Initiative](#) convened more than a hundred funders, practitioners, and allies on climate action at the 2025 Skoll World Forum in Oxford, England. The event, titled "Strengthening Countervailing Forces Through Climate Philanthropy," drew participants from around the world to explore how to be responsive, rather than reactive, to the overwhelming challenges of recent months. The room overflowed with diverse perspectives and expertise related to the climate emergency, from narrative change to multilateralism to business leadership.

The session began in plenary with poetry to ground and inspire us, followed by insights from diverse and visionary climate leaders. Then participants engaged in one of ten discussion groups led by leaders in the sector. These focused on a range of climate strategies and solutions that, as a whole, can make a better future possible. Highlights from comments shared in plenary and takeaways from the ten discussion groups follow.

The power of poetry

Poet and philanthropic advisor Josiane Smith opened the session by reading two of her poems—*The Nightingale* and *Do We Have Enough Faith?* As Josiane shared, the poems were "read as an invocation, and blessing, to bring the voice of nature into the room and to remind us that we have what it takes for the path forward."

Josiane has given RPA permission to make both poems available, in the hope that they can be enjoyed by attendees and shared with new audiences, bolstering confidence that a climate-resilient tomorrow is possible and on its way.

The Nightingale

Josiane Smith

Inside the tree is a life force
coursing through the maze
of its sap filled veins
highway current speeding
up and down, up and down
up and up and out; the sky
is beyond the clustering
of darkened leaves
beyond that even, is the blue
Southend sea, sung to
by the nightingale who knows
which tales you wish to hear
like balm to a restless soul
like rest to a running spirit
like spirit for a losing fight
like fight for a life
on a planet in constant renewal.

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Do we have enough faith?

Josiane Smith

faith in the vision
faith in the search
faith in the mission
faith in our work

faith in our power
faith in our voice
faith in our failure
faith in our choice

faith in the movement
faith in the team
faith in action
faith in the dream

faith in the system
faith for the fight
faith in transformation
faith and foresight

faith in the data

faith in the vote
faith in the science
faith in the lifeboat

faith in the new world
faith in the wound
faith in the untold
faith in the truth

faith in justice
faith in a side
faith amidst crisis
faith that is blind

faith in the ordinary
faith in the small
faith in the findings
faith right after the fall

faith in the stranger
faith in the doubt
faith in our neighbour
faith that casts out

faith in the corner shop
faith in the leader
faith in the poet
faith in the teacher

faith in our children
faith in our guides
faith in our ancestors
faith in the signs

faith in our loved ones
faith when it's hard
faith in ourselves
faith this will pass

faith in humanity
faith even through fear
faith in community
faith in our prayer

faith when it's urgent
faith when it ends
faith in emergent
faith to start again

faith in the process
faith that is tested
faith in the payoff
faith that's invested

faith in the quiet
faith that is found
faith that is private
faith that's homebound

faith in seedlings
faith in spring
faith in the winters
faith in the wins

faith is needed
faith is our fuel
when faith is repeated
faith is renewal.

Perspectives on openings for systems change: multilateralism, culture, business leadership

Heather Grady of RPA noted that we started with a poem, from a poet, because poetry, like all creativity, accelerates us into creating a different future. In opening, Josiane helped us to an emotional and relational space giving us new language and energy. She then introduced three ‘system leaders’ – people who have the ability to see the larger system; who foster reflection and more generative conversations; and who shift the collective focus from reactive problem-solving to co-creating the future. They were tasked with inspiring and challenging participants with transformative practices and helping us imagine a better future so we can build it, offering provocative perspectives from their respective vantage points on systems changing climate action.

Favianna Rodriguez is an interdisciplinary artist, cultural strategist, and entrepreneur based in California who is a trusted advisor to artists across disciplines, and a leading voice at the intersection of art, culture, and social impact. She founded the Center for Cultural Power. She has just stepped down after 14 years. Amol Mehra is Amol Mehra, Director of Industry Programmes, and on the management team, at Laudes Foundation. He is a recognized leader in the fields of business and human rights, just transitions and people-centred climate action. Diego Casaes is the Program Director of the Climate Emergency Collaboration Group, a project we are very proud to host in RPA. He is dedicated to ensuring local voices have a say in global negotiations, and that positive policies respect human rights standards and the protection of nature. Highlights from each of their comments follow.

Diego Casaes of the Climate Emergency Collaboration spoke of the need for “tending to wounds” in the multilateral system – where trust in governments is low due to their failure to fulfill societal commitments. To really drive collaboration, Casaes underscored that it’s not enough to get everyone in the room; stakeholders have to be in solidarity. This means promoting inclusive practices and nurturing new leaders so they can bring their ideas to the table. It also means building trust. As Casaes said, “A lot of people want to fix climate change their way – and what we have to do is fix climate change.”

Artist, cultural organizer, and social justice activist, Faviana Rodriguez urged funders to invest in and build a culture infrastructure for winning on climate. “Culture is power,” Faviana proclaimed. “It is what shapes our values. It’s in a battle for our collective imagination. If you have any doubt that we are in a battle for the narrative right now, look around the world and see how history is being repressed.” If we know that culture shapes our values, our imaginations and our policies, why do we invest so little in it?

Amol Mehra of Laudes Foundation, offered that business can be a force for good. Many business leaders are trying to be their best selves within structures set up to assess and manage risk. As a result, we’re seeing a lot of green hushing – efforts to hide or downplay sustainability efforts; yet, the work is being done, just quietly. If we believe that business can be a force for good, how can we use this energy to accelerate transformation of industry? There are opportunities in areas such as sustainable procurement practices and adaptation finance.

Discussion group takeaways

Following the opening perspectives, participants engaged in small group discussions around a range of levers for systems change. The dialogue that followed made visible the power of connection and imagination for shifting systems, and the abundance of climate solutions and wisdom for the times ahead. At the end of the session, each group shared their “1-2 sentence” takeaway in plenary. Their takeaways follow.

Multilateralism: Unlocking Doors in a World of Gatekeepers

Table Leader: Diego Casaes, Climate Emergency Collaboration Group

A poem for philanthropy:

Rethinking ‘collaboration’

In the darkness navigate the unknown.

Trust in relationships.

Tending to our past over long time

Egos aside, weave our stories together.

Radical Imagination: the Potential of Creativity and Expression

Table Leader: Favianna Rodriguez, Center for Cultural Power

There's no earth without art.

To win big on climate, we need major investment in storytelling.



Applying a Futures Lens to Climate Philanthropy

Table Leaders: Hannah Pathak, Forum for the Future and Olga Tarasov, RPA

Actions that can lead us toward a just and regenerative approach to managing climate change and stabilizing emissions and responding to adaptation needs:

- A "Positive Peace Plan" - a global plan of action for peace, working at the intersection between climate and security
- Reshaping capitalism, to include a wealth tax, internalization of externalities, and a "beyond GDP" approach
- Philanthropy enabling transfers of power and capital in places that need it most, and supporting new wealth in those same regions to be oriented towards climate action
- An elimination of national borders - a construct that has been proven to cause human, economic and environmental harms
- A global \$200 billion fund for culture, as a key enabling for climate resilience
- A shift towards a stewardship mindset - now (in 2040) prevailing in politics, economics and social movements
- A global children's movement - centering themselves as the most important stakeholders of the future

Rewilding Media in the Public Interest for the Climate Emergency

Table Leader: Beadie Finzi, Doc Society

We will harness the transition from centralized to decentralized media by investing

- 1) **projects** (including content that shifts the narrative on climate to a solutions-based frame),
- 2) **people** including journalists and an army of 13-year old girls,
- 3) building or buying-back **publishers** and **platforms** to flood the zone with fact-based content (aka buy ticktock), and
- 4) shifting **policy** around AI to build a system that privileges factual specificity over non-factual volume.

Supercharging Indigenous Leadership on Climate

Table Leader: Leo Cerda, Hakhu

Indigenous communities, especially women, are on the frontlines: trust them, learn from them, champion them, and FUND them to protect their knowledge and the climate.

Walking the Talk on Systems Funding

Table Leader: Sonia Medina, Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) and Kathy Reich

To walk the talk on systems funding for climate, philanthropy needs to fund the connective tissue of the system: the platforms and leaders that bring together political, economic, community, and cultural actors; the ecosystem anchors who nurture and grow the system, and emerging financial backbones who can deploy capital throughout the system in strategic and integrated ways.

What Transformative Business Leadership Looks Like Now

Table Leader: Amol Mehra, Laudes Foundation

In the face of corporate green hushing, climate philanthropy should elevate and empower key stakeholders outside of the C-suite (investors, employees, customers and insurers) and prepare ourselves to act quickly when the opportunity arises for corporate leaders to use their voice again.

Funding Nature-Climate Synergies

Table Leader: Margaret Rugadya, Land and Forest Tenure Facility

Work through intermediaries to ensure that local communities can access sufficient long-term and flexible financing and that nature-based solutions have inclusive governance systems. Make sure that local communities remain the decision makers.

How Changes in Our Inner World Can Influence the Outer World

Table Leader: Josiane Smith

We embrace and embody the parts of the system we want to amplify.

The future is rarely about the future. It is about being more aware of the signals in the present.

Pathways to Prioritizing Global Majority Leadership

Table Leader: Sumi Pasupathy, Karuna Advisory Impact

Center the margins, who is around the table shapes what we can see.

Leadership is there. Infrastructure exists. Movement of resources is the challenge.

Should transfer power and resources, before transferring leadership

What is a work of art, a book, a film or a song that changed the way you think?

77 responses

