

Lupita Ortiz, 2022 Fellow for Aspen, Colorado



Project Overview and Role:

The City of Aspen Climate Office has been working for several years toward centering equity in climate programs, policies, and initiatives. In the last year, Aspen has set new science-based targets, begun developing new bold policies, and started to make administrative updates to Aspen's Climate Action Plan. Achieving success in these initiatives will require a community effort and needs to lift up and support all members of the community. In evaluating the next steps for this work, the team identified a need to take a step back and completely restructure current community engagement practices to more authentically center marginalized voices and meaningfully connect with community members in the Roaring Fork Valley who haven't historically been invited to the table.

To help get the Climate Office started on restructuring community engagement practices, the

City hired me as the Equity and Community Engagement Fellow. My role as Aspen's fellow this summer was to plan and conduct listening sessions with Latinx/Hispanic individuals of the Roaring Fork Valley, identify their interest level in climate change, identify barriers and opportunities in connecting more with the City's Climate Office, and make a recommendation to the City of Aspen on recommended next steps and a path forward.

What did you learn from the project?

1. Local government needs to build and keep long-term relationships with community organizations that are trusted.
2. Keeping individuals in positions of power accountable for serving minority communities is important, and we need more of it.
3. Nothing is impossible. Every great outcome takes time, dedication, and patience.
4. Being an agent of change inside the workforce can be intimidating, but persistence is key.

What was the impact of your work?

Through the information I gained from the listening sessions, I developed three key recommended next steps for the Climate Action Office to help them include the Latinx/Hispanic community in the topic of climate change: hosting events and programs, identify City documents and resources that need to be translated to Spanish, and over time, work to hire a more diverse workforce.

The listening sessions highlighted four overarching takeaways. The first is that a vast majority of the parents learn about climate change through their children, and the children share that they learn about climate change at school. The second is that the lack of internal diversity in the City as an organization keeps these individuals from coming to the City for support. The third topic was that not enough programs and events are provided or hosted for the Spanish-speaking population. Lastly, the community members shared that as Latinx/Hispanic workers they feel disposable by their management.

Through this information, I developed three recommended next steps for the team.

1. Hosting events and programs for the Latinx/Hispanic community in partnership with the organizations the interviewees listed they trust.
2. Review and identify City documents and resources that need to be translated to Spanish and work with the Human Resources Department (HR) to translate those documents.
3. Over time, work to hire a more diverse workforce. Many interviewees shared that they do not feel as if they can trust the City of Aspen because there is little to no internal representation for them inside of City Hall. The next steps I suggested for the team are to continue to have conversations with HR, to be inclusive in their hiring process, and to develop creative ways when promoting new positions available in their department, as this can help with gaining broader applicant submissions.

The initial next steps the Climate Action Office has taken is allowing me to be the bridge builder in connecting them to the organization's community members voiced they trust. Meet and greets started last month. The Team will also begin to discuss the next steps with HR to make more City documents and resources available in Spanish. The third recommendation is a process that the Climate Action Office will continue to think about when hiring, and hopefully, in the future, the whole city can adapt new and creative hiring ideas.

Any links to project deliverables?

[Equity and Community Engagement Report](#)