



LET'S LEAD  
ON CLIMATE



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THIS GUIDE IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY



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## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

*Building off our Let's Talk Climate guides which provided communication guidance, ecoAmerica is pleased to bring you our Let's Lead on Climate series of guides that will feature faith, health, and community organizations that are leading on climate by reducing their climate impact and inspiring others to act on solutions.*

*This guide features stories from organizations and communities across America that have successfully engaged their constituents in programs and initiatives to elevate climate leadership, action, and solutions. From nurses to pastors to local leaders, these stories allow others to see how Americans just like themselves have led on climate in their own neighborhoods and local communities. Within each story are lessons and insights, recommendations, and metrics that reflect outcomes. We hope that in shining a light on these success stories, we can help many more leaders envision how their own organization and community can lead on climate.*

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## GREETINGS LEADERS,

*Americans are known for innovation and possessing tremendous agency in the face of adversity. We roll up our sleeves and bring solutions forward to make the world a better place. Across the nation, Americans are now taking up the mantle on climate change as action on the issue moves from the federal level to local communities and as more people look to local leaders for solutions. Local climate leadership is burgeoning, and with increased visibility and clearer guidance, it has the opportunity for meaningful scale.*

*For this reason, ecoAmerica brings you **Let's Lead on Climate**, a collection of success stories to celebrate local climate leadership, and set of key recommendations to offer lessons and best practices to emulate. With stories from faith, health and local community organizations spanning communities nationwide, Let's Lead shows that climate leadership comes in all shapes and sizes.*

*So, whether you are a locally elected leader, pastor, nurse, or other community leader, this guide will help you take the first steps toward local climate leadership. It provides you useful guidance as you travel farther down your path to success.*

*We hope that this guide will motivate and inspire you and leaders across the country to elevate your climate leadership and action. And, we hope that the next version of this guide features your success story!*

*We wish you the greatest success in your climate initiatives as you create a more blessed tomorrow, guide others on a path to positive solutions, and improve our climate for health.*



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# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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- 1. *Start with people, stay with people.*** Find ways to involve community members in each phase of your climate initiative. This will increase knowledge, input, and participation for stronger outcomes, and build support for your efforts.
  - Do your homework to understand your community. Draft objectives and a project plan that will make an impact on climate, and benefit your stakeholders.
  - Invite a diversity of stakeholders to participate in the planning process. Create welcoming and accommodating opportunities to provide input and share ideas.
  - Form a committee, working group, or task force that can help you build and carry out your plans. These groups can help you go farther faster.
  - Gain leverage and scale by creating a diverse network of larger cross-sector partners. Align on goals that support your project and their priorities.
- 2. *Consider the most vulnerable.*** Carefully consider the impacts and implications for the most vulnerable in your community, for more just, equitable, and supported outcomes.
  - Determine the areas and people who are most affected by climate impacts. Identify their vulnerabilities, build an understanding of their challenges, and consider the implications that your initiative will have for them.
  - Include leaders from vulnerable constituencies in your planning to better address their needs. Work across ethnic, socioeconomic, faith, and community lines.
- 3. *Communicate broadly, clearly, and often.*** Stakeholders will be more supportive of your initiative if they clearly understand your goals, progress, and how they will benefit.
  - Be clear and transparent in your objectives. Show how they will benefit the community and the stakeholders personally. Make your goals publicly available and accessible.
  - Send out regular status updates to celebrate progress and maintain engagement. Be open about challenges, recommend solutions, and articulate timelines.
  - Ask your working group and partners to help you communicate. Their participation in communications creates a broader dialogue that is more inclusive.
- 4. *Seek guidance, be agile, and work toward continuous improvements.*** Remember, success is constant progress toward a worthy goal.
  - Look for models of climate leadership, engagement, action, and solutions that you can emulate. Remember that not all climate solutions or plans fit every community. Be willing to translate other plans to address your needs. Consider piloting your project first.
  - Ask for feedback on progress, and apply it for continuous improvement.
  - Connect with leaders of similar initiatives to share insights, best practices, and ideas. Solicit advice and assistance from decision makers, partners, and those who can help build support and/or help you make progress.
  - Research and seek opportunities within your community and beyond for grants, rebates, or financial incentives to support your climate initiative.

# CLIMATE CAMPUS

## Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate<sup>1</sup> Featuring *Shanda Demorest*

### Health students for a healthy climate

Shanda Demorest, a nurse from the Allina Health system, first noticed a gap in engagement on climate and health while studying at the University of Minnesota. There she noticed there were no groups or initiatives addressing the links between health and climate. Demorest took on this challenge and opportunity to form what is now the Health Students for a Healthy Climate (HSHC) at the University of Minnesota.

### The challenge of being new on campus

Demorest's excitement and preparation for the program was met with challenges. Difficulties arose in finding an appropriate way to engage across the political spectrum.

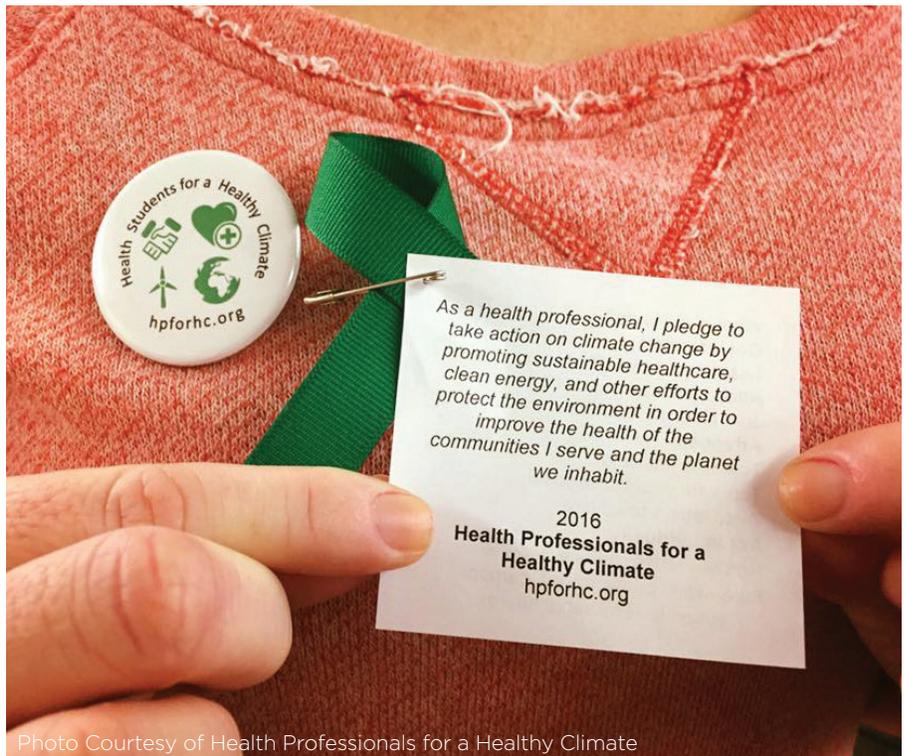


Photo Courtesy of Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate

The group contacted legislators and policy makers and urged them to take action on clean energy to a safeguard health. "But it's been a challenge to do some

*of that work in a gentle and bipartisan way, in a way that's not going to offend anyone, particularly those with whom we want to partner with,"* comments Demorest.

***"We've done a lot of work to frame our communications, education, and work in a way that is hopeful, that helps people think, 'I can make a difference, and you can make a difference.'"***

This led to another main hurdle—communication. Demorest explains, “*We have struggled to answer the questions ‘How do we engage?’ ‘How do we re-engage?’ It’s easy for people to drop out of engagement when they have so many other things going on.*”

Demorest emphasizes the importance of creating a baseline structure to overcome challenges that surface during program formation. Retroactively collecting data points and providing the metrics to help gain support, funding, and legitimacy were difficult. But, as Demorest highlighted, “*If you don’t have the base, it’s easy for things to crumble.*”

## Blazing the trail for health students

To overcome communication challenges, Demorest says her group relied on ecoAmerica’s communication materials to navigate difficult waters and inspire others. Demorest also points out, “*We’ve done a lot of work to frame our communications, education, and work in a way that is hopeful, that helps people think, ‘I can make a difference, and you can make a difference.’*” In working from the ground up to form HSHC, communication was key, and designing a baseline for the group was also vital.

Demorest and her classmates decided the best way to gain legitimacy and become better organized was to launch a survey. This survey evaluated health student perceptions about climate change and its impacts on human health, and solicited feedback on their current and prospective courses covering this topic. Their results matched their expectations. Demorest says, “*Our survey showed that students knew a little bit about climate change, and thought it was important and might have*

*something to do with patient health, but were not getting climate curriculum content in any of their courses.*”

The next steps involved identifying the right people at the university to utilize the survey results and to infuse climate change into the health curriculum. Demorest framed the results of the survey as an opportunity to create this introductory course. She proposed a mockup of the curriculum to the university’s curriculum committee. This process enabled HSHC to implement the curriculum as part of an incoming course at the University of Minnesota that all health students now take.

## Recommendations

- Stay organized
- Reach out to solicit advice and help from decision makers, or those that help build support, for your programs or initiative.
- Host “lunch and learns” to engage key constituencies with program plans.
- Collaborate across disciplines for learning, leverage, and broader reach.

## Key Metrics

- The University of Minnesota
- Has led efforts to engage health students for 1 year
- No funding was involved for the HSHC project
- Engaged 1,000 incoming health students per year with curriculum formed by HSHC
- Recipient of the 2017 Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership Award



## BRACE for climate impacts and action

Climate impacts are no strangers to Florida. Chris Uejio, project lead of Florida's BRACE (Building Resilience Against Climate Effects) program, explains, *"Communities across Florida are dealing with hurricanes, drought, wildland fires, coastal flooding, and the Zika virus. We saw a need and an opportunity to translate our findings (forecasting impacts and assessing vulnerabilities regarding the state of the climate) to county health departments who are on the front lines of these threats. We also wanted to build public health capacity to address this very urgent topic of climate and health."*

With grants and support from the Florida Department

of Health, Florida BRACE was able to engage county health departments. The program seeks to help public health officials respond to the health effects of climate variability and change by incorporating the best available science in true routine practice with goals set to guide them. Counties propose topics ranging from reducing the urban heat island effect to emergency management and preparedness, and receive small grants from BRACE to build out plans and strategies.

### Not all communities fit the same planning and strategy mold

The BRACE program realizes that not every plan can fit every county or impact a community may experience. Uejio explains that, while

some of their strategies are generalizable, they must be tailored to each community, depending on its concerns, stressors, capacities to adapt, and political climates. *"On a scientific and a community engagement level you have to be flexible and willing to work with a variety of communities,"* Uejio comments.

Uejio says many county health departments have *"the overarching challenge that they are generally under-resourced."* He continues, *"County health departments are very resourceful, however."* But, depending on the size of these departments, there can be even fewer resources and staff available to make climate change a priority. *"Even though it touches so many health outcomes on their radars,*

***"Even though it touches so many health outcomes on their radars, engaging on climate change can be a little bit more difficult—they may just not have the capacity to do it."***

*engaging on climate change can be a little bit more difficult. They may just not have the capacity to do it.”*

The BRACE program is designed to address equity, too. Uejio highlights how impacts disproportionately impact many communities like children, older adults, those with preexisting health conditions, the poor, homeless, and people living in high-risk areas. Uejio stresses, *“Communicating that message is a challenge. There are risks present to everyone, yet we have to pay special attention to certain higher-risk populations.”*

### Piloting for learning and leverage

While at first it was a struggle to plan for the variety of impacts and health issues that would arise in counties across the state, Uejio says they quickly learned how to solve this since they are at the front lines of dealing with these events. He remarks, *“We asked them to suggest pilot projects that we would work on collaboratively. Together, we build the evidence base to improve public health.”*

Uejio points to the example of Sarasota County’s multi-pronged strategy, which BRACE helped support. Rather than targeting specific hazards such as hurricanes or drought, the strategy took an *“all-hazards approach.”* Never knowing what might hit their county, they decided to identify and focus on the commonalities of how they could prepare and respond to a variety of hazards that may occur in the future and included other sectors, such as transportation, communication, and electricity generation.

### Recommendations

- Be proactive, not reactive. BRACE had to respond quickly to the Zika outbreak. This led to more short and long-term resilience and emergency response planning.
- Strategies to make society more resilient to extreme events are win-win. They are worthwhile investments that bring jobs to local communities and help heal the community after a disaster.
- Share your successes and learnings with other health departments.
- In communications, make climate impacts and solutions personally relevant.



Photo by Mark Foley, Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida

### Key Metrics

- Program based at Florida State University and has been running for 5 years
- Provided a total of \$66,000 in grants to counties to work on their climate adaptation and mitigation plans and action
- Secured \$1.07 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to work with the county health departments across Florida to prepare for climate change
- Has worked with 5 counties, representing a combined total of over 1.5 million Floridians within the state, and is actively seeking to work with more

# CLIMATE NURSE

## Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments<sup>1</sup>, San Antonio Featuring **Adelita Cantu PhD, RN**

### Nursing San Antonio on climate

Adelita Cantu first began her work on the intersection of health, education, and climate change as an associate professor at the University of Texas Health San Antonio. There she realized she had the opportunity to influence the curriculum students received on climate and health, and felt the obligation to do just that. From then on, Cantu began weaving the topic of climate change into her health classes.

Additionally, Cantu was able to look to the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE) for resources and support. *“Being a member of ANHE gave me the opportunity to meet key mentors,”* she remarks. The mentors inspired Cantu



Photo Courtesy of Adelita Cantu

to use her own voice to lead on health and climate. The mentorship helped her grasp the important role health professionals play in making the climate and health connection and becoming advocates for solutions. Cantu

expanded her leadership beyond the classroom as she gained these skills and additional support.

After developing her climate and health curriculum, and gaining momentum

***“One of my concerns is the set of social determinants of health, particularly with vulnerable populations.”***

with it, Cantu pursued another goal: working towards social justice within San Antonio. *“One of my concerns is the set of social determinants of health, particularly with vulnerable populations. Another is environmental justice, because it’s going to be the people that are the most vulnerable, the low-income people of color, that will be impacted most by climate change.”* Cantu collaborated with several San Antonio non-profits to bring her climate and health knowledge forward, and provide an outlet for action.

### Overcoming political bias

Cantu initially faced challenges pursuing her initiatives because some people perceived the topic of climate change as too politically charged. For example, when proposing her climate change educational series for children at the San Antonio Public Library, the library hesitated at first, thinking the issue was too political. As a professor, Cantu received feedback that connecting climate change and climate science to health would be “pushing a liberal agenda” and would not go over well with the students. Nevertheless, Cantu persisted with both successfully.

### Partnering on common solutions

While Cantu has begun several projects in San Antonio, one she is particularly proud of is her work with the Martinez Street Women’s Center, which hosts an all-girl’s summer camp called Girl Zone. As a part of this group’s acts of leadership, each participant presents a three-minute speech accompanied by a

written statement to the San Antonio City Council, *“so that the city council will know that kids are aware of where we stand and that policy makers need to pay attention to that.”*

Throughout all of Cantu’s endeavors, she has made climate impacts real to the San Antonio community, and engaged a wide range of stakeholders on climate solutions to achieve common goals. And, in doing so, Cantu successfully informed others about climate and inspired action. From curriculum to summer camps, she spread her knowledge, bypassed skepticism, and steered conversations past politics. Climate impacts were discussed in a-matter-of-fact manner rather than engaging in debate, and she connected the impacts of climate change with the direct impacts of human health. *“Now there’s a deeper understanding of what we’re talking about when we talk about climate change.”* Cantu explains.

### Recommendations

- Look into grant mechanisms to provide funding for local community impacts and actions. Regardless of the amount of the grant, there’s a lot that can be done with a small amount of money.
- Seek leverage and scale, and make decisions accordingly.
- Broaden your network and partner for greater impact.
- Take the time to know your community. Do your homework to figure out what kind of projects will be workable.

### Key Metrics

- San Antonio, Texas
- Leading for 5 years through citywide efforts
- Aetna Foundation Community Grant for over 2-years to develop the Air Quality Youth Leadership Academy for \$100,000
- San Anto project funding for \$5,000
- Library project, no funding necessary
- Has engaged 150 people within the community from the various projects

# JUSTICE FOR ALL

## Community United Church of Christ<sup>3</sup> Featuring *Pastor Jenny Shultz-Thomas*

### A community-wide initiative

In 2007, the Community United Church of Christ's (CUCC) congregation voted to make climate justice a priority and mission for the church. As Pastor Jenny Shultz-Thomas describes, the congregation felt that as people of faith the community was called to love one another and to honor all of God's creation, which is not limited to humanity. In order to carry out the congregation's goals, congregants created the Justice in a Changing Climate (JCC) Task Force to begin advocating and acting on climate. This group later became an interfaith and community-wide network that broadened and strengthened the impact of their various projects.

Pastor Shultz-Thomas says her congregation was eager to begin this work and took

it upon themselves to form the Task Force. This group sought out local partners across the community to bring forth various climate projects and initiatives. For CUCC and other faith groups, their stewardship was ignited by their shared values, such as caring for creation and the poor. Establishing this common ground early on led to a collaborative effort, bringing climate solutions to those disproportionately affected by climate impacts.

### Rallying for justice

The Task Force also aimed to make an impact on policies within the community through its climate advocacy work. However, Pastor Shultz-Thomas explains these efforts also came with pushback: "As a larger advocacy community working for justice and advocacy, there's always resistance." To overcome this, CUCC and other groups

held meetings for the whole community to hear from government officials and candidates, allowing the public the opportunity to hold their representatives accountable for climate action and to involve constituents in the decision-making and planning process.

Pastor Shultz-Thomas also notes that it was particularly difficult, "*working systematically across all ethnic divisions and socioeconomic lines*" within the community and her own church. Those who experience climate impacts more severely, such as communities of color and low-income areas, had been inherently left out of the conversation. "A lot of mobilization around combating climate change really goes hand-in-hand with privilege," explains Pastor Shultz-Thomas. To involve all communities in advocacy and action, especially those

formerly marginalized, CUCC developed a wider coalition to “*honestly address environmental racism and combat climate change.*” In focusing more on inclusion, CUCC helped low-income areas increase energy efficiency by pre-weatherizing homes and reduced the church’s carbon footprint by going solar at CUCC.

### Finding allies for solutions

Leading up to the pre-weatherization and solar projects, the JCC Task Force primed its congregation and community for solutions by hosting various speaker events. Community members gather at these events to hear local leaders speak about climate impacts the community faces, challenges within the community, and how the community can benefit from solutions. These events not only inform and educate audiences, but also provide more support for other specific goals and projects the Task Force proposes later on.

Outside of the immediate community in Raleigh, Pastor Shultz-Thomas has also relied on larger organizational support from North Carolina’s Environmental Justice Network and the United Church of Christ to help CUCC form a congregational model and an organized response to the environmental injustices within the community. Support from a larger network coupled with a faith perspective and guiding values allowed CUCC to expand their efforts to communities across the state.

### Recommendations

- Work across ethnic, socioeconomic, and faith lines to broaden support and action on solutions. This not only helps build a stronger foundation for the community but for engaging others on climate action.
- Create a sustainable network of partners and community members to help mobilize across any divides that might exist. This will strengthen and broaden the reach of your initiative or project.



Photo Courtesy of Community United Church of Christ

### Key Metrics

- Raleigh, North Carolina
- Leading the community and 120-members church on climate for 10 years
- Raised \$37,000 within the community to install the church’s solar array of 28 panels and donated leftover funds of \$592 to its sister congregation, Good Shepard United Church of Christ, to invest in a solar array of its own
- Savings of \$1,000 on CUCC’s energy bills per year
- Reduced their carbon footprint by 7 tons per year with their initiative
- Invited 15 congregations to participate in the pre-weatherization program with 21 homes in the community weatherized
- Recipient of Interfaith Power and Light’s 2016 Cool Congregation Award and the 2016 U.S. Foods Raleigh Environmental Stewardship



## Honoring values and saving money

Downey Avenue Christian Church began their Creation Care Team in 2012 in an effort to reduce their utility bills and climate impact. With the guidance of Pastor Jay Deskins and the leadership of others before him, congregants were able to connect their actions with the core values of the church. Deskins explains, *“We believe strongly that our calling as a community of faith is to do our best to care for creation and care for the ways in which we use the resources we have.”*

When the church first decided to take action, Deskins recalls church members welcoming the goals of the Creation Care Team. It was important to shrink their operating costs,

but as Deskins points out, *“It was way more powerful to say that this is not just a budget item. This is how God has called us to be in the community.”* Their calling was to care for creation and for their resources, which was the reason church members decided to participate.

## Inclusion and solutions

With support and guidance from the Disciples of Christ Christian Church’s Green Chalice Ministry, Downey Avenue Christian Church was able to take the initial steps to achieve the Green Chalice certification. Along the way, however, they encountered a couple of obstacles. Some of the LED light bulbs were stolen. And, concerns were raised on perceived costs of installing LED light bulbs, low-flow toilets, and

programmable thermostats.

Deskins overcame these obstacles in a few ways. First, he removed the LED bulbs from the public restrooms (where the theft took place). He then explained to the critics that the improvements came at virtually no cost to the church (rather, it helped it save money on energy bills). And, by grounding the program in the values of the church, many parishioners felt included, and were supportive of the efforts early on.

## One step at a time

The church’s first step was to call its local Interfaith Power and Light affiliate to help coordinate an energy audit, which identified opportunities to save energy. The energy advisor then installed LED bulbs, aerators in the sinks,

***“Everyone can easily make very small changes. They can be carried home from our places of work and worship.”***

smart strips, and light sensors, all of which were paid for through offerings from Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light.

Bob Baker, a member of the Creation Care Team, said the church was able to decrease energy costs with an energy-saving behavior program. Posted signs reminding parishioners to turn off the lights, close the door when air conditioning is on, and program the thermostats directly reduced energy costs by 20%. Deskins and Baker attributed the success to the congregants' commitment to following the program and doing their part.

In 2015, the church took a greater step towards climate neutrality when they applied for a grant to install solar panels from the Indiana Office of Energy Development through Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light. Around the same time, the church was sealed and insulated to maximize heating and cooling efficiency, resulting in decreased gas use.

Through the Green Chalice Ministry's program, the church was able to customize action steps to align with their goals to educate church members on how to care for creation. For example, the energy advisor suggested light sensors for the church, but they instead, used manual light switches. Deskins said that signage reminding congregants to turn off lights was a more cost-effective and teachable method, providing an opportunity to encourage congregants to take these actions home. He cited a parallel teaching from an English proverb: *"If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, he can eat forever."*

Deskins believes that the most important thing was to relay the benefits and results to the rest of the community. *"A creation care program should educate people,"* said Deskins. He continued, *"Everyone can easily make very small changes. They can be carried home from our places of work and worship."* He believes all congregations leading on climate should ask themselves, *"How can I transfer these habits into other areas of my life?"*

## Recommendations

- Customize your own path towards energy efficiency and impact reduction so that it is optimized for your place of worship or work.
- Look for opportunities to educate your congregants and faith community on how they can take climate action in the church and at home.
- Make the connection between energy efficiency, impact reduction, and the core values of your faith community. Tout the benefits of results.
- Be inclusive in your efforts; form a committee, communicate progress with congregants.



## Key Metrics

- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Has led on climate for 5 years
- Energy Audit: All installed at no cost through offerings by Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light, saving the church \$2,661 in products and \$2,319 on its utility bill
- 28 solar panels were installed through a \$20,000 grant, with the remaining \$4,000 paid for by congregational gifts
- Has engaged all 225 members of the church

# EVERYONE'S WELCOME

## Midway Christian Church<sup>4</sup> Featuring *Pastor Heather McColl*

### Spiritual development

Midway Church feels its spiritual development is linked with caring for God's creation and being good stewards of the earth. So, this opportunity has been offered to their congregation through Disciples of Christ Christian Church's Green Chalice program.

The Green Chalice Program is rooted in the denomination's Alverna Covenant, originally introduced in 1981. Pastor Heather McColl said the program "*became really deeply tied to spiritual practice for us – that faith practice of this is God's table and everybody is invited, everybody's welcome.*" As a part of Midway Church's core values as the "*people of the table,*" their focus is to bring their community together at their table to share a meal. They were able to do so by partnering with the local Presbyterian Church that has a community garden. Together, they contacted

nearby restaurants to donate leftovers and their local jail to donate produce they had grown. By involving a broader part of the Midway community, they were able to grow their own food, reduce food waste, and bring people together to share in a meal at "*the table.*"

### Finding solutions for funding

To build support for the program, Pastor McColl referenced church values and teachings that aligned with climate action. But, as Pastor

McColl said, "*The biggest hurdle for Midway Church was financial. We just had to take it in small bits and pieces. This can get overwhelming. The projects caused the wish list to become so massive and so huge.*" Limited funds and resources forced the church to get creative in finding ways to reduce its climate impact. Pastor McColl admitted, "*We're not very good at asking for help or looking outside of our church for funding.*" Yet, by doing so, they were able to locate grant money to support their efforts.



Photo Courtesy of Midway Christian Church

## Bringing solutions to God's table

The church used their endowment to switch to all LED lighting. The congregation learned that in addition to saving energy, the LEDs also reduced the risk of fire hazards. Through various grants, rebates, and low-interest loans offered through local electricity providers, agricultural departments, and others organizations that are also acting on climate solutions, the church was able to make significant progress. They learned that they could make the planned improvements at a much lower cost. Once they asked themselves how they could do things differently, and opened their minds to partnership, doors to amazing possibilities began to open.

Pastor McColl explained that taking action on climate must begin with a conversation within our communities: *“We can all find a starting place with the conversation about climate change and about ways we’re all affected by this. For me, as a Disciple, it all comes back to God’s table. At that table, we have the wonderful, frustrating ability to say, ‘We agree to disagree, but that does not mean you are no less my brother or sister. I will work beside you because I recognize you as a child of God.’ That’s where our starting place is every single time. People are afraid to have some of these conversations, but I think that’s the number one thing the churches should be doing – creating space at the table, creating space for these conversations.”*

## Recommendations

- Start small and then work up institutionally to gain structure and support.
- Be willing to research opportunities within your community that offer grants, rebates, or any financial incentives for “going green.” In the words of Pastor McColl, *“Sometimes we think our vision is so limited that we think if it’s not within our walls, it’s not possible. And that goes against the very gospel and kingdom of God.”*
- Don’t be afraid to start the conversation on climate. One way to do this is with the line, *“We all agree that we need to walk more gently on Creation.”*



Photo Courtesy of Midway Christian Church

## Key Metrics

- Midway, Kentucky
- Began leading efforts in Kentucky 7 years ago
- Cost of LED lighting: \$11,800 (32 fixtures)
- Annual savings from switching to LED lighting: \$4,706
- Cost of double paned windows: \$8,294 (savings not calculated)
- Community meals: \$150/month for produce purchased at farmer’s market (the church is working to apply for grants to reduce this cost)
- Rain gardens: minor labor costs and native plants were donated
- Has engaged all 200 members
- Interfaith Power & Light Runner-Up for Cool Congregation Challenge for Sacred Grounds

# DEFINING RESILIENCE

## City of Providence, Rhode Island<sup>6</sup>

Featuring *Leah Bamberger*

### A more resilient city for all

With an ever-increasing threat to its coastal communities from increases in hurricanes and flooding, the city of Providence, Rhode Island, began to turn the wheels on climate action to better prepare, plan, and adapt for its already-changing climate. Providence's Director of Sustainability, Leah Bamberger, explains that while the city had been making efforts to increase sustainability, it was not until 2015 that it decided to tackle the wave of impacts head on.

Two years ago, the city hosted its first-ever resilience charrette, a meeting held with a variety of stakeholders including community members, a group of architects, designers, and city planners from the county to map out solutions to increase climate resilience. As the meetings facilitators, the city had high hopes this forum would help catalyze a



comprehensive strategy that implemented the input that embodied the needs of the city's diverse population. To achieve this, the city went to great lengths to ensure that participants reflected the city's diversity and not just the usual suspects. As Bamberger explains, the main goals of the charrette were to gain a clear picture of who the players were in developing and implementing

any sort of climate plan and take stock of areas they could improve on.

### Relationship-building over roadblocks

While the city took the time to carefully construct its initial charrette, 87 percent of the participants were Caucasian. This signaled to Bamberger, *"the need to create better relationship between*

*communities of color and the city*” when it came to planning for climate resilience.

Bamberger admits that government officials often struggle to engage with their communities and procure meaningful participation. Community members are accustomed to not being heard and not having their interests factored into the decision-making process, “*They check out,*” says Bamberger. To overcome this, Providence decided to center its work around communities of color and those who are most impacted, inviting them to co-lead the process to develop a strategy to adapt to climate change.

### People taking back the power

It was critical for the city to develop a “*co-creation process*” that involved the city, but ultimately let community members drive the strategy to solutions. Bamberger explains this decision, “*We need to rethink how we are working with communities on this issue and how to take the back-seat listening role.*”

In collaboration with the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island, Groundwork Rhode Island, Partners for Places, the Rhode Island Foundation, and the National League of Cities, the city has been able to gain the broad organizational and financial support and guidance necessary to implement a strategy built by the people for the people.

Putting their plans into practice, the city organized goals the community helped develop into categories—climate, energy, water, zero waste, transportation, food, and

land use and development. Within each category is a broad set of goals mapped to a list of specific actions, all of which are available online to the public through the city’s Sustainability Dashboard. To date, the city has completed 14 priority actions and continually works toward its broader goals, such as carbon neutrality by 2050.

### Recommendations

- A diversity of key community members must be involved from the beginning of the process and feel like they have a meaningful role in climate preparation and action planning. This builds in greater intelligence and support for the final plans.
- Ensure that decisions regarding the planning include special considerations for the people who are most impacted by climate change. Listen to their ideas on how to prepare for and respond to climate impacts.

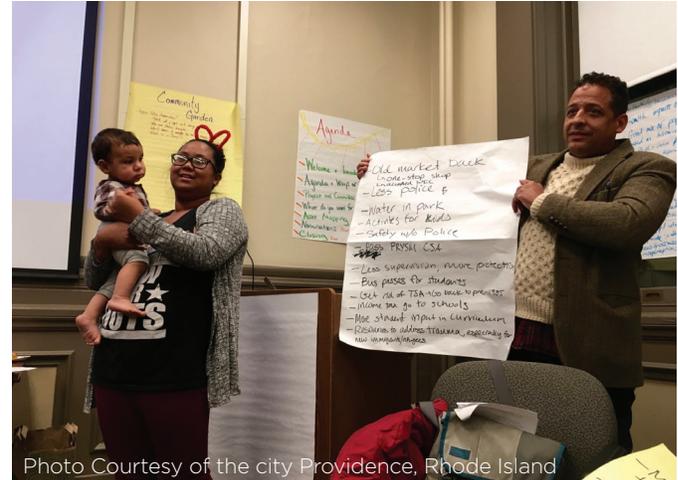


Photo Courtesy of the city Providence, Rhode Island

### Key Metrics

- Providence, Rhode Island
- Has led formal citywide efforts for 2 years
- A second-year grant of \$125,000 from the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth for its Equity in Sustainability initiative with a grant of \$100,000 for it’s first year in 2016
- \$17,000 grand from the American Institute of Architects and the Urban Sustainability Directors Network to host the inaugural charrette and provide a detailed report of the findings
- The Equity in Sustainability initiative aims to reach the city’s population of over 179,000 residents



## Creating a more livable city

Five years ago, the City of Sacramento created its first Climate Action Plan, with specific goals, strategies and actions to reduce emissions and prepare for climate change impacts. The plan created a domino effect that informed their 2035 General Plan, which lays out citywide goals spanning economic development, education, recreation, public health and safety, and more.

Sacramento City Councilman Steve Hansen shares that the city's comprehensive policies will allow their community to be bike friendly, walkable, and less dependent on cars. Hansen emphasizes, "We had to make our public

*infrastructure accessible for people who can't drive, or don't want to drive. People need choices for how to get around and want choices that were usable and safe."* Hansen also explains how equity has been identified as a key issue and challenge, and therefore will be rooted in the city's sustainability initiatives and planning.

## Bridging urban, rural and suburban

Hansen admits, "*Beyond the urban core, we have done a poor job with some of our suburban and rural communities helping them understand the value of the sustainability programs."* This issue became apparent as the city began plans for building affordable housing. They were trying to ensure

the housing was sustainable, convenient for transportation, and would help the city reduce their impact on climate by increasing walkability for all residents, especially low-income communities, which are disproportionately impacted. Hansen points out that in implementing many of these solutions, many of the projects, including the housing projects were "*overlooked quite a lot*" for funding because the communities are not located near the coast, where climate impacts are more severe and larger populations live.

Hansen offers a warning and a recommendation: "*When we can't bring rural and suburban communities to the table, we deprive ourselves of the ability to make smart decisions and move forward*

***"Being really aggressive about competing for funds, being smart about our strategy and how to achieve investments has been one of our sources of success."***

*as a whole.*” Hansen explains they have learned to involve everyone in the conversation, even those that disagree, to collectively understand the challenges and move forward on solutions that benefit all parties.

## Finding best practices and funding

To address equity and ensure that those most vulnerable to climate impacts were accounted for in infrastructure and other planning, Sacramento used the *Dangerous by Design* report (Smart Growth America), which provides a variety of tools and resources to improve community infrastructure. Hansen urges, *“Unless we begin to change some of the ways that we build public infrastructure—street by street, corner by corner—we’re not going to make the progress we need for our own people, let alone for the rest of the world.”*

Hansen explains how city planners must get creative to gain financial support for the solutions. Hansen recalls, *“Being really aggressive about competing for funds, being smart about our strategy and how to achieve investments has been one of our sources of success.”*

As the finances fell into place, the city carefully planned for the future by creating their 2035 general plan, which draws from environmental review reports and feedback from a host of stakeholders. Hansen explains, *“There is no decision too small to be made well when it comes to preventing climate change. Plans need to include energy usage, water usage, land use patterns, and transit. We all play a role in the effort to create effective and equitable climate solutions.”*

## Recommendations

- Create a safe environment, not only for yourselves and the people around you, including children, but also for those who come after you because the decisions we make now will have an impact for generations.
- Take an intersectional approach to building a coalition. Bring in leaders from other efforts and issues to build coalitions that are successful.



Photo Courtesy of the city of Sacramento, California

## Key Metrics

- Sacramento, California
- Citywide efforts began 5 years ago
- Hosted an open street event attracting 4,500 residents to bike and walk 1.5 miles of blocked off city streets to visualize the area without cars
- Thousands have been engaged and the city continually aims to reach all 495,000 residents with resources on how to reduce their impact

# RECREATION ECONOMY

## Placer County, California<sup>6</sup>

Featuring *Jennifer Montgomery*

### Reliance on a nature-based economy

Nestled in the heart of Northern California's national forests near Lake Tahoe, Placer County's economy, culture, and communities all rely on thriving nature. However, many of their natural resources have been threatened with rising temperatures, drier conditions, and variable snow pack as a result of climate change. Local government and community leaders, worried about the ramifications for the recreation industry, local economy, and citizens, got together to plan for climate impacts, and climate solutions.

Placer County's Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery explains the county's concerns were primarily with fires, which continue to grow more intense year after year. Additionally, new reports revealed more climate impacts to the area, including rising lake water temperatures and steep declines in water clarity. "We recognized that we needed



Photo Courtesy of Placer County, California

*to grapple with these impacts and make plans for the future,"* Montgomery says.

### Navigating through rough patches

Home to many recreational areas, planning for climate impacts and solutions was critically important, but not always easy for Placer County. Montgomery says, "Communities in Colorado, Utah, and other areas that are dependent upon the ski industry have similar concerns. We need to figure

*out how we change as a county, and as a community, working with conservation groups and business. And, we need to figure out how to prepare these very important businesses for change."*

Working across sectors also meant across the political spectrum. Montgomery shared that it was difficult to align the goals and vision aligned to develop the Placer County Conservation Plan. "A lot of people were concerned that if we moved forward with the full conservation

*plan we would get significant pushback from our communities and constituents. So, we first focused on the biomass facility, because that was, in many respects, the easiest sale to make,”* says Montgomery.

But the facility was not popular at first. Montgomery quoted Leslie Knope from the TV show Parks and Recreation “‘*When people yell at me, what I’m hearing is them caring at me very loudly.’ That’s something we all need to take to heart.*” Montgomery explains that it took numerous community meetings to find common ground with the development community and the conservation community. “*By making the economic argument, we were finally able to move those things forward.*”

## Balancing growth, impact, and education

To balance a variety of stakeholders and opinions, Placer County’s dual-purpose conservation and development plan has involved both sets of stakeholders to strike a delicate balance. Montgomery explains, “*I’ve championed this dual-purpose plan because it’s the right thing to do. We’ve needed to do it to ensure success.*” The county is also developing a Climate Action Plan.

To combat the spread and intensity of wildfires, the county is creating a biomass facility. This facility, which will use byproducts from forest thinning to generate electricity. “*Our local air pollution control district has been a strong partner in the biomass facility project,*” said Montgomery. “*Their interest is in rectifying air quality issues. This*

*demonstrates that, in many ways, moving toward carbon neutrality might even be a net benefit for us.*”

Montgomery attributes the success of both programs to educating the public on the benefits of the solutions they are working toward. They made progress by engaging the public, fully and transparently, early in the process.

## Recommendations

- Conduct an analysis on impacts and opportunities, from a scientific, economic, and personal/community perspective. Communicate impacts and benefits clearly and appropriately with the public.
- Be clear about project goals with all stakeholders, including the public.
- Invite stakeholder participation in the planning process, and create space for public comment and buy-in.
- Don’t reinvent the wheel. Learn from other communities. Find draft climate action plans, and model them. Connect with other community leaders to share ideas.



Photo Courtesy of Placer County, California

## Key Metrics

- Placer County, California
- The Placer County Conservation Plan has taken 14 years to develop
- Has provided educational tools and resources to over 375,000 county residents and developed 8 committees and working groups to engage residents on habitat and conservation planning and implementation in association with the Placer County Conservation Plan
- Received \$3 million from the U.S. Department of Interior—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Section 6 grant program awarded from the State of California for the Placer County Conservation Plan

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