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Appendix D: Racial Equity and Social Justice Workshop Takeaways



**RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL
JUSTICE WORKSHOP SUMMARY**
*MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
CLIMATE ACTION PLAN*

09/14/2020

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Introduction

The County held a two-part Racial Equity and Social Justice Workshop via Zoom on September 8, 2020 and September 15, 2020 with more than twenty community organizations spanning public health, economic development, environmental justice, civil rights, and religious areas. Workshop participants represented organizations that work with and serve vulnerable communities in the County, and participants were asked the questions outlined below, which the County CAP team developed. The following is a summary of workshop participant responses by question. This broadened engagement enabled the County to begin to identify existing blind spots and barriers to implementation, incorporate diverse voices and perspectives into the development of the CAP, and start conversations with underrepresented communities that will continue through action development and implementation.

Question 1: How does climate change impact the communities that you serve?

Flooding

1. Flooding has several impacts on communities in Montgomery County. For faith-based institutions, flooding in parking lots can be costly to manage and precludes access to services that these institutions provide to the community. In addition, runoff can impact adjacent neighbors.
2. Flooding impacts mobility because it makes it more difficult for people to get to work and can create new physical barriers that also impact mental health.
 - a. One work example is that many Muslim refugees work as rideshare or cab drivers and are unable to work when there are strong storms or flash floods in the area.
3. Many low-income and immigrant communities are likely to live in basement apartments and are severely impacted when flooding occurs. They experience mold as a result of flooding and don't have the resources to pay for professional services to deal with the flooding and mold.
 - a. Many times, these are immigrants who are dealing with landlords that refuse to provide this assistance as well. Tenants often feel powerless and are left to deal with the real-life consequences that are created from flooding in their homes.
 - b. Flooding also causes displacement and homelessness in the community, which in turn can threaten an individual's physical safety.

Utilities

1. High utility costs are exacerbated by high heat days. This becomes burdensome for people living in informal rental agreements such as undocumented immigrants. It also becomes a challenge for people who can't afford higher utility costs.
2. Communities lack access to alternative sources of power in the event of a storm outage. This can lead to fatal health outcomes for those who rely on electronic medical equipment.

Climate Change Health Impacts

1. Many people living in older homes do not have air conditioning and are more susceptible to extreme heat.
2. Climate change increases heat-related illnesses, such as dehydration and stroke for elderly populations, and negatively impacts people experiencing homelessness.
3. People who work outdoors in industries such as construction are more at risk for heat exhaustion and respiratory-related illnesses due to air quality.
4. Kids suffering from asthma seem to experience worse impacts than adults.
5. Air quality is a prevalent issue, and impacts are felt throughout the community.

Economic Uncertainty

1. As evidenced during COVID-19, service workers are hit especially hard by economic crises, as are taxi/Uber/Lyft drivers. These people usually support the local business economy by shopping in their neighborhoods. However, during extreme weather events and other crises, these communities are severely impacted.

Infrastructure

1. Climate change disproportionately impacts low-income and communities of color because of outdated and failing infrastructure in schools. Older heating and cooling systems are more likely to fail, which can lead to mold problems and extreme heat. This makes it harder for children to learn.

2. There are areas where a majority of the children live within walking distance to their schools, but dangerous traffic and poor infrastructure for pedestrians lead to them being bused.
3. Increasing the number of electric buses in the County's fleet would have positive health impacts for children who live in areas with heavy auto and bus traffic.
4. There needs to be better access to transportation choices in lower-income communities. Do people have the same access to transportation? People should be able to walk and bike safely, but first the infrastructure needs to be updated.
5. Persons of all ability levels should be able to move around safely. How safe do people with disabilities feel when walking and biking in our community?

Resource Availability

1. When you are impacted by disaster, you need adequate access to resources; however, many communities do not have the resources they need or know-how to access resources.
2. Some leaders expressed that people in their communities face fear of eviction as well as rental assistance need, childcare concerns, distance learning issues, and food insecurity.
3. In the resilience survey, people talked about the need to access resources, more education on what's available, and the need to access better education.
4. When COVID-19 started, many immigrant communities weren't aware that schools were providing food.
5. Some community members don't have a computer or, even if they have the equipment, don't understand the basics of navigating it to find resources.

Lack of Awareness of Climate Change Impacts

1. Many community members are not aware of the impacts of climate change (partly due to lack of education) or do not perceive it as a major concern. To bring the issue of climate change closer to community members, it is important to link it to an issue that is of high importance or concern (for example, health, income, household costs, and food security).
2. It is hard to concentrate or pay attention to climate change when you are in survival mode and just trying to get through day to day. People may be aware of climate change but have other pressing issues.

Additional Comments

1. Safety means different things to different people. Safety in one area means law enforcement. Safety and enforcement may mean something different in Bethesda versus Silver Spring.
2. The County needs to look from the outside in to really see the challenges that people have.
3. In working with recently arrived immigrants, many are coming from countries where violence and environmental issues such as drought are prevalent.

Question 2: Discuss the ability of the communities you work with to respond to the impacts of climate change.

Awareness

1. There is limited ability to respond to the impacts of climate change, which is largely due to lack of awareness, education, home ownership, and financial resources. One example that was provided was the ability to seek local grants to access financing for post-flood repair work. Many impacted households or organizations lack the capacity (time and ability) to develop and submit required grant proposals, which in turn limits them from accessing available funding.
2. Many communities don't know the resources that are free. It's an opportunity for the County to partner with other organizations to educate community members. For example, work with community newspapers and churches to get information out to the community.
3. Some immigrant communities don't understand how the government system in the United States works.
4. Language accessibility for all languages is important, and the government needs to be educated on the best languages to be used to respond and engage with community members. For example, information should come out on Spanish language radio and television.
5. Many children are living in multi-generation households (for example, three generations), so making kids aware of the issues could be helpful so they can pass on the information to other people in their households.
6. A lot of people don't know what the impacts of climate change are, and they feel distanced from the issue; for example, they do not have a sense of impending doom.
7. Raingardens
 - a. Landlords didn't want to implement rain gardens because they were afraid of pests. The County needs to do a better job of educating landlords.
 - b. Children can be introduced to sustainability practices such as rain gardens.
 - c. Gardens are a great, multi-faceted jumping off point for food systems conversations, business, etc.
 - d. The County should look at school property and work with farmers on implementing more rain gardens at these areas.
Example: www.edibleschoolyards.org
8. Police and other emergency service workers may not be cognizant of the specific needs of individual groups in their responses to the community.

Vulnerability

1. It is hard for people who are financially vulnerable to respond and act to protect themselves. People are in response/reaction mode, not prevention mode—they may be able to pay to clean up from flood damage, but not able to pay for long-term fixes, like drainage systems, sump pumps, or even moving to a safer location, etc.
2. Many seniors have landlines and need someone to check on them after storms.
3. Many people in the community are from low-income households who own old, inefficient cars and who use 'dirty' heating oil in their homes. Additionally, many are renters and tend to live in older buildings and houses with old and outdated heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.
4. Seniors tend to be socially isolated. Many lack access to technology and may not know how to use smart phones to find more information. The mail carrier is usually the first to notice this social isolation.

5. Many undocumented people in Montgomery County lack medical insurance and therefore are not able to seek medical help or attention for issues, such as asthma or respiratory issues, that are worsening as a result of climate change. Many immigrant households also have a certain fear or apprehension associated with the medical system; they may not know how to navigate it appropriately or fear disclosing full information or symptoms, as it may result in consequences such as losing one's job.
6. There must be additional resources for underserved populations because they may not have the insurance or money for repairs.

Distrust of Government

1. Many new immigrants have a distrust of the government.
 - a. People are coming from countries where the government is corrupt and oppressive and have a general distrust of government helping them.
 - b. Some just got out of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers.
 - c. They don't trust anyone that they don't know and in general are afraid to advocate for themselves.
 - d. People will starve because they are afraid to tell anyone that they don't have food.
2. Black communities have experienced a history of systemic racism and injustice, which makes them less trustful of government.

Living Conditions

1. Many community members do not own the places in which they live. Renting makes it harder to respond to disasters because it creates dependency on the owner to do the right thing.
2. There is often a trade-off between costs and comfort/health, and many people who are out of work or earning less due to COVID-19 are trying to minimize costs as much as possible.
3. Many community members are also getting evicted and are increasingly living in crowded homes, which is exacerbating issues such as poor air quality, high heat, existing respiratory and cardiovascular issues, and other issues.
4. Seniors have 26+ villages that are supporting each other to remain in their homes.
5. Be conscious of communities that do not have access to social media or a phone.

Question 3: What barriers exist that prevent the populations you serve from participating in incentive or resource programs for new technology?

Financial Feasibility

1. Actions being put forward in the CAP need to be mindful of different people's ability to afford certain upgrades or changes as well as their ability to benefit from the proposed actions. Many households already have financial difficulties and should not be required to carry further financial burdens as a result of the CAP actions.
2. Affordability of new technologies is a huge barrier for some people, especially if it's something they have to pay for upfront.
3. There are options for renting/owning/leasing solar panels. The state program called BeSMART offers an annual percentage rate (APR) of 4.9%; however, applicants need a good credit score, and for many low-income households it is difficult to qualify. They have a \$30k loan limit.

Awareness and Education

1. Innovation can be scary for people who don't trust people that they don't know. People are more likely to trust information from people they know within their own community than local government. The County needs to get the message across more effectively by using trusted people within the community.
 - a. In some communities, women are often at home during the day and are less likely to know how to access reliable information on innovative programs.
2. Some people are unaware of the impacts of climate change and technologies that exist to mitigate those impacts; information should be prepared in a way that people can receive it.
3. Provide information about new adaptive technologies at existing events, for example, school or community-based programming (also consider using Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA) Delegate Assembly for dissemination).

Lack of Home Ownership

1. Many community members are renters, and therefore the ability to make necessary upgrades to the home or unit is typically up to the landlord. In many renters' experience, they have found that landlords lack the incentives to invest in new, adaptive technologies such as solar panels or water pumps.

Language

1. With immigrant communities, language is often a barrier to accessing information and to increasing awareness.
2. An obstacle is that people may be from a Spanish-speaking country but speak an indigenous language; thus, even if information is translated into Spanish there are still literacy issues.

Technology

1. Some people may have an inability to maintain these technologies after installation, so they would rather not participate.
2. There can be a sense that some technologies, such as solar panels, are not attractive.

Additional Comments

1. People have a lot on their plates, so climate action can be difficult to prioritize in the midst of everything else.
2. Churches can be good spaces for community gardens, and there are examples of this in Baltimore. At George Washington University, produce from the community garden goes to Miriam's Kitchen. These are models to look at for innovation.

Question 4: What does racial equity and social justice mean to you when you think about climate action and resilience for the communities you serve?

Defining Racial Equity and Social Justice

1. Climate change doesn't have even implications across the planet.
2. Poor communities are typically located in areas where industries are also located, which tends to overburden these communities with pollution. Affluent communities don't have to deal with this issue, either because there are no industries in the vicinity or they have resources to put up more legal challenges.
3. As areas become gentrified and the price of rent, food, and other items increases, it will put a further burden on low-income households that already face poverty, for example, within the Black community.
4. It is also difficult as an immigrant—you're starting from zero, with no wealth and no connections, adjusting to a new language. It is hard to adjust, and many are just surviving. Immigrants also face mental health issues, which makes those barriers even harder to overcome. It is important to overcome the awareness about yourself, that my voice is not heard, for example, who's going to listen to a maid? It's often hard to understand that there's something bigger.
5. There is a strong correlation between mental health, green space, climate change, access to safe parks, and even COVID-19—do these spaces feel inclusive for all communities to enjoy?
6. The squeaky wheel gets the grease (resources are given to communities who make the most noise).
 - a. Maybe people don't have access.
 - b. People are working two or three jobs.
7. Respecting the agriculture reserve, but:
 - a. Building density is high inside the Beltway in Montgomery County.
 - b. Using the greenspace argument that is against development that will help working people or older people.

Messaging

1. The climate conversation should be contextualized within the larger environmental and racism frameworks.
2. Campaigns and incentives need to build on people's cultural practices, for example growing food at home/in their gardens.

Actions

1. The County should map different climate impacts and illustrate how climate change impacts communities across the County.
2. Racial equity and social justice should be an integral part of climate planning and should be the overarching framework for the CAP.
3. More resources should be set aside for underserved populations because they may not have insurance or money for repairs.
4. The County should look at a holistic approach because currently resources aren't being put into the communities that need it.
 - a. We want to get people working and out of poverty.
 - b. The good jobs are out of the area.
 - c. Make sure communities have access to resources.

Awareness of Issues

1. People want to move where there are less climate impacts, but mobility is costly and is contingent upon being welcomed and included in a new area. Additionally, real conversations are required as well as providing solutions to people for moving out.
2. Given the very internationally diverse nature of the County's population, we should keep in mind the impact of migration because of climate change. We could have more people move to Montgomery County as climate refugees to join family members who are already here. And we should acknowledge the important role of indigenous people around the world as providing a last stand against environmental degradation in their communities, helping to protect everyone.
3. Many Montgomery County residents have roots and links with other countries that could be severely affected by climate change. The County could see migratory waves as a result.

Engagement

1. Participants emphasized the importance of using community ambassadors to increase the chances of adoption and inclusion of best practices. They also emphasized viewing their communities not as recipients of services or knowledge, but owners, valuing their contributions as well. This is especially important given that so many immigrants, for example, are creators and producers.
2. Caribbean population example: reach residents through Caribbean stores, markets, and churches. Residents of Caribbean descent mainly live in the Upper County and East County. The community ambassador can leave flyers at the store because they already have a relationship with the store owner and can talk to them about the subject. There is a Caribbean heritage of growing/sharing your own fruits and vegetables in the summer. This is also an opportunity for teaching.
3. In addressing climate change practices, we should be open to other ways of conserving; in other words, instead of marketing this as advice to give them, we need to approach their communities and learn about what they are already doing well. For example, many immigrants already grow their own food in gardens, reuse containers, cook from dried beans instead of buying in cans, etc. There is much to learn from them as well.
4. Kids are leading the charge on action toward tackling climate change. Outreach to them will reach their families as well.
5. Promoters of new ideas need to come from within the communities to develop trust.

Question 5: How can the County better engage with the communities you work with on the topic of climate change? How do they best receive information and provide feedback?

Relationship with Local Government

1. There is a lack of trust that underserved communities have with local governments, and that is a major driver for why certain communities do not engage with government.
 - a. How can Montgomery County do a better job reaching out?
 - b. Many times, people in these communities don't know how to reach out even if they want to.

Community Issues and Popular Misconceptions

1. There is a stereotype that Asians are doing very well economically; but, 12% of Asians in Montgomery County live below the poverty line.
 - a. They exist as a silent minority—87% of Asians in Montgomery County are foreign-born.
 - b. Many seniors in this community are housebound because they can't navigate language barriers to access help.
 - c. Some Asians come as refugees from oppressive governments and are reluctant to reach out and engage with local government.
2. Different cultures exist even within communities. As an example, middle class Blacks and poor Black people reach out to different people when they need assistance. Someone who is middle class is less likely to use social services or have a social worker, so reaching them may take a different tactic.
3. Immigrant populations see things differently than those who are native-born, even when having the same ethnic background.
4. People of color are not a monolith, so remove existing stereotypes and stigmas when approaching communities.

Approaching Communities

1. The County should go into communities with an intent to listen.
 - a. Some communities are aware of climate change and want to be heard.
 - b. Bringing swag (giveaway materials) and passing out information isn't enough.
2. Frame issues in a way that is understandable to the community. Instead of just talking about health impacts such as asthma and allergies or spaces near pollution-emitting sources, make the connections to climate change. Tell how it is linked.
 - a. Be ready to provide solutions. What can the community do about it?
 - b. What resources are currently available? Connect people to the resources.
 - c. Don't just pile onto an existing load of issues that communities already have without offering solutions.
3. It's important to work with community leaders who have access and influence in the community instead of "assigned" leaders.
 - a. Build the plan with people who are a part of the community.
 - b. Understand the community.
4. The County has to understand what help-seeking behavior looks like and those things that would be most helpful to the community.
5. Meet people where they are. The information should be understandable for the intended audience.
6. Promote cultural competency and humility within the County staff.

- a. For example, don't go into communities as if you are there to save them.
- 7. Make sure information is disseminated in the language the community prefers.
 - a. Example: Buy ad space in newspapers that are oriented to that community.
- 8. Does the County get community feedback before developing a plan? Sometimes the County comes up with a plan, but the community needed something else. Engagement should go beyond government agencies.
- 9. Develop linkages to lessons from schools. Those without kids depend on community organizations to stay aware of issues, so make use of mouth-to-mouth, on-the-ground community outreach.

Possible Solutions

1. Community health workers are vital and should be a part of the team. This is a short- and long-term solution for building relationships with the community.
2. Contact the Office of Community Partnerships to use existing agencies within the County that already do this work. This team also has translation capabilities.
3. Diversify County staff by having competent people in positions that reflect the diversity of the County. Although having diversity doesn't completely solve the issue, the County has to figure out how we live together with a finite pie.
 - a. How will the County prioritize who is getting what out of the pie?
 - b. How do you make leadership and engagement representation reflect the diverse mosaic world that we are?
 - c. How do we exploit the diversity?
 - i. The environment is a resource that is finite. Not everyone has equal access, and what people in the County hasn't figured out how to do well is live together. For example, how do we have different responses to COVID-19 within the same pie?
4. Policies and penalties also work. The government entity speaks to the common good. Do we have the diversity in the ranks to enact policies? Instead of waiting on the community, there are some policies that should be enacted because they are necessary.

Methods for Engagement

1. Reach out through faith-based communities and be sure to do so in many languages. It's important to speak persuasively to the benefits of the programs and changes the County is proposing. Definitely explore using community ambassadors in outreach efforts.
2. One lesson from COVID-19 is that Zoom and other internet-based meetings are easier for participants to attend.
 - a. Example: A recent PTA meeting had over 150 people attend, which was the largest group in memory.
 - b. Use existing platforms to reach out and make it easier to meet people where they are.
3. Group participants emphasized that messages spread by word of mouth are a very effective way to share information among community members. In addition, using established connections and local network builders is a good way to continue building relationships locally. Also, look at local business schemes, such as established cooperatives in the County.
4. While having the established climate ambassador program is a good start to serve as a bridge between the County and communities, more formal paid positions are preferred.
5. Continue to use multilingual outreach.
6. Focus on high school kids because they are interested in taking action against climate change.

7. Approach locally trusted media, for example radio stations.
8. Focus groups have been a success, especially events at where families can participate, with childcare and other incentives that are proven to work.
9. There are WhatsApp groups that are language-based, and the County Council has a Facebook page in Spanish that gets a lot of engagement.

Additional Commentary

What blind spots do you all see in the County's approach and the aggressive goals of 80% reduction of greenhouse gases by 2027 and no net emissions by 2035?

1. Great goals to accomplish, but it takes money to make things happen.
2. There isn't enough public transit.
3. Plans lack imagination and big ideas:
 - a. For example, what if 50% of the pavement were removed?
 - b. Provide incentives for e-bikes and e-scooters.
 - c. Current plans are based on older or outdated websites.
 - d. Build infrastructure that supports multimodal transportation such as:
 - i. Benches
 - ii. Lighting
 - iii. Shade
 - iv. Bike parking for cargo bikes
4. We think of our roads as they exist versus how they can be used in the future. As an example, what if scooter companies showed e-bikes and e-scooters in narrow bike lanes.
5. COVID-19 shows that people can change. There are people walking and biking; now imagine if they felt safe to do this regularly.
6. Trauma is an issue.
 - a. People bring the trauma of the situations they left behind.
 - b. Black communities are dealing with over-policing.
 - c. Mental health is key in all of this.
7. Diversity in the County is not just Black and Brown. There is also an indigenous population.
 - a. For example, there are Guatemalans in the County that are 100% indigenous.
8. The police don't have the capacity or are not interested in certain communities. For example, parks filled with bottles of liquor. There are no initiatives to have safe parks, safe places, safe illumination. Getting the police involved could help.
9. Public spaces will continue to be full of trash if you don't invest in them. If local government is not investing in us, why should we invest in us?
10. The County has quite a bit of financial influence and should use it to drive change.