

Title: KCI Case Study on Los Jardines Institute and the Justice40 Coalition

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Date: 8/22/2025

Climate change disproportionately harms communities of color and low-income communities (IPCC 2023). The impacts of the climate crisis are compounded by the uneven and delayed response from national governments to climate threats. As governments lack incentives to act to prepare and mitigate environmental threats (Healy and Malhotra 2013), mobilization is an important force for social change (Amenta et al. 2010) and a condition for the adoption of the Paris Agreement (Allan et al. 2023). Further, the voluntary nature of Paris Agreement emissions reduction targets and the slow pace of climate policy adoption and implementation motivate the need for community involvement and environmental mobilization.

Community and civil society involvement in policy development and implementation is associated with greater effectiveness in the management of common resources (Villamayor-Tomas and García-López 2018). Yet, exclusion and inequality mark the history of environmental mobilization in the Global North (Brulle and Jenkins 2006). Thus, environmental justice mobilization, distinct from other forms of environmental mobilization due to its greater representation of communities impacted by environmental issues, is uniquely suited to advance the effective development and implementation of climate policy.

This case study assesses local efforts in New Mexico to advance community and worker-led transitions away from fossil-fuel dependence. We focus on the case of grassroots coalitions that the Los Jardines Institute (LJI) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, has helped convene and their impact on advancing a just transition led by communities and workers. We find that local coalition-building and organizing have ensured the allocation of resources to advance a just transition and blocked the use of resources for fossil fuel projects, such as Hydrogen Hubs, which are greenhouse gas-intensive and would have relied heavily on water in an arid region. In doing so, the case of the LJI, the Justice 40 coalition, and the New Mexico No False Solutions coalitions provide a model for bottom-up, community-led action to reduce the threats of the climate crisis.

We define just transitions as principles, processes, and practices. The principle is that thriving and healthy communities, economies, and environments can coexist. To transition away from fossil fuel dependence justly, transitions must not sacrifice public health, the environment, jobs, or economic assets. Any communities and workers affected by the energy transition must be compensated for their losses. Practicing a just transition consists of ensuring the full participation and informed consent of frontline workers and communities in decision-making processes and following their leadership in developing policy solutions. We recognize that there are no singular approaches to achieving a just transition, so we call for just transitions. As part of this

recognition, we also uplift and seek to advance an Indigenous Just Transition, an Indigenous Peoples' vision for just transition that pursues Indigenous sovereignty, restores Indigenous relationships with and responsibility for Mother Earth, and engages in transformative action to achieve Indigenous community well-being.

LJI and the coalitions it helped develop pursue a just transition through various means. These include a farmer's cooperative, the Agri-Cultura Network, with 75 organic farms; a produce distribution cooperative, Local Food Solutions, with large-scale clients all over the city; a nature preserve, Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, that prevented dirty development; a "food as medicine" program whereby doctors can prescribe healthy food and provide vouchers for free organic produce; and air pollution monitoring programs.

Historical Background and Coalition Development

The LJI and the Justice 40 coalition that LJI leaders helped develop builds on more than 100 [years of collective experience](#) with community-based environmental justice organizing (Martínez 2008). This experience included the history leadership of Dr. Sofia Martinez, LJI Co-Coordinator. "I've been doing what I've been doing now for 58 years, and [Dr. Sofia Martinez] has been doing what she's been doing for over 40 years," said Richard Moore. This organizing emerged out of the need to resist toxic waste dumping, [nuclear testing and harmful scientific experimentation](#) in communities of color, and broader practices of environmental racism in New Mexico and the US (Martínez 2022).

The Justice 40 coalition did not emerge solely to pursue policies under the Biden administration but rather sought to give continuity to a longstanding history of [environmental justice](#) activism with a trajectory extending decades (Alston 1992).

The Justice 40 coalition was established to demand that at least 40% of US federal government investments be allocated to communities on the frontlines of climate and environmental justice. The Biden Administration announced on January 27, 2021, Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, known popularly as the Justice40 Initiative. This Executive Order also created the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council (WHEJAC), co-chaired by the LJI Co-Founder and Co-Coordinator of LJI, Richard Moore. WHEJAC was tasked with advising the White House on how to implement federal environmental policies and address the histories and ongoing practices of environmental injustices. With the Justice 40 mandate in place, the Biden administration was credited for meeting some environmental justice movement demands and allocating \$60 billion in funding for environmental justice priorities as part of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).¹ On January 2025, the Trump administration issued

¹ It is important to note that the environmental justice [movement did not consider the IRA an environmental justice bill](#) due to its inclusion of funding for measures that the movement considers to be false solutions to climate change. A movement-generated analysis of the IRA is available at: <http://climatejusticealliance.org/ira>.

Executive Orders to revoke Biden administration environmental justice-related executive orders. Further, the Trump administration has delayed or blocked the implementation of key aspects of climate change action policies.

The environmental justice movement has historically pursued collective approaches to advancing social change, remaining accountable to local communities, and developing local solutions to climate change and environmental racism. Building on that tradition, Richard Moore, Dr. Sofia Martinez, and LJI leaders sought to engage with and build a coalition made up of a wide range of affected communities and policy actors, including those engaged in public health issues, housing, and agriculture. As part of this process, coalition organizers sought to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the systems that cause injustice and obstruct the achievement of a just transition.

“We started contacting the leadership of some of the groups, and we were doing some explaining to them as much as that could be explained because this Justice 40 initiative on the part of the US government, part of this administration, this has never happened. This is something that's never happened before in the history of these governments at this level.” Richard Moore

These efforts also involved making policy and societal debates on environmental issues intelligible to those affected by these policies and issues. “We had to do fact sheets in plain language... we did a little diagram because our people are very much more diagram-oriented or picture-oriented... so we had to do a whole set of documents,” said Richard Moore. LJI provided spaces for community discussions and dialogues, allowing participants to share their experiences, needs, and perspectives and allowing the coalition to build an agenda that was responsive to those experiences, needs, and perspectives.

The coalition sought to balance its focus across different communities, ensuring that Justice 40 investments were attentive to the unique needs of communities in the region. “We said, ‘okay, as in these meetings of the formation of the Justice 40, we’ve got to put just as much work into the urban community as the rural community,’” said Richard Moore.

Organizers of the Justice 40 Coalition acknowledged that the strength of the coalition and its ability to influence climate, environmental, and economic justice policies in the region would require broad participation from social change and community organizations in the region. “The community has got to feel ownership over this process... and if it’s a government entity or this administration, the community needs to be involved in creating the ground rules,” said Richard Moore. As part of the labor of building a lasting coalition, the groups coming together to form the Justice 40 coalition developed a New Mexico Justice 40 coalition charter. This charter sought to maintain the integrity of justice organizations involved in the Justice 40 initiative and related

advocacy efforts. The charter affirmed that principles of inclusion, democracy, and justice would guide the practices of the coalition. These principles include the Principles of Environmental Justice and the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing, which LJI leaders were involved in developing in the 1990s and promoting since then. The coalition also agreed that all Justice 40 initiative-related projects would abide by the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) to ensure that these projects would lead to community benefits and avoid harm. The coalition also committed itself to building capacity for community and organizational self-determination. Lastly, those developing and recognizing this charter committed to addressing their own organization's internal structures of oppression and resolving internal and inter-organizational conflict restoratively.

The New Mexico No False Solutions Coalition (NM NFS) aims to block the development of projects branded as climate mitigation measures that rely on market-based mechanisms, including carbon offsetting schemes and unproven technological fixes such as carbon offsets, carbon capture and sequestration. This coalition took inspiration from the experiences of Pueblo Action Alliance (PAA) organizers, who attended an Indigenous Environmental Network training on Carbon Pricing in July 2019.

Acknowledging the need to develop collective action against the measures that environmental justice movement actors have described as false solutions to climate change due to the lack of supporting evidence, NM NSF steering committee members developed a coalition of organizations to defeat policies enabling and funding these harmful projects. Like the Justice 40 Coalition, the NM NSF Coalition [follows detailed principles](#) to maintain cooperation among coalition members and practice inclusive and democratic organizing. Further, the NM NSF raises awareness about the lack of scientific evidence to support these false solutions. The coalition effectively [defeated a Hydrogen Hub Development legislative initiative](#) four times in 2022, thus blocking legislative support for projects relying on greenhouse gas emissions.

Curbing Emissions Through Civil Society Coalition-Building

Studies point to the importance of civil society groups as catalysts of policy change (Htun and Weldon 2012; Weldon 2011) and the promotion of environmentally just governance (Bullard and Johnson 2000). Further civil society involvement in policy implementation is associated with improved implementation and stronger local environmental governance (Barnes et al. 2016; Hoogesteger and Baud 2016).

Local organizing was a necessary condition for the effective implementation of the Justice40 Initiative and for ensuring that new and existing federal investments complied with Justice40. Local organizing addresses some of the [known challenges of the Justice40 initiatives](#) (Walls, Hines, and Ruggles 2024). These challenges included 1) the [difficulties marginalized groups and community-based organizations face accessing government funding](#) intended for them (Ray,

Herd, and Moynihan 2023), 2) the [inadequacy of measures](#) to identify deserving communities (Mullen, Whyte, and Holifield 2023), and 3) determining what kind of projects counted as a Justice40 investment.

Local environmental justice organizing can reduce barriers to access to government funding by designing and advocating for policies that reduce the administrative burdens placed on them. Further, local organizing can seek policy alignment across subnational, national, and international policies. Community-led collaborations can support efforts to apply for funding and mitigate the negative consequences of obstructive bureaucratic designs of finance mechanisms. Further, local organizing can aid in developing collaborative ties that enable regranting from nonprofit clearinghouses to community-based organizations. Measures that [Justice40 programs used to identify disadvantaged communities](#) (Mullen, Whyte, and Holifield 2023), such as the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool ([CEJST](#)), deemed large geographic areas as disadvantaged despite the presence of more privileged groups within those regions. Thus, community oversight and consultation can aid in the more granular and efficient allocation of resources and block the use of [bureaucratic discretion](#) for [clientelistic spending](#) and [resource allocations that privilege the privileged](#) (Tormos-Aponte et al. 2022; Tormos-Aponte, García-López, and Painter 2021; Tormos-Aponte, Wright II, and Brown 2021).

The NM Justice40 Coalition has engaged in local and regional efforts to ensure that federal funds directly benefit communities and curb greenhouse gas emissions. One important mechanism that the NM Justice40 Coalition has used to achieve this goal has been to push for the adoption of local policy that empowers community members, the intended beneficiaries of Justice40 investments, to participate in resource allocation decision-making processes while preserving community autonomy and self-determination. In doing so, the NM Justice40 Coalition is advancing principles of environmental justice and just transitions.

“We intentionally decided... that we weren’t going to be owned by anybody. Yes, we need some resources... but we were doing this with no resources because we knew at the end of the day that that needed to get done.” Richard Moore

The NM Justice40 Coalition drafted and [pushed state](#) and local governments to adopt executive orders and resolutions in [Albuquerque](#) and rural [San Miguel and Mora Counties](#) that created oversight committees to ensure local environmental justice organizations are prioritized for state and federal funding. These community oversight powers have been crucial for advocacy for funding for air monitoring programs, non-industrial local farming and agricultural education, and renewable energy projects. “On the proactive side, we want our money back. Here’s how it is. These are the issues that our communities are being impacted by, and this is where we think the money should be going,” said Richard Moore. The coalition’s effort enabled the continuity of climate action policies, albeit limited in light of the challenges posed by changes in presidential

administration. While some climate funding was disbursed prior to changes in administration, coalition groups estimate their losses of funding at more than \$60 million. Still, the coalition continues to ensure that the funding that was disbursed continues to be aligned with environmental justice principles and the aims of the Justice40 initiative.

LJI and coalition partner projects include the Agri-Cultura Network (ACN), Local Food Solutions (LFS), and the Villa de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (VONWR). ACN is a cooperative of farms that also engages in agricultural education. As part of this work, ACN organizers advise local farmers on how to adapt to changing environmental conditions while also consulting with elders to re-learn and preserve traditional agricultural knowledge. ACN also trains those seeking to train the workforce, seeking to provide employment for youth. The scale of this network and its collective approach allow ACN to outbid corporate farms and secure supply contracts with large recipients, including public schools, hospitals, restaurants, and a large network of senior centers located on Indigenous lands. By bridging communities and workers, ACN advances just transitions.

LFS seeks to complement the efforts of farmer cooperatives. It operates a commercial kitchen that produces value-added products, which are distributed through the city's dollar stores. LFS also builds greenhouses at schools, clinics, and affordable housing units. With support from the USDA, LFS plants fruit trees to create "food forests," combining ecosystem restoration with agricultural endeavors. They are now starting a tree nursery, and this program also provides training opportunities for youth workers.

VONWR is a refuge resulting from community-based and coalition organizing that successfully raised funding to purchase a former 570-acre dairy farm that polluted the local aquifer. The property, which is adjacent to the Rio Grande River, was slated for industrial development that would have further poisoned the nearby and downstream communities. Instead, organizing success stemming from coalition-building efforts allowed community groups to purchase and preserve their leadership in the management of the land. In doing so, organizers succeeded in turning what would have been a carbon-intensive development into a site of ecosystem restoration and de-aridification projects.

“There is, in these Justice 40 resources, where resources can be used for energy hubs, for hydrogen hubs, and this kind of thing... you’ve got reacting to that. There are resources within Justice 40 that can go to hydrogen hubs, a whole lot of market-based solutions... and our communities are the first every time anywhere along the line to be experimented on.” Richard Moore

The NM NFS defeated hydrogen hub New Mexico state legislation four times in 2022 while also mobilizing to block the [use of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law \(BIL\) funding](#) from being used to establish hydrogen hubs in New Mexico.

The NM Justice40 and the NM NFS Coalitions provide models for how local community-led advocacy and implementation efforts can advance a just transition and push back against assigning climate change mitigation and adaptation funding to projects that rely on greenhouse gases and lack the evidence to show their ability to curb climate change.

Community-based dialogues and an inclusive coalition organizing approach allowed local policymakers to gain further insight into how different groups were experiencing the environmental justice issues that federal policy sought to address. In doing so, communities guide and inform decisions on the most efficient allocation of resources to address environmental justice issues. “On the farm, we created the safe space for discussion and community came together... how you had to invite everybody to express their needs or interests to come to define this intersection based on whatever it is they worked on,” said Richard Moore. This case demonstrates the importance of community leadership in policy implementation. The coalition's vision, organizing activities, and successes make it clear that grassroots stakeholder communities must have a lead role in deciding how government funds are spent is a requirement of maximizing the effectiveness of the policies and avoidance of funding false solutions pushed by self-interested corporations. While the policy benefits of this inclusive approach to policymaking and policy implementation are desirable for achieving policy effectiveness, this approach inclusive of workers and communities is also, by definition and principle, a necessary condition for just transitions.

Challenges and Recommendations

The need to advocate for the effective implementation of climate change policies burdens communities and organizations that have already been burdened with the impact of climate change and the need to advocate for climate action. Once policies like the IRA and BIL were passed, they were imperfect and included measures that environmental justice groups advised would be detrimental to marginalized communities. Given the harmful measures contained in these policies and the burdensome nature of navigating bureaucratic hurdles to gain access to funding, the intended beneficiaries of these investments experience intense exhaustion. The inclusion of measures with questionable records of achieving climate mitigation, such as carbon capture and hydrogen hubs, as part of IRA and BIL initiatives also delayed and hampered their effective implementation, likely producing negative policy feedbacks (see Moynihan and Soss 2014). “Our people are already stretched out,” said Moore. “You know, whatever you call it—the plate is already cracked and tilted or whatever... so people would say, ‘No, no, no, we don’t have the capacity to take on another issue,’” Moore added.

Developing coalitions that have the ability to influence policy implementation also requires intense labor. Coalitions face challenges in uniting different groups with varying priorities and ensuring that the Justice 40 Initiative benefits the communities it is meant to serve. Given the design of existing policies to address environmental and climate justice in the US, whereby policies include false solutions, coalitions must engage in simultaneous proactive and reactive work, where they push for the allocation of resources to community needs while also fighting against the diversion of funds to false solutions like hydrogen hubs and other market-based strategies. “It has been extremely challenging for a grassroots organization to be able to run a proactive and a reactive agenda at the same time,” Moore observed.

Given these challenges and the ample opportunities to leverage the role of community-based organizations and coalitions to implement environmental and climate justice policies effectively, we recommend that policies include support for coalition-building and the operational costs of organizations involved. The local knowledge of locally trusted community-based organizations and their ability to get diverse groups to become involved in energy and broader systemic transitions is what makes for a just transition. Thus, we recommend that greater resources be devoted to community organizing and coalition work. Further, in order for these coalitions to be sustained, policies must promote greater awareness and diffusion of principles of environmental and climate justice and inclusive organizing.

These measures can aid civil society groups pursuing climate action to address the challenges of sustaining and coordinating a decentralized movement network. The Jemez principles of democratic organizing point to ways to build unity capable of resisting policies and discourses that pit communities impacted by climate change against each other. This aspiration can be achieved through the adoption of various coalition and network norms of inclusion (Tormos 2017). Richard Moore observes the negative and harmful consequences “when [movements] bypass process.” This unity in diversity can be a source of strength for social-change organizations (Smith 2013) and help movements cope with hostility against them, such as ongoing systematic attacks against environmental justice groups. The use of federal funding to silence political dissent and international solidarity with justice-seeking groups is among various aspects of the heightened climate of hostility for groups engaged in the pursuit of climate action.

Local groups also experience challenges related to the rapidly changing priorities of presidential administrations. Large sums of resources allocated to climate action were suddenly frozen or canceled. Moore observed that the legality of these actions does not change the current outcome of obstructing local access to national climate mitigation and adaptation funding. Local groups assessed their estimated losses, identifying at least \$60 million in funds committed that will no longer reach their intended beneficiaries. Local groups expect that sum to rise above \$100 million. This reversal and efforts to block the implementation of national climate policy presents significant challenges for local groups. Locally, organizations had engaged in efforts, many of

which had significant financial and other implications, in preparation to receive climate action resources.

In contexts lacking consensus across the political spectrum on the need for climate action, electoral volatility can hamper the continuity and local implementation of national climate policy. Still, movements have not been discouraged from pursuing climate action. Moore reminds movement partners that “some of the biggest victories in decarbonizing were not dependent on federal funding.”

Moore calls for embracing horizontal and liberatory pedagogies that emphasize knowledge exchanges and the recognition of the value of community-held and generated knowledge, including Indigenous Peoples knowledge. This pedagogical approach is particularly beneficial for organized civil society efforts to compel actors to engage in climate action as it informs and enhances strategic development and decision-making processes. One challenge to sustaining this pedagogical approach has been the heightened vulnerability of environmental justice movement elders and the difficulty of rapidly enabling knowledge preservation and transfers.

In contexts of political volatility, civil society groups seek consistent and increased support from the philanthropic community to sustain and scale up the operation of environmental justice organizations and programming. Further, obstructions to climate action in one scale of governance (i.e., national) may not preclude advancements above or below that scale. Moore reports continued efforts to advance climate justice policies at the state and local level. This approach of pursuing climate action across levels of governance has numerous benefits for environmental governance (Tormos-Aponte and García-López 2018).

Research Methods

This case study relies on a community and movement-based participatory research methodology. This method seeks to prefigure a form of movement-based research that establishes relationships of reciprocity among researchers and organizers, recognizes organizers and the communities they are accountable to as knowledge-holders and knowledge generators, and seeks to avoid the tendency to solely focus on the problems communities face by also focusing on community desires and their efforts to advance solutions to their problems. In doing so, this method builds on a tradition of scholar activism within the environmental justice movement that uses research as part of a broader series of actions aimed at advancing social change and resisting harmful policies in marginalized communities. This method is also responsive to calls from Indigenous Peoples activists to advance a framework for the ethical use of Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge, a need generated by provisions of US Federal policy like the Justice40 initiative, IRA, and BIL. This case study drew insights from a relational interviewing approach and collaboration with Richard Moore, Co-Coordinator of LJI, the life histories and experiential knowledge of organizers Ananda Lee Tan and Tyler Norman, and Fernando Tormos-Aponte’s participatory

action research. This collective draws insights from more than 90 years of combined experience with the environmental justice movement. These methods have been central to social movement research due to their suitability for gathering data about activists' motives for participation and their activities (Blee and Taylor 2002). Relational interviewing is an approach to interview research that builds on principles of treating interviewees with dignity, as knowledge holders and generators, and developing relationships, not just rapport, that result from clear dialogue on mutually agreed terms for interacting (Fujii 2017; see also Pearlman 2024).

As part of the method for this study, we engaged in coalition-level and collaborative ethnographies. These sought to generate insight into the dynamics of coalition-building, allowing us to go beyond individual-level data from interviews and informal conversations, which also enabled access to important insight into perceptions of social problems, the operation of the coalition, challenges faced, and opportunities for advancing solutions to climate change. This two-level approach follows Blee's (2012) study of emerging grassroots groups. This multi-level observational approach aims to 1) validate and triangulate data on the dynamics of coalition building for the pursuit of climate solutions and 2) gain insight into relations shaping coalitional decision-making processes, an area of inquiry that Minkoff and McCarthy (2005) referred to as a "black box." We also observe coalition work during periods of high and low public activity to adequately understand the challenges and opportunities that the coalition faced in the pursuit of climate solutions.

We analyzed archival materials, including movement coalition charters, principles, press releases, websites, and internal and external movement communications, among other sources. We also conduct a thematic analysis of our observations, including our interviews with Richard Moore. The case study employed various techniques, including process tracing and grounded theory, to analyze the data. We use process tracing to analyze the factors shaping coalition dynamics and outcomes; this technique is widely used to identify and map pathways mediating observed or expected relationships between variables (George and Bennet 2005; Weller and Barnes 2014). Likewise, we use grounded theory to build a series of themes and thematically sort our observations. Grounded theory builds on the combined strengths of inductive and deductive analysis approaches, which together allow us to examine the theoretically relevant variables described above while also identifying and theorizing about factors shaping coalitions dynamics that existing literature has yet to identify (Berg and Lune 2012; Strauss 1987), thus advancing theories of coalition building in the context of climate change collective action.

The research approach adopted for this study builds on traditions of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and participatory action research (PAR). Grounded in the principles of climate and environmental justice—such as equitable partnerships, education focused on social and ecological issues, and fair resource access—CBPR and PAR offer frameworks that prioritize the lived experiences and leadership of communities (Gagnon et al.

2016; Kemmis and McTaggart 2005; Lichtveld et al. 2016; Roque et al. 2022; Vaughn and Jacquez 2020). These approaches enable and enhance research that directly examines how communities and civil society groups engage with the impacts of climate change on resource governance and management. Through iterative cycles of inquiry, action, and reflection, PAR fosters a deeper understanding of community and civil society needs, ensuring that research outcomes are meaningful and beneficial to all participants in the pursuit of transformative change.

Recommendations for Future Research

In what follows, we provide recommendations for future research on local efforts to advance a just transition. Movement-based participatory research must be based on relationships of trust and reciprocity with organizers and the communities to which they are accountable. The environmental justice movement has a history of experiencing knowledge extraction from actors in research and academic positions of privilege that have, at times, caused harm due to the inaccurate or adverse conclusions, prescriptions, and assumptions made due to their detachment from the movement. Rather than detachment, movement-based participatory research must embrace engagement and collaboration based on principles of reciprocity, the recognition of movement and community-generated knowledge as authors and knowledge holders and creators, and the ethical use of community and movement-generated knowledge. Researchers can play an important role in enhancing the intelligibility of policy and the technical aspects of the application of existing knowledge. Researchers who only spend minutes, weeks, or months observing movement work will often face intractable hardships to accurately represent the rich and long history of the environmental justice movement and the activist traditions it builds and carries on. “The history with those organizations was important. That’s why I say it’s thousands of years. It’s not just two years of the formation of that,” said Moore.

Movement-based participatory research must create the conditions for community and movement stewardship over observations and data, involvement in research agenda-setting, design, analysis, and dissemination. As with policy that affects them, communities must be involved in setting the ground rules for research. We argue that research lacks rigor when it cannot draw insights into social problems from those who hold knowledge of them stemming from lived experiences. “Our people know and understand those issues... they have to see it, touch it, smell it, or taste it. It’s going to be hard to organize around things they can’t directly experience,” said Richard Moore. We add that it’s hard to research things that researchers have not directly experienced.

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