



# ***Community Climate Ambassador Program***

**Austin Climate  
Equity Plan  
2020-21**



OFFICE OF  
**SUSTAINABILITY**

CITY OF AUSTIN

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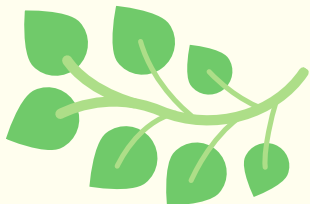
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# Background

In 2015, Austin City Council adopted the Austin Community Climate Plan, which set key goals around community-wide greenhouse gas emissions and helped identify the actions we could take to help achieve those goals. A lot had changed in the years since the plan was first passed, and it was time to update it based on where we were at in 2020.

## Focus on racial equity

The City of Austin's Office of Sustainability partnered with the Equity Office to prioritize advancing racial equity in sustainability planning. This meant **examining the history of racial segregation and environmental justice issues in Austin**, including the structural and systemic barriers that have contributed to racial inequities in our community.

We know that government officials are not always the best messengers, and traditional engagement tactics are not always the most appropriate ways to create spaces for **genuine, authentic conversations**. That's where Community Climate Ambassadors come in!



# Purpose

The **Community Climate Ambassadors Program** was created as a pilot program to elevate the voices of people who have been systematically left out of, misrepresented in, or ignored during climate change conversations and planning initiatives. The Office of Sustainability was interested in **people who could apply an equity lens to climate work or contribute their historical and/or lived experience** to the conversation. Ambassadors were financially compensated for their work.

## *The program sought to:*

- 1 Identify key concerns, priorities and needs related to environmental sustainability from Austin's communities of color and other historically excluded groups.
- 2 Recommend a long-term process and structure for ongoing collaboration with these communities and the Office of Sustainability.

## *Ambassadors were assigned the following tasks:*

### **1: TRAINING & EDUCATION**

Participate in a workshop as an opportunity to learn more about climate-related issues and contribute thoughts to the conversation. Work with staff to design and develop an interview guide for community conversations.

### **2: INTERVIEW REPORTS**

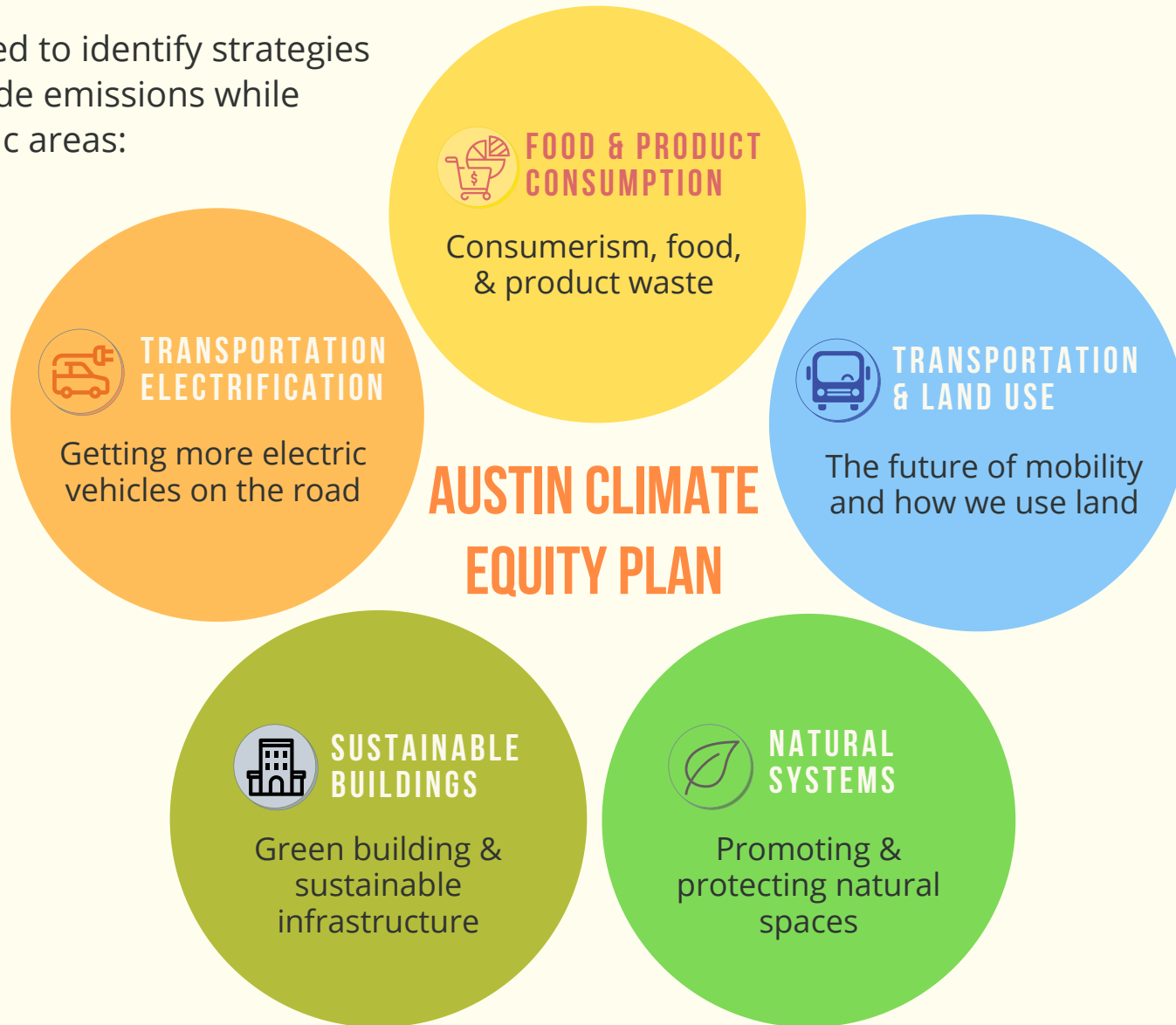
Conduct a minimum of five community conversations to gather and share information about climate issues within the community and provide interview reports back to staff.

### **3: ONGOING PARTICIPATION**

Collaborate with the Office of Sustainability to reach out to networks around plan outreach and support during implementation.

# ***Climate Plan focus areas***

The Climate Equity Plan was created to identify strategies to achieve net-zero community-wide emissions while advancing equity across these topic areas:



# *The Community Climate Ambassadors*



**Back from left to right:** Kiounis Williams, Lourdes Kaman, Lynn Huynh, KB, AJ Gomez, Chelsea Gomez

**Front from left to right:** Deborah Beresky, Nakyshia Fralin, Sheridan Ray, Andrea Casares, Sayuri Yamanaka, and Celine Rendon (Office of Sustainability Staff)

**Second photo left to right:** Taylor Huntley and Dianna Dean

## ***AJ Gomez, he/him, Austin High School Student***

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**Main topic areas for discussions:** Implementing greener processes within Austin's school system, long-term effects of climate change, reducing waste, healthy food access.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** People of color have been oppressed within the U.S. for centuries and their voices haven't been heard on big social issues. I live in the Govalle neighborhood, which is negatively impacted by a lack of affordable housing and gentrification. Youth voices also typically aren't heard, which has brought out young people to try to take control of our future.

**How are you involved in your community?** I am a part of many clubs within Austin High such as Black Student Alliance and Austin High Latino Partnership. I work with student council as Vice President to ensure students' issues are addressed. I also participated in an internship that helped me better understand issues that are formed in and around East Austin, and participate in events sponsored by PODER throughout the year.

## ***Dianna Dean, she/her, Nurse Dean's Mobile Consulting***

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**Main topic areas for discussions:** Displacement in communities, mental health, health and wellness, safety, green spaces.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** People in my community are negatively impacted by social conditions such as low income, mental health, disabilities, and lack of advocacy by people that are Black. Not everyone reads newspapers or has internet access. Many people only hear second-hand information from people they trust in their community.

**How are you involved in your community?** I was born and raised and went to college here in Austin. Community organizing means going out into the community, helping people feel like someone cares, and sharing information in a way that connects with them. I have been a nurse for over 35 years, as a campus nurse at Huston-Tillotson University, a Home Health Care Nurse and currently I work for the Marbridge Foundation.

## ***Sayuri Yamanaka, she/her, Community Organizer***



**Topic areas for discussions:** Energy policy, sustainable and regenerative agriculture.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** People are affected when they are not represented in groups that influence decision-making. I wish to be informed and help other people be informed about climate change and its impacts so families can understand how to participate in solutions.

**How are you involved in your community?** I am the leader of the group in Spanish social media Come Fresco y Sano and I also organize healthy food delivery to low-income people. I work with Mexican Dancers and Native American Culture Conservation groups. I also organize groups of women who want to teach their children how to live a life with low environmental impact. I have experience giving bilingual workshops and workshops to low-income communities Central Texas.

## ***Lourdes Kaman, she/her, Community Organizer***



**Topic areas for discussions:** Resilience and survival, cultural changes.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** Social justice and the issue of climate change are my core values. I believe that if communities were to come together, we would have the power to eliminate unjust inequalities. I think we are focusing so much on working and getting our families ahead that we are not informed of the changes that are happening environmentally. My mission is to inform the community about these issues and help them understand that their contributions and organizing ourselves will make a big difference.

**How are you involved in your community?** Since I immigrated to the US, I have been an active part of my community as a member of various community organizations. Currently, I work for an organization that serves pregnant women, Mama Sana Vibrant Woman. I am also part of Communities of Color United for Social Justice, and a member of the council of Alma de Mujer Indigenous Women's Network. Through my catering business, I collaborate frequently with the Sustainable Food Center.



## ***Sheridan Ray, she/her, Akins High School Student***

**Topic areas for discussions:** Greenhouse gas emissions, pollution prevention, accessible composting.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** I am very interested in marine biology, and climate change is something that is harming the oceans by bleaching coral. I want to bring environmental knowledge, and expand people's knowledge about oceans and nature. I also want to bring my own experience in living in a low-income neighborhood and learn ways to bring equity to my area.

**How are you involved in your community?** I am part of an organization called the Thirst Project at school, where we come up with ways to fundraise to give wells to places that don't have clean water. In my Park Ranger Cadet class, I learned about Leave No Trace principles and put them to practice in my community. Over the summer, I was an intern with the City of Austin Park Rangers.



## ***Taylor Huntley, she/her, Mama Sana Vibrant Woman***

**Topic areas for discussions:** Food access, cultural identity, sustainability.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** Mama Sana Vibrant Woman serves pregnant people of color and anyone experiencing injustices in their reproductive journey. We know how race negatively affects birth and postpartum outcomes as Black and Native pregnant people are more likely to die during and after childbirth than white birthing people. Sustainability trends have excluded Black communities and perspectives that are cultural. I wanted to highlight the perspective of parents and how we want to have a livable earth for our children's future.

**How are you involved in your community?** Our organization works with families of color day in and day out, offering support services, workshops, and supportive spaces. We want to start including sustainability in our curriculums and programming that is accessible and culturally relevant. We have team members that love to discuss eco-friendly and respectful family practices.

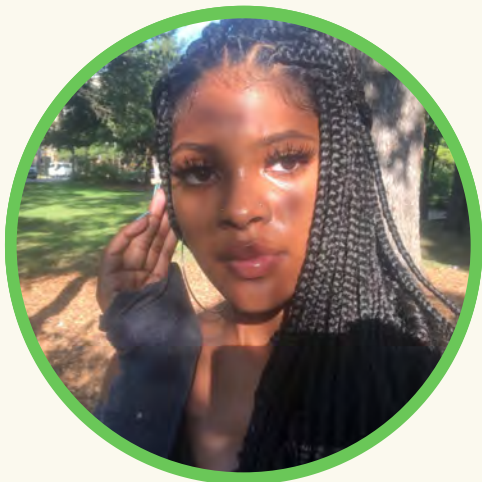


## ***Deborah Beresky, she/her, Community Member***

**Topic areas for discussions:** Food access, affordability, changing people's habits of how they dispose of their trash, composting, pollution prevention.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** The majority of people where I live have experienced discrimination of some kind. We are mostly people of color with different kinds of disabilities, low income, living on a fixed income, or earning minimum wage. We use public transportation to get around because of not being able to afford vehicles.

**How are you involved in your community?** I'm on the Community Strategy Team at Dell Med's, Dept. of Population Health, I'm a criminal justice reform advocate and a Mental Health activist. I represent my peers on the Integral Care's Consumer Council and on the Planning and Networking Committee. I represent disabled people of color living on a fixed income living in affordable housing who were formerly homeless. I'm in recovery from mental health and substance use issues, and I'm a convicted felon. I want recycling to be accessible to everybody in my community.



## ***Nakyshia Fralin, she/her, Huston-Tillotson Student***

**Topic areas for discussions:** Cultural identity, food access, housing affordability, environmental protection.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** I am an environmental studies major. Growing up, I didn't even realize this was a field I could study and when I did, I saw there was no diversity in the field. I have been blessed with three internships where I was one of, if not the only, Black person/person of color in the group. I want to help bring inclusion to the table and be the voice for my community.

**How are you involved in your community?** I serve on the Resource Management Commission for the City of Austin. In this position, I am able to represent and speak for both lower-income families and the Black community.

## ***Lynn Huynh, she/they, UT Austin Student***



**Topic areas for discussions:** Food access/identity/sovereignty and its relation to space, archiving as a way of preserving culture and history, housing affordability and anti-gentrification efforts.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** Some of the most pressing issues for Asian Americans are immigration rights and deportation as well as socioeconomic disparities and education inequity. The LGBTQIA+ community experiences explicit queerphobia, erasure, violence, and workplace discrimination. Being able to contribute to a Climate Plan is important to arm our communities with the knowledge and the tools to prepare for and combat climate change, especially on a local level.

**How are you involved in your community?** I have organized and helped lead the Queer & Trans People of Color Agency - an organization dedicated to the empowerment, visibility, and education of our community.

## ***Chelsea Gomez, she/her, Educator***



**Topic areas for discussions:** Affordability within food and housing, accessibility for community members to be engaged, future of climate issues.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** As a Community Climate Ambassador, I wanted to reach out to the teachers I work with at Austin's school district. I also wanted to reach out to my neighbors in our racially diverse apartment complex, and to the farmers I know at the farmer's market.

**How are you involved in your community?** I work for a nonprofit that serves underrepresented public schools in Austin, providing children outdoor and garden education. I plan community engagement events at the schools I work at that help connect children with nature and inspire them to be future leaders.

## ***Kiounis Williams, he/him, Church Mentor***



**Topic areas for discussions:** Cultural identity, food access, housing affordability, environmental protection.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** As a young adult, I am really interested in social injustices and environmental rights. Community to me means everything. Connecting and living among others is human nature and should be taken seriously. Earth is our home and we all have a duty to protect it and preserve it for generations to come. I want to leave a legacy and make an impact on the world and I believe that it all starts in community and by community.

**How are you involved in your community?** I participate in church health ministry, University of Texas African American Wellness project, and AMEN project for health and wellness.

## ***KB, they/them, ATX Interfaces***



**Topic areas for discussions:** Affordability within food and housing, Accessibility for community members to be engaged, future of climate issues.

**Why did you want to be an ambassador?** My community initiative, ATX Interfaces, exists to bring people of color, women, LGBTQIA+ people, disabled people, and other marginalizations to the center while also breaking binaries between emerging and established artists, performance poetry, academic poetry, and others that currently exist in artistic communities. ATX Interfaces recognizes and gives musicians and writers the floor to speak to their experiences.

**How are you involved in your community?** I participate as the Program Coordinator for the Gender and Sexuality Center at UT Austin, whose mission is to provide opportunities to explore, organize, and promote learning around issues of gender and sexuality. Second, I participate as a practicing artist, editor, and educator. I regularly perform poetry as myself (KB), edit for two local literary journals (Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review and Fields Magazine), and teach with two local organizations (Austin Library Foundation and Lenguas Locxs Writers Collective).

# Training & education

Prior to beginning their work, ambassadors participated in a **Climate Equity Workshop** facilitated by Susana Almanza, executive director of People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources (PODER), an environmental justice group based in East Austin. The workshop helped build a **shared understanding and vocabulary** around the intersection of race and climate issues.



*"Almanza helped [my] soul, all the people that do not look like [me] need to hear what she presented to know where we are now. It empowered me."*

*- Dianna Dean*



*"The training was very helpful because it provided ideas to help frame our climate conversations and relate it back to many different issues within our community."*

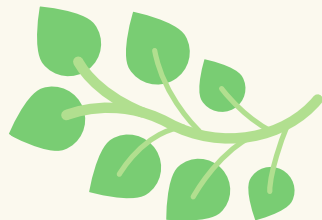
*- Sheridan Ray*

# Ambassador discussions

Ambassadors were asked to **conduct a minimum of five community conversations or interviews** to gather and share information about climate issues within their communities between January and May of 2020. Following these conversations, ambassadors prepared reports for the Office of Sustainability based on what they heard.

Meanwhile, Advisory Groups were crafting the Climate Equity Plan's goals and strategies using an **Equity Evaluation Tool** — a set of questions used to ensure that equity is prioritized. Feedback from ambassadors allowed Advisory Groups to adjust their recommendations based on real community conversations.

While the Climate Equity Plan will not be able to address all of Austin's equity challenges, there are synergies where we can address these challenges through climate action.



# *How the data was used*

Over six months, the Community Climate Ambassadors held **35 engagement events**, such as gatherings, one-on-one interviews, personalized surveys, worksheets, and more. **Over 70 people participated** in the ambassadors' events or completed ambassador-distributed surveys. Where possible, ambassadors were encouraged to collect demographic data from these contributors.

## **1 Interview reports**

Office of Sustainability staff analyzed the ambassadors' 50+ interview reports and noted major themes that were integrated into the Climate Equity Plan.

## **2 Plan refinement**

These themes helped refine the plan's goals and strategies and offered a way to integrate storytelling around community priorities and concerns.

The COVID-19 pandemic and local Stay-at-Home orders affected the in-person gatherings planned by the ambassadors. They chose to adapt their gatherings to online and socially distanced events that included:

- Online group discussions & workshops
- One-on-one phone calls
- Use of personalized surveys & worksheets

## **3 Priorities and concerns**

Office of Sustainability staff noted certain high-level recurring themes, which are shown on pages 15 and 16.

# Priorities & concerns



# Priorities & concerns

Ambassadors helped identify these high-level community concerns, which will be detailed further in the next section.



# Healthy environment

Concerns about pollution, cleanliness and green space

Center health and wellness in climate planning, conduct holistic planning

Acknowledge disproportionate impacts of extreme weather on low-income communities and communities of color

Protect, develop and maintain clean, pollution-free green spaces. Protect and conserve natural resources (water, land, air) from pollution

Invest in and promote clean energy, water conservation, and sustainable materials

Focus on local, affordable, healthy food



*"When I imagine a sustainable Austin, I think about no more pollution, more equality in regards to everyone getting along and no racism, and more action towards making it a safer place overall..."*



# Healthy environment

## CONCERNS

- ➔ PROTECTION OF OUR NATURAL RESOURCES (WATER, AIR, & LAND)
- ➔ AIR POLLUTION
- ➔ TRASH & SANITATION
- ➔ GROWING POPULATION
- ➔ EXTREME WEATHER (HEAT, DROUGHT, FLOODING, & WILDFIRES)

*"Longer, hotter summers and how it's going to affect our house. [...] Protecting our land and keeping our foundation safe from the effects of drought, while also trying to afford the water bills."*



*"Air quality - so many commuting into Austin (too expensive to live), **lots of traffic impacting the air quality.**"*

*"CapMetro being **ALL electric buses.**"*

*"Time of commute has an impact on personal health. Not enough public transportation options from people who live in the surrounding Austin areas who work in Austin."*

## PRIORITIES

- ➔ HEALTHY & NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
- ➔ MORE PARKS & GREENSPACE PROTECTION
- ➔ CLEAN ENERGY & GREENER ALTERNATIVES
- ➔ SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS
- ➔ HEALTHY, LOCAL, AFFORDABLE FOOD

# Affordability

*Concerns about affordable housing, food, gentrification, and displacement*

Prioritize and target incentives for low-income communities and communities of color

Compensate and fund organizations and businesses focused on climate justice and led by people of color

Seek solutions that address household affordability in Austin, including displacement, gentrification and homelessness



*"People who are economically well think that 'Austin is the best place to live', but the reality is that for the working and poor class, it is very difficult to get ahead. Families often have to have two jobs to cover their expenses, and that's where everything else is neglected."*

# Affordability

## CONCERNS

- ➔ PEOPLE STRUGGLE TO AFFORD TO LIVE HERE
- ➔ GENTRIFICATION
- ➔ INCREASING TAXES
- ➔ GREEN SOLUTIONS ARE EXPENSIVE

*"That the **city's municipality is fairer and does not segregate low-income people**, they should assist more people who do not have funds to help them get solar panels, and ecological water systems."*

*"I'm concerned that **my children will not be able to afford living in Austin** because of the high cost of living which is not comparable to wages."*

*"We could do way better. We should **switch to free public transit.**"*

*"Not **sensitive to the needs of seniors** regarding taxes, which go up over \$200 a year."*



## PRIORITIES

- ➔ AFFORDABLE HOUSING
- ➔ HOUSING OPTIONS FOR THE HOMELESS
- ➔ PROVIDE INCENTIVES
- ➔ SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES

# Accessibility

*Accessible and culturally-relevant education and awareness*

Consider financial barriers to participation

Consider inequitable access to economic opportunity related to disability, income, education and healthcare

Consider inequitable access to transportation options for communities who live in areas outside of Austin, such as Pflugerville, Round Rock, Cedar Park, Buda and Kyle

Lack of awareness and educational materials prevents us from meeting sustainability goals



*"You can tell when a translator speaks the language vs using google translate.... I'm less likely to go to events [with wrong translations] because I think if they can't even translate [...] people that are less amped about it and won't go because they can tell it's not for [them]."*

# Accessibility

## CONCERNS

- ➔ RACISM, INEQUITY, & EXCLUSION
- ➔ UNFAIR BENEFITS
- ➔ LACK OF ACCESS TO SERVICES / BARRIERS
- ➔ LACK OF INFORMATION AND AWARENESS ON SUSTAINABILITY
- ➔ TRANSLATION & LANGUAGE BARRIERS

*"CapMetro free/discounted ridership based on income that allows our least fortunate to be able to get to work/groceries. What are transportation options with surrounding communities, particularly those that had to take in Austinites who were pushed out of their neighborhoods (particularly those communities east of IH-35)?"*



*"Language barriers. Making advertising more accessible to different cultures and languages."*

*"Not enough handicap parking for seniors with disabilities. Do more research on a person with disabilities before you give them a ticket if they don't have a handicapped sticker."*

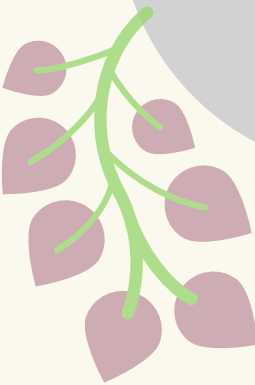
*"HEB promising to open a grocery store and not doing it but opening new locations in already-affluent areas of Austin. When there's **no financial incentive** for these companies to do the right thing and provide services to certain parts of the city, these problems keep getting compounded."*

## PRIORITIES

- ➔ MORE EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
- ➔ MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE
- ➔ MAKE CULTURALLY RELEVANT
- ➔ MORE ACCESS OUTSIDE OF THE CITY
- ➔ EMPHASIZE INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE, GENDER, ABILITY, CITIZENSHIP STATUS, ETC.
- ➔ COMPUTER ACCESS

# Community capacity

*Community resilience, safety, and education*



Build community resilience to long-term climate change impacts by focusing on social/economic stressors and infrastructure for people living in Austin

Emphasize race, gender, ability, citizenship status, and other in climate issues

Improve education materials for community members so people understand why climate change issues are important

Recognize and build on the climate justice work that's been done by local community organizations

Address safety concerns and community priorities and communicate with the community through meaningful connections



*"[...] There is not much education on this subject and it is important. And I would like to teach children to understand climate change issues, and that we adults also learn. I don't know much about it and I want to be more involved."*

# Community capacity

## CONCERNS

- ➔ EXTREME WEATHER (DROUGHT, FLOOD, HEAT WAVES) FLOODING ISSUES
- ➔ CONCERNED ABOUT FUTURE GENERATIONS
- ➔ INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS TO BE PREPARED FOR GROWTH

*"[...] Being a young female alone most rides, I feel uncomfortable and sometimes unsafe on the city bus."*

*"Flooding in Central Texas, noted increase of new developments in 'flood zone', global warming - 'hotter summers'. Fires. There are not enough fire stations for new home development."*



*"Farmers are particularly affected by **extreme weather conditions**, like drought, flooding, extreme heat. That hurts their ability to grow food to sustain the growing demand with the growing population."*

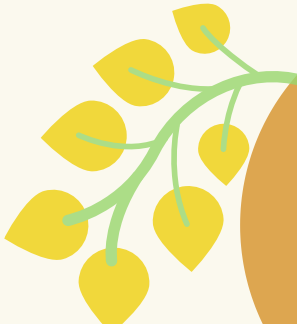
*"**Too many police** in the Black communities. Too much policing Black events. Not letting others feel as if they belong. Unequal schools, unequal employment opportunities."*

## PRIORITIES

- ➔ EDUCATION NEEDS TO IMPROVE
- ➔ FAMILIES WANT TO LEARN & PASS DOWN KNOWLEDGE
- ➔ IMPROVE COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS
- ➔ BE PREPARED FOR CHANGES IN OUR CLIMATE
- ➔ CLIMATE IMPACTS TO AGRICULTURE & FARMING
- ➔ SCHOOL ISSUES NEED ACTION

# Cultural preservation

*Preventing the loss of community history and culture*



Preserve, uplift and support the culture and history of Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

Invest in cleaning and upgrades areas while mitigating or preventing displacement

Acknowledge that Austin is not a diverse city that respects, honors, and acknowledges the history of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).

*"I feel sad because a lot has changed over the last 23 years I have been alive. I feel that Austin is losing its culture as new people move in. [...] It was due to the power and the community of the African American population but now that has changed due to gentrification [...] the community heavily relies on the church."*



# Cultural preservation

## CONCERNS

- ➔ LACK OF DIVERSITY IN CHANGING AUSTIN
- ➔ LOSS OF CULTURE & HISTORY
- ➔ DISRUPTION TO COMMUNITY
- ➔ EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

"The **mainstream environmental movements are often based on whiteness** [...] We don't hear about Indigenous communities fighting to protect their land. Black farmers are huge in the south [...] If you see people that look like you, doing the work is more inspiring."

"I feel that **the city does not truly recognize diversity**. The events in Austin do not cater to African Americans or the Mexican American population."

"Since gentrification in 2005 for my area, my neighbors do not look like me. I can not afford [restaurants in my community], and on special days you attend, **the feeling that you do not belong**."



"To make the community available for recreational activities **I would renovate and make it affordable**. Rosewood park was for gathering in the city. It no longer serves that purpose. The Millennium was designed for the youth but it's unaffordable to maintain."

## PRIORITIES

- ➔ RECOGNIZE & ACKNOWLEDGE RACIST HISTORY
- ➔ MORE PROGRAMS & OUTREACH

# ***Economic empowerment***

*Better access to opportunities, stronger partnerships, and workforce development*



# Economic empowerment

## CONCERNS

- ➔ ASSISTANCE NEEDED FROM GOVERNMENT
- ➔ BUSINESS/COMPANY INVOLVEMENT
- ➔ MORE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES NEEDED FOR MORE PARTICIPATION
- ➔ NEED TO CREATE MORE PARTNERSHIPS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

*"Certain residents don't participate in sustainability, price of solar panels, educating the public, **reaching all income levels**, and not every home has internet or computer access."*



*"Black businesses are losing customers and are being pushed out by the community. The customer population has changed. **The people that used to live here, that used to support the Black businesses have moved.**"*

*"Developers that are coming in and wrecking Austin. [...] I think **developers and people who put profit first** [are getting in the way]. [...] they don't want a more sustainable city. They want a more convenient city."*

## PRIORITIES

- ➔ LOCAL JOBS & SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY
- ➔ GREEN BUSINESS PRACTICES
- ➔ SMALL BUSINESS HELP & SUPPORT
- ➔ INCENTIVIZE FARMERS

# Accountability

*Creating accountability between government leaders and residents*

Ensure equitable distribution of responsibilities in climate action

Include representative leaders and decision-makers from BIPOC communities that are impacted

Equitably design programs for low-income communities

Address community concerns around systemic racism



*"People of color, both in the U.S. and around the world, will be disproportionately targeted by the degradation of the environment. Huge profits and city leadership are being made, mostly by white men, through enterprises that are destroying the environment, while people of color pay a large percentage of the costs of those endeavors."*

# Accountability

## CONCERNS

- ➔ LACK OF REPRESENTATION OF BIPOC VOICES IN PLANNING & LEADERSHIP
- ➔ MISTRUST IN LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS & GOVERNMENT
- ➔ UNFAIR GOVERNMENT DECISIONS
- ➔ NOT ENOUGH ACTION BY INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS & GOVERNMENT

"Ignoring the **history of racial segregation**, ignoring **systemic barriers**, government officials of the city should have community ambassadors, who can help mitigate solutions to age old problems, outreach only reaching out to people with wealth."



"[Sustainability is] **respect, respecting something bigger than myself and acknowledging we are all pieces of a puzzle**. To myself, others, and the earth. I look to indigenous people who have always taken care of the earth, I see what my children will be inheriting and generations to come."

"The meat industry, oil and gas industry, unfortunately, are huge **contributors to adverse climate effects**. Taking that into consideration when making [city] choices [is a solution]. I don't think it's in the hands of the consumer to be responsible for [the climate crisis]. It really has to do with these industries and the way they operate."

## PRIORITIES

- ➔ PROVIDE INCENTIVES
- ➔ FAST ACTIONS NOW
- ➔ ACCOUNTABILITY IS NEEDED TO SHIFT POWER
- ➔ GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE AND INVESTMENT IS NEEDED
- ➔ SEE LONG TERM EFFORTS AND CHANGE

# Reflections

It's important to **understand people's lived experiences** and how those experiences present barriers (structural, cultural, informational, financial) to climate action. This can help us understand how to improve lives, increase affordability, and craft equitable solutions that work for low-income communities and communities of color. As a pilot initiative, **the 12 Community Climate Ambassadors helped co-create this program** to envision a new form of community engagement and storytelling.



*"To me, a sustainable Austin would have a flawless public transportation system that is able to offer its services to ALL people. I really enjoyed being able to educate people on climate issues with others. From doing my work I learned that people don't realize climate issues impact us in Texas." - AJ Gomez*

# Next steps

We hope to replicate this racial equity-centered method of community engagement in future City planning processes and incorporate lessons learned through the ambassadors.

Although COVID-19 impacted in-person gatherings, we learned how the digital divide can present barriers to engagement. We hope to have more physical materials available and to have a budget that is co-created with community members to give them more room for their creative ideas and strategies for engagement.

The first cohort of the Community Climate Ambassadors Program helped build connections and real relationships and has been an important part of addressing community priorities and concerns.



*"I think these insights show me that we should make this information more accessible to members where they can become self taught in these areas, because they affect them so much." - Nakyshia Fralin*

# ***Contributions***

**Much of this work would not have been possible without the support and work of many:**

City of Austin Office of Sustainability

Community Climate Ambassadors

City of Austin Equity Office

City of Fort Collins Office of Sustainability

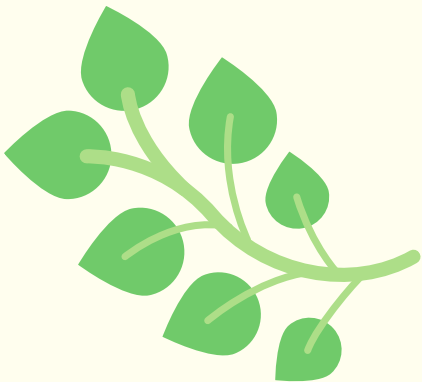
**Susana Almanza**, People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources

**Kerstin Johansson**, Park Ranger Education & Outreach, Austin Parks & Recreation

**Dr. Tane Ward**, Equity Consultant and Local Community Organizer

Climate Equity Plan Steering Committee Members

City of Austin Joint Sustainability Committee



Learn more by reading the full ambassador reports, materials, panels, and videos here:

**[bit.ly/ACEPAmbassadors](https://bit.ly/ACEPAmbassadors)**

More detail and backup materials are available upon request.

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