

Rachel's Network Announces First Catalyst Award Winners

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The 2019 Catalyst Award winners. From left to right: Annel Hernandez, Maria Herrera, Tara Houska, Brionté McCorkle, Juliana Pino, and Heather Toney. (Photo Credit: Rachel's Network)

October 31, Rachel's Network announced the inaugural winners of the first-ever [Catalyst Award](#). Designed to provide women leaders of color support and recognition, the Catalyst Award highlights winners' commitment to a healthy planet.

Each award winner will receive \$10,000, extensive networking opportunities, and national recognition for their outstanding work. In addition, the award winners will be recognized at an invitation-only ceremony held in March 2020 in Washington, DC.

Chosen from a massive application pool, the winners reflect some of the top talent and dedication in the fields of conservation, environmental law, public policy, and water access.

The 2019 winners are:

- **Annel Hernandez (New York):** The Associate Director of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance and a member of the NY Renews coalition, Hernandez is an advocate and activist focused on climate change policy at the city and statewide levels. She works with various

campaigns to push for more aggressive climate legislation, putting equity at the center of each campaign's focus.

- **Maria Gallegos Herrera (California):** Herrera is the community development manager of the Community Engagement and Planning team at Self-Help Enterprises and an appointee to the California Water Commission. She is well known as an advocate for water management and clean water access, and her work focuses on community activations where there are frequent barriers to entering the activism world, such as Spanish-speaking farmworker communities and low-income neighborhoods.
- **Tara Houska (Minnesota):** Houska (Couchiching First Nation Anishinaabe) is a tribal attorney, founder of Ginew collective, the former Campaigns Director of Honor the Earth, and a former advisor on Native American affairs to Bernie Sanders. Her work campaigning against fossil fuels and invasive pipelines earned her numerous accolades, including the opportunity to give a TED Talk, a keynote at Harvard University, and an "Awesome Women Award" from Melinda Gates.
- **Brionté McCorkle (Georgia):** McCorkle works to elect pro-environment candidates and hold elected officials accountable through her position as Executive Director of Georgia Conservation Voters. Her belief in a healthier, more vibrant future for all people and the planet drives her work as a policy leader, strategic teacher, and facilitator of partnerships that protect the environment, advance racial equity, and grow civic engagement.
- **Juliana Pino (Illinois):** Pino worked as the lead negotiator for the most transformative piece of energy system legislation in Illinois' history. In her role as the policy director of the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, Pino works to transform environmental, social, land use, workforce, and economic policies. Her focus is on a transformative, justice-based approach that relies on community participation for success.
- **Heather Toney (Mississippi):** As the first African-American, first female, and the youngest to serve as Mayor of Greenville, Mississippi (2004-2012), Toney's experience as a civil servant shapes her commitment to environmental and social justice today. She is now the national field director at Moms Clean Air Force, an organization of parents across the country committed to fighting climate change and air pollution.

The Catalyst Award represents yet another Rachel's Network initiative that tackles the connection between environmental and gender justice. In January 2019, Rachel's Network received the [Bridge Builders Award for Network and Collaborative Giving Leadership](#) from *Philanthropy Women*.

We selected Rachel's Network because of their exemplary leadership in connecting feminist campaigns with those surrounding environmental justice. The Catalyst Award represents the organization's next step into closing the gap between women leaders of color and the resources they need to drive these critical campaigns.

Our team is delighted to hear more from the 2019 Catalyst Award winners, and to see where these conversation starters go next! Stay tuned for updates on the 2020 award applications, which are due to open early next year.