

Climate Justice Webinar Series

2022-2023 Report

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In 2022, the Southern Climate Impacts Planning Program (SCIPP) partnered with the Disaster Justice Network (DJN) to organize a series of webinars engaging in topics around disaster recovery, environmental justice, and climate adaptation in the Gulf South. The Disaster Justice Network is a network of community leaders, faith leaders, advocates, activists, practitioners, researchers, and students that exists to share critical disaster recovery information and develop strategies to address environmental and social justice in south Louisiana and beyond. The goal of the webinars was to create a forum for deep and open conversations about specific topics, while raising awareness and disseminating relevant and timely information that could be helpful for stakeholders pursuing equity and justice related work. In total, three webinars were held. Below is a description of each webinar and evaluation results. Links to the videos of each webinar, along with resources shared during each event, can be found on SCIPP's website (<https://www.southernclimate.org/events-outreach/meetings-workshops/>).

Entitled **Climate and Infrastructure Funding: A Conversation on Justice Opportunities and Challenges**, the first virtual webinar was held on July 28th, 2022 and featured two panelists, Ardie Griffin and Allison Bridges. Ardie Griffin is the Policy Analyst and Legislative Director at the Emerald Cities Collaborative (ECC), a national nonprofit coalition and Black-led organization that works at the intersection of environmental, economic, and racial justice. The Emerald Cities Collaborative created a “Community Benefits Playbook” that serves as an organizational tool for communities seeking to deepen their understanding of the Biden-Harris Administration’s *Justice40* Initiative. “Community” in this context is defined as residents in neighborhoods and areas that bear the brunt of environmental and economic harms and are without access to environmental goods or amenities, (also referred to as Environmental Justice, or “EJ” communities). The Playbook contains specific chapters on energy, economic, environment, climate, and transportation justice and identifies key stakeholders and resources associated with these sectors. The Playbook ends with a planning guide that takes communities through a process for creating a shared vision around what benefits they would like to see in the realms described earlier. Ardie also discussed ECC’s community capacity building program.

Next, Allison Bridges, lecturer at Columbia University and Emory University, described her work with the Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP) to analyze the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. SEAP released a resource guide for local-level governments on how to use infrastructure funding and how it could be used to advance environmental and equity goals. In the discussion portion, the panelists spoke about the need for procedural equity and well-resourced community engagement within government to elevate the priorities and perspectives of EJ communities within policy contexts— such as having community members take part in defining metrics for state-level *Justice40* plans or having more accessible public meetings, etc. In terms of infrastructure projects, they relayed the importance of engaging community early and highlighted the need for development of implementation tools, such as equity scoring criteria or guides for integrating equity into cost benefit analysis. Collaboration

between researchers and community to amplify community stories and to ensure that the lived experiences of communities is valued and reflected in data was also identified as an important component of climate justice work. Conversation topics also included collaboration across federal agencies, mapping tools and metrics, improving competitive grant processes, and elevating equitable climate adaptation solutions.

Entitled **The Next Big One: The Ongoing Work of Disaster Recovery and Preparedness for Communities on the Frontlines**, the second virtual webinar took place on September 16th, 2022. It was moderated by Alessandra Jerolleman, an Associate Professor in Jacksonville State University's Emergency Management Department, author, applied researcher, and specialist in community resilience, disaster recovery, and climate adaptation. Panelists included Naomi Yoder (Staff Scientist) and Sheehan Moore (Science Specialist Intern) from Healthy Gulf. Healthy Gulf is a network of scientists, organizers, and volunteers that collaborate with communities along the Gulf Coast. Sheehan and Naomi started the webinar off by describing Healthy Gulf's report on pollution following Hurricane Ida. The report sought to characterize what was spilled and released into the environment following Hurricane Ida as well as how much. The report also highlighted recommendations for public and private sector organizations to mitigate the release of toxins into the environment due to severe weather events, keep better records and data, and be more transparent to the public about pollution releases. The authors of the report found that out of the over 2200 incidents of releases made, only 440 incidents specified what pollutants were released, and only 150 specified how much of a pollutant was released. In total, these releases included 730 tons of gases, 5,468 barrels of liquids, and 25 square miles of sheen.

The webinar also featured advocate and volunteer Toi Carter from Louisiana Just Recovery Network. This organization started as a grassroots network of environmental justice leaders and community members that emerged to help communities in the industrial corridor along the lower Mississippi River recover following Hurricane Ida. Toi described the importance of grassroots recovery measures, aid and volunteer networks, and what recovery means from the perspectives of people overburdened by pollution and underserved by institutions. Both presentations emphasized that communities hard from Hurricane Ida, and that experience chronic pollution exposure, are predominantly Black and Indigenous, a legacy which can be traced back to settler colonialism and slavery. Following the presentation, panelists discussed in more detail what it means to foster relationships and work in partnership with communities. Panelists stressed the need to make personal relationships and to "show up" for one another, as well as listening to residents and taking their lead. Panelists also described how institutions should transform to better serve and protect the public from disasters.

The third virtual webinar on February 3rd, 2023, was titled **Hurricane Harvey Aid and Recovery Equity for People of Color Communities**. The session included PhD candidate Melissa Villarreal from the University of Colorado Boulder and Julia Orduña from Texas Housers. Melissa Villarreal is a Bill Anderson Fund Fellow and environmental and disaster sociologist. Her research chronicles the long-term housing recovery of Mexican-origin immigrants following Hurricane Harvey and focuses on women’s experiences. Julia Orduña is the south Texas regional director at Texas Housers, an organization that has been monitoring disaster recovery money in Texas for decades. Texas Housers continues to hold state actors accountable, most recently with their Title VI complaint against the Texas General Land Office's discrimination of BIPOC communities. Julia Orduña spoke about her organization’s efforts to advocate for people in need of affordable housing and people who are left out of disaster aid programs— programs which are primarily designed for homeowners.

After brief introductions, Julia first spoke about key gaps in disaster recovery funds and the importance of working with residents to learn how to navigate complex bureaucratic processes. Melissa explained that county and federal recovery moneys are obtained through separate processes and cover different aspects of recovery. She found that many Latina women she interviewed were given conflicting information regarding how to access aid and waited long periods of time only to find out they needed to reapply through a different system. Melissa did note that when the Federal Emergency Management Agency set up application stations in-person, and in accessible places like local churches, women were more likely to be successful in obtaining aid, adding that many women she interviewed were not able to apply over the phone due to language barriers. The conversation covered gendered aspects of recovery. Melissa spoke about the unique experiences of women who spearheaded the recovery process for their household, a task that was taken up alongside managing their household’s finances and having to provide childcare and education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Julia Orduña added that the majority of people in the community organizing and disaster recovery space are women. In terms of amplifying community voices, Julia described how her organization mobilizes community members to give their input to government agencies that are making policies or disaster recovery plans. The discussion also covered several topics important to just recovery for People of Color communities, including examples of community-centric capacity-building initiatives for recovery, how state actors and politics can be a barrier to recovery, and social science research and ethics.

Attendance and Evaluation

The series was advertised through SCIPP and DJN's email listserv and advertised on social media. The announcement for the webinars received thousands of impressions on Twitter and in total, 337 people registered for the webinar series (webinar 1 = 122 people registered with 4338 impressions, webinar 2 = 76 people registered with 8496 impressions, and webinar 3= 139 people registered with 2787 impressions), and actual attendance for the webinars was estimated to be around 20-50 participants each. Participants represented several institutions, including academia, federal agencies, the nonprofit sector, local health departments and water boards, regional stakeholder networks, community advocacy groups, and participant also consisted of independent consultants, researchers, and community members.

SCIPP team members developed a webinar evaluation survey that was shared at the end of each webinar. 16 evaluations were returned across the three webinars. The results show relatively high rates for webinar satisfaction and utility. For instance, the average ratings for overall satisfaction with the webinar and overall sense of utility of the webinar were 6.4 (on an 8-point scale) 6.2, respectively. Although open ended feedback was somewhat limited, the comments were positive overall. Participants shared that the best aspects of the webinar included: hearing from experts in the field working directly with community members, the opportunity for making connections across sectors and geographic scales, free-flowing conversation, and access to resources and information. Participants reported being able to apply the information in the webinars to their work in the areas of: research, program implementation, and coalition and network building. Participants also indicated that the content was best when the panelists and hosts were clear and enthusiastic and when resources and actionable strategies were presented. Overall, the reach of the series conveys a need for climate adaptation and community capacity building content that centers equity and justice. The feedback presented and the quality of the conversations in the events indicate that the webinar series created a space for cross-cutting conversations with the potential to bridge divides across stakeholder groups (e.g., local and federal government, nonprofit and research sectors).