



Growing Climate Resilience in the Mystic River Watershed

CIRCA Climate & Equity Grant Program

January 2026

Alliance for the Mystic River Alliance



Connecticut Institute for Resilience
and Climate Adaptation



Sponsored by a Climate & Equity grant from the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA). CIRCA is a partnership between the University of Connecticut and the State of Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. More information can be found at: www.circa.uconn.edu

Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed

January 2026

Activities completed using Climate & Equity funds

During the grant period, Climate & Equity funds were used to support early-stage planning, coordination, and community engagement activities related to climate resilience and equity. Activities focused on relationship-building, information gathering, and laying the groundwork for future climate adaptation efforts rather than on capital implementation.

Grant-supported activities included:

- Hiring of Living Atlas Coordinator, GIS Coordinator, and Story Gatherer
- Development of a Living Atlas GIS database in collaboration with Fuss & O'Neill and Resilient Land and Water
- An Alliance Spatial Data Inventory
- Development of an ArcOnline map environment
- Refinement of the Mystic River Observation and Scavenger Hunt Apps
- Organization of the first and second Living Atlas workshops
- Creation of ArcGIS Community Hub Account
- Three tabling opportunities to connect the App to the public
- Development of a Storymap of the Watershed, in collaboration with Fuss & O'Neill

Project milestones

Key milestones during the grant period included:

- Initial project launch and internal planning meetings.
- Engagement with partner organizations and stakeholders to discuss climate-related needs and priorities.
- Identification of priority climate and equity issues relevant to the communities served.
- Feedback process for story gathering protocols
- Story gathering and Development of a repository of collected stories
- Third Living Atlas workshop and final deliverables
- Launch of public Living Atlas Map Viewer and Storymap

Project locations

Activities were conducted within Connecticut, primarily in Groton, North Stonington, Ledyard and Mashantucket, Pequot, and Eastern Pequot Tribal nations. Engagement and coordination took place through meetings (virtual and in-person) with community partners serving residents

in these areas, as well as public gatherings and events. No physical construction or on-site implementation activities were undertaken as part of this grant period.

Grant Project Outcomes

Outcomes resulting from grant activities

The primary outcomes of this grant period were foundational rather than programmatic.

Outcomes included:

- Increased organizational readiness to engage in climate and equity-focused planning.
- Strengthened relationships with community partners working with populations vulnerable to climate impacts.
- Improved internal understanding of community-identified climate concerns and capacity gaps.

Achievement of project goals

The project made progress toward the goals described in the original application by establishing planning and engagement groundwork. While the grant period did not result in fully implemented climate adaptation projects, it supported essential early-stage work needed to advance longer-term climate and equity outcomes, such as laying the groundwork for the “dramatically more” community engagement in the Mystic Watershed Climate Vulnerability Assessment funded by SeaGrant SRC and the Long Island Sound Partnership’s Planning Grant.

Challenges included leadership transition and staff capacity constraints during the grant period, which limited the organization’s ability to move beyond planning and engagement activities within the original timeline.

Community engagement

Community engagement occurred primarily through partner-based outreach rather than direct public programming. Engagement included:

- Coordination meetings with partner organizations.
- Information-sharing conversations focused on climate impacts, equity considerations, and community priorities.

Community engagement also occurred directly, through tabling (with the apps) and at events geared toward community learning about the watershed and storygathering.

- Due to capacity and timing constraints, engagement was more limited in scale than originally anticipated, but it aligned with the communities described in the original application.

Metrics (where available)

- Number of partner organizations engaged: six
- Number of planning or coordination meetings held: multiple
- Number of Community Action Teams formed as a result of this engagement: four
- Number of staff or consultant hours supported by grant funds: reflected in budget expenditures

Capacity-Building Progress

Community capacity-building

This project contributed to community capacity-building by strengthening coordination between the organization and community-based partners serving populations vulnerable to climate impacts. While direct service delivery or infrastructure outcomes were outside the scope of this grant period, the project supported groundwork for future planning, advocacy, and climate resilience efforts.

Organizational capacity-building

Through this project, the organization:

- Gained experience managing climate and equity-focused grant funding.
- Identified internal capacity gaps related to staffing, project management, and data tracking.
- Developed a clearer understanding of the resources needed to advance climate equity work at a meaningful scale, especially when mobilizing whole neighborhoods and Nations to take part.

These lessons will inform future project design and budgeting.

Knowledge-sharing

Advice for other organizations undertaking similar projects:

- Allocate sufficient staff capacity for documentation and reporting from the outset.
- Build flexibility into timelines to account for organizational transitions.
- Clearly distinguish between planning-phase goals and implementation-phase outcomes when designing grant proposals.

Recommendations for future funding rounds

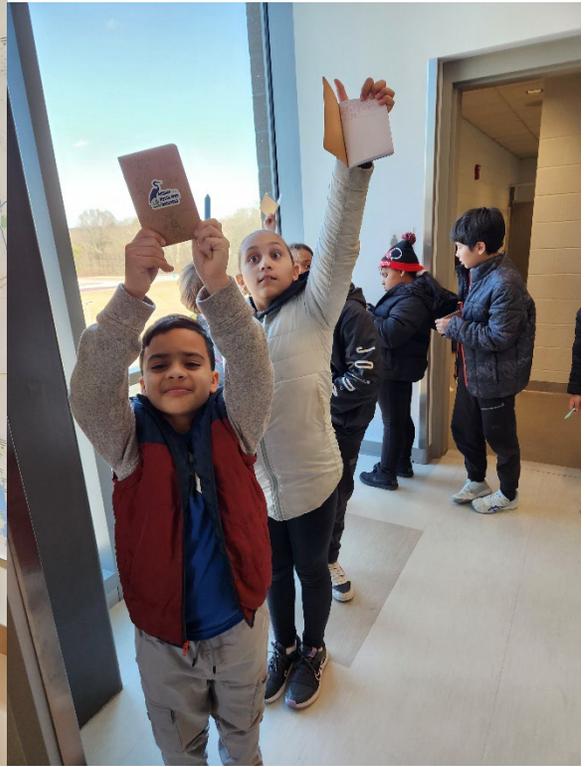
Future iterations of this program may benefit from:

- Explicit funding categories for project management and reporting.
- Support for organizational capacity during leadership or staffing transitions.
- Longer timelines for planning-to-implementation projects, particularly for small or community-based organizations.

Photos







State Planning Participation Add-On

CEEJAC attendance – 2025

By: Brenda Geer – Collaboration Coordinator for AMRW

Attendance at the DEEP **Solid Waste Advisory Committee:**

Attending the Solid Waste meetings is crucial because our reservation is in very close proximity to our Town dump. I have been working with this group to pay attention to some of our community's concerns and working on a plan to address these issues along with the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed. I also recommended starting a rebate program through the State to handle all the "nip" bottles that are being disposed of incorrectly. Something like the return on bottles etc. It would hopefully lessen the amount of waste being "tossed out" on the ground.

Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) **Tuesday, January 28, 2025 9:30am – 11:30am**

[swac-agenda---january-28-2025-final.pdf](#)

Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) **Tuesday, March 25, 2025 9:30am – 11:30am**

[swac-agenda---march-25-2025-final.pdf](#)

*This meeting is being rescheduled to **June 17, 2025 4-5:30 PM**. We hope you are able to attend; please register for the meeting here: <https://ctdeep.zoom.us/meeting/register/UWA3a-aoTRG3M7i815tnGg>*

Description: Join Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council (CEEJAC) Waste Subcommittee for a public meeting with DEEP's Waste Enforcement Division. In this meeting, we learn about how DEEP's Waste Division enforces environmental regulations, rules, and permits. The program will cover the ins and outs of enforcement such as:

- What happens when the public submits a complaint?
- What happens during an inspection? How often do inspections occur, and what are DEEP staff looking for during an inspection?
- Who are the entities engaged in enforcement? State agencies, Municipalities, Federal agencies?

Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) **Tuesday, June 24, 2025 9:30am – 11:30am**

[swac-agenda---june-2025.pdf](#)

Attendance at the DEEP CEEJAC **Energy and Technology Subcommittee**

At these meetings we have been talking mostly about providing broadband to underserved communities. In addition to how we as the State Tribes can work together on different projects together, including having enrolled Native's sitting on the Boards of all the State Committees and Boards.

Jan 15, 2025 - Energy Subcommittee Meeting (Solar For All Updates)

[Download Meeting Agenda](#)

[Download Presentation Slides](#)

[Download Meeting Minutes](#)

[Watch Meeting Recording](#)

Mar 19, 2025 - Energy Subcommittee Meeting (Office of Consumer Counsel)

[Download Meeting Agenda](#)

[Watch Meeting Recording](#)

[Download Presentation Slides](#)

[Download Meeting Minutes](#)

Apr 2, 2025 - Energy Subcommittee Meeting (Community Renewable Energy Siting Tool - CREST)

[Download Meeting Agenda](#)

[Watch Meeting Recording](#)

[Download Presentation Slides](#)

[Download Meeting Minutes](#)

June 18, 2025 - Energy Subcommittee Meeting (Energy Efficiency Board and Conservation & Load Management Plan)

[Download Meeting Agenda](#)

[Watch Meeting Recording](#)

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[Download Meeting Minutes](#)

July 16, 2025 - Energy Subcommittee Meeting (ISO New England and Grid 101)

[Download Meeting Agenda](#)

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[Download Meeting Minutes](#)

Map - [Environmental Justice Affecting Facilities](#)

Map showing our reservation as an **Environmental Justice Distressed Municipalities 2024**

Attendance at the DEEP CEEJAC Air & Transportation

CEEJAC Air & Transportation Meeting (Virtual)

CHEAPR Updates

July 30, 2025 | 5:30-7:00 PM

[Download Meeting Agenda](#)

CEEJAC Quarterly Meeting (Virtual)

Monday, September 22, 2025 | 6:00-8:00 PM

[Register for Zoom Meeting Link](#)

CEEJAC Quarterly Meeting (Hybrid)

December 2025 | Time TBD
Location TBD

CEEJAC Quarterly Meeting (Hybrid)

Thursday, June 26, 2025 | 5:30-7:30 PM

[Download Meeting Agenda](#)

[Watch Meeting Recording](#)

[Download Meeting Minutes](#)

[Download Presentation Slides](#)

CEEJAC Quarterly Meeting (Virtual)

Monday, March 17, 2025 | 6:00-8:00 PM

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Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council's Land and Energy & Technology Subcommittees

Email I received from Sarah Huang, PhD Director, Office of Equity and Environmental Justice Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection asking if I would be a speaker at this event.

I am reaching out on behalf of the Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council (CEEJAC) to invite you as a speaker for a panel discussion on Environmental Perspectives and Issues in Indigenous Communities. After the CEEJAC Quarterly Meeting in March 2025, the council was hoping to engage you and other tribal members in a deeper conversation for our next meeting.

The council is hoping to learn more about challenges and issues that Indigenous Communities in CT are facing, particularly any issues where there may be decisions/policies that need additional support. For example, offshore wind, water quality, invasive plants, and overall stewardship of the land.

*In the council's role, they can provide recommendations and guidance to address challenges that communities are facing and bring solutions to the Commissioner of DEEP. We would greatly appreciate your participation at this event on **Thursday, June 26, 2025, 5:30-7:30 PM at 295 Meridian St, Groton, CT**. Food and drinks will be provided.*

Please let me know by May 9 if you are interested and able to join us.

*Thank you for your consideration!
Sarah*

August 12, 2025

Register for Zoom Meeting

Link: <https://ctdeep.zoom.us/meeting/register/TEwTNrbMQFecNtWP5Tbymw>

Description: Join the Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council's Land and Energy & Technology Subcommittees to **discuss solar and clean energy development in environmental justice communities**. There are a few programs within DEEP that provide a framework and resources for communities interested in sitting solar in their municipality. This subcommittee meeting will open a discussion about some of the unique challenges in clean energy

development in urban and rural EJ Communities and identify key criteria that should be considered. Please join us for an informative session with plenty of time for deeper discussions on clean energy in your EJ Community. We're also excited to have special guests from communities across CT, please join us to hear about their experiences!

CEEJAC Land & Energy Meeting: Solar Siting in EJ Communities

August 14, 2025

Register for Zoom Meeting

Link: <https://ctdeep.zoom.us/meeting/register/TEwTNrbMQFecNtWP5Tbymw>

Description: Join the Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council's Land and Energy & Technology Subcommittees to **discuss solar and clean energy development in environmental justice communities**. There are a few programs within DEEP that provide a framework and resources for communities interested in sitting solar in their municipality. This subcommittee meeting will open a discussion about some of the unique challenges in clean energy development in urban and rural EJ Communities and identify key criteria that should be considered. Please join us for an informative session with plenty of time for deeper discussions on clean energy in your EJ Community. We're also excited to have special guests from communities across CT, please join us to hear about their experiences!

I attend these CEEJAC meetings so that there is a Tribal voice when discussing the topics that CEEJAC covers. At this point there is NO Tribal representation on any of the CEEJAC Committees. I am working on trying to change that. Afterall, these areas of concern affect Native Americans as well. I have spoken at several of these events and expressed the importance of having Tribal representation sitting on these Boards and Commissions etc. We have not had the best relationship with the State over the past 400+ years, but I am working on improving that relationship by suggesting that it's imperative that the Native voices in Ct are included in these Boards and Commissions and even as Legislators in our State. Especially by being included in Maps as a "underserved" population and holding the Governor to his statutory responsibility of applying for Grants for Housing etc. for the Tribes in Ct.

Respectfully submitted

Brenda Geer

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Collaboration Coordinator for AMRW