



CIRCA Report Cover EmpowerED

Community-Driven Climate Education

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Connecticut Institute for Resilience
and Climate Adaptation



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Final Report CIRCA Climate and Equity Grant EmpowerED

Summary

EmpowerED is a climate justice education program focused on co-creating a place-based climate change curriculum in partnership with a cohort of public housing residents. The goal of the co-creation model is not only to generate a module to be used beyond the scope of this project, but also to build the knowledge and skills of the cohort needed to foster greater engagement in decision-making processes impacting their neighborhoods. The project planning team consists of representatives of PT Partners, the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, and the City of Bridgeport's Sustainability Office. This is a multi-year effort, and we are grateful to have received a CIRCA Climate and Equity Grant to support the end of Year 1 into Year 2.

Grant Project Activities

The EmpowerED planning team hosted monthly community conversations and two weekend retreats with a consistent cohort of approximately 25 and a total reach of 41 Bridgeport residents. The climate justice conversations included group workshops, group research investigations, community sharing, and experiential learning activities. Residents gained a greater understanding of climate change impacts, vulnerability factors, and disparate impacts through a hyper-local lens.

The EmpowerED team hired a new community facilitator in April 2025. Community conversations were held every month for the 12 months of the grant, providing a consistent community space for learning and collaboration. Full-day weekend retreats were held in July and November 2025 to delve more deeply into systems thinking and mapping of the core systems residents value. In December 2025, the EmpowerED team outlined a curriculum that will, once finalized, be piloted with community leaders through the Neighborhood Revitalization Zones (NRZs).

Sessions were held in Bridgeport, primarily at Gary Crooks Community Center (located at the PT Barnum Apartments public housing campus), with some hosted at Burroughs Community Center and Bridgeport Public Library Beardsley Branch. It was important to host the conversations at these locations because of their accessibility to the public housing residents.

Please use specific metrics wherever you can (for example, number of outreach meetings held, number of trees planted, number of community residents reached, number and names of partner organizations, etc.)

Grant Project Outcomes

Data show that EmpowerED participant residents have demonstrated an increase in knowledge and confidence in discussing climate and environmental justice-based topics since the inception of the program in October 2024. Residents' levels of engagement in conversation have increased, with more people asking and answering questions. Initially, only 3-4 residents were actively engaged in asking and answering questions. In the past two sessions, this number increased to 8 residents frequently asking or answering questions during the conversations. In addition, the complexity of the questions and answers the residents share has increased over the program period.

Participants increased their awareness of how to engage in local and statewide planning processes and participated in complementary civic activities outside of the EmpowerED sessions. One of the strengths of the EmpowerED program is the partnership with the City of Bridgeport's Sustainability Office. This connection has provided opportunities for many of the residents in EmpowerED to apply their learning to conduct tree surveys, air quality monitoring, and park cleanups with the City of Bridgeport and civic engagement groups. EmpowerED participants also came out to Bridgeport's BEEport walks, waterfront pathway engagement events, and supported the maintenance of green infrastructure in Bridgeport alongside the city's Sustainability Manager.

EmpowerED is one of several programs PT Partners facilitates with the public housing residents. Each of these programs offers stipends to the residents to support their participation. Residents opt into the programs and are not required to attend any given session. PT Partners has noted that EmpowerED has one of the most consistent participation records of their programs and attributes this to the strength of the relationships that have developed between the residents and the project team and among the participating residents themselves.

We have collected data from residents on the following:

- Meeting notes and observations of discussions - what themes emerge, how understanding of climate change and environmental justice has grown
- Exit tickets - what they have learned, what questions they still have
- "Squad" discussions identifying community assets, challenges, vulnerable areas, sources of pollution, potential solutions, and barriers to implementing solutions
- Resident interviews and focus groups were conducted by an external evaluator to measure their sense of belonging, their knowledge of climate justice and how

it relates to their lives. As of the writing of this report, the data collected is still being analyzed. The delay was caused by unforeseen circumstances that prevented the external evaluator from being able to complete the data cleaning and analysis process. An addendum to this report with summary findings of the interviews and focus groups will be supplied by February 12, 2026.

We have successfully engaged a cohort of 25 residents who are interested in learning more about the intersection of climate and environmental issues with challenges in their daily lives and are motivated to be more involved in creating solutions to those climate and environmental issues.

As of the end of this grant period, the program is ongoing. The EmpowerED planning team has drafted the EmpowerED curriculum module and will continue to co-create and refine it for the remainder of 2026. The team is pursuing funding to continue building the program and support the piloting of EmpowerED in Bridgeport Neighborhood Revitalization Zones (NRZs) later in 2026. All partners are committed to this project and intend to follow through with our vision for the foreseeable future.

The project was ultimately a community engagement project and was very successful in engaging our target audience. Over a year and a half, we have maintained a consistent cohort of approximately 25 participants and reached a total of 41 residents. Participants are public housing residents who are active members of PT Partners, a grassroots, resident-led, community organizing non-profit that aims to rebuild community in Bridgeport public housing. Including evening and full-day sessions, there were 14 EmpowerED events over the last year.



EmpowerED Team - November 2025. Gary Crooks Community Center, Bridgeport, CT

Capacity-Building Progress

Public housing residents across Bridgeport are more aware of climate change, how it impacts their health, and avenues for engaging in public planning processes. Outside of and in parallel to the EmpowerED program, members of the cohort have participated in a ParkScore project, tree surveys, stakeholder engagement sessions for statewide EJ regulations, air quality monitoring, and public park cleanups.

Through this program, collaborative members have deepened partnerships and deepened knowledge. The partners intend to collaborate long-term on a broader variety of projects. Some of these projects include tree and native plant installations, green infrastructure planning, mobility and transportation/complete streets, waterfront access

and restoration, and parks improvement projects. The curriculum developed based on the lived experience of the residents in the EmpowerED cohort will support place-based climate education among Bridgeport community leaders.

Organizations undertaking community-led climate education projects should prioritize adaptability and relationship-building over rigid timelines or predefined outputs. Moving at the speed of trust is essential when working with residents whose lived experiences, historical relationships with institutions, and daily constraints shape how and when meaningful engagement can occur.

Building strong participation requires active listening, transparent communication, and flexibility in program design to respond to resident feedback and emerging needs. Allowing space for trust to develop ultimately leads to stronger learning outcomes, deeper community ownership, and authentic engagement rather than a purely deadline-focused approach.

Pictures



Photo of resident sharing her sustainable gift wrapping during the December 2024 EmpowerED Sustainable Holidays Community Conversation on solid waste.

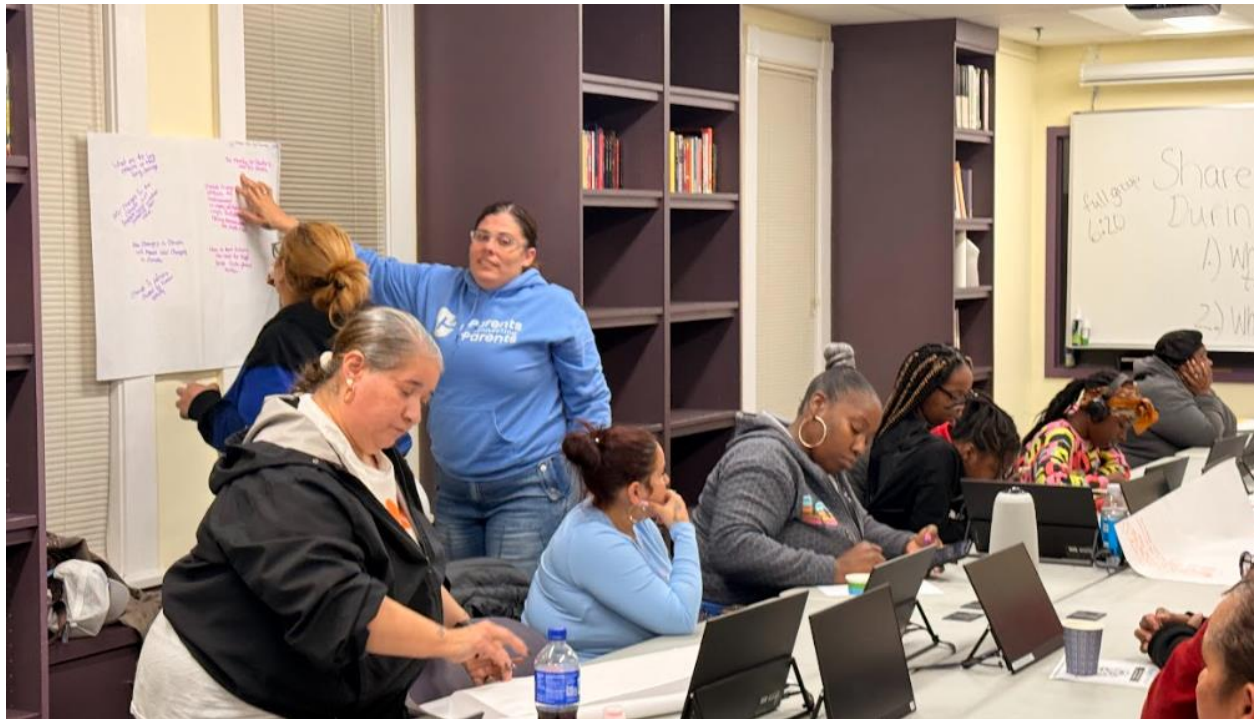


Photo of residents presenting group projects during November 6, 2025 Community Conversation

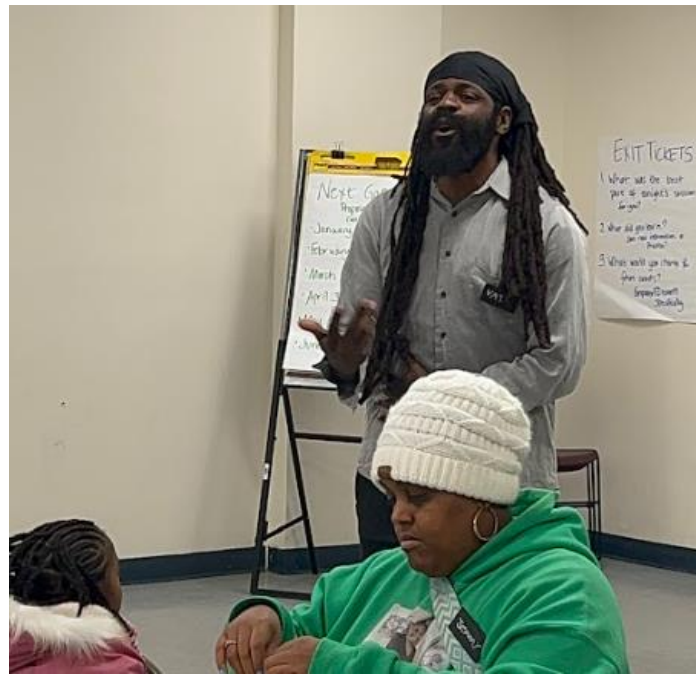


Photo of guest speaker, Vatic Kuumba, Executive Director of nonprofit One Square presenting to residents during EmpowerEd's December 2024 Community Conversation

EmpowerED Program Impact Report

Individual and Focus Group Resident Interviews

Interviews Conducted by Ebony Flint, Consultant

November 2025

Overview & Methodology

In fall 2025, the CT Roundtable on Climate and Jobs hired consultant Ebony Flint to conduct focus groups and interviews of the residents who participated in the EmpowerED program as of November 2025. The interview questions were developed by EmpowerED team members in collaboration with Ebony Flint, all based upon the desired outcomes established by the team at the inception of program development.

Twenty-five EmpowerED residents volunteered to participate in the interview or the focus group process. The interviews and focus groups were conducted over the course of two days. Each interview lasted between 10-30 minutes and the audio was recorded using a device owned by Ebony Flint. No EmpowerED team members were present during the process, and each resident was assured anonymity throughout the analysis process. No EmpowerED team members have heard the recordings of the interviews; none of the responses are attributable to any individual.

The desired outcomes and the questions that investigate whether those outcomes have yet been achieved are described here:

Desired Outcome	Question
Residents feel included, a sense of belonging, feel that their voices are heard and valued.	What does belonging mean to you?
	How do you know when your voice is heard?
	Then, has the EmpowerED program accomplished this for you? Why or why not?
	What could help strengthen or maintain that sense of belonging and being heard?
Relationships are built and trust is established amongst the team	What does trust mean to you?
	What are the characteristics you would need to build a relationship with someone?
	Is the EmpowerED program accomplishing this for you? Why or why not?
	What else could help strengthen or maintain the trust and relationship?
Residents can discuss neighborhood concerns, and what they would like out of training workshops. Residents can connect their lived experience with how natural and human-caused phenomena are connected to those environmental impacts.	What neighborhood concerns have you had about environmental/climate-related impacts?
	Are these your most pressing issues? If not, what others do you have?
	Have they been addressed in EmpowerED?
	What solutions have you learned about to address these issues?
	Do you feel more aware of these solutions based on your EmpowerED experience?

What do you feel you would need for your concerns to be better addressed?

This report presents a systematic qualitative coding of the EmpowerED program resident interviews and focus groups across three thematic domains, aligned to the desired outcomes of the program: (1) Belonging, Voice & Connectedness; (2) Trust & Relationship Building; and (3) Environmental/Climate Concerns & Awareness.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Due to unexpected circumstances relating to the suspension of operations of the CT Roundtable on Climate and Jobs in December 2025, the transcription of recordings, coding, analysis and report were generated using AI. The EmpowerED team recognizes the incongruence with using AI for a project that is focused on environmental justice. All of the aforementioned tasks were planned to be conducted using non-AI based technology and tools; in order to meet the grant reporting requirements we needed to use this approach.

Cross-Interview Thematic Summary

The table below summarizes the key emergent codes across all interviews.

Theme / Code	Description
Belonging as Inclusion	Defined as not being left out; being included in meetings, activities, and community
Belonging as Physical + Mental	Belonging has both a physical dimension (place, housing) and a mental/emotional dimension (sense of fit)
Voice = Visible Change	Participants feel heard when their words lead to tangible responses or written acknowledgment
EmpowerED as Platform	Program consistently cited as space where voice is heard and belonging is felt
Connection Through Conversation	Trust built primarily through ongoing dialogue, presence, and follow-through
Trust = Words Taken Seriously	Trust defined as having one's words acted upon, not ignored or thrown back — requires vulnerability and reciprocity
Staff Turnover Undermines Trust	Frequent changes in staff or leadership disrupt relationship-building and erode trust over time
Industrial Smell / WPCA	Smell from WPCA, sewage or industrial plants is the most common environmental concern — linked to asthma/health
Flooding as Climate Issue	Flooding and drainage infrastructure failures are primary climate-related concerns
Heat & Lack of Green Space	Urban heat island effect and lack of shade trees cited as quality-of-life and health concerns
Safety & Children	Gun violence, safety concerns especially for children, and lack of mentorship cited as pressing neighborhood issues

Theme / Code	Description
Building Infrastructure	Elevator breakdowns, potholes, and inaccessible spaces cited as pressing concerns for elderly/disabled residents
Increased Awareness via EmpowerED	Nearly all participants report heightened awareness of environmental issues and solutions through the program
Need for More Residents	Multiple participants call for broader outreach, more resident participation, door-knocking, and flyers
Desire for Deeper Learning	Participants want to go beyond introductory content to more in-depth, ongoing environmental education
Need for More Partners/Action	Participants want to see tangible outcomes and more organizational partnerships, not just conversation

Domain 1: Belonging, Voice & Connectedness

Q1: What does belonging mean to you?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
Just being able to just be in a place without feeling any type of way, left out.	Belonging as non-exclusion; emotional safety
Coming together.	Belonging as collective unity
When we're all connecting... they're including everybody, they're not leaving anyone out.	Belonging as inclusion and representation
I've been here since 1970... I know the community here real well. I try to help.	Belonging as community rootedness and responsibility
Everything that belongs to something that belongs to you.	Belonging as ownership and connection
Physically I belong here, I belong to my people, I belong to my community, but mentally I don't know where I belong. I don't feel like I fit in.	Belonging as dual physical + mental/emotional experience
Like I belong to something. Like if you're connected to someone.	Belonging as personal connection and friendship
Something that lost for you... feel like I'm connected to heal.	Belonging as connection to people/place; sense of closeness
This home isn't— it belongs to housing... [shifts to] connecting with the organization: we talk about things for the future.	Belonging re-framed as purpose-driven connection; future-orientation

Emerging Themes: Belonging is defined most frequently as inclusion (not being excluded), closeness with others, and community ownership. One resident uniquely adds a dual-dimension lens — physical belonging vs. mental/emotional belonging — highlighting that external membership does not guarantee inner sense of fit. Another resident reframes belonging in terms of purposeful connection and collective action toward the future.

Q2: How do you know when your voice is being heard?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
When I get answers to my question... changes happen.	Voice = responsive action; tangible outcomes
What changes made.	Voice = observable change
When we see Jules and it's written out, and what we speak about is put up on the Eckman board.	Voice = written/visual acknowledgment
When they heard me, they be calling me.	Voice = direct follow-up and responsiveness
They paying attention to you.	Voice = active attentiveness from others
Whatever is being said is being carried out in action.	Voice = action; words must translate to outcomes
When my voice being heard because then it's listening... I tell them I'm gonna say something.	Voice = asserting self; others actively waiting/listening
The way they looking at you... they really listen to what you're saying.	Voice = nonverbal cues; eye contact and body language
If I'm having a conversation about the environment and people give feedback on what I speak about, that's when I feel like someone is listening.	Voice = substantive feedback; dialogue, not just silence

Emerging Themes: Participants identified both visible responses (action, change, written record) and relational cues (eye contact, feedback, follow-up) as indicators that their voice is heard. Two residents emphasize that action is the ultimate proof of being heard — words without follow-through are insufficient.

Q3: Has EmpowerED accomplished a sense of belonging and voice being heard? Why or why not?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
Changes happen... they've done that with the EmpowerED program.	EmpowerED = site of visible change
Basically coming together every month with dedication, motivation... engagement.	EmpowerED = consistent, motivating community space
Being involved... everything you're doing. You feel real good in the meeting.	EmpowerED = meeting space fosters inclusion
When I'm talking to them about the situation out here, they hear me... they're right there with me.	EmpowerED = active listening and presence
They help you [with what you're going through].	EmpowerED = personal support
EmpowerED is all about environmental justice and clean air justice... it's educating us on what our rights are.	EmpowerED = rights education; connects personal experience to systemic issues
I'm learning a little bit about everything... I can connect to it. I can relate to it.	EmpowerED = learning enables connection
I sit there and I listen... I really like what she be saying, and I like to go to that program.	EmpowerED = safe space for shy participants; listening valued

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
Yeah, as far as our environmental [issues], yeah... One day we were at a meeting and she came and sent the link to my phone and showed me how to get into it.	EmpowerED = responsive to individual needs; staff adapt to participants

Emerging Themes: All participants affirmed EmpowerED has fostered belonging and voice. One resident adds a rights-education framing — the program's value lies partly in helping residents understand their rights and compare them to what is actually happening. One resident highlights individualized staff responsiveness as a concrete example of feeling heard.

Q4: What could help strengthen or maintain that sense of belonging and being heard?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
They've done pretty well. We communicate back and forth.	Satisfaction with current approach; maintain consistency
Just keep it consistent. The meeting up and everything, engagement.	Continue consistent meetings and engagement
Add more people... more residents. Put up the flyers because not everyone has computer access.	Expand outreach; use flyers for digital-access gaps
I would like for them to train more people, get more people involved, more residents.	Increase resident participation; expand reach
Try to keep [it going]... see if they can make it more better.	Continue personalized support; incremental improvement
I wish for the education to continue — moving from basic knowledge to more in-depth knowledge, because we never stop learning.	Deeper, ongoing education; move beyond introductory content
Everybody talking to each other and see what we learning and talk about it with each other.	Peer-to-peer sharing within the group
I think one-on-one would be more helpful for me.	Individualized engagement for quieter participants
More people. Numbers. The more people you have petition or speak about it, get heard and get done. Got to go door knocking.	Scale participation; door-knocking; numbers create power

Emerging Themes: Recommendations span consistency, expanded outreach (flyers, door-knocking), peer learning, individualized engagement, and deeper educational content. One resident uniquely calls for a progression from introductory to advanced learning. Another resident frames more people as a power-building strategy, not just an outreach goal.

Domain 2: Trust & Relationship Building

Q5: What does trust mean to you?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
To be fully confident in their ability to execute, provide... trust the doctor to do what they're supposed to do.	Trust = competence confidence; professional reliability
When you tell somebody something and then they keep it confidential... what's said here stays here.	Trust = confidentiality; privacy

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
The vibes, the feeling, the energy... you trust your feeling, your instincts.	Trust = intuitive/energetic read of a person
Most of the people out here, they trust me. They come to me... I've been having the communication with the residents.	Trust = earned through long-term presence and action
Not stab you in the back.	Trust = loyalty; no betrayal
I want to be able to trust you with my words... when you're expressing yourself there's a certain level of vulnerability. If those words are taken seriously and put into action, then yeah, you have my trust.	Trust = vulnerability + action; words must be honored
Trust, they could trust me, I could trust them... getting really close to each other.	Trust = mutual closeness and reciprocity
It all depends. I trust you and I may not trust you.	Trust = selective and conditional
I can come to you with a secret, and just because you get mad at me don't mean you should go and spread that secret.	Trust = discretion; holding confidence even through conflict

Emerging Themes: Trust is defined across multiple dimensions: confidentiality, loyalty, intuition, competence, and reciprocity. One resident provides the most nuanced definition — trust requires that vulnerability be honored through action, not just acknowledgment. Another resident extends confidentiality to include emotional conflict, noting that trust must hold even when the relationship is strained.

Q6: What characteristics would you need to build a relationship with someone?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
Communication, presence, understanding, patience... and consistency.	Communication; presence; patience; consistency
Character and personality... if someone doesn't have a cool personality, it's going to be a problem.	Character; personality alignment
The vibe, the same thing, the energy. You trust your feeling, your instincts.	Energy/vibe alignment; intuition
We could build a friendship first... that way we communicate. Sooner or later, she's gonna go, let's talk.	Friendship first; open communication; patience
Believe in trust and depend on.	Dependability; mutual belief and reliance
Trust is definitely one of them... Understanding. Empathy. I would rather that over sympathy, actually.	Trust + understanding + empathy (over sympathy) as relational foundation
It's like a friend. It's there for you. Anything happens, they'll be there for you.	Availability; reliability; unconditional support
We need to trust... yeah, relationship.	Trust as prerequisite for relationship
I don't need any characteristics. A person — it's all about the conversation and what's being said... you can still build because you're saying something positive.	Conversation and positive intent over fixed characteristics; growth mindset

Emerging Themes: Relationship-building requires communication, reliability, compatible energy, and empathy. One resident specifically elevates empathy over sympathy as a key relational

quality. Another resident takes a more flexible stance — characteristics matter less than the quality and positivity of the conversation itself, suggesting a growth-oriented relational approach.

Q7: Is EmpowerED accomplishing trust and relationship-building? Why or why not?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
Because they're holding these community conversations, they want to interact and listen and put together a system that'll work.	Community meetings = relational platform; collaborative intent
Unity. Everybody coming together for the same cause... I believe that would be it.	Shared cause fosters unity and trust
Get trusted. Yeah. And we think it's pretty good, like the way it flows.	Organic trust; positive flow of interactions
They're helping because they do the meetings. When people go into meeting, they heard your voice.	Meetings = trust builder; voice validation
Like it's good, because she comes back and tell us things that we didn't know.	Staff follow-through and sharing new info builds trust
I think it is working on it. Whoever started out in the beginning is not here anymore... changes happen so frequently, it takes some time for that trust to happen. And then if it's changed again, [trust is disrupted].	Trust is a work-in-progress; staff turnover and process changes are barriers
I think so, yes. I can relate to what she's saying... I could trust her for what she's saying.	Relatability; credibility of staff
By me being in it... it's making me come out of my little shyness.	Program reduces social barriers; builds confidence
I don't know them like that... I'll trust in the work before I allow them to trust them on a personal level. The group, yes, but the staff — I don't really know them like that.	Trust in the work precedes personal trust; group trust stronger than staff trust

Emerging Themes: Most participants affirm EmpowerED is building trust, primarily through meetings, consistency, and staff credibility. However, residents raise important nuances: staff turnover disrupts relationship-building over time, and trust in the program's work may exist independently from personal trust in individual staff members.

Q8: What else could help strengthen or maintain trust and relationship?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
Open community conversations to the public. Give incentives.	Public access to meetings; incentive structures
Just keep being who they are. Keep being consistent and coming through, pulling up.	Staff consistency and authentic presence
We think it's pretty good, like the way it flows.	Satisfaction; no major changes needed
I would like for them to train more people... the more residents get involved, the more power.	Scale participation; build collective power
Have done more advices... more like resources and stuff.	More resources and advisory support

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
From the start, it would help if we're all a part of the process... when opportunities pop up and you don't get to involve everyone, it takes time to build trust in the new process.	Inclusive process design; transparency in transitions and opportunities
They'll be there for you. That's my function, is there for you.	Relational availability; being present
I think one on one would be more helpful... I never said [that to anyone].	One-on-one engagement; needs to be offered proactively
By actually seeing at least one thing done that we're talking about. As far as the environment, the people, the agriculture... nothing has been completed yet.	Completed outcomes build trust; talk must translate to visible results

Emerging Themes: Recommendations include maintaining consistency, offering more resources, inclusive process design, and proactive one-on-one outreach. One resident raises a structural point — trust is damaged when participants are excluded from new opportunities or process changes without explanation. Another resident is explicit: trust requires seeing at least one tangible completed outcome.

Domain 3: Environmental & Climate Concerns

Q9: What neighborhood concerns have you had about environmental/climate-related impacts?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
Flooding... sewage system backing up, smell in the streets... cleanliness of the parks... smell from the beach.	Flooding; sewage; beach odor; park cleanliness
Floods... the whole underpass of the railroad strip would be just flooding.	Flooding; drainage infrastructure failure
The air and the pollution... water, sewage, trash, all on the same strip.	Air quality; pollution; sewage proximity
The smell from them plants... ever since they put them plants around, people getting sick. I started using my pump.	Industrial plant odors; respiratory health impacts; personal health effect
The smoke... and the rodents... yeah, not good at all.	Smoke; rodent infestation
We're right next to the WPCA... a smell I am almost scared to inhale because it coats on my throat... I don't have the lung capacity because I have asthma. In the summertime, it's the heat. There's hardly any shade.	WPCA/industrial proximity; respiratory health; urban heat island; lack of green space
For the residents, it's mostly about food and shelter. How are they gonna do all that?	Food and housing insecurity as environmental justice concern
The smell... I'm right here in the back with the smell right back there. It comes in your house.	Industrial smell permeating homes; chronic exposure
Safety for the kids... that tower that's down there — the chimney stack is pollution and it gets people sick with asthma, respiratory issues. I wonder if that tower is giving off radiation.	Gun violence; child safety; chimney stack/industrial pollution; radiation concern

Emerging Themes: Environmental concerns cluster around four issues: (1) industrial/WPCA odors causing asthma and respiratory illness, (2) flooding and drainage, (3) urban heat and lack of

green space, and (4) neighborhood safety especially for children. WPCA impacts they identify connects the proximity to personal health consequences including asthma. One resident raises the novel concern of potential radiation from infrastructure, reflecting residents' broader health anxieties beyond smell alone.

Q10: Are these your most pressing issues? If not, what others do you have?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
The children's playgrounds in the parks. The drug paraphernalia... the unhoused situation... it's difficult to raise children.	Children's safety; unhoused neighbors; drug litter
Camera-wise. Safety, especially with all the kids.	Neighborhood safety; surveillance gaps
The air and the pollution [are most pressing].	Air quality is top priority
Right now [the moped gas smell] is at the top... a lot of people out here are sick because of the smell.	Immediate fire/air hazard; community-wide health
The smell out here... the rodents... not good at all.	Smell and rodents are most pressing
There's others, but yeah, those [WPCA smell and heat] are the pressing ones.	WPCA smell + heat confirmed as most pressing
Food and shelter. That's one thing I'm like... I know they don't have much.	Economic insecurity as most pressing issue
Just the smell. That's it.	Smell is sole pressing concern
I have other issues... they need to really clean up. The elevator is nasty. People shouldn't have to walk through feces and urine. The elevator gets broke for weeks — elderly, seniors, disabled people have to complain before it gets fixed.	Sanitation; elevator/infrastructure failures disproportionately affecting disabled and elderly

Emerging Themes: While odor and flooding are most common, each participant's most pressing concern reflects their circumstances. One resident introduces the most detailed infrastructure concern — broken elevators and sanitation failures that disproportionately affect elderly and disabled residents. Economic concerns (food, housing) appear alongside environmental ones, pointing to intersecting vulnerabilities.

Q11: Have these concerns been addressed in EmpowerED?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
We have brought it up. I believe things have, of course, with PT Partners, we get things done.	Issues raised; some progress through partner orgs
It's been brought up... in the meetings.	Issues acknowledged in meetings; resolution in process
David teaches more about the air quality... they do talk about different solutions.	Educational approach; solutions discussed
I gotta tell her [at the next meeting] because this happened right now.	New concern not yet shared with EmpowerED
Has EmpowerED addressed any of these things, like with the smells or the rodents? Yeah, nice.	Confirmed: smell/rodents addressed

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
A little. Just the knowledge alone. Knowing what's causing the smell, knowing what's causing the heat, you now know how to fix it. Can you actually fix it is a whole other thing.	Partial address: knowledge provided but implementation remains uncertain
No, no. [Not addressed with EmpowerED regarding food/shelter.]	Housing/food concerns not yet brought to program
Yes, yeah. We'll be doing something about building a wall... to block the smell. They've been working on it for a while.	Wall construction proposed as smell solution; in progress
Yeah, they addressed the safety issue. They're trying to address the safety issue... police presence. But you see him for the first couple weeks — you don't even see him anymore. So it's temporary.	Partial address: safety measures initiated but not sustained; police presence brief

Emerging Themes: Most environmental concerns have been raised in EmpowerED settings. However, a recurring theme across is the gap between acknowledgment and resolution. One resident distinguishes clearly between knowledge (provided) and actual fix (uncertain). Others describe temporary interventions that are not sustained, questioning program impact beyond the meeting room.

Q12: What solutions have you learned about to address these issues?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
I learned about the bioswales along in the city... different places throughout the city.	Bioswales as flood/water management solution
Partnership with modern... to get resolved.	Partnership-based solutions; systemic change
They do talk about different solutions... yeah, okay.	Solutions discussed but not recalled in detail
They be telling me what's going to happen. They're sharing solutions too.	Staff sharing future plans; smell solutions communicated
The smell... if they knock, yeah, the plant you're talking about.	Reporting/knocking strategy for plant smell
I find myself turning off my car. Reconsidering efficiency when I drive... plant a lot of trees... or get a hybrid.	Individual behavior change: reduced idling, efficient trips, tree planting, clean vehicles
How to define the profile things we do in the community... doing more stuff together.	Community profiling; collective action as solution
Building a wall or something... to block the smell.	Physical barrier (wall) as smell mitigation
[No specific solutions learned.] Do you feel more aware of different solutions? Yeah, I do.	Awareness of solutions exists but specific solutions not recalled

Emerging Themes: Solutions include bioswales, physical barriers, community reporting, individual behavior change, and collective action. The standout response for the most concrete personal behavior changes adopted because of EmpowerED learning — reduced car idling, efficient driving, and interest in tree planting and hybrid vehicles. This suggests the program's environmental education is translating into individual practice for some participants.

Q13: Do you feel more aware of solutions based on your EmpowerED experience?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
Heightened your awareness... they're correcting misinformation.	EmpowerED = awareness raising; correcting misinformation
I at least feel more aware... but I know it's going to take some time.	Increased awareness; realistic about timeline for change
Do you feel like when you go to the meetings, you're able to be more aware of the solutions? Okay.	Awareness confirmed through meeting attendance
Yes. And solutions too? They're sharing solutions too.	Both problem and solution awareness increased
Do you feel more aware of solutions? Yeah.	Affirmative; awareness confirmed
Yeah, yeah, yeah. I am aware. Even if you can't make it happen now, there's power in the knowing. The not knowing hurts... the knowing — I'm like the duck waiting to get in.	Strong awareness; 'power in the knowing'; readiness to act when resources allow
Yes, I do.	Positive; increased awareness
Yeah, yeah, yeah... I never knew this. I never knew that. I'm just writing it down now.	Strong learning/discovery response; high engagement
Yeah, I do. I just wish, you know, like with the kids, I wanted to start my own organization...	Awareness leading to civic motivation and action planning

Emerging Themes: All ten participants affirmed increased awareness of environmental solutions through EmpowerED. 'There is power in the knowing' — framing awareness itself as a form of readiness. One resident goes further, showing awareness translating directly into aspirations for community organizing around children's issues.

Q14: What do you feel you would need for your concerns to be better addressed?

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
We've got to get the people together... get the word out... get voices together.	Community mobilization; collective voice
More meetings. More information.	Increased meeting frequency; more content
More information about the climate, the air... maybe making a pamphlet or something.	Educational materials; tangible take-aways
My concern is the community... the smell, them plants that be smelling a lot. A lot of people out here are sick.	Community-wide advocacy; systemic response to industrial harm
Safe environment, clean neighborhood.	Basic safety and cleanliness as foundational needs
Maybe I need for them to come live where I live and then they'll understand... they are just too far removed. More touch points, continuous partners when it comes to actually doing some of those things.	Decision-makers must experience lived reality; more action-oriented partnerships; continuous engagement
To be handled. To be there and to listen.	Responsiveness; consistent presence and active listening
It's already addressed really. I just want to keep participating, keep learning.	High satisfaction; desire for continued engagement

Representative Quote	Code / Theme
More people. Numbers. More people you have petition or speak about it, get heard and get done. Got to go door knocking, have people sign petitions.	Numbers = power; petitions; door-knocking as community organizing strategy

Emerging Themes: Participants need more meetings, tangible materials, broader community mobilization, and continuous partnerships. One resident raised the most critical structural observation: decision-makers and advocates are 'too far removed' from the lived reality of residents, and meaningful progress requires those in power to experience community conditions firsthand. Another resident solution in terms of collective power — more people equals more leverage.

Key Findings & Recommendations

Based on coding across all ten interviews, the following key findings and recommendations emerge:

Strengths of the EmpowerED Program

All participants expressed a positive overall experience with EmpowerED. The program is widely recognized as an inclusive, educating space where residents feel heard and increasingly informed. Staff responsiveness — including adapting to individual tech needs and consistently returning with new information— is a key trust-building practice. The program has successfully raised awareness of environmental rights and systemic issues, translating for some participants into personal behavior changes (reduced car idling, interest in clean transportation and tree planting). The statement 'I never knew this, I never knew that' captures the transformative learning impact the program is having for residents with limited prior exposure to environmental issues.

Critical Tensions & Areas for Growth

Two residents surface important structural critiques not prominently visible in the other interviews. They identify staff turnover and process changes as significant barriers to sustained trust — trust built with one set of staff resets when personnel change. They distinguish sharply between trust in the program's work and personal trust in staff, and calls for at least one completed, visible outcome to substantiate the program's promises. They also raise a power-distance critique: advocates and decision-makers are 'too far removed' from the lived reality of residents to fully understand or urgently address their concerns.

Environmental Priorities — Expanded Understanding

One resident was able to provide the most detailed account of WPCA/industrial proximity impacts, connecting the smell directly to asthma and lung capacity, and adding urban heat island effects as a compounding quality-of-life concern. Another interviewee introduces a new concern — potential radiation from a downtown chimney stack — reflecting residents' broader health anxieties that extend beyond documented environmental harms. Children's safety and gun violence continue to be raised alongside environmental issues, reinforcing that environmental justice for this community is inseparable from public safety and infrastructure quality.

Suggested Next Steps

1. Develop and distribute printed pamphlets and flyers summarizing environmental issues and solutions for residents without computer access.

2. Increase meeting frequency and create smaller-group or individualized engagement options for participants who are shy or less vocal.
3. Establish and communicate a transition protocol when staff changes occur, to preserve relational continuity and minimize trust disruption.
4. Identify and celebrate at least one visible, completed outcome (e.g., a resolved odor complaint, a completed infrastructure fix) to demonstrate that conversations lead to action.
5. Invite decision-makers and funders to spend time in the community — not just for meetings but to experience the lived environmental conditions residents describe.
6. Develop a pathway from introductory to advanced environmental education content for participants who have completed foundational learning and want to go deeper.
7. Address the WPCA odor/respiratory health concern with urgency, connecting residents to medical, legal, and advocacy resources.
8. Expand the program's scope to explicitly address children's mentorship, infrastructure failures (elevators, potholes), and housing/food insecurity as environmental justice issues.