

Empowering Southern Communities to Advocate for Equitable Climate and Health Solutions



Mission:

Advance policies and institutional actions that promote racial equity and shared prosperity for all in the growth of metropolitan Atlanta and the American South.

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) has been working to develop and advance systemic processes that create opportunities for energy equity, health equity, economic inclusion, and equitable growth. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3.

PSE strengthened community-based leadership, established trusted relationships and partnerships with local community leaders and advocates, and utilized community organizing to address climate change and health equity issues. In the long-term PSE envisions this work will lead to greater racial equity and climate-resilient and thriving communities. For a high-level overview of PSE's CCHE-related efforts, see their 2022 CCHE theory of change ([slide 25](#)) and described in detail below. Key partners in PSE's CCHE-funded work are listed at the end of the document.

Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

Pivoted the Community Advisory Board (CAB) to a successful community-driven coalition. PSE's CAB has evolved from an organization-driven coalition to community-driven and community-focused group for climate and health that was rooted in policy recommendations driven by community. The CAB has grown to be a network hub that engaged diverse community members including young people and seniors. The CAB pursued two routes of change: policy advocacy and community-driven solutions. For policy change, the CAB focused on initiatives like home weatherization and specifically worked to improve WeatherRise ATL, the City of Atlanta's program aimed at reducing energy burden for the most impacted neighborhoods. Community-driven efforts empowered residents to take immediate actions, such as setting up water stations during heatwaves. This dual approach fostered community and network growth, with the CAB making policy recommendations in collaboration with other organizations and local government offices.

Prioritized solutions to extreme heat. PSE and Smart Growth America collaborated on an extreme heat resilience campaign in Atlanta to address environmental injustices and health inequities exacerbated by extreme heat. A key component of this campaign was the production and screening of the video "ATL Rising: Building resilience in the face of extreme heat," which highlights the interactions

Select Resources

- [ATL Rising: Building resilience in the face of extreme heat](#)
- [Climate justice messaging: Using the power of voice to advance policy](#)

between extreme heat, the built environment, and health equity in Atlanta. Two screening events brought together residents, activists, and climate policy leaders to discuss the impacts of extreme heat and potential solutions. The screenings facilitated discussions on personal experiences with extreme heat and the need for resources like cooling and hydration stations. This campaign also included efforts to map urban heat islands in Atlanta through community science initiatives, furthering environmental and climate justice in the city.

Co-designed a learning session about communicating with southern legislators about the CCHE message framework and shared the experience with fellow CCHE network partners based in the South. As described in "Climate Justice Messaging: Using the Power of Voice to Advance Policy," the session highlighted the need to adapt messaging to resonate with different audiences, including using relatable language and framing climate issues in terms of health and safety when advantageous. This approach aimed to build local power and promoted future progress by educating elected officials and the public about the urgency and necessity of climate action.

PSE made significant strides through its Justice40 Accelerator, a network designed to support local organizations in Black and historically marginalized communities of color in pursuing government funding opportunities. Founded in collaboration with Elevate, Groundswell, Hummingbird Firm, and The Solutions Project, the Justice40 Accelerator aimed to ensure these communities received direct investments from the federal government's Justice40 initiative. The program helped climate and environmental justice organizations build capacity, form partnerships, and prepare to access government funding for community-designed solutions. The Justice40 Accelerator supported 49 organizations across 23 states. Since its inception in 2021, participants have secured \$43 million in federal and state funding for community-led climate projects. The City of Atlanta engaged PSE to audit the City's Contracting and Procurement Department, to evaluate the deployment of federal funding and funding beneficiaries.

Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **Organizing fatigue emerged as a significant challenge for PSE due to the community's exposure to numerous research and philanthropic initiatives over time.** This led to a sense of weariness and skepticism among residents towards new projects. To address this, PSE emphasized values-based organizing, ensuring that community members felt genuine ownership and value in the process. This approach helped build trust and demonstrated a long-term commitment to the community, which is essential for overcoming organizing fatigue and fostering sustained engagement.
- **PSE found success by leveraging its strengths in community engagement and adapting their strategies to fit their unique capabilities.** Initially PSE followed a pre-set plan but determined to shift to approaches that worked best for their community, leading to more effective and impactful outcomes. Momentum of the CAB grew as PSE adapted the project plan to better align with their strengths and community needs. The CAB operated with a clear understanding of their capabilities and agency, driving both immediate community-driven solutions and long-term policy changes.
- **PSE enabled residents to understand and apply the concepts of climate change, health, and equity to their everyday experiences.** By providing relatable examples and fostering open, non-prescriptive conversations, PSE empowered the community to identify and address local issues themselves.
- **PSE has learned the importance of helping community members recognize and communicate the impacts of climate change on their health to their healthcare providers.** For effective climate resilience, healthcare systems need to be proactive and supportive beyond just keeping hospitals operational. This includes integrating environmental health screenings in healthcare facilities to better understand and address the environmental impacts on patients' health. While climate issues may start appearing in Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNAs), they still need to be elevated to the level of other critical health concerns.

Looking Ahead

PSE aims to expand its impactful work beyond the initial target ZIP codes, with an increased focus on advocacy and capacity building in other communities in metro Atlanta and rural Georgia. PSE plans to increase community expertise at the intersection of climate change and health inequity, strengthen the regional environmental justice advocacy infrastructure, and support communities with advocating for equitable climate and health policy change. PSE will continue its community-led approach and lean into its value-based organizing expertise. Additionally, PSE plans to strengthen its partnerships with fellow CCHE network partners, share learnings, and deepen the

impact of their work. PSE's goal is to grow a coalition of climate and health equity advocates in the South, united around a shared agenda for change for the communities most impacted by climate change and poor health outcomes.

Key Partners

Organization	Type
Atlanta Regional Commission	Government Partner
City of Atlanta Mayor's Office	Government Partner
Historic Westside Gardens	Community Partner
Morehouse School of Medicine	Academic Partner
Smart Growth America	Community Partner
Spelman College	Academic Partner
U.S. Water Alliance	Environmental Partner
Urban Heat ATL	Environmental Partner