

Keynote speech given by Jalonne White-Newsome, senior program officer with The Kresge Foundation's Environment Program, at the World Water-Tech North America Summit on Oct. 19, 2016.

Opportunities and Incentives for the Water Sector in Building Resilience to Climate Change.

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to be here today and thank you for the introduction. I recently joined the Kresge Foundation earlier this year as a Senior Program Officer in the Environment Program. For those of you who have never heard of Kresge, we are a \$3.6 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America's cities for low-income people through grant making and social investing; we provide resources in several areas ranging from Education, Arts & Culture, Health, Human Services and of course, our Environment Program. I wear a couple of hats at the Foundation: leading the strategy development and portfolio on Sustainable Water Resources Management, as well as the development of our strategy at the intersection at Public Health and Climate Change.

Before joining the Kresge Foundation, I spent several years working as a chemical engineer in industry, a public health engineer in state government for a couple of years, a climate change researcher in academia, and a federal policy advocate. Out of all those roles, **one of my most important roles** – other than being a mom – was being the caregiver for my 90 year old grandparents. I knew this would be a tough job, and I expected some challenges with my grandparents letting me handle their finances, or, my grandfather allowing me to drive his

precious Chrysler, but what I didn't expect is that this experience **as a caregiver would serve as my entrée into this phenomenon called climate change.**

I started to become concerned when I noticed my grandparents started to worry about how **'this change in weather was affecting them'**, particularly during really hot days. I began to understand that it wasn't just my grandparents, it was senior citizens, poor people, the homeless and those living in dense cities that were getting sick and dying due to heat related conditions. I began studying the heat waves that occurred in Chicago in 1995, in 2003 in France, and even worked with a researcher here in Canada to understand why the city systems and services that were in place, were not suited to address the needs of populations that were vulnerable to heat. **So what I discovered is that the same inadequacies in our systems that prevent us from adapting to heat related climate impacts, are the same system inadequacies that are limiting our ability RIGHT NOW to adapt to "water related concerns" exacerbated by climate change.**

Let's look at some specific examples of where "extreme heat" and "extreme water" are similar.

- The spatial patterns in many cities are often the result of discrimination and place low-income residents in areas where they are most vulnerable to both heat related and water-related disasters. Living in areas of high-imperviousness not only make urban

heat islands more pronounced, but also minimize the ability of capture storm and flood waters.

- The physical infrastructure that is typically used to bring people relief during heat waves – the availability of cooling centers at recreation centers, libraries that have, air conditioning, water and other support services – are often times NON existent in poor communities because they haven't been maintained. This is very similar to 'lack of proper water infrastructure that results in more CSOs, more flooding, more contamination, more public health concerns and in some cases, more incidences of non-compliance in these same communities.

While spatial patterns of where people live and the quality of infrastructure can make it difficult to adapt whether we are talking about “extreme heat” or “extreme water”, **there is a positive similarity between these two climate impacts.** This might seem counterintuitive but in times of crisis - the research and evidence shows that one of the keys to survival – particularly in communities vulnerable to environmental and climate threats – is the more **COHESIVE a community is, the better.** IN fact, the literature shows that those folks that survived the heat waves of Chicago in 1995, in France in 2003 and in Canada, as well with the flooding, hurricane and multiple water crisis' that continue to occur across this nation, 'knowing your neighbors, looking out for those that have special needs, and pooling and sharing resources' has saved many a life before government resources and relief ever showed up.

Whether it's extreme heat or extreme water, there are some similar risks, similar vulnerabilities, similar inequities, and some similar solutions. The frequency and acuteness of the extreme weather we are experiencing not only puts stress on water systems, operations, but it also puts stress on people and amplifies the inequities **of the level of services and protection. This is where RESILIENCE is critical.**

When we talk about climate **resilience** in our environment program at the Foundation, we talk about advancing a comprehensive and integrated approach to climate resilience that encompasses climate mitigation, climate adaptation, and social cohesion. **So that means we support efforts that reduce carbon emissions, inform adaptation practices, and create opportunities to build stronger, people-networks that are informed, primed and able to influence key decision makers in an effort to minimize the inadequacies of our current systems.**

So I'd like to share some thoughts about building a more climate resilient water sector by offering some thoughts on 2 big questions:

- 1. What is the role of foundations?**
- 2. What does equity have to do with climate resilience?**

Let me start with the role of foundations.

We all have a role in building a more climate resilient water sector – because there is no silver bullet, no nice template, or model that can begin to solve all of the unique, water challenges across the country and our world. We need organizations that can take risks – and the philanthropic sector can do just that. Foundations are not captive to quarterly returns or election cycles, and we can sometimes act more boldly than the private and public sectors, take more risks, especially when the social good we are trying to advance requires it. So whether it's pilot projects, innovating financing schemes or building the capacity of small, community based organizations that can't access other financial streams – we can take reasonable risks, especially if they are elements that can build a stronger water sector and are tightly aligned with our mission and strategy.

Foundations also have the ability to deploy a wide variety of tools. Most people are familiar with grants – i.e. money you don't have to pay back, but there are also social investments/impact investments that are nontraditional and can leverage capital in ways that can encourage other investors to fund projects that drive social change. For example, we have been supporting an organization out west to develop an innovative way to finance natural infrastructure for watershed protection; and we are exploring other models at this time similar to 'pay for success' where cities are creating incentives for investors that will ultimately meet compliance goals and other public benefits, as well as investments that will give us social and

financial returns like investments in cutting-edge technology that could streamline water management and operational efficiency. We also can do the little things – like convene people, use our strategic communications capabilities, support research, and our influence when need be.

But Resilience in the water sector is not only a physical and technological challenge, it is also a social challenge. There are communities vulnerable to climate change that are intentionally left out of the conversation and the decision making because of lack of access, lack of information, lack of power and straight up discrimination. **I believe that one of the most important roles of a foundation is our ability to elevate the** voice and needs of marginalized people, those who have been left out of the economic and social mainstream and not invited to the decision-making tables. The ‘on the ground expertise of community experience is undervalued and disregarded in many cases, which to me, is one of missing pieces of building a more resilient infrastructure. One way Kresge is working to ensure community expertise is integrated into the decision making processes is by supporting the climate resilience work of community based organizations, through technical assistance, convenings and peer learning. **Our hope is that by building the capacity of community’s, they can be primed and ready to work with key decision makers to influence systems in a way that can make them more responsive to accommodate the needs of communities and not just be reactive.**

So moving on to the second question, **what does equity have to do with building a climate resilient water sector?**

Unless you've been living in a bubble, I hope you would agree that without a shadow of doubt that climate change disproportionately impacts low income, communities of color. And the only way for us to address these impacts is to acknowledge the failure of multiple systems: Systems that were created to protect property, protect the environment and protect people, but they are failing in some places. Regardless of your socio-economic status, your race, level of income, your zip code or level of privilege and/or power, **everyone has the human right to access clean, health and safe water.** And how do we measure the efficacy of these systems?

Well, I propose **that EQUITY** should be a new measure, an additional metric that helps us evaluate just how good our services are being provided in the water sector.

But we can't get to EQUITY or equitable outcomes if we don't understand diversity and inclusion. Very simply, **Diversity** is the wide range of differences among people and their perspectives; **inclusion** is the ability of diverse sets of people to raise their voices and impact decisions that matter; and EQUITY is the outcome we desire— which is Improving the long-term water quality, access, affordability and management of water for everyone.

To achieve EQUITY in the water sector, diversity and inclusion must be considered in the decision making among everyone - general managers, investors, planners, engineers, consultants, members of the local water board. We all have a part. There's a couple of

questions I've been asking many water experts like you in this audience that I hope we will start to ask ourselves back home so we can all begin moving towards more equitable outcomes.

Are diversity and inclusion a part of any policies or governing documents?

- Does your governing body look like the people you serve? Does it have representation?

Do governance, policies, practices and standard operating procedures, promote equitable outcomes?

- Does the leadership and chosen decision makers reflect the community they are serving?
- Are the most vulnerable people and places protected?
- Are capital and water plans being designed in a way that it encompasses the concerns of communities that are disproportionately impacted?
- Are certain communities being penalized by inadequate 'rate structure' that haven't been adapted to the current water use context in a particular area?

Are the 'benefits' of improved water management being distributed in a way that will are not just distributed equally, but equitable?

Are accountability guidelines, monitoring and evaluation in place to support equitable outcomes?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you measuring impact, improvement in compliance, fewer system disturbances, the increased ability of people to pay their bills, less shut offs, healthier communities, more jobs, etc. |
| Is there a transparent process that allows stakeholder education, input and decision making capability? |

Asking the tough questions is just a start. But I would hope that the incentives for building a more climate resilient water sector are clear. And I believe the multiple crisis’s we have experienced breed opportunity - the opportunity to build a more resilient water sector rests on advancing innovative partnerships, innovative funding practices, and how diversity and inclusion can make both the physical and social infrastructure across this country, **ready for anything climate change brings, particularly for those that are most vulnerable.**

Thank you so much for your time and attention and I challenge each of you to reflect on these questions in the car, on the plane ride or train ride home; and most importantly, **how you can keep ‘people at the center’ and ‘equity at the forefront’ of the great work you do.**

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