

Reimagined in America: What Can the World Teach Us About  
Building a Culture of Health?

## Episode 13

# Advancing Climate Justice

### WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

On the May 13, 2022, episode of RWJF's [Reimagined in America: What Can the World Teach Us About Building a Culture of Health](#) webinar series, Nia Mitchell of C40 Cities and Bethany Howard of the Eastside Community Network in Detroit discussed how U.S. communities can learn from places abroad to advance climate justice and improve health and well-being for all.

A full transcript of the discussion can be found below.

*Please note: Transcripts are produced by a third-party transcription service and may contain discrepancies.*

## **MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Greetings, everyone. I hope you all have had a chance to take the Blue Marble Quiz that we had up on the screen or that you'll spend a few moments after the webinar taking it. It's super fun. And if you enjoyed it, I hope you'll share it with others, especially your kids. I'm Karabi Acharya and I lead the Global Ideas for US solutions team here at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. I'll be your moderator today for our 13th episode for the Reimagined in America webinar series. If you're returning to the series, welcome back. And if you're joining us for the first time, welcome. We're really excited to have you.

Before we begin, I want to take this opportunity to recognize and acknowledge that Philadelphia, where I'm based, is the ancestral lands of the Lenape people, also called Lenni Lenape. The traditional stewards of what is now Delaware, New Jersey, Eastern, Pennsylvania, and Southern New York. The Lenape were the first tribe to sign a treaty with the United States. Despite many Lenape being forcibly removed from their ancestral lands and relocated to Western states, the Lenape's presence and resilience in Pennsylvania continues to this day. This land acknowledgement is one small act to pay respect and honor the original caretakers of this land from time immemorial until now and into the future recognizing the histories of land theft, violence, erasure, and oppression that have brought us here.

Before we dive in, I just want to give you a few quick reminders. If you want to turn on live closed captioning, simply select the live captions button that's on the bottom of your screen. The webinar is being recorded. Everyone will receive an email early next week with a link to the recording and any of the resources that we discussed today. And finally, we ask that you submit questions to our speakers using the Q&A button on the bottom of your screen. Using the Q&A button is preferable to using the chat if you want to ask a question to our speaker. And on that note, we found that we are always in the middle of a robust conversation just as the webinar comes to its official end time. And we know that many of you will need to drop off at the hour, but for those of you who are able to continue the conversation a little longer, we'll plan to keep the line open for another 15, 20 minutes to continue the Q&A with our speakers.

So as you may know, the Global Ideas for US solutions team at RWJF is charged with learning from the world and bringing those lessons back home to help all of us in our efforts to improve health and wellbeing and build a culture of health here in the United States. One of the most pressing global crises we face today is climate change. It's devastating impacts on our health and wellbeing, no borders crossing every community, state, and nation. For a long time, the image that came to mind when we think about climate change is this horrible one of a polar bear sitting on a shrinking ice cap. And that is very real that reality holds, but it's really important that we begin to see that the images of climate change also include our children struggling with asthma due to air pollution,

our families displaced by floods, or our elders sweltering in the intense heat waves of summer.

Speaking of heat waves, you may have seen the latest climate and health outlook from the US department of Health and Human Services. It explicitly states that some communities face greater health risks from extreme heat, including those who are elderly, live alone, those who have existing health conditions, have poor access to healthcare, who live in rural areas who work outdoors, who make a low income, who face ... who have trouble paying their utility bills, live in poor housing, or live in urban areas without adequate tree cover. So in short, it's clear that climate change amplifies existing inequities. And that's why we're here today, to speak about climate justice and to understand how communities, both here in the United States and around the world, are stepping up and taking matters into their own hands. Climate justice, as a term, and equally a movement acknowledges that climate change has these differing social, economic, public health, and other adverse impacts on certain at-risk and underserved communities. And this relates to environmental justice in that these inequities that communities already face due to pollution and industrial hazards where they live are again only amplified by climate change.

Advocates for climate and environmental justice are working to address these inequities head on through long-term mitigation and adaptation strategies. Right now, our Global Ideas team is supporting and learning from six US cities that are already leading innovative community-driven approaches to mitigate the health and equity risks posed by climate change. And they're drawing their inspiration from efforts abroad. Detroit is one of those cities. And C40 serves as an organizing partner and global connector in this effort. So I'm really excited that Bethany and I are going to share some insights with us today. Now, we always like to begin by hearing from you. We have a poll with two questions that you should see on your screen. The first question, how do you see your community advancing climate justice? And check all that apply from the list. You may need to scroll down to see the second question. The second question is, why did you join today's webinar? So please answer those. I'll give you a minute and then we'll see the responses. Carl, just let me know when folks have had a chance to reply

**PRODUCER: Kyle McLoughlin, Burness**

Sure thing. (silence)

All right. A minute in, we have about 65% participating. So I'll give it another 20 seconds or so.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Sounds good. And then we can look at the responses. (silence)

## POLL

**How do you see your community advancing climate justice? Check all that apply from the list.**

- Making a stronger link between climate, health and racial equity
- Learning from the wisdom and experiences of those most impacted by climate and environmental harms
- Launching new efforts to prepare for climate impacts (for example, working on air quality, reducing waste, improving food security)
- Setting time-sensitive goals for climate mitigation and adaptation
- None of the above
- Other

**Why did you join today's webinar? (Check all that apply)**

- I want to know more about advancing climate justice
- I'm looking for solutions that I can bring to my own community
- I want to understand what we can learn from other countries
- I never miss a *Reimagined in America* webinar if I can make it!

**PRODUCER: Kyle McLoughlin, Burness**

Alright. I'll be ending the poll now.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

All right. Well, this is great. So how do you see your community advancing climate justice? So the number one response, 66% of you, was you're making a stronger link between climate health and racial equity. The next one down was launching new efforts to prepare for climate impacts, a very important one, And then the last two were learning from the wisdom and experiences of those most impacted at 42%, and then 35% was setting time sensitive goals for climate mitigation and adaptation. And then, why did you join today's webinar? I want to know more about advancing climate justice, 85%, looking for solutions, 53%, and understand what you can learn from other countries, 48%. And 8%, I never miss a Reimagined in America webinar. I love that. 8% is solid. I'm sure the next one will go even higher. So thanks so much for this. Really glad to have you with this.

So I'm really excited to introduce our two speakers today. Nia Mitchell is an Afro Cuban climate justice advocate who began as an environmental justice community organizer in East Oakland, and now serves as the manager of US Health, Equity, and Climate at C40. And in this role, she supports the ongoing partnership with RWJF to accelerate global best practices for building climate resilience and improving health equity in six US

cities by facilitating peer sharing opportunities between grantees and a C40 global network. Welcome, Nia. Bethany Howard serves as the climate equity coordinator for Detroit's Eastside Community Network. She was born and currently thrives on the Eastside, a fifth generation resident. She's deeply connected to the history and legacies there. Having recently received a master's in community development, Bethany is using her degree and role at ECN to amplify the agency and expertise of her community. Welcome, Bethany.

Many thanks to you both for being with us today. So I'm going to kick things off with a couple of questions of my own and then really eager to hear questions from the audience and we'll have a lot of time for Q&A with the audience. So Bethany, I'd love to start with you. I would love for you to sort of take us on a journey with your coalition in Detroit. Can you tell us a story of the Eastside community, the environmental and climate injustices that have mobilized the residents, and how you've looked around the world and the Philippines specifically for inspiration in your work?

#### **GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Absolutely. Thank you so much, Karabi, for moderating this space. Again, I'm Bethany J. Howard from ECN here in Detroit. And to get started, I would like to provide you with a few stats to put in context of the connection of composting, waste management, and air pollution. 30,000 Detroiters don't have access to a full line grocer. 48% of households are food insecure. All of our pilot neighborhoods have limited access to healthy food and are struck with health problems such as asthma, that accompany food insecurities in spaces of historical disinvestment. A low income community of color bears the brunt of environmental and public health burden, which leads us into an article that I found. According to BridgeDetroit, Jena Brooker, Detroit is a hot spot for asthma. Rates are now 46% higher than the state average. This particular region hasn't met air quality standards in several years for ground level ozone, a pollutant that's emitted into the air from industrial facilities like our incinerator, and vehicles, and gasoline vapors. And the burning from the now closed incinerator was a part of this waste management quagmire on the eastside of Detroit. Now I would love to take you all on a journey so you can see where all these statistics are actually happening. So we have a map that we're going to show you.

Alrighty.

[Video plays, showing a map of Detroit's Eastside Community]

So I'd love to take you all on a journey of what's happening with our pilots and what we're doing to reduce waste, enable security, and lessen pollution. Here we have the incinerator that burns waste leading to toxic ash emissions and unbearable smells that pollute the air. Our three pilots developed a waste program to help with composting.

Here, we have the two Stellantis plants. In February of 2019, they announced their expansion in an area that is already prevalent with asthma and has already experienced environmental racism because of volatile organic compounds that are being admitted at a much higher rate than another Stellantis plant in a neighboring suburb. Eastside Community Network, where I work, serves as an advocate to uplift experts that are already doing climate work, fostering climate resilience spaces to increase awareness. Georgia Street Community Collective started by Mark Covington serves as one of the sites where composting and training processes take place through FoodPLUS Detroit.

Here we have a space where our compost build with Breathe Free Detroit was held on April 30th. This is where Just Transition to Zero Waste and Just Transition for Residents in the community . And next, we have sustainable community farms that connects with other urban farmers to uplift zero waste composting among youth, and to educate generations about what's reusable, recyclable, and compostable. At 8,212 miles away, we have our mentor in the Mother Earth Foundation who help to inform and guide our efforts in quality composting whose organization addresses waste and toxic pollution, climate change, and other health and environmental issues through systematic reduction and proper management of waste. So that is the spiel of what's happening over here on the Eastside.

#### **MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

That's incredible, Bethany. Thanks so much. And I love the maps. That really helps to tell the story. Nia, I want to hear a little bit about your work at C40. You're connecting a network of cities around the world who are dedicated to advancing climate solutions. Tell us why are cities a powerful locus of change and maybe speak to some of the things that cities are doing to advance climate justice.

#### **GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

Well, thank you, Karabi, for the introduction and the RWJF team in general for creating the space to discuss these critical issues, and Bethany for that amazing aha beginning to our conversation. So for some quick context, C40 Cities is a network of 96 cities working together to tackle the climate crisis. And we work at the city level because we understand that cities are where the majority of folks are living right now and that innovation and action can happen faster because all of the necessary players are close together. So there's so many efforts taking place to mitigate and adapt to climate change right now. But one that I would like to uplift is addressing urban heat impacts.

So climate change will not only bring higher average temperatures like Karabi perfectly illustrated and in her beginning remarks, but heat waves will also become more common as noted in India last week. And heat impacts in cities are unique because the asphalt absorbs so much heat that it leads to higher daytime temperatures and reduced

nighttime cooling. And that's a phenomenon known as urban heat impacts. Now, urban heat islands are a health issue for many, but especially for children because of their developing respiratory systems. It can get aggravated by air pollution and smog, which increases during higher temperatures. Now, this is also an equity issue, especially in the US because of the 1930s era new deal program that offered government insured mortgages for homeowners to mitigate the wave of foreclosures taking place.

So while not a problematic idea, the issue with this program was its execution. The parameters for appraising and vetting properties used color coded maps and ranked loan worthiness of neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with heavy immigrant or black populations and in some cases even a single black family being present were deemed too risky and they were shaded red and were denied access to the program. This is where the word redlining comes from. And today, researchers have found that there's up to a 13 degree difference between redlined and non-redlined neighborhoods in the same city when it comes to heat. So this is because of the strategic disinvestment amongst other outcomes that led to less green spaces in these areas.

Recognizing this issue, one of the grantees I support in Jackson, Mississippi is focused on selecting appropriate green interventions, essentially parks or community gardens, to help reduce their city's urban heat island effect. And recently, they connected with the local middle school and are scoping out possible activities. Now, to support their effort, I'm working to have them meet with Barcelona. Barcelona recently refurbished 11 schools outside spaces by replacing the concrete with natural land. And they did this by going through a collaborative process with local authorities, organizations, school staff, students, and parents to incorporate and even incorporate educational components to their work. So while Barcelona does not have a history of structural racism that resembles the US exactly, Jackson can learn about Barcelona's challenges for implementation, get insights into best practices, and be offered feedback on their ideas.

Climate change impacts like urban heat islands will be felt all over the world. And if we learn from each other, cognizant of our own spatial histories and circumstances, the possibilities for efficiently and effectively achieving climate justice increases, benefiting the global community, not just our local neighborhoods.

#### **MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Sorry. I couldn't find the unmute button. Thanks so much, Nia. It's really incredible to hear some of these stories. As you both have begun to touch on, we know that climate change is compounded by discrimination, structural racism, and other isms, and you mentioned redlining specifically. I would love to turn to you, Bethany, and talk a little bit about how you are seeing those three issues intersect in Detroit and how is your coalition working to tackle those issues locally?



### **GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Absolutely, Karabi. ECN is attempting to tackle systemic issues that are exacerbated through health concerns like asthma, climate change, and environmental racism by making sure that we have community action in place with our pilots and other programs that we have within our organization. Our pilots in projects like Detroit composting for community health, through pilots like this, it helps our organization to amplify the residents voice through community initiatives and build capacity for practice and the policy advocacy that is important as well. ECN has established the Stoudamire Wellness Hub and our mission is to educate community members about climate change and environmental justice.

Compost is just one area that we will weave into ECN's resilience hub. And I would like for you all to see what's happening during a compost build at one of our pilot sites. Along with the build, there was also creative arts and or oral histories that were collected to share with generations to come. And in this pilot specifically, residents are reducing waste through composting, enabling food security, and lessening pollution. And here you will see pictures and photos and a video that shows our pilot leaders in a clip that captures everything perfectly.

Video: So when you talk about climate, and health, and equity, and all of those things, we really want to let people understand how compost contributes to that. So gathering the resources of food that we can't eat or we don't eat, making composts and then applying it so that we can address the flood situations, we can address the food security, food nutrition because compost in the soil is going to make it better. The soil is better, the food is better, the people are better. And for our climate, we don't want to put ... I always tell people there's two choices. Drop it in the can that contributes to the landfill and the methane that's changed our climate or drop it in the container that's going to get it back into the soil, back into the food, and back into the people.

Zero waste, basically looking at everything from reusable, recyclable, compostable, and putting things in order where they should go. Having families to think about what they're purchasing prior to purchasing or why they're even buying it. And when they buy it, where is it going to end up?

For this event, for preserving oral histories of the folks that live here, the folks that are part of this pilot program to really just share and be able to teach the next generation the importance of what has already happened here in this neighborhood.

### **MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Thanks so much, Bethany. The video was great. It felt like we were right there. And apologies for the audio issues. I believe it was just music that was in the first part in



terms of the audio. But, Nia, I'd love to turn to you. You get to see what cities around the world are doing and you get to see these kinds of community driven efforts across the globe. And I'm wondering sort of what are some of the patterns that you're seeing or some of the opportunities that you're seeing where folks are connecting climate change, health, and equity. If you could speak to that a little.

**GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

Yeah. So super happy to touch on this at a very high level, but in order to answer this question, I think that I'll continue to pool this thread of redlining, but make it super clear via transportation. So on the health and equity front, historically redline communities align closely with maps of the worst air pollution and subsequently deal with disproportionately high rates of asthma and are at higher risk of heart attacks and strokes. And while this reality can be attributed to a host of activities, urban planners having freeways disproportionately borrow through low income communities of color has undoubtedly played its role. Now, in regards to climate, we must understand that transportation is a key sector of greenhouse gas emissions. And according to our lead scientists at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, it has to be transformed, but it's not all bad. Okay. In fact, transportation is essential to quality of life.

Reliable transportation facilitates economic opportunity because it means access to jobs, goods, and other services. When we weave together health, equity, and climate, we not only see the layered negative consequences of individual car infrastructure harming marginalized communities and overall planetary wellbeing, but we actually are given the space to invert the problem and look at it as an opportunity. Now, Lawrence, Massachusetts is a great example of this. Using resident leadership, they're working to transform certain transportation pathways to address heat impacts and increase green space, creating a walkable, a bikeable, a transit-oriented community means residents are more likely to be physically active, are less exposed to air pollution, and are reducing their community's carbon footprint. Ultimately, what I'm trying to highlight is that when cities address health equity and climate together because they understand that they're intimately connected, we can create the solutions that chip away at past harms and ensure a more sustainable and equitable future for all instead of a select few.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Thanks so much, Nia. I'm going to ask another question to both of you, but I want to remind our audience that if you have questions, please enter them into the Q and a function at the bottom of your screen and we will get to those in just a moment. I think a lot of folks on the call, they're working on issues in the United States. And I would love to ask both of you, maybe I'll start with you, Nia, about what advice do you have for US communities and policy makers who are striving to connect the dots between health, equity, and climate change? You've already said a bit on this, but going back to that image of the polar bear on the streaking ice cap, I worry that for too many people that

that is the only image of climate change. How do you help it become real for US policy makers and leaders?

**GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

Awesome. Thank you for that question. So the best way that I can answer this is from my lived experiences and what I'm learning at C40 and supporting the six cities and the RWJF cohort. And what's been really inspiring about the work that these cities are doing is that they're listening to their residents and their communities. They're honoring the fact that resident lived experience, their physical bodies hold valuable knowledge about how to achieve climate justice. That solves this complicated nexus of health, equity, and climate, right? Who better knows what their city needs when folks are the ones that are waiting under an unshaded bus stop during a heat wave? And in the same breath, what my grantees are doing is empowering them. Too long, we have left residents out of the decision making process for policies that will shape their lives. And so what we're noticing in the global community of practice that's focused on delivering at this nexus is that folks are moving towards shared governance. It's something that has [diversity 00:29:08] and so many names and can implement so many diverse strategies that I'm happy to get into later on in the conversation. But essentially it works to include non-traditional power holders at the decision making table and value them for their time. So thank you so much. That would be the advice that would offer. Listen to the people that live in the community you're helping to support.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

That's fantastic, Nia. Thanks. Bethany, kind of the same question to you. As you're talking to people in your community and to policy makers, how do you help them to understand the connections between health, equity, and climate change? What are some of your go-to examples or stories?

**GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Okay. So for US communities and policy makers who are really ready and willing to connect the dots in health equity and climate change, you have to first acknowledge that those are all interconnected. So that's the first point. Just realizing, "Okay. Hey, maybe this is actually what's going on. I need to see what I can do to address one thing, this may address another." Share stories, listen to people who want to share their stories. Pretty much what Nia said, connecting with the residents because they are the experts ultimately. And after you acknowledge that, after you share stories or decide to listen to stories, you can join an organization or get connected with an organization like ECN because they exist all over the United States. So community development organizations that are here to exist to help communities have relationships and just to make sure that people are connected and are aware of resources.

So if you need help finding a community organization wherever you are, please reach out to me and I will definitely help you assist in that research to make sure that you're connected with someone who pretty much knows what the beat of the street is and what's happening with the residents. Specifically at Eastside Community Network, we are connecting those dots between health, equity, and climate change by using our resilience hub to ensure that community member voices are elevated, that they know what's happening within government and legislation, and just making sure that we are making those connections with policy makers. We're also making sure that communication is a critical component to this. We're listening to everybody and we're deciphering and making sure that we're attaching that to policy advocacy in some way. And just making sure that it's effective and that people are actually aware of what's happening.

Policy makers are also being reached out to and being educated in every process that we have. Even with composting, we're holding up those policy makers accountable and making sure that they're putting things on the book and that they're signing ordinances and showing up to meetings and just requesting their presence in the space so they know exactly what's happening and who the experts are and who's already been doing the work for decades like some of my pilot leaders. In this pilot specifically, we have also looked abroad for best practices through Mother Earth Foundation. So we're learning from them what has already worked, what has been proven to be the best thing as far as composting is concerned. And we've learned from them just to make sure that we're connecting those dots using health, equity, and climate to make sure that we are pushing this goal forward for a citywide and decentralized composting system here in the city of Detroit.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

That's great. Thanks so much, Bethany. And actually, I'm happy to turn over to a number of audience questions that have come in. And one of them, Bethany, really is building on what you were just talking about, which is, could you talk a bit more about your community's relationship with Mother Earth Foundation and how other cities might develop mentor relationships with global cities? So Bethany, I'll let you start, but Nia I imagine you've got a part of that answer as well. So go ahead.

**GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Okay. So Mother Earth Foundation was actually a connection that one of our pilot leaders made through an organization called GAIA. Please forgive me. I don't know exactly what those acronyms mean, but again I can always make sure that I give Karabi of those once I figure it out for you. But we were connected through that organization and Mother Earth Foundation because they were already implementing and have a significant waste management system. In Manila, Philippines, we've been looking to

them and asking them questions. So they have a 10 step composting trail that they actually follow to implement and show management and just to make sure that certain city officials ... Their cities are called barangays. So they have managers over the barangays that actually monitor to see who's doing what. They have a system. Hey, don't put your eggs here. Don't put your meat here. So we're following behind Mother Earth Foundation pretty much implementing what they have here or looking to implement what they have in the Philippines here in Detroit because their system has pretty much taken off and people are literally trying to mirror the system that they have there in the Philippines because it works. It's very effective. And hopefully, that can be implemented here in the states, specifically Detroit.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

That's great. And Nia, I know that C40 part of what you do is you help cities to develop relationships with other cities. You've been a huge part of helping the US cities connect with global cities. So the question is how could other cities develop, mentor relationships with the global cities or cities outside the US? Any suggestions there?

**GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

Well, the first thing I would say is that I think city leaders are super eager to connect with each other. At least in my work that's what I've seen. So don't shy away from definitely sending that cold email and just trying to establish a connection. Within my work with the grantees what I've been able to leverage is the fact that we do have this C40 network. So all of our cities already have a relationship with C40 as a trusted partner and are interested in that shared learning component. And so the way that we do that with my effort or with our effort with the RWJF partnership is one has spent one hour one-to-one connection with a city specifically to learn about one topic. One that I would love to uplift was Lawrence's connection actually with Fortaleza in Brazil, who Fortaleza transformed their transportation system, to be more what we call it, multimodal transportation, but essentially to be more walkable, to be more bikeable. And now they had a deep dive discussion. And one of the strategies that for Fortaleza used is something that Lawrence is looking to implement. One suggestion is definitely don't shy away, have questions prepared, and try and get those deep dive conversations because cities want to share what they've been doing and want to learn from your efforts as well.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Absolutely. Bethany, let me pose this question to you. This is a question about how do you communicate the impact that you have to the folks involved? It can take years to see improvements in health outcomes by tackling climate justice issues. How do you tell this story in the shorter term? What are the kinds of impacts that you talk about?

## **GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Awesome. So with each pilot, they're collecting a compost. So in particular, I'll focus on Renee with FoodPLUS Detroit. So me and her had an extensive conversation yesterday and she was telling me how we're going to implement, how we're going to add practice into these things. So with her particular pilot, they have other Georgia Street Community Collective and they're going to take pictures of homes within a two and a half mile radius. So they're taking pictures of the home, they're examining their garbage cans and their recycle bins just to see what's happening around it. So whether it be rodents that are into the garbage can because everything is being thrown away, food scraps that we could actually compost and that could go to a certain place and be mitigated somehow. The squirrels, the possums, everything is attacking the garbage can. So monitoring the garbage cans in that two and a two and a half mile radius, looking to see what we can do or implement at that particular home.

So then every week they're going to go and take pictures to see if people want to be a part and do community engagement and door knocking. Excuse me, to see if people want to be a part of the pilot and if they actually want to implement composting and do drop offs because it's in a two and a half mile radius from the Georgia Street Collective where they're doing drop offs and they're walking through the compost. We're looking through the compost to see like yay or yuck. So yay, you have eggshells, you have the orange peel, you have the apple rhymes. Yuck, we don't want meat in this, so we probably should take this out. So they're actually sifting through the compost, examining it to see what they can add to the soil and then to the compost in order to add to the soil to start gardening. So it's just going to be a circular thing that's happening.

So they're trying to get more neighbors involved. All of our pilots are actually doing some sort of data collection to make sure that we're seen. So for Breathe Free Detroit, for instance, they're weighing and measuring their compost. They're weighing and measuring the trash that they're taking out. So I have my compost in one bin and I'm throwing away my paper and everything else minus the food scraps. So they're weighing those to see, can we monetize this? Can we get the tonnage of the waste management down so we're sending less food scraps to the landfill? It's an amazing thing.

So they're actually collecting data to see from start to finish what a lot of this composting is or to show how composting is actually going to benefit our city. So we started very bare. And even me, they have me collecting compost and I'm also donating. I'm not donating, but getting to the pilots or dropping off to the pilots. I didn't know anything about compost a year ago. So even that, if that doesn't show you one part of it, they're actually doing this with more residents. We have up to, I think, 50, maybe 70, 75 altogether in all three pilots of residents that are actually doing the work. And you got 75 people talking about it, then me. So hopefully it'll just spread like wildfire and the compost will just take off. So hopefully we'll be able to see some evidence, have some

hard numbers for you all that definitely like those. But we have the qualitative and quantitative efforts to show that we're actually moving this work forward.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Fantastic, incredible. Nia, there's a question for you in here. Folks want to hear a bit more about the work in Lawrence, Mass and how are they build ... what is it they're doing to build a walkable cycle-friendly neighborhood? How was it put together? How do they encourage households to swap cars for greener transport? And I'll add in, can you talk about sort of the global learning? You already mentioned a bit about that, but maybe a little more about how they've connected with Fortaleza.

**GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

Sure. It's a big question. So I'll do my best to answer it in a minute or so. But the work in Lawrence is actually being spearheaded by two organizations that are known as community anchors, I would say. They're established organizations that already have deep relationships with residents. As organizations, they value resident leadership in how they function outside of this specific project. It's part of their organizational framework. And so with that, they applied to this grant in order to transform their city. Because Lawrence has high rates of air pollution, they're formally redlined community, they also have disproportionate impacts when it comes to flooding in addition to heat. So there's a lot of compounding challenges taking place. Now, their strategy is really unique because they're actually really leaning on their residents for the leadership of both what activities they're going to do and also the process for how they're going to achieve the outcomes of this grant.

So what I would like to touch on really is the fact that they've developed a resident task force. Now, this is a group of four to five residents that are actually getting paid by the program to not only do community outreach, but to sit at meetings with the transit authority, to deep dive in with the organizations that are leading this project as well as the city partners at the table. And that's really important to highlight because that's how folks actually learn to listen and value resident knowledge, is when you give them the space at the decision making table to participate. Participation at that level also requires, one, some aspect of education in general. And so the organizations that are leading this work are also working to educate their resident task force on multimodal transportation, on its connection to climate. And then the residents are then able to connect with the wider community on this front. So they still haven't decided on the exact activities that they will be doing to transform Lawrence, but the fact that the power is really in the resident taskforce hands, I think is what is super important to uplift.

On the global side, one other place that they connected with through the master class, which was an event that all of the cohort participated in. It wasn't just for Lawrence, but they actually connected with the city in Italy that looks at the city as a . And so they look



at it as all of us have shared investment and shared ownership of our community. And so the city implemented different strategies to get their residents to participate in different activities that were taking place at the city level. And so that's another connection that I wanted to highlight. Is that there's a lot of efforts taking place globally for this shared governance, community ownership. Everything by multiple names, but the effort is essentially the same. And so I think that's a good place to start before I get lost in my train of thought.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

No. That's great. And both of you, Nia and Bethany, you've both talked a lot about just the importance of community ownership, community engagement, all of that. And Bethany, I want to actually try to combine a couple of questions that have come in, which is you're ... In your introduction, we mentioned that you're a fifth generation resident. And so if you could talk a little bit about why is that important for this work? What has been ECN's history in the neighborhood? How have you sort of been working to establish trust with community members? And then how are you using that to work with Detroit's leadership? But if you could just speak to sort of the importance of people from a place doing the work and what that means.

**GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Absolutely. Again, just to ring out, I'm a fifth generation resident. I literally stay in the same house that my great-grandfather came from Mississippi to purchase here in Detroit. So just being in this space, seeing the community change, I believe ... We were in sessions before we actually had the webinar and I was telling them how the Chrysler plant actually expanded from the time I was a child and now I'm a 35-year-old woman. So just seeing that, seeing the displacement, seeing the investment, but this investment in people kind of happen as I've grown up. And I've been able to see the huge wall that they put next to Stellantis. So being able to physically live that, have that experience, understand what my neighbors, what the residents I serve are saying and attaching it to some of that, and actually trying to do the work to actually change the world, what my father actually says. And I'm like, "I don't know if I can do that, dad." But at the same time so it's just to actually see some of those things happening and to have the residents know that I hear you, I see you. I know you aren't crazy because I'm going through the same thing.

So even with the floods that happen in 2021, and brownouts, and the heat, and everything, we're all kind of in it together. So most of us in ECN, a majority of us actually stay in the area that we serve. So I think that just adds to the tenacity of wanting to change things or wanting to make sure that our area is taken care of and that we are actually being heard and that we're implementing those things within the space. ECN has been in the community since 1984, so even years before I was born just doing the work and developing programs based on the needs, and the ebbs, and flows of what our



residents need and how we can best serve them. Again, listening to the residents, making sure that their voices are amplified, making sure that they are aware of initiatives that are going on and that they do know about resources and just building up and developing people.

I remember the CEO saying during a meeting that Eastside Community Network is a university of sorts. So whether you're a resident, whether you work there, you're going to learn something. And when I heard her say it, I was like, "Yeah. Okay." But now I'm really living it. And I'm just kind of taking the jewels that I'm learning and listening to people. Just actually walking the walk and talking the talk, that is definitely something that's happening there. And just to push things for policy advocacy, we have a coalition specifically for climate. So it's the climate action coalition that we have. We have members of the City Council that have come in. We have connections with the Office of Sustainability here in the city. We're working across the board with the green task force. That's also another coalition that's specifically honing in on transportation, organic recycling water because we have the flooding. So many things that are compounded with climate or within climate. We're addressing all of those things and we all have connections with them and we're bringing that information back to our residents. "Hey, what do you have to say about this? What do we need to do about this?"

So ECN is definitely a part of that. Being that I'm a resident and I also work there, I'm kind of in between, "Hey, this is what we need to do. Sound the alarm. So it's all inter interconnected again. So just being in this space has been ... from birth has been a highlight. And also working in this space has been a highlight as well." So I'm kind of at this point where I don't ever want to leave because I actually want to see some real change happening. Now that I have connections with people, with Detroit's leadership, we've talked to council members to push ordinance for further and to start ordinances and things of that nature. So it's been a very rewarding thing to actually try to get some of these things on the book and to actually be a part of that. Little old me who wasn't even composting last year and now I'm kind of gung-ho for it. So I'm excited.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

That's incredible. And I just think that's incredible that you're living in your great-great-grandfather's house.

**GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Great-grandfather. Yep.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Great-grandfather. Okay. Yeah. That's fantastic. I think you're both talking about the power of one person and the power of some relatively simple actions that really can

have a huge impact, something even as simple as composting. This next question is for both of you. And Nia, maybe I'll start with you. This is about gentrification and displacement. So what strategies are being used to prevent the displacement of long-term residents that sometimes occurs when an area is being transformed into green space and other types of climate adaptation projects? Nia, what are you seeing that people are doing to prevent displacement and gentrification?

**GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

That's a great question. So the first thing that I'll say on this front is that it is a new phenomenon, right? So we have to understand that when it comes to achieving climate justice, there's a lot of things that cities are simply just experimenting in right now. We're all trying to figure it out at the same time. And I think this note on climate gentrification or environmental gentrification is a lead example of that. One of the cities that I work with, Seattle, is really trying to leverage land value capture as a strategy to bring resources into the community instead of displacing the community. I think I connected with you via chat for the person that sent me this, but if you send me your email, I will send you more resources on this front specifically about land value capture.

Another thing that I'll just quickly say is that a lot of cities are also beginning to implement racial equity boards or just have racial equity frameworks when it comes to their policy making. And so I'm happy to follow up and share some resources on that as well because it's a good strategy of just making sure that you are actually thinking about these things. A lot of the gentrification that takes place or environmental gentrification takes place is because folks weren't considering it when they were first just thinking about making their community climate resilient. And so having those checks and knowing that you're going to be monitoring and evaluating your process and having a framework to do that I think is one of the stronger tools that folks have at their ... that are available to folks at this point.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Yeah. Thanks so much. Bethany, what would you add? What are efforts that you've seen in Detroit or perhaps elsewhere that help to mitigate the issues of displacement and gentrification?

**GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

So I know specifically with Detroit, they just recently released a grant for neighborhood improvement organizations to actually beautify their space. So that's one thing that we're excited about for our residents. We also have a Sustainability Fellowship Program within ECN. So that's where I work with two fellows to actually work on a space to beautify land space. It is just a really great program to actually see their residents want to beautify their neighborhood and actually add some green stormwater infrastructure if they could

or build on what they're doing within the fellowship. And just literally making sure that people are aware, even within ECN, because we're definitely into green stormwater infrastructure. Just making sure other people know about it. Do you know what an impermeable paver is? Are you aware of what a bioswales is?

So making sure that people know these things and that they have options and they just don't have to deal with the status quo. Do you know what a backflow water valve is? Do you know what a rain garden is? A lot of people aren't aware what a rain garden is and how good they are at mitigating things. So if we can actually tell our neighbors, educate them, build capacity about some of these things that green stormwater infrastructure or any other resources for that matter. Composting, do you know what composting is? Are you aware of it? Can you implement it into your home without it being that much of a hassle? I would say yes, but for the most part, if they have the tools and if they're aware of these things, it is no telling what people can do with that information and how they can implement it into their home and making their homes and their families just that much more resilient because they have the tools and they have people that are sharing the tools with them.

#### **MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

That's great. Thanks so much, Bethany. Well, believe it or not, we are approaching the hour. And it's been such a thought provoking discussion. And as I mentioned at the top, for those who are able to stay on, we're going to continue for another 15, 20 minutes depending on how many questions we get from you all. If you do need to jump off, I totally understand. I would love it if you would fill out a very short survey that's going to pop up on your screen. Your feedback really helps us. We take it very seriously. I hope you'll follow Bethany and Nia's amazing work through the links in the chat and through the follow-up email that we're going to be sharing next week, along with the recording. So with that, I will move on to additional questions from the audience. Okay. So Nia, this is a question for you. So obviously cities are the focus of C40, but do you know if there are ... And you may not know the answer to this, but do you know if there are efforts being made to learn about climate justice programs internationally that focus on rural areas outside of cities? Anything you want to say about that?

#### **GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

Thank you. I definitely would have to get back to you on that front. What I will say is that we do work also with smaller cities that are not officially non C40 cities. For example, Fortaleza is not a C40 city, but because their work was so transformative, I was able to connect with them and connect them to Lawrence. C40 does have an effort to connect with smaller cities that are outside of the C40 network right now, but I'll have to follow up with you about the rural component.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Thanks. This is a question for both of you about air quality. And maybe, Bethany, will start with you. What is the relationship between local air quality and environmental justice for frontline communities and the more nebulous challenges of global climate change? So I think it's sort of the local global as well as the air quality and environmental justice piece. Bethany, do you want to start? And then we'll go to Nia.

**GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Yeah. I can. I'm sorry. I'll just basically say the air don't care. That is something that a lot of us say within our climate action coalitions and something that I've stolen from my coworker, Aaron Stanley. The air don't care. So wherever you put an incinerator, wherever you put a plant like the Stellantis plant is where I could run down the street and run back home, wherever you put an asphalt place. We have an asphalt company that's trying to put a factory on the west side of Detroit. So it's just all of these things. The air does not care. So it affects us all. It's traveling everywhere. The gas vapors from my car that I drive, those are being admitted into the air. When I'm turning on my gas stove to make some tea, the air don't care. That literally encompasses everything that's happening. So whether I'm at home, that's affecting the way that I breathe. If I'm doing it, whether in Chicago, if I'm in Los Angeles, if I'm in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, the air does not care. It affects us all. So no matter what's happening, we're all affected by it and we're all connected whether locally, state, globally. The air does not care.

**GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

I love that.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Yeah. So Nia, tell us. How do you see this connection between local frontline communities and this sort of giant challenge of global climate change?

**GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

Thank you. And I really do love that phrase and I'm going to take it from you now, Bethany. So I tried illustrating this in one of my responses earlier, but I think it's really clear when we look at freeways. Certain communities, it really is ... have been disproportionately borrowed through. They've been the ones that experience eminent domain, for example, in West Oakland, low income communities of color, specifically black communities. Their homes were just taken by the US government in order to build the freeway that now runs through. So I think that's one major component of how local air quality is impacted by environmental injustices or environmental racism. And then unfortunately what ends up happening is that the same way that we have local or

domestic sacrifice zones, if you will, but communities that it's just okay to put this plant here, it's just okay to have this freeway here.

We also see that taking place globally. There are global sacrifice zones. It is not a coincidence that around the world, airports are located in the areas that are low income, outside of the United States we're seeing that phenomena. And the way that our globe is connected right now via trade routes, via not only waterways, but also in the sky and with planes and recognizing that planes actually lead to major emission, carbon emissions as well. And so I think that what we're seeing is that yes, you can think super locally and think about ... just maybe do some research on the freeway in your community. That's super fascinating. And then when you expand it out and see how we're all actually so connected via goods and services. I think that it makes the air pollution component really, really clear and other health impacts as well.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Yeah. That's a really great example. Let's see. Okay. So here's an easy question, I'm joking, for both of you. And Bethany, I'll start with you. So the question is, how do you get those "at the top" to trust those who are less fortunate than them to share power and resources? I would imagine you've got some good examples and good stories of that.

**GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Yes. So those at the top, we are extremely persistent. I know me, especially when we're reaching out to council members and people that we want to hear of state reps. Sometimes we have ones that are very keen to hearing, and listening, and to know, and to understand what's happening in that space. Can I say their name specifically? Okay. So Rashida Tlaib, she represents us in the 13th district here, and she's been very, very assistive and always understanding what's happening, listening even to the point where our resilience hub ended up being funded with 1.7 million to actually expand it and add to the resilience hub. So we can make sure that we're spreading the message and that people know that is a place that they can come for resources and just to wind down and for respite. So thanks to her.

I'm sure there are other representatives like that as well, but her specifically being able to listen, being able to connect, being able to ... and wanting to understand your constituents and your ... the people that you're representing and actually uplifting them. So when you think about people who are at the top, some people just don't want to know what's happening with the people that they serve. So when you have people like Rashida Tlaib, and there are many others, but her specifically because she's at the forefront of my mind. When you have people like that who are dedicated to making sure that the residents that they serve, the communities that they serve are being at the top of what's happening and just making sure that we're forming policy around that because everything has to have the legalese and everything surrounding it. So having people like

that that are willing to decipher what our neighbors are saying and push that policy forward, that is always ideal. So just having a kind and compassionate heart and being just an awesome human in general can kind of put you in that space to where you're understanding of what other people are going through. And I think when there's a politician, that's set up that way, that is ideal for us messaging forward.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

That's fantastic. Yeah. Nia, what would you add? What are some success stories that you've seen around the world about getting those at the top to listen to the folks most impacted?

**GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

Yeah. That's a great question. And I would say that absolutely. If you get lucky with political leadership that has the political will and the desire to listen and really give the reins to residents, that's like chef's kiss, right? Like your ideal situation. What I've found in my work though is that it also is speaking the political leadership's language. If they're not there yet, if folks are not clear or eager to hand over and share power with their residents or community organizations, I think there's two strategies that folks can implement. One is coming from the side of projects that are just fundamentally more innovative and you have a diverse array of solutions when you bring diverse stakeholders at the table. So honoring that and really shifting the frame in how you're trying to get political leaders to share power I think is one really useful strategy.

The other strategy that I witnessed at the state level in California was the Transformative Climate Communities Grant, and I'm happy to share a link to this in the chat or via email. But basically what this program did is that in the grant application, you had to have a collaborative structure from jump. So from the beginning, in order to get this funding, you had to have city leadership at the table and you had to have a nonprofit organization as a partner and I think that really helped. When you're able to lay the foundation and have a strong framework for things like, "Hey, you're just going to have to do this equity work." That will obviously get you to the place to really share power with your residents. So I would say those two things.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Yeah. That's really great. You've both talked about sort of the increasing number of efforts around co-governance strategies and things like that, where the efforts are sort of baked into the system. It's not sort of a choice then. It's sort of more of a requirement. All right. Let's see. Okay. So Bethany, this is a question for you. In Detroit, are there efforts by community members or organizations to hold accountable the companies that are causing large scale air pollution within these communities, sort of the corporate entities?

### **GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

Yeah. Actually, a lot of us are working within silos, so to speak, but we do have formations to where we are coming against. So whether it be air pollution or certain things, there are groups that are coming together forming letters that they're sending to lieutenant governors legislation that's even in the background that's actually being pushed and people are sending around petitions to get things pushed forward. So there is a lot of community and collective things that are happening as far as cooperation and people binding together because we're just literally at our wit's end with some of these things.

So I know with Stellantis specifically, the reason we have formed the Eastside Climate Action Coalition at Eastside Community Network, that was one of the catalysts for that. The smells that come from there. You get that eggy gassy smell or you get the paint and it's like, "Hey, we have to call EGLG." So that's the Environmental Great Lakes Authority that we have here that we have to call into. Stellantis even went so far as, because we've collected, we got that number out everywhere, our organization along with other organizations, they made their own number for people to call into so they can kind of like, "Hey, call this number instead." And we're just like, "Hey, don't call that number. Make sure you call this one." So we can keep track of the smells and everything that are happening, keep track on when they need to be held accountable for some of those things.

So just one example, but there's so many other groups and so many other things happening with transportation, water mitigation. There's just so many things, climate, and I wish I could just sit here and just rattle everything down to you. But I know specifically water mitigation, transportation, air pollution, food waste. We have groups that are pushing a lot of those things forward. There are ordinances in the work, legislation being pushed forward for that, locally and statewide. It's really great. Again, just to be a fly on the wall and to actually work with a lot of those experts that are pushing some of these plans forward, especially here in the state of Michigan.

### **MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

That's fantastic. It's really incredible to see all the momentum that is happening. I've got one last question for both of you, and then we'll close. I'll start with you, Nia. Any advice to cities and local advocates on how to sustain a multi-pronged focus on climate health and equity when it can be so challenging to work across silos? How do you sustain those efforts? Nia, why don't you start?

### **GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

I feel like if we had the solution to this, we would have solved the climate crisis. One thing that I've noticed that I think is really strong is coming from a grantee, one of our grantees in Cleveland. They're focused on the circular economy. And so that



fundamentally requires a lot of different city departments at the table and a lot of different just sectors working really together. And so one strategy that I think ... that Cleveland has implemented that I think is really cool is that they have a specific office or a specific role just for this. They have one person that is the city lead on this front for this project that is consistently meeting with the non-profit organization that's leading this work and is able to communicate with the other city departments on their effort. So while it's not our ideal holistic workspace for the climate crisis, which I know we will eventually get to or hope we get to, I do think that being able to create roles that are specifically holistic and aiming to tackle these intersections through one project is a really strong way of making sure that we don't get lost in all of the other components of addressing the climate crisis.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Yeah. Thanks. Bethany, anything you want to add in terms of how do you get folks to work across silos and sustain that work to tackle equity, climate change, and health?

**GUEST SPEAKER: Bethany Howard, Eastside Community Network**

So personally, I believe it's all about collaboration. Always making sure that people are aware, making sure communication and the lines of communication are in tip top shape, making sure that everyone ... Okay. This is what Bethany is doing, this is what Nia is doing, this is what Karabi is doing. How can we combine these? So just making sure that the lines of communication are clear, making sure that collaboration regardless of our differences, regardless of what a diverse table that we're at, making sure that all those things are kind of laid out on the floor, getting ideas from everyone, making sure that everyone feels respected, mutual respect.

Making sure that trust is there, making sure that you have someone who has that in mind because even if there's one person there, that's like, "Okay. Hey, this is the goal. Let's get to it." I think as long as you have that energy even with one person, you're going to get to where you need to get, whether it be in a grant, whether it be to push ordinances forward or a policy forward. I think just making sure that you have at least one person with a collaborative spirit. Two or three more would be great, but just having one will probably be ideal to just make sure that everything connects because it's all interconnected anyway. And that's just one thing that people need to make sure that they have at the forefront. It all matters because it's all circular.

**MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

Wow. Well, that's a perfect way to end. Bethany and Nia, I want to thank you both so much for taking the time to talk with us today. It was really an incredible conversation. And I want to thank everyone who joined us and especially for staying on for this additional time for this incredible conversation. As you sign off, like I said, you'll see a very, very short survey. It is incredibly helpful to us. Please just take a quick moment to fill it out. It helps us to design these webinars. As always stay safe, be well, take the Blue

Marble Quiz, and I hope to see you on the next Reimagined in America webinar.  
Bye-bye.

**GUEST SPEAKER: Nia Mitchell, C40 Cities**

Thank you. Bye.