

Research and Evidence Webinar Series:

# Civic Engagement and Climate Change Mitigation

Exploring Opportunities at the Intersection of Research,  
Community Participation, and National Service

March 23, 2022

# Welcome

Civic Engagement and Climate Change Mitigation:  
Exploring Opportunities at the Intersection of Research,  
Community Participation, and National Service



**Melissa Gouge, Ph.D.**

Research Analyst,  
AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation/  
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# Introduction

Civic Engagement and Climate Change Mitigation:  
Exploring Opportunities at the Intersection of Research,  
Community Participation, and National Service



**Dana Fisher, Ph.D.**

Professor of Sociology and the Director of the  
Program for Society and the Environment,  
University of Maryland

# *Environmental Stewardship: Conservation, Climate, and Social Justice*

Dana R. Fisher

Professor of Sociology and  
Director, Program for Society and the Environment  
University of Maryland

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Program for Society and the Environment  
at the University of Maryland - a Graduate Field Committee





# What Is Environmental Stewardship?

- Urban environmental stewards conserve, manage, monitor, advocate for or educate the public about the local environment (Fisher et al. 2007).

# What are the effects of environmental stewardship on the **individuals** participating, the **communities** involved, and the **environment** itself?

- **Who** participates in environmental stewardship across the US (and who doesn't and are there systemic barriers to participation)?
- **Are** these types of activities related to other kinds of environmental and civic participation?
- **How** does the nature of the work (site type, skill level, and organizational structure of the activity) relate to the nature of civic participation during and after?
- **How** does participating in environmental stewardship strengthen the roots of democracy?

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## FOCUS ARTICLE



### Climate activism and its effects

Dana R. Fisher | Sohana Nasrin

University of Maryland at College Park,  
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#### Abstract

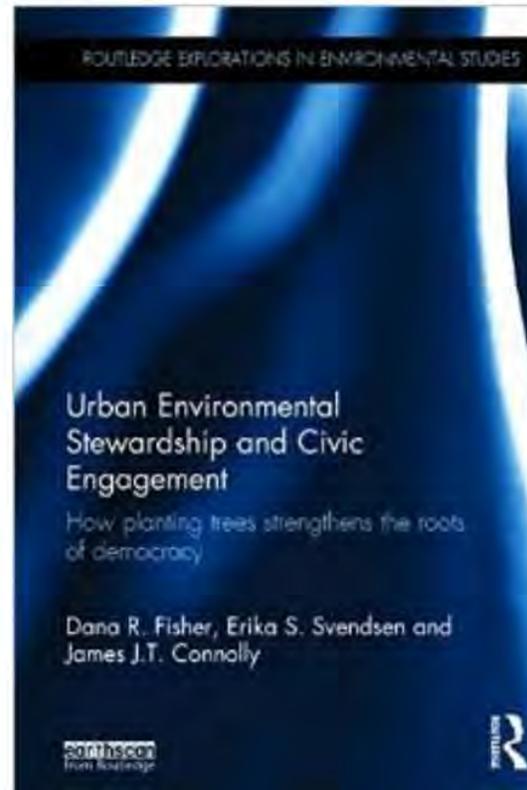
As activism including climate strikes have become a common occurrence around the world, it is important to consider the growth in climate change-focused activism and participation in social movements as a specific type of civic engagement. Although studies have analyzed climate activism and the climate movement, there is limited research that integrates it into the broader literature on civic engagement and which considers how these forms of engagement are related to specific climate outcomes. Here, we take a first step in understanding the material outcomes of these efforts. Specifically, we provide an overview of climate-related activism as a form of civic engagement, paying particular attention to the targets of this activism and its environmental outcomes in terms of greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Then, we focus on one of the most common tactics to gain momentum in recent years: the school strike, which has mobilized a growing number of participants around the world. We discuss how the Coronavirus pandemic has changed the climate movement with much activism moving online. We conclude by discussing the overall state of the knowledge about the outcomes of climate activism, as well as highlighting the need for careful research to measure its effects across scale.

This article is categorized under

Policy and Governance > Private Governance of Climate Change  
The Social Status of Climate Change Knowledge > Climate Science and  
Social Movements

#### KEYWORDS

activism, civic engagement, climate change, social movements



**comment**

## The broader importance of #FridaysForFuture

The #FridayForFuture campaign has prompted unprecedented numbers of youth to join the climate movement around the world. This growing movement is important beyond its potential impact on climate policy because it is creating a cohort of citizens who will be active participants in democracy.

Dana R. Fisher

**D**uring the week of 15 March 2019, more than 1.6 million young people participated in the youth climate strike on all seven continents. This international day-of-action built on the efforts of young activists, like Greta Thunberg and Alexandria Villasenor, to mobilize young people to walk out of school to fight for the climate and for their future<sup>1</sup>. A second climate strike has been called for May, and is expected to rally even more participants. The young participants in #FridaysForFuture (<https://www.fridaysforfuture.org>) and its reluctant spokesperson have received support from scientists around the world<sup>2</sup> and attracted substantial media attention. Although most of these students are too young to have a say in who leads their countries or even to participate fully in their respective political systems<sup>3</sup>, they have chosen to skip school with a punchy soundbite that "going



forms of activism, protest and even striking (from school) is a very important component effects of activism<sup>4</sup>. In other words, when young people participate in activism, they

## Selected Resources:

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- Connolly, J. J., Svendsen, E. S., Fisher, D. R., & Campbell, L. K. (2012). Organizing urban ecosystem services through environmental stewardship governance in New York City. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 1–9.
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# Speaker

Civic Engagement and Climate Change Mitigation:  
Exploring Opportunities at the Intersection of Research,  
Community Participation, and National Service



## **Denae King, Ph.D.**

Research Program Manager,  
Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland  
School of Public Affairs,  
Texas Southern University

## **Suzanne Pritzker, Ph.D.**

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and  
Associate Professor,  
University of Houston

Research and Evidence Webinar Series:

# Experiencing civic engagement in an era of natural disasters

Suzanne Pritzker, PhD | University of Houston

Denae King, PhD | Texas Southern University

March 2022

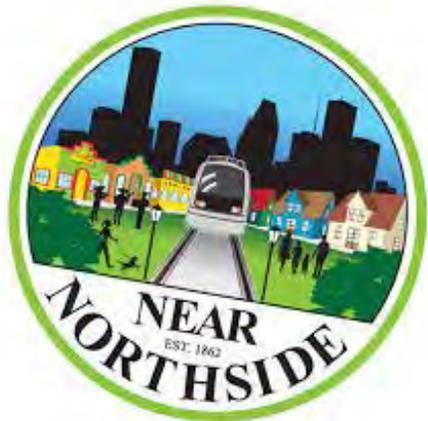
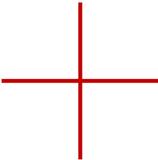
# Who we are: Two universities, **partnering** with four communities



**UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON**

**TSU**

TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY



# The context of our research: Houston, two years after **Hurricane Harvey**



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A once-in-1,000-years flood event

**33 trillion** gallons of rain

**\$125 billion** in damage

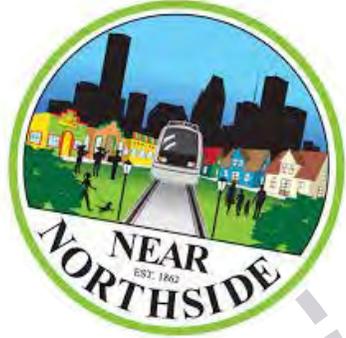
**154,000** homes flooded

**100+** deaths

**75** Houston schools closed  
due to damage

**175,000** voter registration  
card deliveries affected

**Impacted communities** still  
working to recover



How did this impact the way community members experience **civic engagement?**

# Our approach: Community-based, **participatory action** research



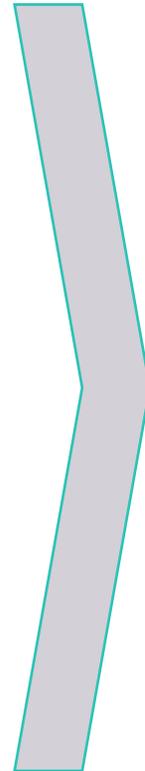
## **By** the community

Co-researchers worked alongside university team to develop a plan

**4** communities

**8** co-researchers

**5** languages



## **With** the community

Co-researchers recruited participants, and facilitated interviews and focus groups

**190** participants

**26** focus groups

**14** interviews with key informants



## **For** the community

Co-researchers analyzed findings and developed recommendations

**12** thematic categories highlighting challenges and opportunities



In their words: A lived experience  
of **civic engagement** in the context  
of Hurricane Harvey



## Disaster Prevention and Preparation

"We need to be prepared, because this isn't just a one- or two-time thing"



## Disaster Response and Short-Term Recovery

"Help the people who are affected by the disaster"



## Long-Term Disaster Recovery

"Harvey has come and gone, and we still have people who are hurting in the aftermath of it"



# Disaster Prevention and Preparation



"We need to be prepared, because this isn't just a one- or two-time thing"

"Houston is not prepared for a hurricane or storm"

"I mean we need a detailed emergency plan"

- "Infrastructure...not built to...protect the public"
- "Stop building...we are in a flood zone"
- "Need you to follow through and do what you gonna say"
  
- "a more fast direct way to be prepared as a community"
- "provide...information for us like how to prevent this"
- "to have more places where we can go"
- "someone to come for us...people who are disabled and elderly"
- "we needed access to our medical supplies"



# Disaster Response and Short-term Recovery



“Help the people who are affected by the disaster”

“But it was really, really heartbreaking”

“Everybody was like helping everybody”

“Coordination was so critical after Harvey”

- “houses that flooded...were a total loss, it was something so sad”
- “we couldn’t get food”
- “I had high anxiety”
  
- “participation is spontaneous”
- “people...came by and said...is there anything we can do”
- “they want to come and help”
- “go and help with...neighbors”
- “we gotta help our elderly”
  
- “has to be some kind of coordination when these, these incidents happen”
- “community support as regards Harvey...it’s not that much”



# Disaster Response and Short-term Recovery



“Help the people who are affected by the disaster”

“Pass that information down”

“Depends on the leader you’re talking about”

- “we would pass the word out”
  - “we get on the internet”
  - “we need help and don’t get information”
  - “find someone who spoke both languages so they could help”
  - “instruct me as to what I’m doing wrong as to the reason I’m not qualifying”
- 
- “the response...is pretty good”
  - “I can’t say if I trust them or not”
  - “trust your neighbor before you trust your governor”
  - “you got to get where they assign you to go or you can be fired, fined...”



# Long-term Disaster Recovery



"Harvey has come and gone, and we still have people who are hurting in the aftermath of it"

"Don't know where the money went"

- "the money, at the end of the day, still wasn't distributed fairly"
- "you know this is nothing but lies...what is they doing with the money"

"Anchored us to the community"

- "I think I've been more involved since Harvey"
- "Harvey would be the...catalyst...for this community"

"The urgency is gone, or that's the sense"

- "back to normal"
- "community was exactly the same as it was before"



# Long-term Disaster Recovery



“Harvey has come and gone, and we still have people who are hurting in the aftermath of it”

“Lord, don’t let this water come in”

“Why would you live in an area your house has been flooded eight times”

- “we are still suffering from that day, even if a lot of years have gone by”
- “Lord, don’t let this water come in. Jesus, not this time”
  
- “if we have a flooding problem we’re stuck”
- “the neighborhood had been kinda abandoned”



"Why would you live in an area your house has been flooded eight times?"

"I don't know what else I can take on."

"We are still suffering from that day, even if a lot of years have gone by



"I think that people, a lot of people including the media, they just move on."

"I don't wanna have to leave my house, but I don't think I can do it no more."

"When it comes down, I'm standing in the dirt praying. It's all you can do.  
**Lord, don't let this water come in.  
Jesus, not this time."**

# Recommendations

Several needs emerged from this community-engaged research:



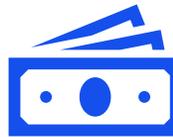
Meaningful, sustainable disaster preparation, with focus on infrastructure



Increased coordination across organizations involved in preparation and recovery



Intentional planning to meet community members' needs



Awareness of distrust, especially related to resource allocation/distribution



Clear avenues for accessible information about disaster preparedness/recovery resources



Consideration of community impacts from repeated natural disasters

# Speaker

Civic Engagement and Climate Change Mitigation:  
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## Carlos Vazquez Rivera, Ph.D.

Social Community Psychologist

University of Puerto Rico, Humacao

## Jacquelinee Rojas Livia, Ph.D.

INARO volunteer

Instituto Internacional de Investigación y  
Acción Comunitaria



INARO

# PROYECTO INARO

**Plan de Acción Comunitario para  
Situaciones de Desastres Socio-naturales**



**AmeriCorps**



*"Montones de voluntades, transforman realidades"*

Luz Sánchez Díaz  
Líder comunitaria

Alicia Montañez Cruz  
Líder comunitaria

Jennifer Abreu Santana  
Líder comunitaria

Grekchy Meléndez Hernández  
Coordinadora

Nilda Cuadra de Jesús  
Estudiante

Jacquelinee Rojas Livia  
Voluntaria

Carlos Vázquez Rivera  
Investigador Principal



1

IAP

Integrando la investigación, acción y  
participación

# Preguntas de Investigación

## Pregunta #1

¿Cuáles son las características comunitarias que inhiben o promueven el compromiso y participación comunitaria?

## Pregunta #2

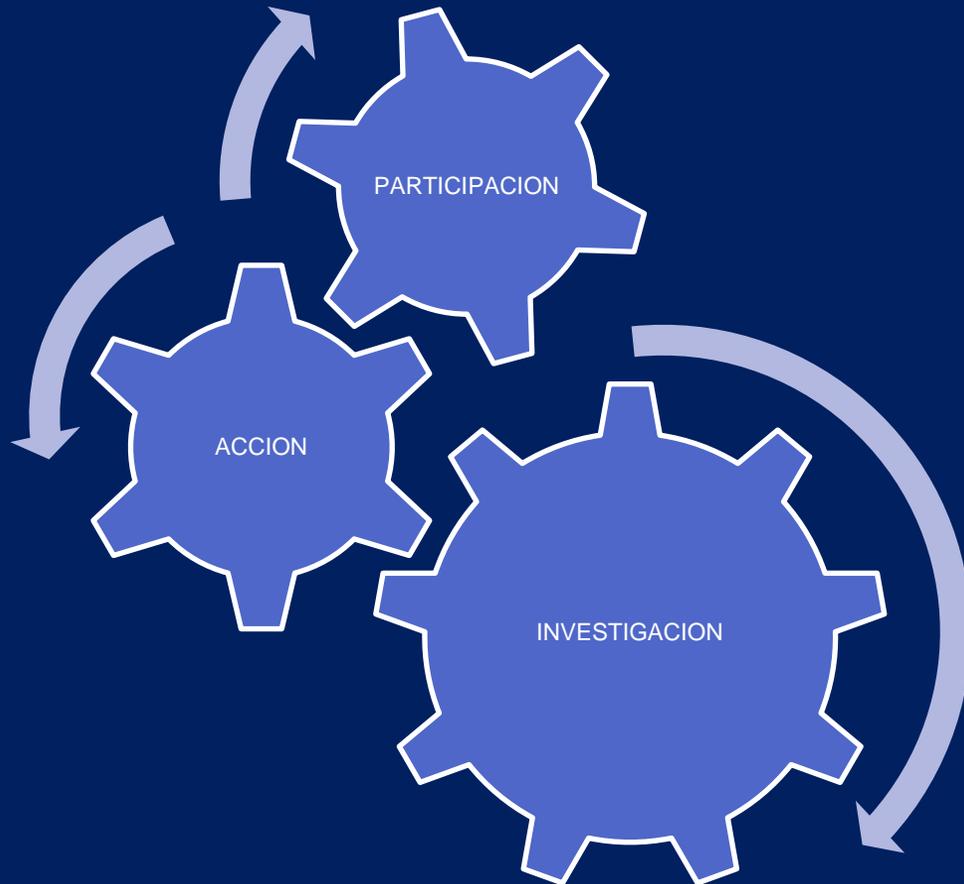
¿Cómo es la vinculación comunitaria después de una experiencia de desastre socio-naturales?

## NUESTRA DEFINICIÓN DE IAP

*“Un método dirigido a horizontalizar la investigación, refortaleciendo a las personas involucradas, para generar un cambio sobre lo que se investiga”*

*(EIC, 2019)*

# PROCESO DE INTEGRACION



- **Constitución del EIC**
- **Implementación (encuestas, entrevistas, grupos focales)**
- **Análisis (codificación, categorización)**
- **Presentar en diversos foros (comunidad, universidad)**

2

# RESULTADOS

Lo que conocemos



# COMUNIDAD



## Además

- Es donde la gente;
- Se conoce
- Se comunica
- Se interesa por los vecinos
- Se hacen familia
- Se ayudan unos a otros
- Es una forma de ver el mundo que se encuentra bajo amenaza.

- Feria comunitaria
- Repartición de alimentos
- Vacunación
- Pruebas COVID-19
- Cartografía social

# PARTICIPACION

- Acto de voluntad
- Ser parte de algo
- Cuidarnos
- Diversos rostros
- Juntarse
- Socializar

- Desconectarse de la tecnología
- Priorizar la comunidad
- Conocer necesidades

¿Qué es?

¿Qué requiere?

¿Qué permite?

¿Cuándo lo vemos?

- Lograr un cambio
- Hacerse familia

- Asistir a las actividades
  - Tener iniciativa
- Cumplir una función
- Buscar soluciones

# ¿QUE LA PROMUEVE O LA LIMITA?

P  
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PROMUEVE

Espacios para socializar:  
actividades deportivas, lúdicas,  
festejo, familiares, en los  
sectores.

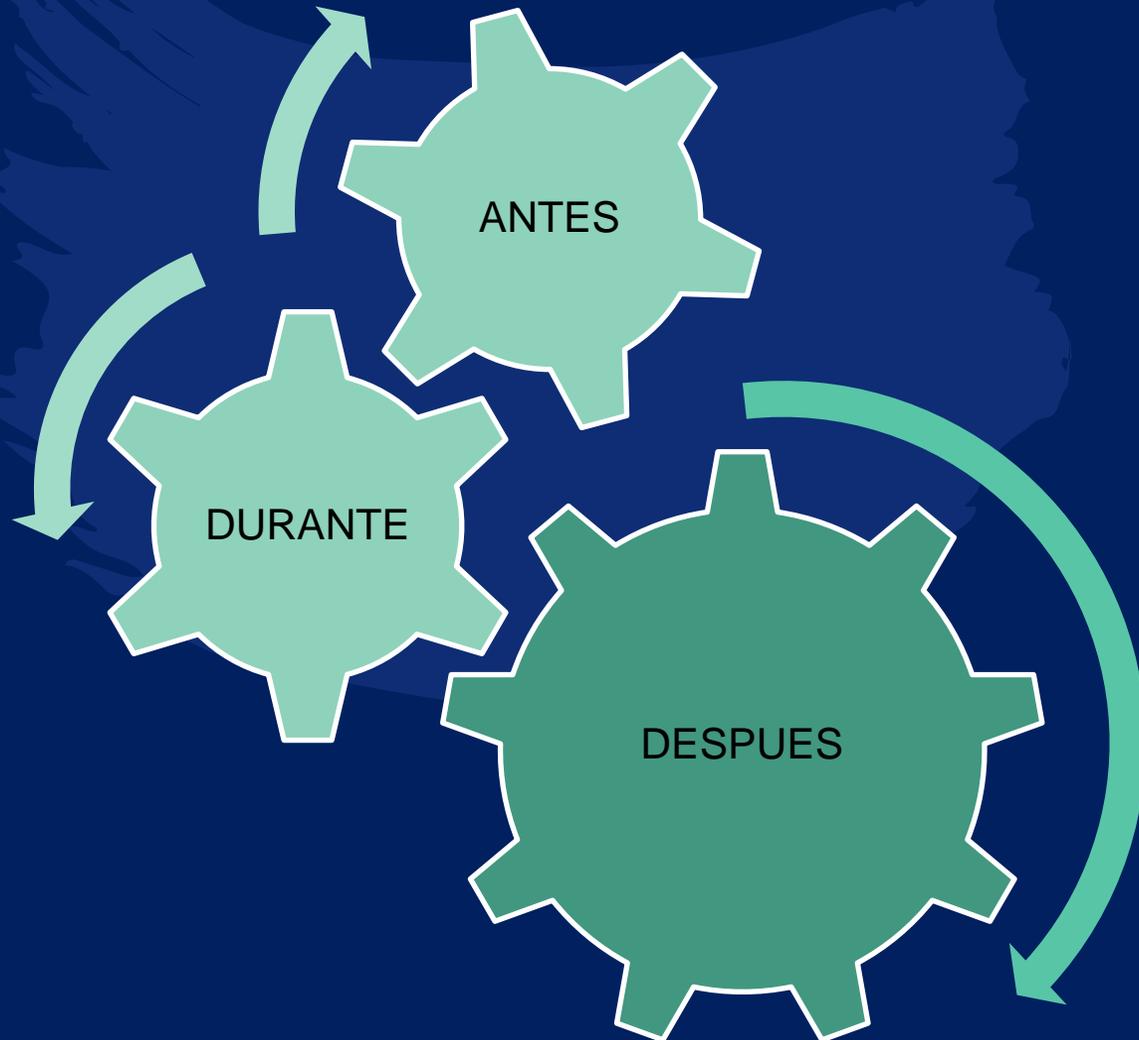
La confianza entre las personas.  
Conocimiento de las necesidades  
comunitarias.

Visitas domiciliarias.  
Motivar, animar, invitar.  
Refortalecer el Sentido de  
pertenencia.

Falta de transporte público.  
Falta de comunicación social.  
Barreras intergeneracionales.  
Exceso de usos de teléfono y  
tecnologías.  
Competencias entre vecinos  
(quién tiene más).  
Individualismo.

LIMITA

# PLAN DE ACCION COMUNITARIO



- Documento vivo
- Se reorganiza según las experiencias y saberes
- Considera el presente, el pasado y el futuro
- Articula comunidad, participación e investigación
- Desastres socio-naturales
- Nivel del desastre depende del nivel de preparación

# PLAN DE ACCION COMUNITARIO: PRIMEROS PASOS

## Movilización

- Reclutar más líderes comunitarias
- Aplicar lo que sabemos sobre lo que limita y promueve la participación
- Concientizar a las personas de que los desastres socio-naturales son parte de nuestras vidas

## Organización

- Brigadas de acción
- Comités de Emergencias por sectores
- Reuniones mensuales
- Reclutar voluntarios por cada sector

## Comunicación

- Actividades de preparación
- Difundir y revisar el Plan de Acción
- Crear diversos canales de comunicación (tradicionales y tecnológicos)

## Acciones

- Recojo de la basura y reciclaje
- Directorio de organizaciones colaboradoras
- Identificar necesidades y recursos de cada familia
- Identificar puntos de encuentros
- Identificar personas con mayor vulnerabilidad
- Integrar a las autoridades locales
- Realizar un censo comunitario

# PLAN DE ACCIÓN COMUNITARIO: ¿QUE NECESITAMOS?

## Capacitaciones

- Preparación para afrontar desastres
- Filtración de agua de pozo
- Primeros auxilios de salud física y mental
- Cultivar
- Usar técnicas de los abuelos

## Equipamiento

- Bombas de agua
- Lavadoras
- Energía renovable
- Infraestructura de internet satelital

## Suministros

- Agua
- Alimentos
- Semillas
- Medicinas

## Centro de acopio

- Materiales de necesidades básicas
- Actualizarlo periódicamente
- Desarrollar un sistema de administración rotativo



# PLAN DE ACCIÓN COMUNITARIO: ¿QUÉ RECURSOS TENEMOS?



Una escuela abandonada que puede servir como refugio



Reconstruir la cancha como espacio de encuentro y organización



# SECCIONES: PLAN DE ACCION COMUNITARIO (PAC)

Coordinación

Preparación

Aviso

Negocios

Medios de  
comunicación

Refugios

Evacuación

Manejo de  
crisis

Búsqueda



## SIGUIENTES PASOS PARA EL PAC

Presentación  
del PAC a la  
comunidad

Devolución  
del PAC a la  
comunidad

Revisión del  
PAC por el EIC

Implementar  
el PAC

The Sun is the star  
at the center





INARO

*“Montones de voluntades, transforman realidades.”*

*— Comunidad de Montones, 2019 —*



# Speaker

Civic Engagement and Climate Change Mitigation:  
Exploring Opportunities at the Intersection of Research,  
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**Jennifer Willett, MSW**

Assistant Professor,

University of Nevada, Reno

# Making the Invisible Visible- Addressing Climate Injustice in Northern, NV

March 2022



Office of Research and Evaluation ([Evaluation@cns.gov](mailto:Evaluation@cns.gov))

# Nevada Research for Change Team



## TEAM:

- Jennifer Willett: University of Nevada, Reno (PI/Director)
- Jennifer Sims: Upward Bound (Community Partner)
- Estefania Caldera (Leader)
- Victoria Gomez (Youth Scientist)
- Bronsen Costello (Youth Scientist)
- Nadia Lopez (Youth Scientist)
- Adan Albarran (Youth Scientist)
- Kevin Munoz (Youth Scientist)
- Najeh Abduljalil (Leader)
- Alejandro Arriaga (Youth Scientist)
- Dayana Valdez (Youth Scientist)
- Rose Barajas (Youth Scientist)
- Karla Avina (Youth Scientist)



# Slow Violence

Our focus.



- Hidden environmental injustices and disasters
- Happen to hidden populations (working class, people of color, and other hidden people)
- Occur over time
- Small environmental problems create large problems for the community
- Not publicized
- Solution: Make the invisible visible to work on them

# Northern Nevada Context

Environment, population, and demographics.



- All of our research is based in Northern Nevada, including in Reno, Sparks, and Sun Valley.
- Environmental concerns for slow violence
  - Climate is fragile and susceptible to climate change impacts like wildfires and floods
  - Various mountains and open land used for dumping
  - Not environmental regulations
- Social and economic concerns for slow violence
  - Minority population in Reno is high (26.4%) and highest in Sun Valley (45%)
  - Not enough services to help people in need
  - Housing affordability among the lowest in the nation

# Research Objectives and Questions



Our team creates awareness to resolve slow violence. We shine light on environmental issues that low income communities face, and discuss possible solutions. We believe social justice should be demonstrated in our communities.

- Research Questions:
  - What the experiences of slow violence in Northern Nevada?
  - From the local viewpoint, how best can slow violence be resolved?

In our presentation today, we are going to focus on climate injustice.

# Research Processes



## Photovoice

- Youth scientists take pictures of climate and environmental injustices in their neighborhoods
- Engage in the SHOWeD interview
  - What do you SEE here?
  - What is really HAPENNING?
  - How does this relate to OUR lives?
  - WHY are things this way?
  - What can we DO about it?

## Secondary sources

- Surveyed community members at events about their experiences with environmental injustice
- Looked up additional facts and talked to people



# Finding 1: How climate change impacts hidden communities in Northern Nevada

# Climate Disaster: Flooding



Swan Lake flooded an elementary school and many houses in the area.

# Climate Disaster: Wildfires



Wildfires are dangerous and the smoke negatively impacts health.





## Finding 2: How climate change intersects with other issues in Northern Nevada

# Climate Change and Infrastructure Needs



Lack of infrastructure, like drainage systems and sidewalks, creates dangerous situations for pedestrians when ditches flood from climate change.

# Climate Change and Working Outside



Concern for working class communities who work outside during dangerous air days

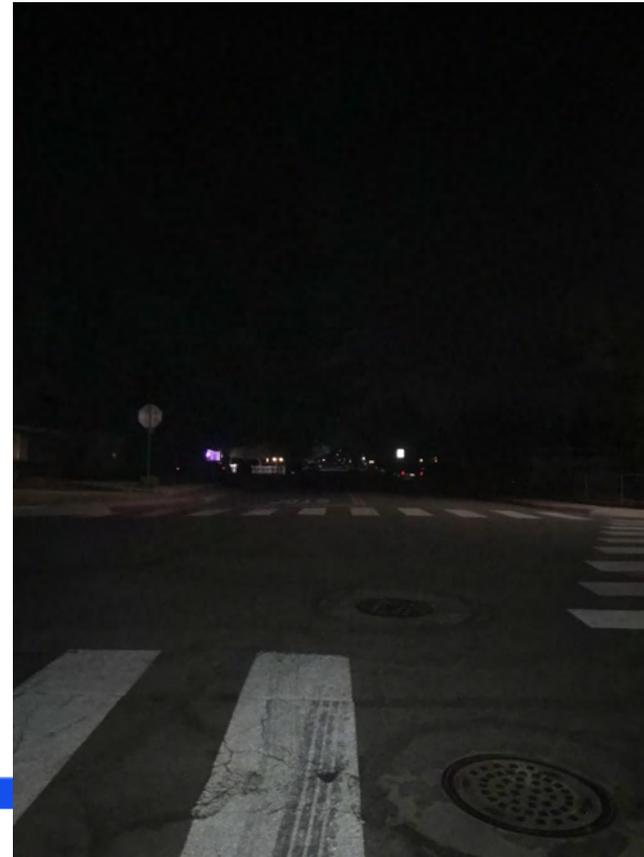
# Other Slow Violence Problems We Work On



Dumping large items is common, and the garbage accumulates because services are slow to respond



Lack of street lights leads to danger for pedestrians, including kids walking to school



# Community Survey Results



- Confirmed our photovoice findings
- A majority of respondents were from hidden communities
- 70% were heavily affected by wildfire smoke
  - Impacted health, work, and ability to go outside
- Significant experiences with dumping
  - *Sits for months and nothing is done about it*
  - Respondents committed to actions to not dump

# Our Impact on Theory of Slow Violence

How we look at climate change



- Most problems are not hidden and unseen by other populations but normalized to the point of the invisibility and lack of awareness.
- Climate change happens in a multitude of ways other than just air pollution. We have found that climate change can be amplified by lack of infrastructure in some communities, lack of affordable housing support, and weak local regulations.

# Our Actions

- Built relationships with supporters and groups we wanted to support
- Presented to the community, teachers, and librarians
- Spoke at public events
- Met with Governor's staff and spoke at Governor listening tours
- Met with local government officials including the General Improvement District, School Board, and Sheriff's Office
- Raised money and donations for homeless youth
- Organized and distributed survival kits to local homeless populations



# Next Steps for AmeriCorps Partnership



NCCC team was canceled during the first months of COVID

- Re-establish team to support NCCC grant and project
- Bring NCCC team to the area to work on issues
- Organize community clean-up day
- Build infrastructure like sidewalks



The local government in Sun Valley suggested this sidewalk, which goes to a school, as a pilot for a NCCC team.

# Conclusion and Thank You



- Slow violence and climate injustice are affecting Reno communities.
- AmeriCorps can make a difference in these impacts through supporting community-identified next solutions.
- We can also make an impact by focusing on resolving climate change.
- Thank you! From the Research for Change Team!

# Reflections

Civic Engagement and Climate Change Mitigation:  
Exploring Opportunities at the Intersection of Research,  
Community Participation, and National Service



**Shane Dermanjian, M.S.**  
AmeriCorps  
Office of Research and Evaluation

# From Service to Research

Shane Dermanjian – Research Assistant

AmeriCorps Office of  
Research and Evaluation

# From Service to Research



My progression →

**October 2012**

Superstorm Sandy hits New Jersey

**2012 – 2016**

Undergrad coursework on climate change

**2016 – 2017**

First AmeriCorps term, environmental stewardship

**2017 – 2018**

Second AmeriCorps term, disaster recovery

**2018 – 2020**

Graduate school, studying public policy

**2019 – Today**

Work at AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation



## October 2012: Superstorm Sandy made me start paying attention

- Plunged me into acutely caring about the environment around me
- Felt like I had to do something about this, it was existential... but then I didn't
- While in college, I learned about how rising sea levels and climate change pose unique dangers to my home state of NJ



Seaside Heights, NJ  
(Wikimedia Commons)



# September 2016 – July 2017: AmeriCorps Cape Cod

## Conservation

- Shellfish propagation
- Fire fuel reduction
- Trail and herring run maintenance

## Environmental education

- Elementary school presentations
- General community presentations

## Program outreach/volunteer events

- Annual cleanup days
- National Volunteer Week
- MLK Jr. Day of Service





# September 2017 – July 2018: SBP New Jersey

## Home reconstruction

- Gutting
- Framing/hanging drywall/taping
- Flooring/tile
- Insulation
- Finish carpentry
- Painting
- Installing flood vents

## Volunteer management

- Ensuring workplace safety i.e. with power tools, ladders, etc.
- Teaching volunteers how to do construction tasks





# The intersection of climate change and my service:

realizing climate change  
will make the need for  
everything I just did all the  
greater



Truro, Cape Cod, MA – May 2018  
(my photo)

## So... what are we going to do about it?

- *How do more people get exposed to environmental issues, so they also comprehend the importance of these topics?*
- *How do we prepare our communities for the worst to come?*

**The answer: through AmeriCorps**



**Exposure + Service +  
Interest in Public Policy =**  
me working in research at  
AmeriCorps

Thanks!

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# Reflections

Civic Engagement and Climate Change Mitigation:  
Exploring Opportunities at the Intersection of Research,  
Community Participation, and National Service



**Laura Schlachter, Ph.D.**

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# Research and Evidence Webinar Series:

**Civic Engagement and Climate Change Mitigation:** Exploring Opportunities at the Intersection of Research, Community Participation, and National Service



## Thank You!

- The webinar slides, recording, and transcript are available on our [Impact Webinars page](#). Spanish captions are available.
- Visit: <https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact/webinars> for past webinars
- For more information on AmeriCorps Research and Evaluation: [evaluation@cns.gov](mailto:evaluation@cns.gov).

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