



# Decarbonizing Buildings to Make Communities Healthier — and Wealthier

How BlocPower pioneered a program to decarbonize buildings and spread the benefits of green energy projects in low- and moderate-income communities

Sector Energy

Project Location Alameda County, CA

Key Partner Revalue.io





# Overview

Donnel Baird’s family had to weigh impossible choices to stay warm when he was young. They would turn on the oven and open the windows to let the methane gas escape — a dangerous but necessary workaround that may sound all too familiar to the 16% of U.S. households facing energy poverty exacerbated by old and inefficient buildings.

Now, Baird is a pioneering climate technology entrepreneur who understands that making sure no family needs to make that choice again is the same mission as ensuring no family is locked out of the clean energy transition. He also knows there is no path to greenhouse gas reduction at scale that doesn’t run directly through low- and moderate-income communities.

He founded BlocPower with a mission to green aging urban buildings by replacing unhealthy, fossil fuel-burning heating and cooling systems with efficient, all-electric heat pumps, water heaters and solar panels. To distribute the benefits of clean technologies to those on the frontlines of climate change, BlocPower places financially underserved communities at the very center of its operations.

To help residents access and own the social, environmental, financial and health benefits that come with greening their buildings, BlocPower provides software that allows cities to design electrification programs where they’re most needed, and offers innovative financing strategies to keep home energy upgrades affordable for building owners. The company also is a pioneer in workforce development, reimagining who can and should lead the charge in a just, clean energy transition by training workers in low- to moderate-income communities.

BlocPower is an example of how we can build an equitable future and put a serious dent in greenhouse gas emissions seeping out of buildings — which account for nearly a third of the total emissions in the U.S. Existing buildings stand for decades to come, so every effort to accelerate the pace and scale of their energy upgrades will become a force multiplier.

# Elemental Impact

BlocPower joined the Elemental portfolio at a pivotal moment in the company's growth, looking to expand geographically beyond its home market in New York and establish a presence in California.

With funding and project support from Elemental, the company initiated 13 building retrofits in Alameda County, CA. Elemental introduced the BlocPower team to local partners, including developers and women- and minority-owned contractors, whose work is supported by local and frontline workforce training program graduates.

One of these retrofits focused on the home of the Parkers, who discovered their property in San Leandro, CA was not insulated. Their efforts to stay warm in the winter hiked their energy bills up so high they worried they would lose their house. For a \$285 monthly payment, BlocPower and local developer Revalue.io electrified and weatherized the Parkers' property, removing the gas furnace and adding insulation, a heat pump water heater, new windows and doors, electric appliances, five mini split HVAC systems and a new electrical smart panel. Now, the Parkers' energy usage is efficient and effective — keeping their home comfortable year round.

Those energy reductions matter, and BlocPower and Elemental took it a step further to democratize access to wealth by ensuring anyone can tap into the unparalleled investment opportunities in the transition to a clean energy economy. BlocPower issued a [Climate Impact Note](#), an innovative peer-to-peer fundraising strategy where community members can invest in the startup and provide project-based capital for green energy projects in low- and moderate-income communities around the country.

This means successful projects reap double benefits: cleaner, healthier homes and communities through green energy upgrades and economic opportunity through investment returns.

What's more, embracing a crowdfunding strategy not only gives people who are concerned about climate change a chance to invest in climate solutions and build wealth, but also unlocks ways to channel their investment into improving their local communities and creating jobs.

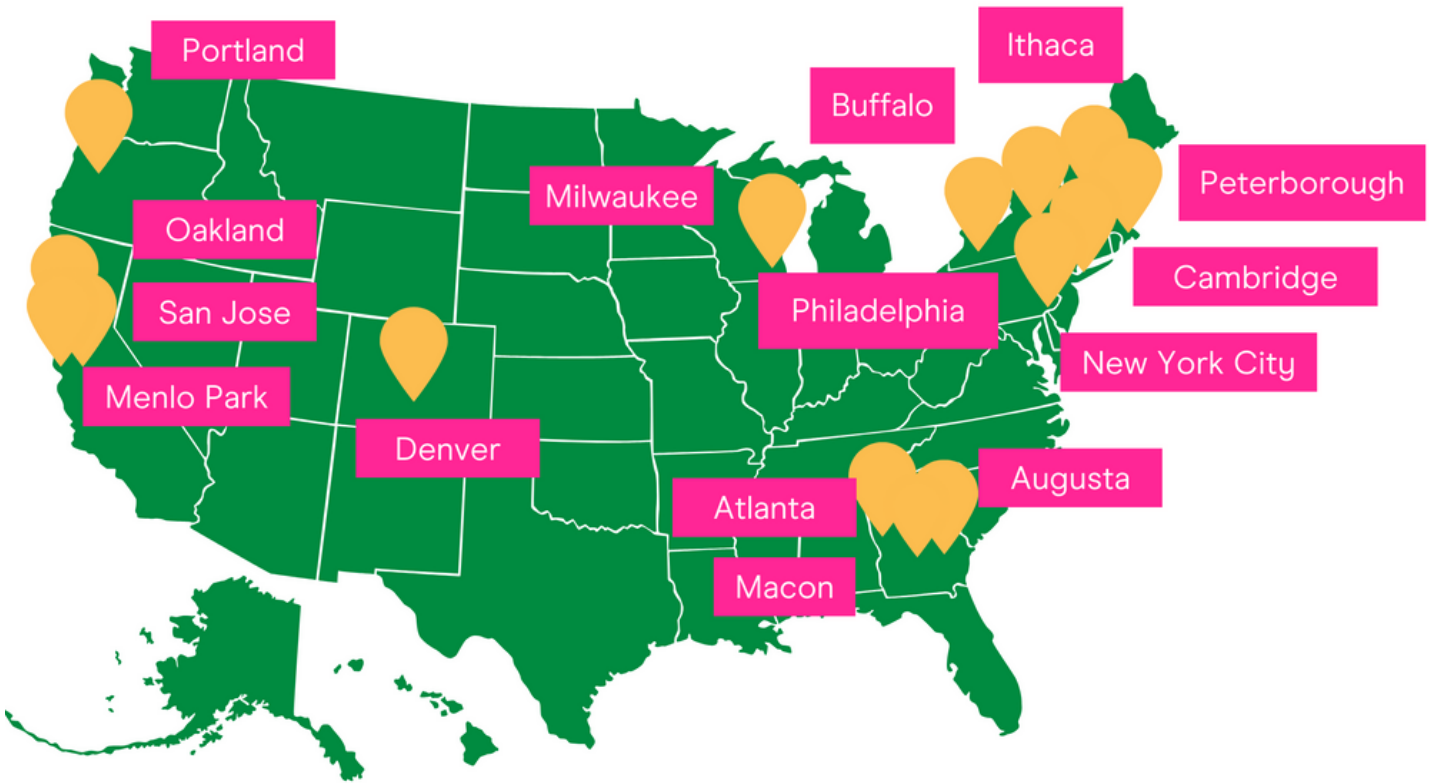


*The weatherization process*

## Powering Up

Entrepreneurs like Donnel Baird have the ability to see what others don't, the drive to see that vision through and the resilience to bounce back from failure. But even the most seasoned founders can use support as a company grows. Elemental provided coaching as Baird navigated the complex world of fundraising, helped him refine his already formidable thought leadership and communications skills and funded interns and mentorship opportunities as he built out his team from 26 to more than three times that size.





Since completing the project with Elemental in Oakland, BlocPower has scaled across the U.S.

## The Next Level

Insights and perspectives the company gained from the project with Elemental helped BlocPower create a repeatable business model, which it has now deployed in over a dozen U.S. cities, including five in California. BlocPower also has raised more than \$3M in successful crowdfunding campaigns with returns as high as 7.25% for its community investors. Ranging from \$50 to hundreds of thousands of dollars, BlocPower has received contributions from more than 1,000 crowdfunding investors across three campaigns.

One takeaway from the collaboration is that creative financing strategies are vital to engaging customers: BlocPower’s financing model allows owners to eliminate fossil fuel use in their buildings for as little as \$0 down.

Another is that relying on and compensating trusted local partners is key to demonstrating commitment to the community — and yields important insights. As BlocPower formed relationships with local contractors across the U.S., including those in Alameda County, it again and again heard these partners say their work was impeded by a shortage of trained clean energy workers. So BlocPower turned its attention to workforce development, and in 2021, launched its Civilian Climate Corps, which has trained over 1,700 under- or unemployed New Yorkers and facilitated more than 400 job placements in heat pump and solar installation, building energy auditing and related fields.



# 30%

of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions come from residential and commercial buildings.

And BlocPower's workforce development efforts don't stop in New York: In early 2023, the City of San José, CA awarded BlocPower nearly \$500K to electrify 250 residential buildings while supporting green workforce development.

"When you give someone from a low-income community a green construction job, you turn that person into a climate advocate," Baird said. "The way to do that is not by talking at them, it's to employ them."

BlocPower's market expansion project with Elemental helped the company secure a \$63M Series A fundraising round in 2020 and validated its continued scale to dozens of additional cities across the country, including Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Baltimore and more. Now a leading national climate technology company, BlocPower has raised nearly \$250M and completed energy projects in more than 1,000 apartments, homes, houses of worship and commercial buildings. Donnel Baird was named the inaugural recipient of TIME's 2022 "Dreamer of the Year" award and the company he founded was Fast Company's #4 Most Innovative Company in the World in 2022.

BlocPower was honored in March 2023 as an Emerging Leader by Vice President Kamala Harris in recognition of its building decarbonization and workforce development programs in "Justice 40" communities.

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— Donnel Baird  
BlocPower CEO

