

ADDRESSING CLIMATE VULNERABILITY IN YOUR COMMUNITY – A SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PRACTITIONER CONVERSATIONS

INTRODUCTION

At the October 27, 2017 Metropolitan Council PlanIt Workshop “How to Address Climate Vulnerability in Your Community,” University of St. Thomas students from the Environmental Writing and Community Outreach course, through the Office of Sustainability Initiatives’ Sustainable Communities Partnership, recorded conversations of workshop participants, consisting primarily of City and County staff, to highlight opportunities and challenges in performing climate change planning for communities. After recording the morning workshop, students transcribed the breakout sessions and created a comprehensive account of the event, including strong recurring themes, challenges, communication roadblocks, and ideas expressed within the breakout groups. This synthesis demonstrates the relationship between the “major players,” local communities, and other stakeholders involved in these essential climate conversations. Addressing the political nature of climate change is crucial to the development of the discussion.

Purpose

This document aims to discuss the challenges in undertaking climate change planning, including a common misconception that addressing climate change must be expensive in order to be effective, the difficulty of garnering staff and financial support from various municipal departments, and the limited resources and time available to perform this work. This report will also discuss community partnerships and ways in which stakeholders can influence government and government officials. Additionally, the document will cover the political nature of climate change in depth. This paper will discuss why practitioners should frame the issue of climate change in a way that will encourage rural communities, who may be unreceptive to the notion of climate change, to engage in such conversations. One of the bigger issues that will be explored is that communities do not always have evaluative standards for plans and therefore do not know exactly what actions to take. An absence of Plan examples and sharing of resources between various communities generates the need for a broad template for all communities to follow.

Deliverables

This analysis will provide various recommendations for how staff or stakeholders ought to present the concept of climate change to urban and rural communities, including sympathetic and unsympathetic residents. Furthermore, this document will address how to properly address the lack of communication and shared resources between communities, and how collaboration can improve the conversations about climate change impacts. Finally, recommendations will address apathy within communities and misconceptions of the short-term and long-term costs. The principle aim of this assessment is to analyze and report effectively on the many issues discussed at the Metropolitan Council workshop and provide well-crafted recommendations to facilitate climate change and resilience planning efforts for metropolitan communities.

COMMUNICATION AND BUY-IN

Public Engagement

A major theme of the workshop was how to effectively frame the conversation of climate change to the public so that the public is engaged and understands the issues. Workshop participants expressed a frustration and hesitation in discussing climate change with their communities, especially when they feel their residents are apathetic or in denial about climate change. One workshop member suggested framing the topic of climate change as a conversation rather than a lecture. This does not mean practitioners cannot show facts and scientific evidence, but communication lines must be open so that the conversation can include productive listening to different points of view. By bringing various viewpoints into the conversation, the topic becomes relatable and understandable for all audiences. If the problems associated with climate change seem too large or out of reach, it will be more difficult to get people involved in implementing change. One breakout group mentioned that if climate change does not seem to relate to an individual’s personal life, it is often harder to encourage them to be interested and involved. Other participants discussed that climate change conversations often overwhelm and frustrate people, which is why it is important to have a positive or optimistic approach to the topic. If presenters merely list the mounting problems and all the negative climate change impacts, people tend to feel discouraged. If people feel like they cannot contribute solutions, they will be less likely to remain involved. However,

if individuals are encouraged to take positive and realistic actions to produce solutions, change seems more possible. As one consultant suggested, “People need to see the amazing examples of where this has been done in the past...once you can see an example, then it suddenly feels possible.” Demonstrating that climate change affects many different people makes solutions more inclusive rather than polarizing. By connecting people through a common problem and highlighting possible solutions, practitioners can bring stakeholders together to address the problem.



Intentional and Inclusive Engagement

To facilitate effective climate change conversations and include all viewpoints, more people need to be involved beyond just the elected officials or “major players”. A County level staff member stated that her goal was to influence both the politicians and the communities she works with because encouraging the people affected by climate issues to invest in the conversation is just as important as getting the major players involved. First, staff need to identify who the real “major players” are. While politicians and various organizations are influential in these conversations, media outlets may also play large awareness-raising role as well.

Multiple participants at the workshop brought up the importance of inviting the public into the conversation to ascertain their perspectives and opinions. As workshop participant put it, “We need to find ways [for] City Councils to not just be talking to any empty room by stating whatever jargon, but they need to start reflecting different perspectives, more perspectives, and bring in more voices.” One of the small groups discussed about various strategies to involve the community in the City Council meetings, which can be a challenging task. Utilizing social media to alert the public of such conversations can be ineffective because of the extensive amount of time it takes for the little effect on participation. One workshop participant stated that for many people in the general public, attending City Council meetings is simply not possible due to time and other constraints. To entice the public to attend, Councils should provide food, games, and childcare. Another issue that was discussed was the difficulty of making sure everyone has a voice in the climate conversation. For example, one participant mentioned that a community group asked for environmental resources to be translated into Spanish; this did not occur because the task would have incurred too much cost. In this case, when the City does not allocate funds for translation services, an important segment of the population is effectively missing from the climate change conversation. One participant also raised the problem that it is difficult to bring people into the conversation when you cannot even identify who is missing from it. The latter issues acutely influence effective communication between decision-makers and interested stakeholders. The problems raised by the workshop groups must be addressed to ensure that engagement is intentional, inclusive, meaningful, and yields results.

Buy-in

When addressing issues within a population or specific community, buy-in is extremely important and has a huge impact on the future outcome of that community. A representative from the workshop stated that, “Without buy-in there’s no progress, there’s no funding, there’s no official action.” It is essential to identify a target audience to know who is being encouraged to make behavioral changes. The general public is often that target audience along with politicians who influence the public and make decisions regarding societal changes. It is important that the media addresses the issue of climate change because if the media is not covering it, then the community is likely less engaged in discussing the issue. However, the media is not always an effective broker of conversation because a many community members may be convinced that climate change is not real and that it is not occurring. Moreover, a County staff member claimed that the general public is often resistant to change because, “Politically for us, it’s the constituents [who] are telling staff and elected officials that they believe in climate change, or they don’t.” While engaging with climate change deniers, practitioners need to locally frame and reference the discussion. Elected officials need to express actions to the community as small-scale, achievable changes that are tangible and within reach. Although elected officials often guide the community in one direction or another, they are not the only ones who are influential. Local organizations, City Commissions, nonprofits, and businesses are also influential in expressing environmental and climate change concerns. The key here is communicating climate change in a manner that will be embraced by the local community, encourages change, and effectively helps everyone to achieve buy-in to the climate conversation.

Work Silos

Participants in the workshop also highlighted that work and expertise silos between cities and counties remain an impediment to conducting climate change work. A “silo” happens when people tend to work within their department, group, etc. and do not communicate or collaborate much with others. A representative from a County addressed the

challenge of collaboration, stating, “We have really limited responsibilities under law and the people working for us have no desire to do anything beyond what’s required by state law because they don’t want a City Council telling them what to do, so we don’t have a coordinated effort.” The reluctance to collaborate stems from jurisdictions not wanting to be told what they can or cannot do, or what projects will and will not be approved by a decision body. Another example of this challenge comes from addressing the land use, “The authority lies with the cities and the townships within the County.” The representative continued, “We [the County] don’t have the land use authority to say and develop what should be occurring on this particular floodplain.” This clearly demonstrates the struggles between different jurisdictions over who has the authority to implement change. In this case, although the County may put forth recommendations regarding land use, the City ultimately decides what will take place. Even if all the necessary staff resources and capacity are present, if staff at different jurisdictions do not interact and communicate effectively with each other, progress may not be made. An individual expressed their concern that “some counties are really bad in terms of the silos talking to each other,” and even went on to ask his group for guidance in overcoming this issue. The group only reiterated his concern, and another member commented that, “[overcoming the silo issue] is not the easiest thing to do because it’s going to be a change. A lot of the staff members have been there for 20 years, and things have always been the same way. So, when I come in within the last 10 months wanting to change things, it’s a challenge.” He brings up the point that when staff has been constant for so long, they can isolate themselves and refuse to communicate with newer employees or embrace their new ideas. The same individual stated, “Our board is all 60+ year-old white men, and they have siloed themselves.” This can pose a challenge for anyone attempting to promote change within these jurisdictions. A lack of collaboration or closed lines of communication creates obstacles in planning for climate change and is another impediment to ensuring commitment to the climate change conversation.



SYNTHESIS

It’s no secret that the work on Comprehensive Plans is challenging and diverse. City and County staff often consist of small teams that are stretched between multiple projects with looming deadlines. Representatives at one table seemed to find difficulty to determine how to tackle the curation of their Comprehensive Plan: “I don’t even know where to start,” one individual admitted, while another said, “This is the first Comprehensive Plan I’ve ever done.” Many appear overwhelmed by the approaching deadline and shared the sentiment of, “I wish we would have started a year ago.” Preparing for the plan itself is a major process. Integrating solutions that address climate vulnerability, however, can feel separate and extraneous from the statutory requirements. One representative said of their climate change planning, “We do bits and pieces of it, but we don’t have an actual climate change group that meets on a regular basis. [...] I think our biggest challenge in doing climate vulnerability work is organizational structure.”

Organizational Structure and Statutory Authority

Current organizational structures can make municipal departments feel like they are clashing rather than collaborating. This conflict becomes an inhibitor to change when larger issues such as natural disasters or climate change fall under the scope of many different departments. One of the representatives explained their personal experience with this challenge: “One of the things we struggle with is getting our Public Works staff on board with seeing their role in climate change planning.” Many representatives voiced their frustrations in getting other departments to think outside of the box. Collaborating across departments towards beneficial solutions requires staff to adopt new ways of thinking. There is a need for staff to leave their comfort zones to make effective collaboration possible.

Statutory roles and responsibilities can prevent staff from testing new approaches and reaching out to other departments, preventing collaboration on projects that may integrate change. One representative shared that their department’s “biggest challenge is coming up with a coordinated effort. [...] We have really limited responsibilities under law, and our people that are doing this have no desire to do anything beyond what’s required by state law.” This dissonance between departments makes finding and working towards solutions difficult at best and impossible at worst. Problems arise when the staff members feel that they do not have the authority to initiate or implement change. These representatives might be innovating creative solutions, or developing wildly successful plans, but they may find that these ideas fall outside of their authority. As one individual said, “a big challenge is feeling my hands are tied, and it’s not my decision to complete the resilience component.” Another County-level staff person stated, “we don’t have the land use authority to say and develop what should be occurring on this particular floodplain in an extreme weather event.”

City and County staff are seeking a balance between doing what's expected of them and planning ahead for unforeseen needs.

There is also the struggle to come up with “real ideas [to] put into the Plan that will actually affect people; that [the City] can actually do” to help the community in the long term. Some representatives feel there is a lack of resources to help them embed innovations and benchmark with other communities. Staff seek frameworks that can help them move through the process of drafting a plan. One individual said, “Help with rules or policies would be great,” for drafting a plan that will be effective.

Capacity

As previously mentioned, staff resources vary greatly between communities, and can often end up being a significant issue when attempting to promote climate change planning. Many individuals brought up this challenge, and it became apparent that a lack of staff resources or a lack of motivation within an existing staff can put a quick stop to any attempt to create change. As one individual explained, “When you're looking at a small community; we have one City administrator, that's it.” When a small community takes action to mitigate or adapt to climate change without effective staff capacity, it becomes a major challenge to make any relevant and lasting change. In yet another case, a participant described a situation in which there was plenty of staff available, but a lack of motivation. He explains: “There's a bunch of people motivated, but our staff don't want to go beyond the basic statutory requirements.” The same individual later stated, “These smart people are sitting there without a venue for doing anything.” He recognizes the problem that even with enough time and staff resources, there still needs to be support for the proposed changes and the motivation to further implement said changes. Representatives felt that “if the cities didn't give money for it, you feel like you can't.” One representative stated that they “struggle with this all the time.” From these conversations, it's obvious that staff often feel that their duties are meant for a particular set of deliverables that restrict taking liberties or pushing forward new, innovative initiatives.



Time also becomes an issue in these situations, as one representative of a small community mentioned: “[Our] staff has very little time because we are a smaller staff and have to wear a lot of different hats.” Another representative explained that “because we're all scrambling just to finish our Update, we don't have time to build the relationships with all these leaders and advocates.”

Governance

Just as City staff must have the motivation and authority to make changes within their cities, it is potentially an even greater issue if elected officials are not motivated to promote change. This issue came up in many groups, as it seems to be a recurring and common problem within Minnesotan communities. One woman brought up the issue that “city officials and staff are afraid to address or even say the words climate change.” The issue of climate change is often an avoided topic for elected officials, as they are reluctant to make statements that they know might bring about opposition and conflict. Another individual reiterated this point in their statement: “what [elected officials] aren't wanting to see are any drastic changes, for fear that they will anger someone, draw attention to themselves, and lose their position.” Another voiced their agreement in saying, “politicians a lot of times do what they think their constituents want them to do.” Other individuals brought up the challenge they face when speaking up for their position and trying to influence elected officials. One representative explained that, “large landowners and farmers are going to have an outsized impact in terms of public officials; the opinions of those who have 1,000 acres of land count for more than someone with their half acre for their house.” When elected officials value these opinions over other voices, they can prioritize issues that pertain to a particular constituent or constituents over other perspectives.

The Public

Members of the public are often educated about certain aspects of climate change, but they aren't always motivated to act, especially when climate change seems like a larger issue than one resident's actions can solve. Climate change has countless sides to it—from the causes, to the effects, to the solutions. There are so many aspects to climate change that it can become easy to become overwhelmed by the prospect of addressing it. One representative at the session said, “I think part of the challenge - in the planning world that I live in, the local government world I live in - is when you talk about climate change, it's a very big issue. It's literally a global problem, a global issue. And it's attached to weather, so it seems like a big technical, scientific thing. [...] I think if we talk about catastrophic, or increasing the numbers of heat events or high frequency rate events [...] [talking] in those terms, that seems bigger and more abstract, and less in the controllable range of what the City can do.” Even if the public is thoroughly educated in the more technical details of climate change—at least enough to know what the problems are and why they matter so much—the details are still daunting.

With so many different perspectives and beliefs, a common problem is finding solutions that are not only effective, but are also supported by enough residents of the community. Some citizens might be willing to sacrifice personal comforts to contribute towards dealing with climate change, while others might not be. Some citizens might prioritize verbal action, while others might believe written demand for change is more important. One participant commented on this issue and said: “We have a very diverse population and very diverse beliefs. And so, it’s a really big challenge [...] to take a stand on something like that in our area.”

Another representative emphasized that public action can often be the driving force behind change within the government. “It is almost like court-appointed stuff, you know in situations when you’ve got a resistant client, how do you get past the [...] blinders they have, for whatever reason. And sometimes community pressure can help remove those blinders.” However, finding advocates with the initiative and ability to bring others together to start this change is part of the challenge. How do Counties and Cities enable citizens, and give them the chance to participate in climate change planning? How can residents become equipped to truly create change within their home Cities? Solutions should create partnerships, build systems to influence decision-makers, and address diverse viewpoints and perspectives on climate change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In performing climate change planning work, participants in the Plantt workshop emphasized the difficulty in communicating the importance of climate action to communities that do not readily accept the science of climate change. This concern is valid, especially in a state such as Minnesota, which has a diverse population with varying backgrounds and perspectives. It is important to note that presenting the issue of climate change to a rural community should be approached differently than presenting it to an urban community.

Localize the Climate Change Conversation

Urban and rural populations have different needs and perspectives on the issue. Stories can relate the issue directly to the lives of those in rural or urban communities and make the concept of climate change less of a “far away” problem. When presenting planning and policy proposals to a rural area, it is important to address the threat the changing climate has on livelihoods. Urban communities, on the other hand, may be more interested on how the changing climate will affect the City infrastructure and services. Throughout the world, energy and water management in urban areas has had to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The threat to these vital assets will likely increase in the future (Climate and Society).



- **Rural Community Example: Crop Health** The rising temperatures that come along with climate change are especially detrimental to Minnesota’s most valuable crop: corn. For each day corn crops spend in temperatures 86 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, their potential yields drop by up to 6% (Pierre-Louis). Adapting to climate change and lessening its effects stands to improve the lives of those in rural, agricultural communities. Excessive carbon emissions in the air have an adverse effect on agricultural products. Greenhouse gas emissions reduce the nutrition of crops, which in turn brings down their value (Climate and Society).
- **Urban Community Example: Flood Prone Areas** Utilize the Metropolitan Council’s Localized Flood Map to assess what areas are subject to potential localized flooding. You can search for a specific neighborhood and demonstrate where areas of greatest risk are located. If there is a popular park or landmark in your community, consider the effect localized flooding may have on it. Build a specific scenario-related example so your residents can understand how the changing climate will affect their lives.
- **Universal Community Example: Rising Energy Cost** Have your residents look at their energy bill. Most services have a feature that shows a graph or chart of the energy used in comparison to the outside average temperature. There is a correlation between energy costs and temperature. When it is hotter in the summer, residents’ air conditioners require more energy to maintain a comfortable in-home temperature. As global temperatures are on the rise, so are the temperatures here Minnesota. According to Risky Business’ Assessment, “Electricity demand will likely increase throughout the century, increasing 4% to 13% by the end of the century (with a 1-in-20 chance of a more than 18% increase). Even when combined with changes in heating demand, this change translates into a likely increase of 4% to 18% in energy costs” (Heat in the Heartland Report).

Establish Climate Knowledge Brokers

It is one thing to have these examples available; it is another to get your residents to interact with them. The question then becomes: How do you effectively make these personal connections to local communities? Gathering members of a community together and presenting a generalized scientific lecture on the topic probably is not the best option, particularly if a large percentage of the population is skeptical of the climate science. Having an established and well-respected member of the community speak to the population in a way that customizes solutions to the unique situations of the community is a more effective approach to presenting the issue. These community members are called climate knowledge brokers. The climate science provided in the IPCC's research is often complicated and hard to understand for individuals outside of the scientific community. Climate knowledge brokers bridge the gap between scientists and the general public by simplifying the complex findings of their research (CDKN). It is essential that these brokers have a solid understanding of both the science, as well as the mindset of the community members that they are discussing the issue with (Dilling and Lemos). Another important approach for the broker is to not solely focus on the negatives of the situation. When presented with too much pessimism, people may feel a sense of hopelessness and choose to shut down and not address the problem at all. Brokers can frame the issue as an opportunity to leave a better planet for our children, or as a way to create green jobs within the community (Hoffman).



If you are building a relationship with a member of a specific community, also utilize them like a representative. Ensure that the relationship is a partnership. You could even ask if they would host an event where community members could engage in a discussion on specific topics. If you're able to create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their stories and concerns, you will have a better chance of success.

Go to the Community

So how else can you engage with your residents and local community members on these issues to collect feedback used for planning? Practitioners should consider all of the community members' varying needs and desires. To discern community needs, there has to be intentional and meaningful engagement with residents. Dan Milz, a professor from the University of Minnesota, explained in his presentation at the PlanIt workshop that the standard practice of a PowerPoint, panel of experts, and a room full of empty chairs with a "reserved for the public" sign has proven unsuccessful. When looking at the alternatives, it is important to meet citizens where they are at, both physically and mentally. As mentioned before, you can use a climate broker to learn about a specific approaches and accommodations to address group needs. The broker can share information and also collect community information. You can personalize the issue and give community members tangible examples and collect feedback on the local examples.

Planners can consider to youth and family events to engage with community members at community-driven events. Set up a table at a school open house, local sporting event or community parade. Have fliers with talking points of what you want their opinion on. Take notes or have them fill out a survey. For example, if there's a thriving hockey community in your area, set up a table at a local youth hockey tournament with cocoa and clipboards.

Engage Using Social Media

Another way to engage with your community is to use social media. An article by Jennifer Peterson explains the Facebook experiment, titled "100 Great Ideas," that was utilized to gather ideas for the future of a library in Miami. These community organizers created an open forum on Facebook inviting anyone in Miami to join in on the discussion. More than 600 members joined, and 150 ideas were shared. Facebook particularly has many features that could be beneficial in collecting residents' ideas and opinions. There are many ways to engage community members to get their input. Remember to firstly meet residents where they are at and be sure to give them an easy & accessible way to share their thoughts.

Break Down Silos

As important as it is to engage local communities, it is essential to do the same in the workplace. Building relationships and having value-driven discussion with other departments is crucial. Ask what others do – listen and learn. A break-out group at the PlanIt workshop defined silos as very specific knowledge contained within a group with no intention of broadening a given issue beyond that skill set. To break up silos, they emphasized why collaboration matters. Award-winning journalist Gillian Tett dives deep into the issue of departmental isolation in *The Silo Effect*. It is a great resource to begin thinking about breaking down silos. She presents five lessons learned over time to ameliorate the silo obstacle.

1. Keep the boundaries of groups or departments “flexible and fluid” (Tett 247). Rotate staff between departments, if possible, and design physical spaces that comfortably channel people together – thereby forcing interactions. Create programs where people from different teams can collaborate in that comfortable setting. A County representative at the workshop said, “What I’ve done is met separately with departments. I’ve had countless meetings with Public Health to see how I can incorporate public health ideas into the plan. A lot of the staff have been there for 20 years, and it’s always been this way. Then, I come in 10 months ago and I’m changing things, so it’s going to take some time still.”
2. Pay and incentives are essential (Tett 248). Try collaborative pay systems or being versatile with your department’s budget. A County representative at the workshop said, “We are leading by example. We’ve found that one way to do this is to give them (another department) money. So, we’re taking money out of our budget, and we’re going to give it to them to implement, and this is a huge win for us.”
3. “Information flows matter too” (Tett 248). If information is tucked away, risks can build up. Individual departments can interpret data differently, so dialogue around data is still necessary. “Cultural translators” can be employed to move between the various departments and explain to each department what is happening in the others. These “translators” can be people who already work for the organization and know it well. “If someone is saying something in a different language from the one you use, that does not mean you should ignore it,” said Paul Tucker, former Deputy Governor of the Bank of England (Tett 249). Sharing data is imperative, especially if it is related to a complex problem such as climate change.
4. It pays off if people try to “reimagine taxonomies they use to recognize the world, or even experiment with alternatives” (Tett 249). Classification systems can become outdated and serve narrow groups. Doctors at the Cleveland Clinic, for example, changed the way they organized medicine. Care has since been designed to reflect patient needs rather than to reflect systems based on traditional physician training.
5. Use technology to “challenge silos” (Tett 250). Feel open to testing different ways of organizing data. Computers do not have biases like humans; they can be programmed to rearrange and process data unlike a person ever could. It is simple to utilize network drives on computers instead of secured departmental ones. All in all, it is important to remember that “mastering silos is not a task that is ever truly completed” (Tett 247). It is a process of making efforts to collaborate and “buy-in” to the issue – which in this case is climate change. A district representative at the workshop said, “without buy-in, there’s no progress, funding, knowledge, or change.”

Build Funding Capacity

Reaching across silos helps make community action more effective, but there is limited progress that can be made without sufficient resources. Probably the most widely discussed resource, whether relating to City planning or otherwise, is funding. The greatest plan cannot be put into action, at least not properly, if those who are acting on it lack the funds to do so. So, certainly, financial capacity is a big issue that should be carefully considered. One source of funding that is worth focus is funding from the nonprofit sector. Though a nonprofit may or may not directly support an “environmental” cause, they may support community causes with sustainability and resiliency goals.

Of course, more funding may not always be the most necessary change. Better communication between different local and regional organizations may lessen the need for funds if their goals align. Organizations can “stack” their funds on the same project, widening the possibilities. As a simplified example, perhaps a City wants to construct a new recreation center, and a neighboring City also needs a new recreation center. Through collaborating with each other, the two Cities can build and benefit from a single recreation center, meeting the service needs of a multijurisdictional area.

Additionally, collaborations with university researchers, especially graduate students, may be a form of stacking. Researchers usually receive grants to cover any costs they encounter for their projects, but these tend to be limited. However, this research may be beneficial to communities; for example, students from St. Thomas studied fertilizer runoff into the groundwater. This is a concern for many recreational fishers, as this runoff can cause algal blooms, which makes it difficult for fish populations to survive. Collaboration between communities and researchers can provide benefits for the communities while enabling applicable research.

One more possibility for building funding capacity is to crowdfund resilience projects. Sites like Kickstarter and GoFundMe provide a platform for entrepreneurs to gather the necessary startup costs. Although the hundreds of thousands of dollars these projects usually target are small compared to the scale of many planning projects, these platforms serve an alternate purpose: outreach and/or public relations. They allow people from all around the world to see what your community is doing and possibly start similar projects of their own. This could be useful for smaller projects, such as community gardens, art projects such as murals, or installing a “new” recycled playground at a City park.

Promote Volunteerism

However, there are other kinds of resources at play. Some of these tie into community engagement. For example, time, brainpower, and labor. When it comes to climate issues or issues that affect the community, there are plenty of people willing to volunteer their time to improve the community. Part of what needs to be done here is simply coordination. Additionally, a possibility may be to reach out to young people, specifically to students. Any activity that can be done reasonably well by adult volunteers should be opened to students as well. Besides helping the community, these opportunities can help young people in the community feel vested and develop valuable skills for their future, both as a working adult and as an active community member.



Volunteers are not just a source of physical labor to get a job done quickly, however. Engaging community volunteers in brainstorming for projects that affect them was discussed in multiple groups at the workshop. Volunteer ideas as well as physical skills are resources that can be highly effective if leveraged correctly. Additionally, response to such brainstorming sessions may help to gauge community interest in projects and determine which projects are worth funding and implementing (Villeneuve 1-2).

Obviously, volunteers are hard to find without a certain amount of community engagement, especially if volunteers with specific skill sets are needed. The environmental organization MN350 provides a good benchmark for this solution. In MN350's weekly email newsletters, they feature a "Skill of the Week," which is crucial in beginning or continuing one of their many projects. The advertising sections of local newspapers may be a place to start gathering volunteers with certain skills; additionally, an e-newsletter sent to known advocates and leaders in the community can help to inform community members.

Make it Accessible

Another issue regarding resource allocation is accessibility. This refers less to financial resources and more to physical ones, like planning documents and City Council meeting minutes. For something to be accessible means that anyone it could possibly affect should be able to utilize it. One group at the PlanIt workshop discussed translation as an issue. The solution to this seems quite simple: hire a translator. However, often the issue of accessibility is not so easily solved. An article from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada describes the process of an indigenous community getting involved in City planning in their area, but in the end the City acknowledged them merely as stakeholders rather than politically independent individuals. The author of the article notes, "A civic culture and institutional structures that affirm and operationalize indigeneity would have improved the outcome of Saskatoon's planning processes" (Fawcett et al 158). As we might learn from this, a huge component in making resources accessible is for planners and City officials to simply recognize the diversity and capability of the community. On one hand, this means that more work is required to acknowledge people of different backgrounds and their capacity. To improve accessibility, community volunteers may be able to assist to provide accessible resources, whether they are audio documents, subtitles, translations, "kid friendly" versions, or other resources.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from the Metropolitan Council PlanIt workshop, collaboration between parties is key in addressing and solving climate vulnerability. Without the invitation from the Metropolitan Council, the Environmental Writing and Community Outreach students and the University of St. Thomas would not have been able to come up with solutions to real-world problems regarding climate change in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Likewise, collaboration between City Councils and their constituents is key to finding the right solutions for citizens' concerns regarding climate change. Since representation from the community is crucial, accessibility of information in various forms should be a top priority. The recommendations in this document came from the participants in the PlanIt workshop. This document should serve as a guideline for local and federal governments to meet climate vulnerability needs.

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LOCAL PLANNING
HANDBOOK

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