

## 2020 USDN EDI Fellowship - Briana Carbaja – City of Fort Collins CO



My name is Briana Carbaja. My pronouns are she/her(s), and I identify as a queer, Xicana, intersectional social justice activist. I am a 21-year-old UCLA undergraduate double majoring in political science and geography/environmental studies. Growing up in South Central Los Angeles, my family and I were many times over victims of environmental injustice. These injustices fueled my passion in becoming a young warrior in the fight against climate change. Before becoming a USDN fellow, I was a council member for Mayor Eric Garcetti's first-ever Youth Council for

Climate Action. Being able to influence small change in my huge city left me hungry for playing a larger role in making systemic change, so I applied to work with the City of Fort Collins, CO.

My main focus as described in my initial work plan was to center with equity and lead with race when assisting in the updates to our Climate Action Plan, Energy Policy Plan, and the Road to Zero Waste Plan. By placing racial equity at the center of our planning process, the Our Climate Future work recognizes racial inequity is the most pervasive type of inequity in our country. In updating these three plans, there are three phases:

1. Understanding Community Priorities
2. Strategic Planning
3. Plan Release and Adoption

While the previous fellow with the city, DeAngelo Bowden, was instrumental during Phase One; I was lucky enough to assist in the efforts of planning phase two. Phase Two included gaining broader community insight as to what the city heard from underrepresented community stakeholders during Phase One. In order accomplish this goal, we planned the 9 weeks of engagement. The 9 weeks of engagement were a virtual workshop-style event led by the city. We invited community members to discuss and offer ideas about how to implement change in the city regarding topics relating to Our Climate Future. Topics included renewable energy, equitable access to healthy food, and equity, diversity, and inclusion. The workshops were an incredible success, but we were disappointed to see that our efforts did not garner as much participation from our historically underrepresented community members.

After processing the data we received from the workshops, one recurring piece of feedback we read was that the workshops were too official, overly structured, and seemingly unwelcoming to some of our HUGs. Taking this deeply into consideration, the Cup of C.A.P. (Climate Action Planning) initiative was born. Cup of CAP purposefully shifted away from our traditional methods of engaging community members in city conversations and instead centered around humanity. The goal was to virtually outreach to communities we did not normally engage with and casually show up as people, get to know who they are, build trust, and try to obtain people's feedback into our Big Moves (while sharing a beverage). The Big Moves are 15 goals we have set for the city based on residents' priorities in Phase One. For instance, one such goal is, "Everyone in Fort Collins can safely get to where they need to go within 20 minutes without a car." Our Plan Ambassadors and Community Partners seemed excited by the Cup of CAP initiative and were

more than happy to assist us in connecting to their community. We have PA/CPs who work with us to connect the city to students, our Indigenous community, the LGBTQ+ community, the Black community, and so much more. The work Fort Collins does would not be complete without our community members, who we hope someday will lead the city in all aspects.

Overall, I learned 5 things I will carry with me throughout my life:

1. Showing up as a person and bringing yourself to the table is an essential part of forming non-extractive relationships.
2. Relationship building is a marathon worth running. One day soon the community will be able to lead all city initiatives.
3. Targeted universalism and equity need to be at the heart of all government policy if we want to see a just transition and a sustainable climate future.
4. Anything is possible. There is nothing as we cannot do. It simply takes time and a dedicated team who share the same vision.
5. The workplace can be fun, and should be!

Looking towards the future, I am hopeful Fort Collins will achieve complete buy-in about centering with equity and leading with race from every level in the city, even at the highest offices. They will be one of the first cities in America to be completely led by the community, and are prepared to get them to that level via the creation of an Equity Office, a community equity committee, and by providing community training for local organizers to learn how to advocate for themselves at every level of government. My ultimate vision is that they get to a point where the entire city's goal is active anti-racism, every policy is created with targeted universalism at its core, and they run on 100% clean renewable energy with high-paying green jobs as the main source of employment for many of their residents. The path there is to continue to set the groundwork for fruitful relationships, holding space for humanity in every city initiative, creating programs with the specific purpose in mind to close resource gaps, and being open to improving all the time. I love the City of Fort Collins though I never stepped foot in it due to all of the people who make it an amazing place to live. I am so grateful for the opportunity to have worked and learned alongside people who are wholly committed to a complete reimagining of local government with the ultimate goal of achieving equity.