

# Co-Empowerment for Community Climate Resilience



## Mission:

*To raise awareness of the connections between pollution, place, and the public's health.*

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, the Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience (CEER) has been working with community residents and local partners to build power and implement a home weatherization pilot program in NE Houston. Additionally, CEER is collaborating with Harris County in the development of a Climate Justice Action Plan. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3.

Through their CCHE-funded activities, CEER has mobilized Northeast Houston residents to understand the connections between climate change, pollution, and health and advocate for change. By partnering with the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC) and other local organizations, CEER has implemented a home weatherization pilot program to protect low-income Black and Latino residents during heat events. Additionally, CEER's Climate Ambassadors and community engagement efforts have significantly increased awareness and support for climate justice initiatives. Over the long term, CEER hopes to see improved health and residents centered in decision making. See an overview of CEER's key activities and intended impacts in their [CCHE theory of change \(slide 17, 2022\)](#), described in detail below.

## Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

**Pivoted from its initial focus on policy advocacy to address a community-identified immediate need: home weatherization retrofits to protect residents during heat and other extreme weather events.** Winter Storm Uri motivated this shift. CEER community members joined the HARC in a large, community-led heat mapping effort that demonstrated how heat lingers in certain neighborhoods. This effort provided a powerful visual of heat impacts and informed interventions for specific neighborhoods. CEER developed a heat awareness campaign, including a report and health fair. This campaign educated the community and decision-makers about the issue, leading to increased support for a community-identified climate justice priority: home weatherization retrofits to protect residents during heat events. CEER also raised awareness about equity and health outcomes in collaboration with Legacy Community Health – Texas's largest Federally Qualified Health Center – and UT Public Health. Local city agencies improved their understanding of how weatherization and other programs connect to health and climate change.

**Partnered with HARC to design and implement a home weatherization pilot program aimed at streamlining and humanizing the home repair and weatherization process for low-income Black and Latino residents in Houston, reducing frustration and delays.** CEER successfully mobilized the community, with 300 people attending the first kick-off meeting in February 2024. Weekly office hours helped residents complete applications, revealing additional barriers such as unreasonable income qualifications. The pilot employed residents from the communities CEER serves as community navigators. CEER's partnership with HARC reshaped HARC's priorities to integrate equity into their research activities, a significant shift from previous operations. See [2023 Heat Stress Report: Creating a Heat Resilient Houston Created by the Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience](#)

**Informed and equipped Northeast Houston residents to understand the connections between climate change, pollution, and health.**

Through popular education and community engagement, residents became more aware of how climate change impacts their physical and mental health. CEER recruited and trained 14 residents to work as Climate Ambassadors, who engaged their networks to educate and advocate about climate change. CEER’s work with health providers like Legacy Health Clinic, UT School of Public Health, and an Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE) fellow highlighted different perspectives on the impact of climate change, including extreme heat, on mental and physical health, helping residents connect the dots in new ways.

**Supported community leaders advocating for change.** CEER convened the Northeast Collaborative Platform (NECP), which consists of CEER member organizations, impacted residents, and place-based, grassroots groups active in Northeast Houston. This coalition met monthly, creating space for dialogue, organizing, and visioning. CEER hosted 45 NECP meetings, with attendance ranging from 40 to nearly 300 residents, to advance collective strategies and address community concerns. The Climate Ambassadors played a crucial role in facilitating these meetings, conducting outreach, and engaging their neighbors. They organized and participated in over 15 direct actions, sharing their stories and advocating for community needs through events such as the 5th Ward home tour, Sunset Review townhalls, and the Houston Community Climate Summit. These events highlighted the importance of environmental health, energy efficiency, and community resilience.

**Worked with health partners to elevate climate justice and support bi-directional learning between residents and practitioners.** CEER’s health partners, Williams Lyons with Legacy Community Health Centers, and Brett Perkison, a physician and Assistant Professor from the University of Texas School of Public Health, mobilized health stakeholders to add their voices to CEER’s Climate Justice Campaign. Lucindra Campbell-Law with ANHE used her skills to educate and inform residents. Together, they developed curriculum and led trainings with health practitioners; this work also shifted how practitioners see community work and their collaborative role. These efforts focused on movement building, capacity building, and leadership development of neighborhood leaders to advance their vision of climate justice.

**Acted as the community engagement partner with Harris County, the third-largest county in the U.S., to develop a climate justice plan.** CEER strengthened its relationship with the Harris County Sustainability Office and developed an equity framework for their climate justice planning process. CEER collaborated with residents, partners, and county representatives to develop the plan based on community input gathered in the first year. Residents reviewed the initial draft, and the full plan is expected in Spring 2025.

**Experienced significant growth and change as an organization.** CEER as an organization expanded its staff to five members and doubled its community leadership programming. CEER expanded its work with health and academic partners and their reputation grew considerably, becoming a recognized and important part of the Northeast Houston community. The heat campaign helped CEER build relationships with the media, and media outlets frequently reached out to CEER for insights on climate and health issues.

## Key Partners

Organization	Type
Connective	Organizational Partner
Fifth Ward, Kashmere Gardens, Trinity Gardens, Denver Harbor Super Neighborhoods, Northeast Action Collective, Healthier Nickel, Faith Revitalization Center/Fifth Ward Missionary Baptist Church	Community Partners
HARC	Institutional Partner
Legacy Community Health Centers	Health Partner
Alliance of Nurses for a Healthy Environment	Organizational Partner
Coalition of Community Organizations, Mi Familia en Acción, West Street Recovery, LINK Houston, Air Alliance Houston, MOVE Texas, SEIU	CEER Member Partners
University of Texas School of Public Health	Academic Partner

## Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **Balancing rapid response with policy work is critical, as is relationship building.** CEER's focus has evolved significantly since 2017. Initially, CEER strictly focused on advocacy, aiming to change policies by working with the City of Houston. However, over time, CEER realized that while advocacy is crucial, it needed a broader approach to address the community's immediate needs effectively. Taking the time to get to know community members and listening to their needs, rather than rushing into action, has proven invaluable. This approach has helped CEER align its initiatives with the community's priorities, particularly the universal value of focusing on homes.
- **The work necessitates navigating different scales of jurisdiction.** CEER has learned to keep its eye on state level policy while pursuing local level changes. State level politics can undo years of hard work to advance change at the local level.
- **Take a holistic approach.** Standing up this work requires community trust which comes from working with a network of trusted partners that bring different talents to the table. A key component of CEER's strategy became actively engaging with the community, such as participating in food distribution events. These efforts helped CEER build relationships with residents and establish itself as a helpful presence. The organization recognizes the importance of a holistic approach, nurturing mental, spiritual, and physical health in different settings. This holistic perspective is essential for sustaining long-term community engagement and resilience. CEER's multi-pronged approach, encompassing various programs and initiatives, has positioned it as a comprehensive resource for climate and health issues in the community.

## Looking Ahead

The organization has learned to balance rapid response to storms and other catastrophes with ongoing policy work. This dual approach has been a learning experience, requiring constant adaptation and strategic messaging. CEER is now focusing on statewide and federal policies, aiming to work with advocates to make resources like weatherization and flood protection more accessible to residents. CEER is also working on establishing a resilience hub and creating economic opportunities in the community as part of their long-term strategy, including collaborating with Texas Climate Jobs on job training opportunities.

Looking ahead, CEER will continue its weatherization assistance work, which is currently in the second year of a three-year pilot program. The organization plans to develop power-mapping strategies to build relationships around weatherization and identify opportunities for intervention at various levels. This information will help shape CEER's strategy for local, state, and federal policy changes. Additionally, CEER's involvement in the Harris County climate justice plan has provided valuable insights and will significantly influence their next steps. As the third-largest county in the U.S. develops its climate justice plan, CEER's role as a community engagement partner will be crucial in ensuring that residents' voices are heard and integrated into the plan.

CEER feels confident and strong in continuing its work, driven by the momentum and shared values within the community. Residents' focus on home-related issues has become a central theme, and CEER is committed to being a messenger for this cause. The organization is optimistic about cultivating smaller changes that will lead to significant, long-term impacts.