



## Climate Breakthrough Announces 2021 Multi-million Dollar Award Recipients



*From left to right: Denise Fairchild, Sara Jane Ahmed, Kathrin Gutmann*

SAN FRANCISCO, December 7 2021 — The Climate Breakthrough Project, a philanthropic organization focused on climate change mitigation, has named the three recipients of its 2021 Climate Breakthrough Award, the largest environmental award of its kind. Each of the awardees, who for the first time are all women, will receive three million US dollars to design and implement their breakthrough climate change strategies.

Larger than other climate-focused prizes, the award is given to individuals with cutting-edge climate change mitigation ideas that haven't yet caught attention from traditional funders. First launched in 2016, it gives each recipient the funding to jump-start and scale their strategies to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

*"Progress in addressing climate change is far too slow; we need to see transformational change this decade and that requires innovative new ideas. The Climate Breakthrough Project enables philanthropy to make high-risk, high-return investments that unleash the creativity of outstanding*

*teams and individuals to pursue the game-changing strategies that we need in order to win,”* said **Walt Reid**, Director of the Conservation and Science Program at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and founding board chair of the Climate Breakthrough Project.

The 2021 Climate Breakthrough Awardees are: (*see below for more details of their proposed climate strategies*)

- **Denise Fairchild of the United States**—a veteran leader in environmental justice who will dive into efforts to dismantle the root causes of climate change;
- **Sara Jane Ahmed of the Philippines**—a renowned strategist in finance who seeks to develop resilience and investment opportunities in climate vulnerable nations;
- and **Kathrin Gutmann of Germany**—a seasoned campaigner who plans to take Europe towards a future powered by 100 percent renewable energy.

*“The recent COP in Glasgow reinforced the need for bolder strategies to dramatically reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. These three extraordinary individuals are leading the way with their high-impact ideas, expertise, and moxie. We are thrilled to support them in their game-changing efforts,”* said **Savanna Ferguson**, Executive Director of the Climate Breakthrough Project.

The new awardees join [11 \(eleven\) others](#) whose transformational work supported by the Climate Breakthrough Project has achieved critical recognition from their peers and the press, has garnered considerable follow-on funding, and has brought about innovation in climate change mitigation. Many of them were involved in COP26 events and negotiations in Glasgow.

*“The real gift from Climate Breakthrough for me was the ability to think bigger and to ask bigger questions of what is possible,”* said **John Hepburn**, an awardee in 2016, whose *Insure Our Future* work has led to a rapid global movement to stop insurance companies from underwriting and financing coal projects.

**Tzeporah Berman** used her 2019 Award to kickstart what has become the globally acclaimed *Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty* initiative. *“For decades, countries have been setting targets for emissions reductions but there was no framework to ensure international cooperation to stop the expansion of oil, gas, and coal projects and ensure a global just transition. I am honored to have received a major boost from the Climate Breakthrough Project to do this work at a critical moment in history.”*

2018 awardee **Tessa Khan**, of *Uplift* and previously with the *Climate Litigation Network*, said: *“The Climate Breakthrough Project has given me the freedom and resources to think and act creatively and ambitiously in relation to addressing climate change, which is incredibly valuable.”*

Based in California, the Climate Breakthrough Project is supported by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the IKEA Foundation, the Quadrature Climate Foundation, the JPB Foundation, the Oak Foundation, and the Good Energies Foundation.

More details about the 2021 awardees and the Climate Breakthrough Project are available at [www.climatebreakthroughproject.org](http://www.climatebreakthroughproject.org).

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## THE 2021 CLIMATE BREAKTHROUGH AWARDEES

**Denise Fairchild** has spent her career leading campaigns and building alliances in environmental justice and community development work, most recently taking the [Emerald Cities Collaborative](#)'s influential work in climate and economic justice to the federal level. Her deep passion and expertise led her to early leadership roles, including at the Local Initiative Support Corporation in Los Angeles and the Community and Economic Development Department at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College, where she was credited with raising over US\$100 million for community-based housing and commercial development projects.

While Denise's breakthrough strategy is still taking shape, its core is energy democracy—a movement seeking to understand and unravel the multidimensional root causes of climate change. Having co-edited an acclaimed book on the issue, she wants to disrupt the foundation of America's fossil-fuel dependent economy by prompting large and enduring cultural shifts in energy consumption norms. This vision represents something novel in American climate efforts. One of her potential approaches is targeting scope 3 emissions, which typically represent the majority of a company's gas releases but are ignored by many carbon reduction policies. Denise plans to use her relationships within the energy democracy and frontline communities, as well as government, environmental, and business communities to be a driving force in making cultural shifts as a cornerstone to carbon reduction. As she has done throughout her career, Denise will involve in her strategies the leadership and expertise of people of color and youth.

**Sara Jane Ahmed** is founder of the Financial Futures Center and currently also serves as Finance Advisor to the Ministers of Finance from 55 of the world's most climate vulnerable countries or [the Vulnerable Twenty \(V20\) Group](#). In her relatively short career so far, she has been credited with a number of wins including a recent government-sanctioned moratorium on new coal-fired power in her home country of the Philippines and the development of the Sustainable Insurance Facility at the V20. Sara's previous roles include advisory positions at the Climate Change Commission in the Office of the President in the Philippines, the United Nations Development Programme, the Asian Development Bank, and the World Resources Institute.

Her breakthrough strategy is to catalyze economic transformation through investments in financial and energy planning in the world's most climate-vulnerable countries. She calls this package of policies and financial mechanisms a Climate Prosperity Plan, or CPP. CPPs include plans designed to unlock new investment opportunities in climate-vulnerable countries, in addition to an analysis of how the plans are financed, implemented, and projected to boost growth. To make this vision a reality, she has launched a new organization, [the Financial Futures Center](#). The first Climate Property Plan is being rolled out in Bangladesh, where the government has integrated it in their national strategies. Sara's goal is, by the end of 2030, to create and implement CPPs for the top 50 most climate vulnerable developing countries—representing an estimated 1,600 million tons of emissions, 1.4 billion people, and US\$2.5 trillion in GDP.

**Kathrin Gutmann** is currently the Campaign Director of the [Europe Beyond Coal Campaign](#)—a network of NGOs working to move the continent beyond that fossil fuel by 2030. Throughout her decades-long work in climate and energy, Kathrin has lent her strategic expertise to a wide array of successful programs at organizations including the Climate Action Network Europe, WWF, the European Climate Foundation, Greenpeace International, and the environment ministry in her home country of Germany.

Under her leadership, the Europe Beyond Coal Campaign has spurred the retirement or planned retirement of 166 coal plants and coal exit plans in 21 countries across Europe. Now, Kathrin aims to apply that invaluable experience in building civil society coalitions to a new challenge: ensuring Europe is fully powered by renewable energy by 2035, leaving behind the age of coal and fossil gas. As European countries phase out coal and the fossil fuel industry racks up more losses, Kathrin believes Europe will need an unprecedented scaling up of renewable energy resources and a complete overhaul of its power systems. With her Climate Breakthrough Award, Kathrin plans to develop a strategy on how civil society can influence municipalities, policy makers, financial and corporate actors, and citizens to give up on burning fossil fuels and embrace a renewables-based power system, chiefly operated by wind and solar in combination with storage and smart grids.

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