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Climate Breakthrough Award, Largest Climate Action Grant for Individuals, Announces 2022 Recipients

The prestigious award is designed to free recipients to pursue their most ambitious and innovative climate endeavors to help resolve the climate crisis.

SAN FRANCISCO, October 4, 2022 – A Colombian climate diplomat, a Kenyan impact-driven strategist, and a trio of groundbreaking campaigners in India are the three recipients of the 2022 Climate Breakthrough Award, organizer Climate Breakthrough said today.

In addition to a US\$3 million, multi-year, flexible grant, each of the three recipients will also get capacity-building resources to create their new (or scale up early-stage) climate mitigation work. The 2022 recipients are: [see more details in their bios]

- **Isabel Cavalier Adarve (Colombia)**—A well-connected former diplomat, Isabel plans to use the grant to help new, emerging and existing climate leaders in the region escalate change, and to develop broad yet unique strategies to get civil society more involved in governments' climate commitments.
- **James Irungu Mwangi (Kenya)**—A social impact strategist, James hopes to utilize the grant to ramp up a budding, multi-pronged initiative he's recently started that aims to leverage Africa's socio-environmental assets and turn them into a driver of climate action and economic transformation in the continent.
- **Vinuta Gopal, Sanjiv Gopal, and Briakesh Singh (India)**—The first ever team recipient, they plan to expand nationally their nascent, yet groundbreaking, "collaborative, networked, and unbranded" approach that has proven fruitful in elevating sub-national efforts towards reaching India's climate goals.

"Congratulations to Climate Breakthrough for the sustained commitment to climate action and to the 2022 recipients of the Climate Breakthrough Award. I'm excited to see what these inspiring climate optimists will do and I hope they continue to get all the necessary support that matches their compelling ambition and can-do attitude. Philanthropy alone cannot address the climate crisis, but we've seen how it can punch way above its weight particularly when it places more creative freedom and equity in the hands of highly-skilled people on the ground," said **Christiana Figueres**, Co-host of the podcast [Outrage and Optimism](#) and former Executive Secretary, UN Convention on Climate Change (2010-2016).

Climate Breakthrough Award: Structure and Selection

The Climate Breakthrough Award is a global multi-million-dollar, multi-year, flexible grant that relies on four tenets—more money, longer funding period, fewer obligations, and larger focus on learning instead of accountability—to provide the recipients with freedom and stability to create beyond incremental change.

The award is for recipients pursuing a new climate endeavor or scaling up one that might be considered too ambitious or early-stage by traditional funders. It is not for past work, an ongoing project with established funding, technology R&D, or institution building. Candidates are scouted (no applications), vetted through reference testimonials, and then invited to conversations on leadership and breakthrough ideas. Only after selection do they develop their strategy proposal.

All of this year's recipients are based in the Global South.



Left to right: James Irungu Mwangi (Kenya), Isabel Cavalier Adarve (Colombia), Sanjiv Gopal, Vinuta Gopal, Brikesh Singh (India)

While some past recipients have come from North America and Europe, the structure of the award means that more matching opportunities are in the Global South. In fact, over 70 percent of the awards to date have gone to global projects or projects in these regions.

"We look for extraordinary leaders with big ideas for climate action that have not been tried before—ideas with the potential to transform entire industries or countries and materially change the lives of millions of people. This year's award recipients are exactly such leaders, and they share a commitment not only to addressing the climate crisis at scale, but to doing



so in ways that will improve the lives of and opportunities for the people in the communities most affected by this crisis," said **Savanna Ferguson**, Executive Director of Climate Breakthrough.

Walt Reid, founding board chair of Climate Breakthrough and Vice President of Environment & Science at [the David and Lucile Packard Foundation](#), added: "Many of the most creative approaches to the challenges of climate change are coming from people in the Global South. But they have less access to philanthropic support, especially support like the Climate Breakthrough Award, that gives them the freedom to pursue their own visions for powerful climate action."

Climate Breakthrough Award: Legacy

Since 2016, Climate Breakthrough has now given out 17 awards (16 individuals and one team of three) across 13 countries totaling over US\$51 million. Recipients use their grants for a wide range of innovative climate mitigation strategies including litigation, forests, challenging fossil fuels, and transforming transportation and utilize a variety of tactics including campaigns, policy, investment, and movement building.

Liz McKeon, Climate Breakthrough Board member and also Portfolio Lead in Climate Action at [the IKEA Foundation](#), said: "As a funder of the program, it's a genuine honor to be championing these forward-thinking individuals who are so exceptionally capable as they push the boundaries on what big ideas could look like for our planet."

2020 recipient **Nicole Rycroft** is using her grant to transform the global pulp and paper sector away from carbon- and biodiversity-rich forests. "Scarcity can constrain organizations to small-step strategies. The award has given us the means to step confidently into a new, ambitious, multi-year endeavor for forests; to think big and go big because the challenge of the climate crisis needs us to be working at much larger scales," said Rycroft, the Executive Director of [Canopy Planet](#), a non-profit dedicated to transforming unsustainable supply chains.

Agreeing with Nicole, 2018 recipient **Bruce Nilles** said his grant allowed him to jump-start [a building electrification campaign at RMI](#) when that sector was largely off of the radar of most health and climate advocates and funders. "This significant funding was critical to be able to scale a campaign that has now helped inspire a movement which is now calling for an end to all fossil fuels out of our buildings," said Bruce, now Executive Director at [Climate Imperative](#).

Other endeavors catalyzed by the Climate Breakthrough Awards and have gained widespread recognition include [the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) ([Tzeporah Berman](#), 2019 recipient), the [Insure Our Future](#) campaign ([John Hepburn](#), 2016 recipient), and the China Oil Cap research project ([Yang Fuqiang](#), 2017 recipient).

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ABOUT

Climate Breakthrough is a global philanthropy supporting extraordinary climate leaders to pursue their most ambitious, innovative climate endeavors through the Climate Breakthrough Award, a multi-million-dollar, multi-year, flexible grant. Our mission is to make an outsized impact in resolving the climate crisis by freeing these leaders to translate their boldest ideas into transformative climate action that swiftly and justly closes the gap between the world today and a sustainable future.

Launched in 2016, Climate Breakthrough is based in San Francisco and is funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, IKEA Foundation, Quadrature Climate Foundation, Good Energies Foundation, Vere, and JPB Foundation. For more information, visit www.ClimateBreakthrough.org/

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