

Initiative Final Evaluation Report

2018-2024 | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

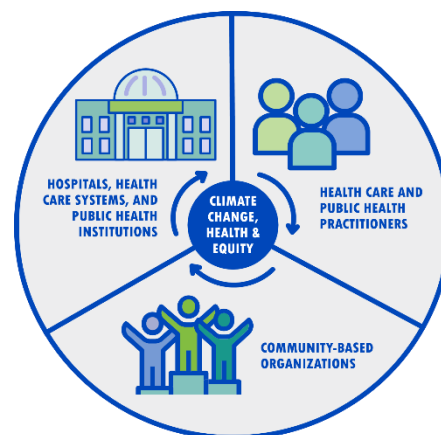
JANUARY 2025

Introduction

The Initiative Final Evaluation Report outlines the progress and impact of The Kresge Foundation's (Kresge) Climate Change, Health, and Equity (CCHE) initiative.¹ This \$30 million, five-year effort aims to advance climate policies and solutions that benefit low-wealth communities and communities of color, reducing their climate-related health risks over the long term.

The CCHE initiative includes three strategies and each is represented by a cohort of network partners:

1. **Health Institutions Network Partners:** Hospitals, health care systems, and public health institutions focus on deepening climate and equity knowledge, adopting equitable policies, increasing climate resilience funding, reducing carbon footprints, and building public support for climate resilience.
2. **Health Practitioner Network Partners:** Health care and public health practitioners incorporate climate-related health issues into their work, advocate for equitable climate resilience, influence public policy, and build supportive cross-sector relationships.
3. **Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) Network Partners:** CBOs strengthen advocacy capacity, build partnerships with health institutions, and drive the adoption of equitable policies to reduce health risks for low-wealth communities and communities of color.



Graphic of the CCHE initiative strategies

¹ The findings presented here are based on primary and secondary network partner data collected and/or analyzed by a third-party Evaluation and Learning Team ([Ross Strategic](#)) over the course of the CCHE initiative, including but not limited to network partner reports; network partner and Kresge publications; network partner, Advisory Committee, Kresge, and CCHE initiative Partner meetings; peer learning sessions, interviews, and focus groups

The initiative emphasizes cross-sector partnerships, advocacy, community engagement, and power building to achieve key outcomes such as strengthened relationships, increased climate resilience funding, and the adoption of equitable climate and health policies and solutions. It operates under a Theory of Change that outlines its roadmap for achieving impact.

Underpinning the Theory of Change is a holistic definition of climate resilience. This definition includes the enhanced capacity of human and natural systems to cope with and recover from the direct and indirect effects of climate change, mitigating these effects, and strengthening connections among individuals and networks to advance social cohesion. At the center is equity.

“Kresge has invested in the best thing to invest in in uncertain times: networks of people who are cross disciplinary and cross sectoral.” – CCHE Advisory Committee Member

Launched by Kresge in 2018, the initiative began in a dynamic and sometimes chaotic context. **Figure 1** below shows a high-level timeline of the CCHE initiative with key learning and evaluation milestones, as well as external and Kresge-wide events impacting efforts related to climate, health, and equity. Phase 1 (December 2018–May 2021) allowed for a staggered start of network partners’ work under the initiative. Health Institution and Health Practitioner network partners integrated into the CCHE initiative to continue ongoing work with the Kresge Foundation, while CBO network partners joined with a Phase 1 planning grant. During Phase 2 (June 2021–December 2024), network partners across all three strategies focused on implementing their workplans.

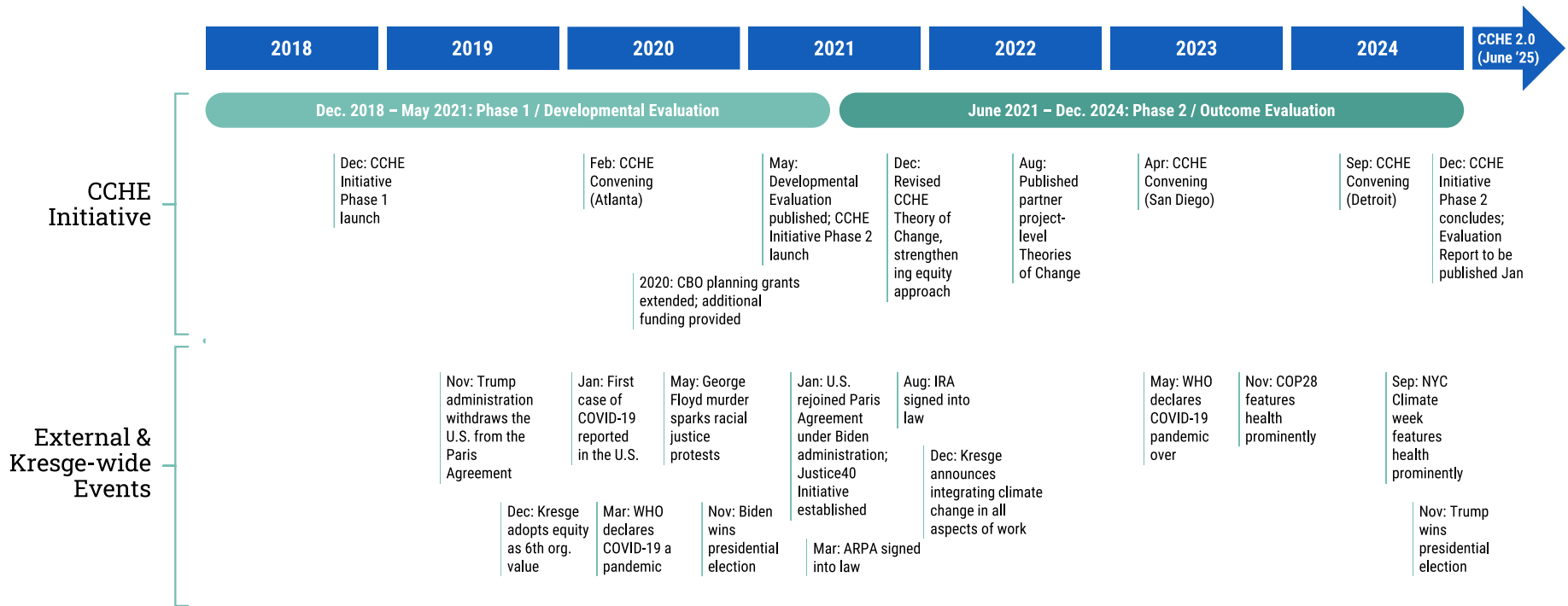
Network partners advanced despite COVID-19 and increasing civic unrest, seizing the moment created by unprecedented federal investment and a growing sense of urgency. This environment presented both challenges and opportunities, requiring adaptability and resilience to navigate the shifting landscape.

Since 2018, the United States has experienced a notable increase in climate change-induced extreme weather events. Between 2018 and 2022, the U.S. faced 89 major climate-related events, including severe storms, droughts, floods, tropical cyclones, wildfires, and winter storms. Widespread protests following the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, led to increased awareness and calls for racial equity and justice.

U.S. federal and international conversations have increasingly recognized the interconnection between climate and health. In January 2021, as a strong signal of the federal government’s commitment to addressing climate change and delivering environmental justice, the Biden Administration established Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.² Of particular relevance to the CCHE initiative, the Order established the Justice 40 Initiative, which aims to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of federal investments to disadvantaged communities, and the new U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OCCHE). Additionally, health has become a significant focus at international climate events, such as the introduction of the first Health Program at Climate Week NYC and the establishment of Health Day at COP28. According to the American Climate Perspectives Survey 2024, a significant majority of Americans believe that climate change is affecting their health and that health professionals should lead on climate action.

² The White House. Fact Sheet: Executive Order 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (2021). Accessed Dec.30, 2024.

Figure 1. CCHE Initiative Learning and Evaluation Timeline and Major Milestones



Acronyms: World Health Organization (WHO) | Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) | American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) | New York City (NYC) | United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP)

Key Findings

Field of Practice

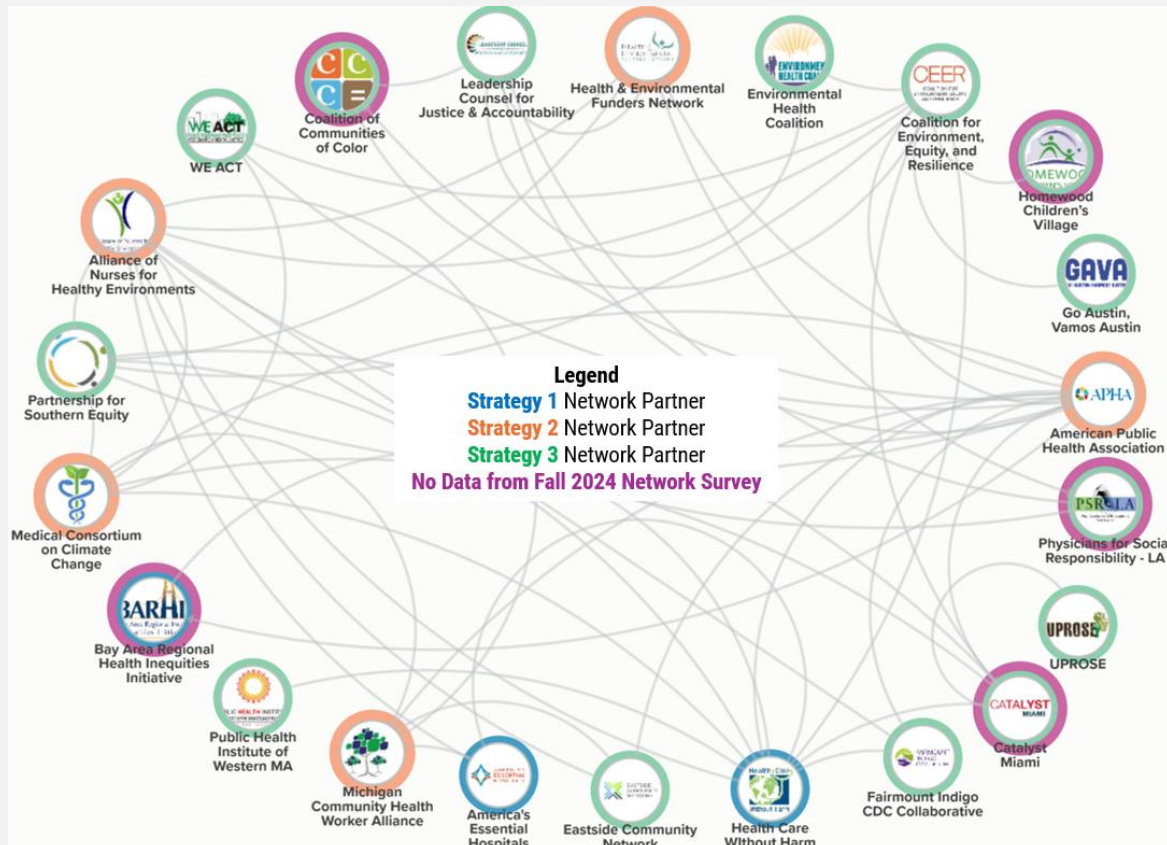
- Kresge, through the CCHE initiative, has played a major role in building a national field of practice that is notably strengthened by centering racial justice.
- Within the CCHE initiative there has been a significant increase in awareness and knowledge regarding the interconnected issues of climate, health, and equity and network partners have more clearly codified their commitment and approach to promoting climate resilience and health equity.
- Within the CCHE network, more people in more places are actively working at the intersection of climate, health and equity and, increasingly, leadership roles are being filled by individuals from communities most affected by climate harms, ensuring that their voices and experiences are central to the decision-making process.
- Network partners have galvanized greater investment in equitable climate resilience efforts, with particular benefit to community-based organization (CBO) network partners who have gained attention and trust from national funding organizations and federal agencies.
- The rising number of climate justice lawsuits, the development of a National Climate Resilience Framework, and continued substantial investment in climate adaptation and mitigation all point to a heightened demand for accountability and readiness for action, indicating that the field is maturing.

Cross-Sector Collaboration

- The CCHE initiative played a moderate to major role in fostering cross-sector collaboration within and beyond the CCHE initiative. CCHE network partners have strengthened their relationships with peer organizations, research entities, and government partners, accelerating their work and positioning them to collaborate on additional priorities related to climate, health, and equity.
- Kresge has successfully built a network of cross-sector partners, fostering new and deepened relationships, particularly among Health Institutions and between Health Practitioners and CBOs, which are expected to have a lasting impact on advancing climate, health, and equity goals.
- By strengthening their partnerships with government and health institutions, network partners have significantly increased their leverage, enabling them to shape and advance systems change more effectively.
- Network partners shifted the ways in which local policymakers and institutions engaged with CBOs and include community priorities in local planning efforts.
- Network partners from Health Institutions and Practitioners have improved their ability to work with communities and CBOs, advancing climate justice and policy advocacy. CBOs have imparted the crucial lesson of prioritizing community needs over specific issues, fostering community power.

NETWORK PARTNERSHIP GROWTH

In response to the need for greater connectivity among funded partners in the CCHE network, Ross Strategic developed the [Network Mapping Tool](#). The tool provided descriptive information on network partners' geographic locations, key strategies, and topics of focus under the CCHE initiative. **We observed marked network expansion between the first (“baseline”) network map produced in 2021 and the final map in December 2024, demonstrating an increase in the number of partnerships within the network.**



Mobilization

- The CCHE initiative has played a major role in building the capacity, skills, and resources of CCHE network partner organizations to mobilize for climate action in ways that center justice and equity and integrate health and resilience.
- Network partners have enhanced their constituents' capacity for policy advocacy, enabling them to play more influential roles in legislative processes. By serving as trusted intermediaries, CBOs are bridging residents and institutional actors to support community-informed policies.
- Network partners have also leveraged various tactics to increase the ability of constituents and partners to implement equitable climate solutions beyond public policy. Promotion efforts have led

to changes in organizational policies and operations and increases in funding for climate, health, and equity efforts.

- Network partners have also directly advocated for adoption and implementation of equitable climate resilience policies, leading to the passage of numerous climate, health, and equity policies, as well as the prevention of harmful legislation.
- In culmination of work to increase capacity for advocacy and implementation of both policy and other climate, health, and equity related solutions, data suggest more constituents of CCHE partners are mobilized to advance climate mitigation and adaptation approaches that center health and equity.

Community Power

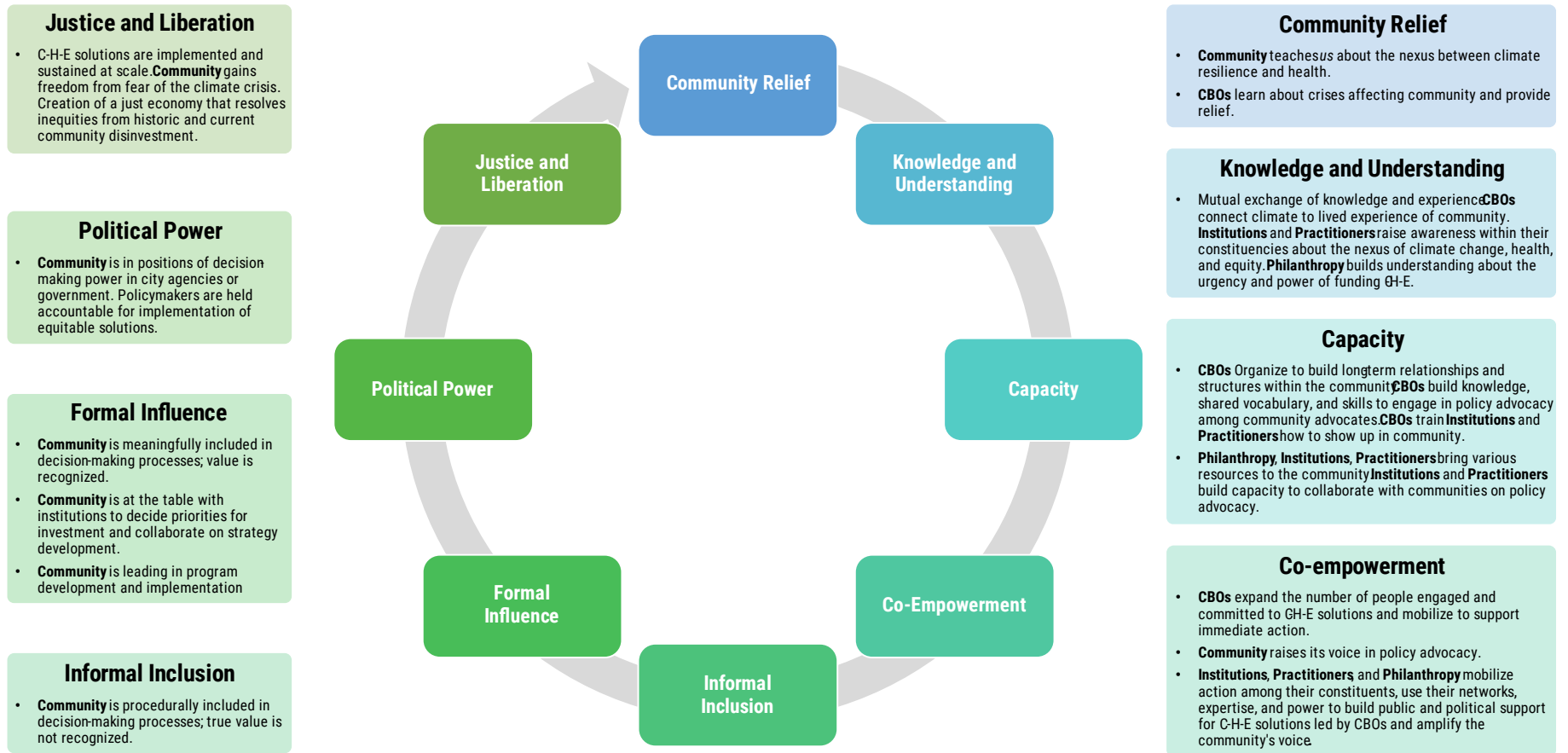
- The CCHE initiative showcases the multi-dimensional work led by network partners to mobilize community power to advance policies, systems, solutions, and investments aimed at ensuring climate mitigation and adaptation actions serve as equity multipliers. Compared with 2018, Health Institutions and Health Practitioners network partners now take on more multi-dimensional roles than in the past, acting as conveners, network weavers, and providing assistance beyond funding. See the visual below which illustrates what community-driven change looks like in practice and how network partners contribute.³ The visual includes eight types of activities that range from programmatic to transformative efforts. On the right are four inter-related and mutually reinforcing activity areas in which network partners - CBOs, Health Institutions, and Health Practitioners - advance community power; on the left are ways in which the community is supported to deploy their power.

Sustainability

- With their enhanced profile, successful acquisition of additional private and public funding, and the increased partnership capacity, most CCHE network partners are well-positioned to sustain and expand their impactful work, better serving their communities going forward.

³ This figure is based on the experiences of network partners from an earlier Kresge initiative, the Climate Resilience and Urban Opportunity Initiative (CRUO), and updated with observations from the CCHE network partners' actions.

Creating Space for and Deploying Community Power



Recommendations

In the face of escalating climate challenges, the intersection of climate, health, and equity demands urgent and coordinated action. This set of recommendations is directed at public and private funders who play a pivotal role in driving systemic change. A 2024 report, *Promoting Health, Protecting Our Planet*, noted that philanthropy, with its ability to be flexible, take risks, and drive transformative change, is essential in initiating, speeding up, and expanding the significant transitions needed to safeguard our collective health from climate change. It plays a vital role in bringing together stakeholders and ideas from various sectors—such as government, business, non-profits, public health, and environmental organizations—to leverage diverse expertise and resources, address the complex connections between climate change and health, and promote comprehensive and systemic change.⁴

To effectively implement these recommendations, funders may need to shift towards trust-based philanthropy. This approach emphasizes trust, transparency, and collaboration, recognizing that communities are best equipped to address community needs. By moving from a donor-centric to a community-centric mindset, funders can foster greater mutuality and transparency. This transformation involves reimagining grantmaking to include unrestricted funding, multi-year grants, and reduced reporting requirements, empowering grantees to work more effectively towards their missions.⁵

By investing in community power, strategic communications, and collaborative networks, funders can amplify their impact, foster resilience, and promote health equity. These recommendations aim to guide funders in leveraging their resources and influence to create sustainable, equitable solutions that address the intertwined crises of climate change and health inequities.

The financial backing for intersectional work centering health, climate, and equity has not grown as rapidly as the clarity of the need and impact. — CCHE Advisory Committee Member

1. **Allocate resources to narrative change and strategic communications to disseminate health-centered narratives that convey the immediate threat of the climate crisis and motivate action.**

Effective communication raises awareness, changes mindsets, and mobilizes public and political support for climate, health, and equity initiatives. Funders, thought leaders, and CCHE network partners noted that actors in the climate, health and equity space have not been explicit enough about the role of fossil fuels in climate change and the need to transition away from fossil fuels and other sources of greenhouse gases. The climate, health, and equity field can attract new partners and resources by clearly articulating how its work advances health equity. Ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to live in safe, healthy environments can have dual benefits: addressing the immediate impacts of climate change and promoting long-term health equity. Demonstrating the pathway from these investments to improved health outcomes will highlight the tangible benefits of addressing climate-influenced environmental factors.

⁴ CLI/Wellcome. *Promoting Health, Protecting Our Planet: Pathways for Philanthropic Impact*. March 2024.

⁵ Trust-Based Philanthropy Project. (n.d.). *Practices*. Retrieved January 3, 2025, from <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/practice>

- 2. Amplify stories and examples of successful partnerships between public health and health care institutions and communities to untangle persistent barriers.** Showcasing a variety of partnerships and their accomplishments can highlight the potential of collaborative efforts. While evaluation data demonstrate that health professionals are becoming more vocal, visible, and effective in their support for community-informed climate actions and have built more skills, including building community partnerships, CBO network partners faced challenges finding strong local health practitioner and health institution partners. This difficulty often stems from health partners still learning how to collaborate effectively with communities and overcoming longstanding barriers, such as power dynamics and lack of shared vocabulary. Network partners emphasized the need for more stories and examples of successful partnerships to illustrate what can be achieved through collaboration.
- 3. Support community power building to spread and scale successful systems change work.** The CCHE initiative has shown that investing in CBOs engaged in community power building can lead to significant policy changes and increased community leadership and influence. By investing in community power, funders can create lasting and meaningful change that addresses immediate needs and builds community capacity for systemic change. This approach builds trust and legitimacy, empowering individuals and enhancing their capacity to advocate for and implement change. Grassroots organizations can effectively influence policy and build networks that amplify their impact, making it easier to scale successful initiatives.
- 4. Strengthen network weaving to enhance impact at the intersection of climate, health, and equity.** Network weaving involves creating and strengthening connections among individuals and organizations to foster collaboration, innovation, and collective action. It includes bringing new people into the network, connecting existing members, and facilitating collaboration on projects to strengthen the community.⁶ By investing in network weaving, funders can help create a more connected and resilient network that is better equipped to address the complex challenges at the intersection of climate, health, and equity. The CCHE network has proven valuable for advancing equitable climate action, and with sustained effort, it may reach a tipping point for maximum impact. The climate, health, and equity field needs more explicit network weaving to amplify and scale the work. This includes convening collaborative learning networks to boost peer support, innovation, and the dissemination of effective practices; funding and “matchmaking” organizations working in specific cities or states to drive local action, build electoral power, and connect with the existing climate justice movement; and convening network partners for cross-strategy learning sessions to share experiences, challenges, and best practices, fostering relationships and building a community of practice.
- 5. Continue to fund in ways that reduce the burden on grant-funded partners, including multi-year flexible grantmaking and relationship building between funders and grant-funded partners in ways that foster trust, collaboration, and thought partnership.** The CCHE initiative demonstrated the effectiveness of a multifaceted and trust-based funding strategy. Network partners appreciated Kresge's flexibility with grant funds, which included multi-year funding, planning grants for CBOs

⁶ NetworkWeaver. (n.d.). *What is network weaving?* Retrieved January 3, 2025, from <https://networkweaver.com/what-is-network-weaving/>

during Phase 1, and general operations grantmaking for Phase 2. This approach supported trust-building and partnership between Kresge and network partners, allowing them to adapt to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To further reduce the burden on network partners, the CCHE Advisory Committee suggested shifting to a participatory grantmaking model and funding a suite of pilot projects to test the implementation of climate/health solutions, then evaluating and scaling the approaches that are successful. This strategy would empower network partners to have a say in how funds are allocated and ensure that successful initiatives receive the support needed to expand.

6. Position evaluation and learning to advance the work using principles of equitable evaluation.

Funders can use evaluation not just as a tool for assessment, but as a means to advance equity, return learning to the system, and answer critical questions about the ways in which historical and structural decisions and conditions affect the condition to be addressed through a given initiative or program. Funders can consider utilizing participatory evaluation, in which grant-funded partners and their constituents are involved in designing and implementing evaluation process. In addition, providing technical assistance support to funded partners to help them identify, track, and report on meaningful indicators that show their impact can reduce reporting burden, build capacity, support sustainability, and strengthen the underlying project-specific data for measuring the impact of an initiative at scale. Regular feedback loops to share evaluation findings with grant-funded partners is a critical aspect of equitable evaluation, as this bidirectional learning helps build trust through transparency and offers the opportunity to ground-truth evaluation findings and help improve programs and initiatives throughout implementation. This approach fosters a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, ensuring that programs remain responsive and effective.

Culmination of the Work: Examples from Across the Network

The following provides a snapshot of select examples of network partner successes (“wins”) and impacts over the course of the initiative. The smattering of examples represent climate change, environmental justice, and health-oriented impacts culminating from work of network partners through the CCHE initiative, but are not exhaustive. Refer to the [“CCHE Network Partner Wins to Advance Climate Resilience” memo](#) (published Learning Cycle 3, January 2024) which includes a broader spectrum of wins as identified by CCHE network partners across a wide variety of activity areas.

CCHE Network Partners Efforts have led to...



\$1.7 million dollars in American Rescue Plan Act funds are being deployed in Detroit to build climate resilience hubs equipped with solar power, battery backup, etc. to bolster community resilience in the face of power outages, floods, heat waves, and other crises.



The Springfield City Council in Massachusetts unanimously adopted Community Choice Energy (CCE), enabling residents to switch to 100% clean electricity. The program, which allows the city to procure competitive electric supply on behalf of residents and businesses, has been approved by the Department of Public Utilities.



New York Power Authority is transitioning more than a gigawatt of peaker plants to battery storage installation for clean energy, removing a significant source of air pollution which impacts residents’ respiratory and cardiovascular health.



The EPA designated a 3.7-mile stretch of the lower Neponset River in Massachusetts as a Superfund site, which will ensure action to improve the ecological health of the river and benefit communities.



Publication of the [Health Care Emissions Impact Calculator tool](#), the first-ever free, publicly available tool, designed specifically for health care, for measuring greenhouse gas emissions across all three Scopes.



Miami-Dade County Florida developed an [Extreme Heat Action Plan](#), leading to a proliferation of projects, programs, and studies related to climate resilience in the face of extreme heat. The NWS lowered the heat advisory threshold from 108 to 105 degrees to reduce morbidity and mortality.



Oregon passed in a [series of bills](#) that included reduced energy rates for low-income households, funding for home energy efficiency upgrades, and requirements for utilities to eliminate GHG emissions by 2040.



The San Diego Association of Governments in California approved an \$8 million pilot program to increase bus trips in low-income communities of color and provide

free youth transit passes for those under 18 in 2023. This initiative removes a significant financial barrier for families, improves access to essential services, and promotes environmental justice by prioritizing pollution-free buses in the most impacted communities.



A California county Equity Officer transformed the county's planning process to allocate nearly \$100 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to center equity. This transformation included instituting new procedures that require county government agencies to collaborate with CBOs in entirely new ways when developing funding proposals. Additionally, these new procedures mandate that county health departments work with CBOs to specifically highlight health impacts, as neither health nor climate issues are immediately obvious to those unfamiliar with the work.



Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority Board of Directors approved electrification of a commuter rail line. The electrification will reduce air and noise pollution and improve health outcomes in these communities by replacing approximately 1.6 million gallons of diesel and 18 thousand tons of CO₂ annually.



Three safety net hospitals piloted implementation of operational interventions to reduce emissions and cut utility costs.



The State of New York approved the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) requirement that a portion of benefits from clean energy investments must go to disadvantaged communities as financial investments.



Governor Kathy Hochul of New York announced an additional \$15 million to expand the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) for the 2022 summer season, allowing income-eligible residents to qualify for air conditioners, providing them relief from extreme heat and associated health issues.



Sunset Park Solar is launching a 725-kilowatt solar array at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, providing clean, affordable energy to the neighborhood. This community-led initiative aims to reduce GHGs, stabilize energy costs, and save \$1.24 million in lifetime energy bills for about 150 households.

Conclusion

Over the past five years, the CCHE initiative has made notable progress in advancing equitable climate resilience, health, and equity. By centering racial justice, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and supporting network partner mobilization, the initiative has significantly contributed to building a robust national field of practice. Our analysis shows that CCHE has played a crucial role in increasing awareness, expanding the number of actors at the climate-health-equity intersection, and growing leadership that reflects the communities most affected by climate harms.

The initiative's efforts have led to meaningful policy advocacy, enhanced funding strategies, and the implementation of equitable climate resilience solutions. Network partners have mobilized their constituencies, resulting in several policy wins and increased capacity for sustained advocacy. The CCHE initiative has also highlighted the importance of community power, with CBOs leading the way in creating space for community-driven solutions.

CCHE has effectively supported synergies among strategies, resulting in a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts for advancing a more equitable climate agenda. To adapt to the changing political landscape and continue to effect change at national, regional, and local scales, it is essential to strengthen local leadership, build robust coalitions, leverage local policies, enhance public engagement, and secure diverse funding sources. This approach will help maintain local momentum and drive progress at all levels, especially in light of recent political shifts.

There is an opportunity to address notable and persistent disconnects in the climate, health, and equity field by finding and communicating the common ground among those pursuing environmental justice, health equity, and climate adaptation and mitigation. While challenges remain, the progress achieved through the CCHE initiative provides a strong foundation for continued efforts in building and accelerating climate adaptation and mitigation solutions that advance health equity and racial justice. The initiative's impact on policy advocacy, community power, and cross-sector collaboration has laid important groundwork for sustained and transformative change.