

# JOIN THE MOVEMENT!



## Member Handbook



ORGANIZING for  
HEALTH and JUSTICE

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# 1

## **WELCOME TO CLEAN AIR!**

Clean Air: Organizing for Health & Justice (Clean Air) is a grassroots, membership-based organization that prioritizes the leadership of working-class people and people of color to run and win environmental justice, equity and public health campaigns. The collective establishment of a strong membership base is central for us to build the political will and power to challenge unjust institutions and systems, and to create new systems that are rooted in equity and real democratic decision-making.

Clean Air's members identify and tackle the problems in their neighborhoods by organizing for solutions that meet the need of current and future generations. Becoming a member or supporter of Clean Air means you are part of a community for equity and justice that's leading a nationally recognized model for smart and effective grassroots organizing.

## **GOALS AND THEORY OF CHANGE**

Clean Air bases its organizing in neighborhoods, addressing tangible, on-the-ground conditions that impact people's lives. The shifts that take place because of resident organizing and leadership, and the issues and campaigns they take on, create the conditions and the constituency for widespread systemic change

**OUR END GOAL IS TO MORE EQUITABLY  
DISTRIBUTE POWER THROUGHOUT THE  
COMMUNITY.**





## THEORY OF CHANGE

### Mission

Build power by developing grassroots leaders who organize their communities to run and win Environmental Justice and public health campaigns in WNY

### Organizational Values

Environmental Justice  
 Leadership Development  
 Democratic Decision-Making  
 Resident Knowledge  
 Appreciation, Recognition and Celebration  
 Race & Class Equity & Inclusion

### Strategies

Prioritize leadership and organizing of working class people and people of color

Facilitate and support member lead campaigns

Build and align shared interest to advance equity and community well-being

Take collective action



Develop resources that align with the organization's mission, vision and values

- Diversify income streams to prioritize individual and membership contributions
- Increase member lead fundraising
- Continue to deepen relationships with local funders who are interested in institutional change and capacity building
- Continue to develop relationships with national funders who share our values
- Capitalize a Sustainability Fund

### Resources

### Outcomes (short term)

An equitable and representative network of strong community based leaders who build power together to advocate and mobilize for public health and environmental justice

Policymakers are accountable to working class communities and communities of color



### Outcomes (long term)

Residents control decisions impacting their communities

Political, social and economic systems and institutions are restructured to be equitable and accountable to community priorities

Policies that protect public health, the environment, promote equity and that are enforced



### Impact

A world where our environment promotes health and equity and where systems place communities at the forefront of decision making.

## 2

# ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

Clean Air was founded in 2007 by Western New York residents concerned about the high levels of cancer and illness in their neighborhoods, and who demanded an active role in the decisions that impact their communities.

Our initial campaign and victories were in Tonawanda — including a direct-action campaign to hold Tonawanda Coke responsible for the environmental and human toll its practices imposed on the community.

Since this start, Clean Air has organized with multiple Western New York communities around environmental health, justice and equity issues.



## TIMELINE

- **2007** - Residents in Tonawanda begin organizing around significant health concerns and the connection to the chemicals emitted from 53 industrial companies in their community
- **2009** - Tonawanda residents establish Clean Air and hire the first Organizer
- **December 2009** - After a rally at the plant's gates, the US DOJ, US EPA, NYS DEC and US Coast Guard raid Tonawanda Coke with a federal search warrant.
- **2011** - Tonawanda neighborhood organizes with Clean Air to stop Amigone Crematory from blanketing their homes with ash, leading to a lawsuit from the NYS Attorney General and DEC against Amigone Crematory. Amigone suspends operations in 2012.
- **March 2013** - Landmark conviction against Tonawanda Coke in federal court – the 2<sup>nd</sup> criminal conviction in *US history* under Title V of the Clean Air Act. Tonawanda Coke is found guilty of 14 felony counts and the Environmental Control Manager found guilty of 15 felony counts and sentenced to a year in prison.
- **December 2013** - NYS attempted to expand the truck plaza by the Peace Bridge. This project threatened air quality and excluded thousands from commenting on the project. Clean Air filed a civil rights complaint with the DOJ demanding equal treatment and improved air quality by the Peace Bridge.

# TIMELINE (CONT.)

**2014** - Clean Air hosts green infrastructure (GI) experts and facilitates workshops for local decision makers, resulting in the Peace Bridge Authority allocating \$3 million for GI interventions to improve air quality and protect Buffalo's West Side neighborhoods from diesel exhaust. Clean Air members also blocked the plaza expansion, which would have led to hundreds more idling trucks in the community.

**June 2014** - Clean Air holds the first regional Just Transition Conference, bringing together world-leading experts with tools, techniques, and case studies to support our collective future after large factory closings. Clean Air begins partnering with organized labor to prepare for the possible NRG Huntley Coal plant closure.

**August 2015** - NRG announces the closure of the Huntley Coal plant, the largest polluter in Erie County. A few months later, Clean Air and labor partners establish \$65 million in the NYS budget for communities facing coal plant closures. This was the first fund of its kind in the country.

**2015** - Clean Air launches Tonawanda Tomorrow, a community partnership with local businesses, government, organized labor, and residents focused on creating an economic action plan to prepare for lost tax revenue and jobs after the closure of the Huntley coal plant. Over 1,000 residents participated in the process.

**2016** - Clean Air and partners establish the first-ever participatory budgeting (PB) process in the City of Buffalo. Residents of the Masten District voted to fund 11 projects, including a Farmers Market on Main St. and improvements to the Dewey Avenue Park.

**2016** - Clean Air is featured on the award-winning news program, *The Stream*, as a national expert on environmental justice and civil rights, and invited to the White House to help guide the expansion of participatory budgeting in the United States.

**2017** - Another successful participatory budget process in the city's Niagara Council District, which awarded \$12,000 to projects like technology upgrades and snow plows for community centers.

**2017** - The Town of Tonawanda adopts Tonawanda Tomorrow, an economic plan with action steps to replace the tax revenue, create jobs, increase renewable energy, and open up the waterfront, after the closure of the Huntley Coal Plant

**2017** - Clean Air and Delavan Grider residents win \$3 million in the state budget for clean-up of the old American Axle site on East Delavan Ave., which has been leaking PCBs and hazardous waste for over 30 years.

## TIMELINE (CONT.)

**2018** - After more than two years of organizing with Seneca Babcock residents in South Buffalo, we stopped Battaglia Demolition, a concrete crushing facility, from blanketing the neighborhood in silica dust. Clean Air and residents continue to organize for adequate recourse for the harm that residents have endured, including resources to reimagine a healthy and vibrant environment and community.

**January 2018** - Clean Air organizes for resident input before the City of Buffalo's budget's creation, resulting in the city's first-ever budget proposal day. Hundreds of residents turned out to voice their opinions on how the city should spend the \$500 million budget.

**July 2018** - After Clean Air is confidentially notified that a waste heat tunnel at Tonawanda Coke collapsed, we publicly call on the DEC to examine potential toxic emissions, including benzene, being released into the surrounding community. DEC inspections at Tonawanda Coke revealed 176 environmental regulation violations resulting in a cease and desist letter issued to the company.

**October 2018** - Tonawanda Coke reorganizes under Chapter 11 bankruptcy, closes its doors, and permanently vacates the site. As a result of the shutdown, benzene that posed a 75 in 1 million lifetime cancer risk in neighborhoods in the Town and City of Tonawanda in 2008 dropped to 7 in 1 million.

**2019** - Clean Air began organizing with current and former Tesla workers to hold the corporation accountable for a workplace culture of sexual harassment and racism. We need a renewable energy economy that provides generational sustaining careers that are just and equitable.

**2019** - Clean Air and our members continue to organize for the comprehensive clean-up of the Tonawanda Coke plant paid for by the company and not community tax-dollars.

## NEXT:

- **CAMPAIGNS**
- **MEMBERSHIP**

# 3

## CAMPAIGNS

Clean Air’s members identify and tackle the problems in their neighborhoods by organizing for solutions that meet the needs of current and future generations. We collectively organize to confront corporate and institutional wrongdoing, hold government leaders accountable, and reimagine and recreate democratic and just systems for our people. This often requires challenging the status quo, while other times it requires centering cooperation and collaboration.

All campaigns are run by campaign teams made up of members that live in the community in which their campaigns take place. Member involvement drives our organization forward.

If you are interested in joining a campaign team, call our office or get involved at a meeting!

For information on our current campaigns, visit [www.cacwny.org/campaigns](http://www.cacwny.org/campaigns).





# 4

## MEMBERSHIP

Members live in communities impacted by environmental injustice and environmental racism where Clean Air has led campaigns to build power, stop suffering, acknowledge harm, and right wrongs through member identified remedies. Our members live in communities that have been cut out of decision-making processes because of their income or the color of their skin. We recognize that developing the leadership of our people is key to transforming individual resources into the collective power necessary to build the world we need and want to live in. While we fight like hell for justice, we also foster a loving community that takes the time to appreciate, recognize and celebrate our people.

Members elect the Board of Directors, approve bylaws, make campaign decisions, and recruit new members. Members also pay annual membership dues to help keep Clean Air going, from supporting administration costs and staff time, to campaign meetings and trainings.

Even though many of our members are not wealthy, member giving matters. Member giving ensures that the communities we work with are in control of the organization and the campaigns we choose, run, and win. Membership dues are based on an annual cycle, through one-time dues or monthly “sustaining” dues. We ask that anyone who joins the organization financially contribute an amount that is personally meaningful to them and aligns with the urgency of our work.

Do you know someone that wants to be a member?

Have them call **716-852-3813** or go to **cacwny.org**.



## **BUILDING GRASSROOTS POWER**

- Our membership base's financial contribution means that we do not rely on financial help from the same institutions and corporations that are polluting our environment. As a membership-based organization, our members maintain power over our organizing work.
- As a membership-based organization, members lead by participating on teams throughout Clean Air's work. Members plan, execute, and evaluate all levels of our work.
- Members participate in conferences and training to develop organizing and leadership skills.
- Members participate in Clean Air and our coalition partners' local actions to demonstrate our collective power.
- Members build the organization by identifying future leaders and participants. This can include serving on a staff hiring committee, recruiting other leaders, or asking their friends and family to become members!
- Members celebrate hard work and earned victories, whether through a potluck, the Annual Dinner, or a happy hour get together.

## **SUPPORTERS**

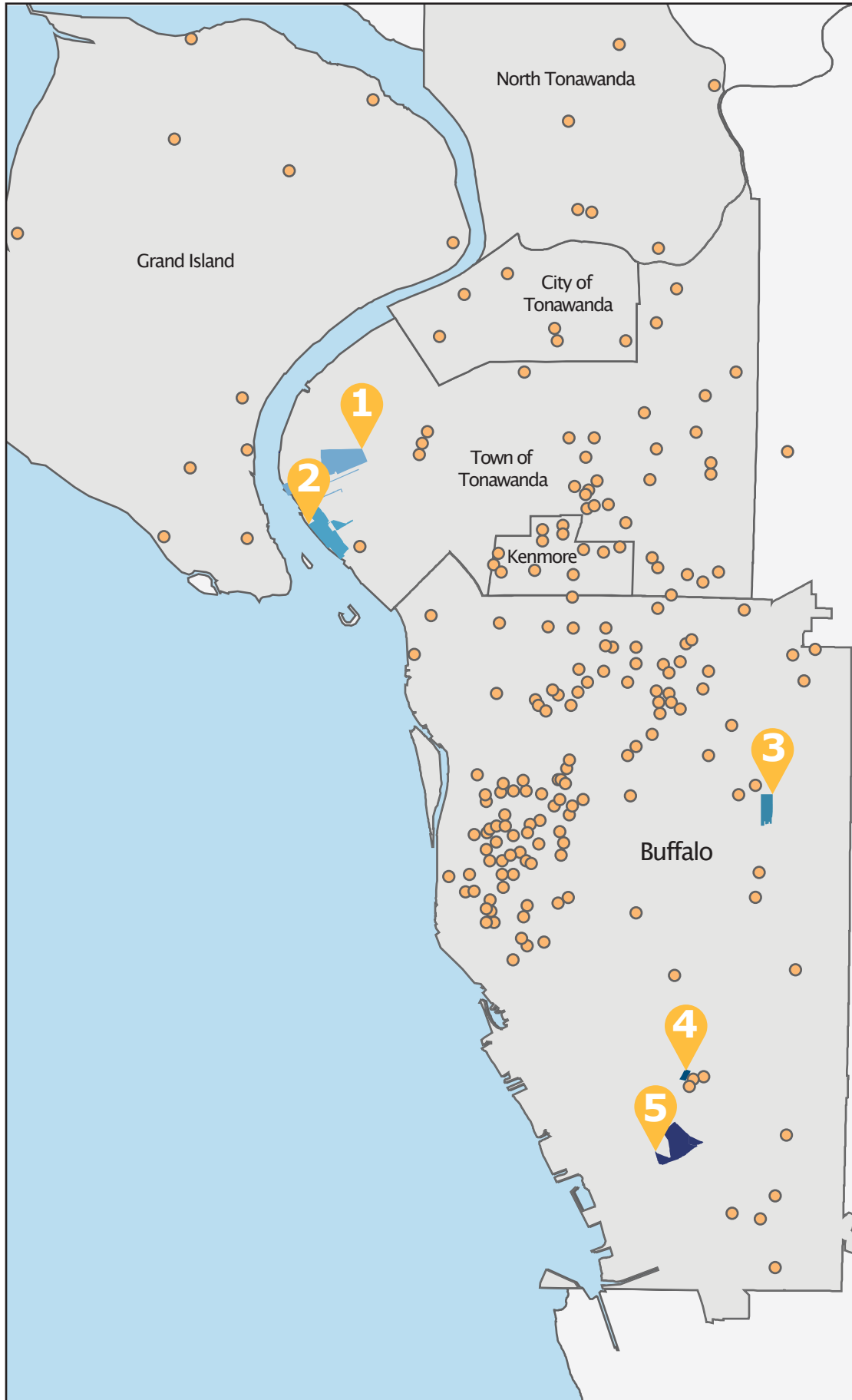
We recognize that there are many passionate and talented people outside the organization's campaign areas. *Supporters* participate in solidarity in campaign work, engage in community events, and attend the organization's Annual Dinner. While Clean Air Supporters are often active in creating positive change throughout WNY and within our campaign areas, they *do not* elect the Board of Directors, approve bylaws, or establish/lead campaign work.

## **NEXT:**

- **MEMBERSHIP / CAMPAIGN MAP**
- **DECISION MAKING &  
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**



# Clean Air Coalition Work



- Members
- Membership Areas
- Campaign Locations

## 1 Tonawanda Coke

Held Tonawanda Coke accountable for decades of disregard to community health and the environment. After the company shut down in 2018, we began organizing for the clean-up of the plant paid for by the company.

## 2 Huntley

After the retirement of the NRG Huntley coal plant, we helped lead the creation of an economic development for the town to recoup lost tax revenue, and we continue to organize for the cleanup of the plant and its reimagining as a community resource.

## 3 American Axle

The Eastside American Axle site is ground zero for contamination, with hazardous oil, grease and PCB toxins that have leached into the sewer system. In 2015, we joined forces with residents to organize to stop the toxic runoff and remediate legacy waste.

## 4 Battaglia

Organized with residents to stop Battaglia Demolition, a concrete crushing facility without proper permits, from polluting the Seneca Babcock neighborhood. After the company was forced to close, members continue to organize for adequate recourse to reimagine a healthy and vibrant environment and community.

## 5 Tesla

We need a renewable energy economy that provides generational sustaining careers that are just and equitable. That's why we're organizing with former Tesla workers to hold the corporation accountable for a workplace culture of sexual harassment and racism.

5

DECISION MAKING & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



CLEAN AIR ORGANIZING for HEALTH and JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MEMBERS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DIRECTOR

TONAWANDA COKE LEADER TEAM

ORGANIZER AND DIRECTOR OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

ORGANIZER

ORGANIZER

ORGANIZER

ORGANIZER

GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING ORGANIZER

TESLA TERMINATED TEAM

TESLA LEADER TEAM

JUST TRANSITION LEADER TEAM

AMERICAN AXLE LEADER TEAM

BATTAGLIA LEADER TEAM

MEMBER FUNDRAISING TEAM

# HOW WE WORK & MAKE DECISIONS

## WE ARE A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Clean Air is a 501(C)3 non-profit organization. This designation allows for federal tax exemption of nonprofit organizations. This means that Clean Air has the ability to receive charitable donations that are tax-exempt. As a nonprofit, Clean Air has bylaws that guide our operations and decision making, and a Board of Directors.

## FUNDRAISING VALUES

### Where Our Money Comes From

- Foundation Grants
- Members and Donations
- Special events
- Government

### Where We Spend Our Money

- Leadership Development
- Campaigns
- Fundraising
- Administration

We are committed to the development of resources that align with our organizational mission, vision and values. The resource base for non-profit organizations, and the constituency that these organizations serve, are rarely aligned. Clean Air has been known for its independence and its willingness to take difficult stands. Continuing to develop a resource base that is secure, diversified and reflective of our constituency will be critical for upholding and maintaining our independence. *In the coming years, we are committed to increasing member-led fundraising and deepening our relationships with local and national funders who are interested in institutional change and capacity building.*



# 6

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors manages the affairs of Clean Air by:

- Determining how the organization will carry out its mission through long- and short-term planning.
- Approving and monitoring Clean Air's campaigns and involvement with academic research projects and fiscal sponsorships.
- Being legally responsible for the organization.
- Knowing what our budget is, being active in planning that budget, and planning the fundraising to meet that budget. Board members also approve the annual budget and provide fiscal oversight.
- Hiring and evaluating the performance of the Executive Director
- Giving a meaningful annual personal financial contribution (in order to achieve 100% board giving)
- Participating in fundraising activities and special events, and asking its own network to contribute or become members of Clean Air.

Board of Directors are elected based on their passion for the issues we tackle and commitment to serving the needs of the organization. Each Board Member must be a dues paying member or supporter. Board members are then elected by a membership majority vote.

## BUILD AND MODEL JUST SYSTEMS

We use this knowledge to create ways of being that are directly opposed to the dominant unjust norms. For instance, instead of top-down capitalist structures, Clean Air's members are the driving force leading our work, because our members are the most directly connected to the environmental issues being tackled.

With grassroots organizing at the heart and soul of our movement, members create the connections and relationships that enable our base and power to grow locally and nationally. In this way, we internally model the democratic and just culture that we are organizing for externally.

We are organizing for a world where our environment promotes health and equity and where systems place communities at the forefront of decision-making. We foster relationships, build community, and empower grassroots leaders.



# 7

## CULTURE & NORMS

As we see the effects of climate change and the polarization of our country in terms of class, health care, and individual rights, we know that we must come together to organize for our collective justice. This requires us to understand the unjust systems that dominate our society and dream about alternative systems that are healthy, just, and equitable.

Clean Air and our members and supporters engage in trainings that build our analyses around the interconnected extractive systems that have created devastation amongst people world wide. We develop our understanding of how those systems wrongfully target poor, working class, and people of color more directly.



# 8

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What is community organizing?**

Community organizing is a process where people come together in shared self-interest around solving an issue. Organizing often involves some sort of conflict and associated social struggle in an effort to win power and justice for people that have been forcibly harmed and erased. The grassroots power generated through community organizing forces traditional power holders to act in more equitable ways while simultaneously redistributing power throughout the community.

- **What is Environmental Justice?**

Environmental Justice refers to those cultural norms and values, rules, regulations, behaviors and policies where all people can be confident that their community and environment is safe and healthy, without the interruption of environmental racism or class inequity. Environmental Justice is supported by decent paying and secure jobs; quality schools, housing and health care; democratic decision-making; and personal empowerment.

For a brief history of Environmental Justice, check out this short video by ProPublica: [http://bit.ly/ProPublica\\_EJ](http://bit.ly/ProPublica_EJ).

- **What is Environmental Racism?**

Environmental racism is the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color. Environmental justice is the movement's response to environmental racism.

- **What is a Just Transition?**

A Just Transition is a process to create social well-being for poor and working class people and people of color, while moving toward solutions that mitigate and remediate the environmental damage done by industrial and corporate business and growth.

For us, a Just Transition means building an economy that provides family sustaining jobs and consistent tax revenue, while improving the environment, public health, economic growth, race equity and democracy.

- **How does Clean Air decide the campaigns it works on?**

Our campaigns come directly from our residents or our members who are experiencing issues in their communities. In order for Clean Air to adopt a campaign (put resources behind it) a resident must submit a campaign proposal to our Board of Directors.



- **Who do I contact about environmental injustice in my community?**

Give our office a call and we would be happy to talk to you about what's going on. You can also file complaints with the following agencies. Make sure to keep copies or a call record of all complaints.

**The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation** is a state agency designed to protect and enhance the environment. DEC's regional offices can answer questions about local businesses, recreation areas, rules affecting your property, and can investigate reports of environmental damage. You can also file complaints with this office.

Regional office:  
270 Michigan Ave.,  
Buffalo NY 14203-2915  
Phone: 716-851-7050  
Fax : 716-851-7053

For general information and questions email:  
**contact@dec.ny.gov** or **region9@dec.ny.gov**

**The United States Environmental Protection Agency** is the federal environmental agency. For general information and concerns please call the Public Information Hotline, toll-free, at **877-251-4575**

**The New York State Attorney General** is the state executive branch that defends actions and proceedings on behalf of the state.

Complaints about issues that you think are breaking NYS law can be filed on the Attorney General website **<https://ag.ny.gov/complaint-forms>** or by calling **1-800-771-7755**.

- **What is the role of Clean Air's staff members?**

At Clean Air, staff members act as facilitators, coaches and trainers. Our staff supports members, aids in developing campaign goals and strategies, and supports leadership development among members that build the needed individual skills and connections necessary for campaign momentum and political strength.

- **Where can I find Clean Air's policy on scientific studies and research?**

Clean Air has an Academic Research Policy that determines when we engage in research and how we allow research institutions to get involved with the campaigns that we work on. Any individual looking to partner with us for research must complete a research proposal and submit it to our Board of Directors to be approved. Clean Air only engages in research that is intended to change our members' lives, build power, support the goals of our campaigns and work toward the vision our members have for our world.



## **MEMBER TESTIMONIALS**

“When I attended my first Clean Air meeting, I felt that Clean Air was the epitome of what I thought a grassroots organization should be. Not only does Clean Air provide the necessary tools, platforms, and information for our campaigns; we also provide the indispensable element of hope.”

**- Gary Schulenberg, Member / Membership Campaign Team/Tonawanda Coke Campaign Team**

“We know what we need in our communities. Empowering residents to make decisions, to make our voices heard, is vital to creating change in an effective and equitable way. No area of the work is kept in the dark. Clean Air’s staff and leadership really work to empower its members.”

**- Jenn Carman, Board Member / Membership Team**

“Workers need to fight for what they are owed by banding together and demanding it, because it won't just be given to us. Clean Air invigorates and inspires their members to fight for their own health and wellness while challenging polluters regardless of size, money, or political power.”

**- Rob Walsh, Member / Membership Campaign Team/Tesla Campaign Team**

“For those people who are interested in getting involved, they [Clean Air] cultivate that and find places and ways for people to take on their own leadership roles.”

**- Diana Strablow, Member / Huntley Just Transition Campaign Team**

“We are not an organization that comes in and actually just takes on an issue and we run with it, but we actually help to organize the community... help the community organize themselves to build leadership so we build community empowerment.”

**- Sydney Brown, Board Member / American Axle Campaign Team**



**GET IN TOUCH!**

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