

Opportunity For Improvement: What Participants of the Climate Knowledge Exchange Seek from the City to Help Foster Resiliency

THE RESILIENT COASTAL COMMUNITIES PROJECT

INFORMATION

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A look into the NYC Climate Knowledge Exchange, and what community participants are looking for in concrete government action.

In 2021 the Climate Knowledge Exchange (CKE) was created by the NYC Mayor's office of Resiliency in an effort to identify the most significant knowledge gaps impeding an equitable climate response in NYC.

Subsequently, in 2022 CKE was held again in the hopes of bringing together participants from community leaders to scientists in order to improve processes of engagement and better implement the knowledge conveyed by participants.

Throughout the three workshops, community members participating in the Climate Knowledge Exchange drew from their expertise to demonstrate how the city can better center community needs in planning and development.

Improvements they voiced ranged from equity to commitment to action and thus also clearly aligned with the input from environmental and climate justice organizations interviewed by the Resilient Coastal Communities Project (RCCP) regarding the same subject.¹

This memo was prepared for the RCCP in order to clearly outline which aspects need the most attention from the city, the following memorandum summarizes issues which the community members present at the workshops sought improved effort from the city.

¹ [RCCP Community Interview Report 2022: Designing Community-led Plans to Strengthen Social Cohesion: What Neighborhoods Facing Climate-driven Flood Risks Want From Resilience Planning.](#)

While the topics were created by only a sample of the larger NYC communities, they attempt to represent overarching issues that directly affect the ability for local initiatives to engage with city planning regarding resiliency and prepare for climate related issues. These topics include; supporting Community Science and sustaining a "Dynamic Process"

Furthermore, CKE participants expanded upon how the 4 step process of engagement- Funding, Accessibility, Networking and Elevate- can all be better developed in order to effectively capture their needs for building capacity. Accompanying the analysis of input from CKE input and recommendations, participants' direct quotes can be found in the Appendix.

1. Recognize Intersectionality within Communities by Elevating / Empowering Collaborative Efforts.

As voiced by both CKE participants and local climate justice organizations interviewed, a critical area of city planning needs to center around addressing the intersection of threats confronting communities, especially those who face environmental and climate injustice.

As noted in the RCCP Community Interview Report 2022, "Threats compound and intersect with problems of poor and inadequate housing, contamination, racism, and existing environmental injustice", the city can address the intersectionality of these issues by connecting scientific knowledge to urban policy to community

needs and knowledge.

By aligning science to the daily life of community members the city not only demonstrates an effort to address the varying barriers they face but also encourages participation by amplifying the tangible issues that action can solve.

A fundamental part of addressing the intersectionality of climate change issues is by also amplifying historically overlooked communities and voices. The CKE participants continuously acknowledge the need for diverse hiring being inter-generational and spanning a wide ethnic range.

In order to accurately capture the experience and needs of communities, the city must recognize the wide diversity of people that need to be given a voice and space.

Recognizing the intersectionality of environmental issues is also crucial in helping empower communities when co-developing plans. As stated by interviewees, the city currently fails to “bring communities into the planning process” and would like to see improvements in models for “collaborative decision-making”:

Participants of the CKE workshops also sought to address these issues by advocating for more inclusive and expansive spaces for sharing. All aspects of the decision-making process from meetings to policy implementation should be more open-ended in order to ensure that compounding threats to well-being are being appropriately addressed- so that environ-

mental justice and community resilience may be realized.

In addition to inclusivity, community members feel they would also be empowered in co-developing plans if the city clearly identified and implemented actionable next steps with subsequent follow-ups.

Improvements to “Elevate/ Empower and Recognizing Intersectionality” that community members want:

- Address the intersection of threats communities face by making them a priority for policy initiatives.
- Acknowledge historically overlooked communities by practicing diverse and inter-generational hiring practices.
- Include community members in all levels of the decision-making process.

2. Support Community Science

Both CKE participants and interviewees expressed a critical need for the city to accept community knowledge. Essentially, the city must “uplift community knowledge” by providing equal visibility and legitimizing community science as a data source.

The knowledge gathered from community members’ experiences and expertise need to be equally shared and considered as those from academia. Empowering both knowledge sources equally advances the process of the

academic community understanding the community needs and research projects being designed and directed with community goals in mind.

The CKE participants acknowledged that recognizing and accepting community science as a valid data source begins with the effort of realizing the intersectionality of environmental issues and decolonizing the existing system of research in order to amplify community input.

Improvements to “Community Science” that community members want:

- Recognize / legitimize community experience, expertise, and knowledge as a valid data source.
- Equal visibility to community science and academic research.

3. Funding

As demonstrated by the advice of CKE participants and the experience of interviewees, the first step of the 4 phase process for collaboration, funding, is integral for communities to be able to have the capacity to meet their needs. A major improvement that both groups would like to see from the city is equitable compensation.

As voiced by an interviewee, the current arrangements “almost never made for equitable compensation” and thus made participation from certain groups of individuals “infeasible”

By compensating community members appropriately for their exper-

tise the city will not only provide the means for continued participation but foster an environment that encourages constituents to actively take part in constructive dialogue.

Additionally, CKE members voiced the need to create metrics to ensure an equitable distribution of funding among communities. The purpose of these metrics would include both keeping the city accountable for distributing vital resources and ensuring that the most urgent needs are being met in a timely manner.

Furthermore, CKE participants noted that funding support systems would also greatly improve their ability to maintain capacity. Community members would benefit from the city funding the following support services:

- Grant writing programs.
- Technology (to apply for grants).
- Access to federal funding.

By supporting the ability of community organizations to access federal/ external funding the city helps assure that capacity is not only being maintained but also expanding. In addition to funding support for community organizations to apply for federal funding, CKE participants hope that funding for community needs be built into city/ local governments’ annual contracts.

Improvements to “Funding” that community members want:

- Equitable compensation (i.e.

appropriately pay people for their participation).

- Create metrics to track and ensure the distribution of funding.
- Fund and support training programs / resources for grant applications.
- Reform funding agreements in local / city governments.

4. Maintain a “Dynamic Process” and Mutually Beneficial Networks

Much of the frustration from CKE participants and interviewees alike is the lack of follow-through from the city on implementing policy or initiatives. Both groups expressed a need for the city to improve on following-up after hosting meetings or workshops that require the community’s participation.

Furthermore, there must be improved follow-through on the policy or initiatives created collaboratively between the city and community. Essentially, the city needs to translate the time and effort from the community into actionable next steps that are eventually realized.

Part of assuring a ‘dynamic process’ is by maintaining a sustained dialogue through networking and creating partnerships. An area of concern voiced by both groups is that the city does not necessarily instill trust. The lack of check-ins and follow-ups does not inspire confidence from community members.

Additionally, a fundamental safe

space must be established at events between the city and community by having training protocol for community engagement, conflict resolution, and inclusive collaboration.

The establishment of a safe space helps instill trust as well as create a culture of respect. Community members need the city to improve its transparency; part of the reason why a “dynamic process” is lacking is that the city does not realistically set expectations for actions and voice what they are actually capable of achieving.

Ultimately, by honestly communicating their ability and creating a safe space/ culture of respect the city can better provide long-term partnerships that bring together government and community.

Furthermore, improvements in networking can be achieved by the city practicing more diverse hiring of individuals from communities they seek to serve.

This diverse and inclusive expansion must also include engaging indigenous communities so that shared leadership and decision-making may be as expansive as possible. Community members also expressed that the community needs to improve on network sharing by making contacts at the state and city level accessible as well as stakeholders.

Improvements to “Dynamics Process and Networking” community members want:

- Follow-up and follow through on initiatives (via check-ins).

- Frame outreach in terms of “actionable” next steps.
- Create training protocol to ensure a safe space / culture of respect during collaborative meetings.
- Be transparent about capacity and set expectations realistically.
- Share leadership with an inclusive range of communities.
- Publish/ share networks (state / city contacts, shareholders, etc.).

5. Accessibility: Redefining Translation

The CKE workshops made it clear that there are two areas of accessibility that the city must improve upon; translation and outreach. In terms of translation, community members would like to see an increased effort from the city on translating materials into various languages and being conscious of potential language barriers.

For example, language accessibility can be improved by normalizing multilingual meetings and outreach material. As part of an attempt to expand inclusivity and recognize intersectionality, the city must dedicate resources to assuring all constituents are able to access information in their preferred language.

Outreach is another form of accessibility that requires considerable improvements, especially considering that interviewees specifically expressed that they were “surprised” that “deeper outreach doesn’t happen”.

When planning outreach the city not only needs to emphasize translation to other languages but also redefine translation to capture the additional barrier that prevents some community members from fully understanding the information being conveyed. Essentially, outreach needs to also be translated into easily understandable and digestible language.

CKE participants revealed that translating outreach or science to more clear language helps humanize it and thus encourages engagement. Additionally, the city should explore communicating easy-to-understand material in different modes like social media, images, and audio.

A variety of communication modes and platforms not only proves to be beneficial in engaging communities but also helps account for other barriers individuals face when trying to access information.

Improvements to “Accessibility” community members want:

- Normalize multilingual meetings and outreach.
- Translate material into different languages and understandable language.
- Increase modes of communication (social media, image, audio).

Concluding Recommendations

Collectively, it is evident that there are multiple areas of resiliency planning

and development that are severely lacking community collaboration.

As demonstrated by the direct quotes located in the Appendix, individuals throughout NYC are eager and prepared to support the city in creating policy for resilience but their voices are too often overlooked. While there are various areas for improvement with multiple dimensions, this memorandum sought to encapsulate the most pressing topics that need to be addressed.

All the recommendations presented in this memorandum are important and deserve full consideration from the city since they focus on centering community needs. However, the following suggestions demonstrate the extent and urgency of progress needed by the city:

- Address the intersection of threats communities face by making them a priority for policy initiatives.
- Equal visibility to community science and academic research.
- Equitable compensation (i.e. appropriately pay people for their participation).
- Share leadership with an inclusive range of communities.
- Translate material into different languages and understandable language and increase modes of communication.

Considering how closely the input from CKE workshops overlaps with advice from interviewees of the RCCP

Community Interview Report 2022,² it is clear that communities experience a significant lack of acknowledgement from the city in the current decision making process. As indicated continuously by participants, follow-up is crucial in building trust; thus the city must demonstrate a concerted effort to implement the extensive information voluntarily given and compiled throughout the CKE workshops.

In order to better prepare NYC for the unprecedented future ahead it is imperative that city and local governments incorporate the input currently being provided by community members.

APPENDIX, 1

Direct quotes from Climate Knowledge Exchange Participants on each topic:

1. Elevate/ Empower and Recognize Intersectionality

- Ensuring that these are inter-generational and multiethnic forums. Echoing the comments of someone who said that youth and elders should be represented.
- Being inclusive in terms of who is at the table for meetings. Who are “experts” in the community may be elders without “certificates” etc. but with really important [knowledge].
- Decolonize “knowledge” and learn from [the] expertise of residents
- Acknowledge and address previous and systemic marginalization and extractive practices utilized by government and scientists against or at the expense of communities (especially black, brown, indigenous, and women).
- Elevating community knowledge through policy. If this policy is [placed] at the city level, the law says that [the] community has to be engaged. Use climate knowledge exchange to influence policy for action.

2. Community Science

- Support equal visibility of materials in different realms (e.g., academic literature and reports from Community Based Organizations — elevate everyone’s work).
- Legitimize community science as [a] data source.
- Give extra weight to community knowledge/experience it is often dismissed as [less] than valuable in the context or face of government and science knowledge.

Funding

- Community organizations and members are overburdened in almost every way you can think of and their expertise is often undervalued. Compensating them for their time and expertise is essential to equity and to [ensure] their ability to engage in these processes.
- Funding allows additional viewpoints to enter the space and [enables] broader knowledge sharing.
- There are multiple grant programs available for supporting this work; what

APPENDIX, 2

Direct quotes from Climate Knowledge Exchange Participants on each topic:

is still missing is creating capacity for community-based organizations to apply for the funding.

- Have the city facilitate community access to federal funds.
- Technical support for grant writing and compliance/administration.
- Codify CKE funding/support into NYC law.

“Dynamic Process” and Networking

- Ensuring there are mechanisms for identifying and implementing actionable next steps.
- Transparency, agency, accountability at every step.
- Always framing KE findings to address the statement “Knowing the risk doesn’t help me reduce my risk” so that what is actionable is clear. So communities know what is needed on their part.
- Create ways to hear from residents, but incorporate that community feedback into processes that result in action.
- Begin developing training protocol for community engagement, conflict resolution, collaboration.

Accessibility: Redefining Translation

- Funding jargon can be a barrier.
- Translate scientific into clear human language.
- Effective communication tools that speak to many audiences (language, literacy, cultural backgrounds, etc) are critical.
- Translation of findings in a multitude of ways, language, and cultural relevancy, but also how this relates to individuals and collectives in tangible ways. i.e. how does this translate in regards to clear next steps someone can take, what is the clear invitation or direction in tandem with findings.
- Create a more engaging way to translate/deliver information to those who aren’t interested in the science/ don’t have time to invest in learning the science behind it.