

MoCo Carbon-Free 2030
An Evidence-Based Communication Strategy for Community Engagement and Action

Montgomery County is a diverse, smart, compassionate community. We love our families. We care about making a difference. We appreciate and enjoy our parks, environment, and the natural wildlife. We want to protect and hold up people who unfairly become marginalized. And we care about what might threaten life as we know it and the ideals that make Montgomery County a great place to live. The Evidence-Based Communications Workgroup on Climate Change held our community strengths to the core of our plan. We evaluated the science to understand where the biggest threats exist, where climate opinion offers avenues to behavior change, and how to manage a diverse range of recommendations coming out of the other workgroups.

At the foundation of our work was the policy that heightened the importance and relevance of this work. On December 5, 2017 Montgomery County was the first county in the country to adopt a [climate emergency resolution](#). This affirmed the county's understanding, commitment, and understanding – at least at a political level – to the threat of global warming. Since then, the county has voted for a new executive, Marc Elrich, who was one of the County Council members that voted for the climate emergency resolution, has since set carbon reduction goals of 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035. All of the workgroups – including ours – had this goal as the driving focus for our recommendations. And, living here, we also spent hours researching, brainstorming, and forming approaches that we know will work – because this is our home and our place on a planet that has become vulnerable because of how we live and the carbon we emit.

This workgroup recognized why the science and environmental frames have not moved people to a place of action – simply, people hear or read the data and feel that climate change is still far in the future and something for future generations to address. But the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C approved by governments](#) revealed that climate inaction leaves us only until 2030 to take effective action to drastically reduce carbon and change our carbon emitting behaviors. The county's climate emergency resolution, carbon reduction goals, and the science that drives the urgency to action were driving forces to the social behavior change communication approach we developed. The Yale Climate Opinion Maps specific to Montgomery County also show that there is a very high awareness that climate change is happening (83%), caused by humans (71%), and that it is hurting our natural environment and will harm future generations (68-81%). Based on the urgent need for action and current perspectives of county residents, combined with evidence from peer-reviewed research on effective messaging, we chose a **health frame** that demonstrates not only the health co-benefits of a green economy and other mitigation and adaptation efforts, but also provides some insurance and legacy that future generations have a chance to live on a healthy, livable planet. This frame gives our community the motivation to act now and feel the benefits now and well into the future.

The accompanying PowerPoint walks through our evidence-based approach in greater detail and includes a Communication Strategy Logic Model (outlining resources, activities, objectives, knowledge and belief, outcomes, and ultimately the behavioral outcomes of the communications campaign) and a Process Flow (a tool to guide the communications team on how to determine which recommendations should be included in the outreach campaign). The communications strategy works for carbon reduction recommendations that will help us achieve the goals for the county, but also recommendations for sequestration and adaptation that will have a slightly different approach. The health frame will work with all of the work group recommendations, while advancing those into the communication and outreach plan that require the support and engagement of the target audience and influencers. The strategy we recommend targets community-level changes, however, the framework can be adapted and nuanced for other audiences, such as industry and business.

Target Audience

The campaign focuses resource on communicating with residents that are already supportive of climate action, are likely to support needed behavior change, and understand that climate change is happening right now. The key influencers we will engage include business and industry associations, faith leaders, civic associations, schools and PTAs, youth and children, health providers and long-term care providers, first responders, nonprofit groups, and foundations.

Core Health Frame Messages

We developed three core health-frame messages:

- Climate change is a health emergency. Climate change is harming the health of MoCo residents now, and, unless we respond, these harms will increase.
- Climate solutions are health solutions. Fighting climate change will improve our health immediately and protect our own and our children's health for the future.
- Your actions and support will make a difference for climate and health in MoCo.

Possible Campaign Brand and Tag Lines

Brand Recommendation: MoCo Carbon-Free 2030

Tag Lines (based on top two concerns – health and fate of children/grandchildren):

- “Protecting our health and future.”
- “Health county, healthy planet.”
- “Your lungs and your children will thank you.”

Key Recommendations

County Communications

- Increase and stimulate internal Climate Action communications across divisions.
- Showcase county's climate action activities via external communications.
- Develop and use evidence-based climate action communication frames and messages.
- Prioritize communicating climate change solutions that require and benefit most from public stakeholder engagement and support.

Community Partnership

- Engage and facilitate action through ongoing external stakeholder actions (meet residents where they are).
- Engage community as partners and support their needs, so they will take action on a personal level and support MoCo activities.

To ensure the effectiveness of the communications campaign, we also provided a communication development and improvement process that ensures evaluation and provides opportunity for mid-course corrections or other creative strategies. Ongoing (quarterly) reporting to county residents should include the recommendations that are currently being implemented, benchmarks achieved, and measured outcomes so the community will be well aware of the result of our collective efforts. We also recommend the establishment of a Climate Change Communication Commission of volunteers who will be key to educating and engaging people throughout the county and can also report progress.

Our final thought is, despite the frightening reality of the threat posed by climate change, offering a positive vision of our future is critical. We'd put it this way: Fighting climate change is our pathway to a health, safety and fairness for all Montgomery County residents. The harder we fight, the sooner we'll get there.

The Evidence-Based Communications Sub-workgroup Members:

Joyce Breiner

Robert Gould

Ilissa Ocko

Janette Rosenbaum

Walter Weiss

Lauren Brown

Bob Guldin

Daphne Pee

Marci Roth

Ethan Goffman

Helga Luest (Chair)

Paula Popsas

Joy Siegel