Public Engagement

To meet aggressive climate goals in Dane County the Office of Energy & Climate Change, with everyone's help, has to facilitate a culture where sustainable practices are the new normal, where people make climate-smart decisions relative to electricity and natural gas as well as transportation choices, purchasing practices, and waste management. And where people talk to each other about climate change. This aspect of the CAP, a comprehensive public outreach and engagement effort, will help give citizens the information they need to make climate smart choices and help them realize that their colleagues, friends, and neighbors are making climate-smart choices too. The Office of Energy & Climate Change will engage Dane County residents in a way that helps empower them so they see themselves and their neighbors as part of an influential group - Dane climate champions, the people who are taking Dane County forward in a sustainable, responsible way.

"Polls on climate change show that 70 percent of Americans believe that climate change is happening and that it will cause harm to future generations, yet two-thirds of Americans say they never talk about it."

-Climate Generation

This outreach and engagement effort will reinforce all other climate and energy programs and policies in this report by highlighting and making accessible what's already happening and available, giving people the inspiration and instructional pathways for their own changes.

This broad public engagement effort will include:

- **Broad awareness raising.**
- **Diverse engagement initiatives** that inspire people to action, giving them clear direction on what they can do to be part of the solution.
- **Awards and storytelling** that showcase the existing successes in our community, demonstrating what's possible.

Lists of the top 10 or 20 or 100 things you can do to address climate change are becoming common. If you read enough of them, you'll notice that one action shows up on the vast majority of them, and it sounds simple: Talk to someone you know about climate change. Interestingly, most people seldom discuss climate change with their friends or family. If you think about it, it is hard to imagine that climate change will become a top-tier, top-of-mind issue for most folks unless people are talking about it. Family and friends are a great place to start.

▲ (L to R, in the foreground) Nathan Larson, Rooted, Lesley Wolf, Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute (HWLI), Sophia Seol, Dane County Office of Energy & Climate Change, Ally Burg, UW-Madison, and Laila Azam, Striving to Improve Health for All participate in an HWLI workshop. The HWLI trains community-based coalitions to engage the public in addressing social determinants of health.

There are many organizations across the country focused on climate change that have invested a lot in strategies for constructive dialogue addressing climate change; many research papers and other less academic pieces have been written on the topic. Groups that do excellent work in the area of climate conversations/dialogue include the Climate Reality Project (climaterealityproject.org/blog/3-tips-experts-how-talk-about-climate-crisis-effectively) and the Alliance for Climate Education (acespace.org/).

The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication covers public opinions about climate change. The program's director, Anthony Leiserowitz, and his team conduct the most comprehensive polling in the nation on climate change. In their words:

> A team of psychologists, geographers, political scientists, statisticians, pollsters, and communication scientists, we investigate how and why citizens in the U.S. and around the world are, or are not responding to climate change,

identify key audiences requiring tailored communications, and develop strategies to engage these audiences in climate change solutions.

A small sampling of their projects/studies includes these insightful works:

- Global Warming's Six Americas (climatecommunication.yale.edu/about/projects/global-warmings-six-americas)
- Identifying Climate Messages that Work (climatecommunication.yale.edu/about/projects/identifying-climate-messages-work)
- Engaging Latinos in the US on Climate Change (climatecommunication.yale.edu/about/projects/engaging-american-latinos-climate-change)
- Climate Change in the American Mind (climatecommunication.yale.edu/about/projects/climate-change-in-the-american-mind)

Another group, not too far from Dane County, that we find particularly helpful on the topic of effective climate conversations is Climate Generation (climategen.org) based in Minneapolis. This group's core programing has a very in-depth focus on climate communications and storytelling. Each year they host a two-day, intensive Talk Climate Institute (climategen.org/our-core-programs/trainings/public-trainings/talk-climate-institute-2019-recap) workshop where participants learn more about climate change and a lot more about how to talk about climate change. Climate Generation points out that effective conversations about climate change are not about how well you can talk, but rather, about how well you can listen. They offer these practical steps on "how to talk climate" (adapted content from the Alliance for Climate Education):

1. Ask permission.

2. Ask an open-ended question about the other person's thoughts about climate change.

3. Listen – do not interrupt.

4. Repeat back to them what you heard, instead of responding with your thoughts.

5. Share your personal experience with the issue.

6. Share a fact that helps ground your perspective.

7. Keep the conversation going, preferably by asking for more of their thoughts.

8. Thank them and share what you've learned.

9. Ask them to join you in exploring climate solutions.

Talk to a family member or friend about climate change and the wacky, extreme weather we've been having. You can also begin engaging with us at the Dane County Office of Energy & Climate Change by visiting our website and sharing your climate observations, stories, or solutions. We'd love to hear from you!