

2020 USDN EDI Fellowship - Paola Ramirez Peña – City of Lawrence and Douglas County KS



Paola is the Urban Sustainability Directors Network Fellow for the Sustainability Office of Lawrence and Douglas County, Kansas where she analyzes the impacts of climate change and cultivates spaces for communities of color to be joyous. She is from Oakland CA and a graduate of The University of Kansas. Her research and advocacy work centers community health and well-being through artistic initiatives, holistic farming, and education. In a previous position with the office, she led an effort to adapt community engagement efforts during the first

months of the COVID-19 pandemic to be entirely online. Paola has a Bachelors in English with a minor in Sociology from the University of Kansas and is a graduate of the Honors College. During her fellowship, Paola collected and analyzed data on the values driving the Climate Adaptation Plan as defined by staff and board members. She then used the guiding values to complete a scan of communities most impacted by climate change by familiarizing herself with community demographics and utilizing national and local data to map climate hazards to support the priorities of the city and county's upcoming Climate Adaptation Plan. She created an inventory of past strategic plans on climate change hazards and vulnerabilities that could support current and future initiatives. Beyond her time as a fellow, Paola is working in tandem with staff and board members to map stakeholders to prioritize equity and shape future engagement opportunities.

Embarking on the fellowship during a global pandemic came with particular challenges and opportunities for learning. For Paola, working remotely required an increased transparency on mental health. Her biggest takeaways from the position are the importance of having a supportive and personal relationship with other members of the office and the acceptance that revolutions happen in the day to day work. In her free time she writes, roller-skates, bakes, and cries over *Watchmen* on HBO.