

TALK CLIMATE INSTITUTE



Wilder Center, St. Paul, MN
March 12-13, 2018



Over 65 people came together for two days at the Talk Climate Institute to learn and practice how to talk about climate change. The invitation to attend was geared towards people at the community level, who are concerned about climate change but lack the skills or confidence to hold meaningful conversations about it, which is a primary step for inspiring engagement in solutions.



BACKGROUND

As it turns out, conversations about climate change aren't about how well you can talk, but rather how well you can listen. In order to have a rich dialogue about this issue, we need to be willing to learn from each other. This is especially important when trying to connect with someone who may have a different viewpoint than you; aligning our values helps us break down barriers and find common ground.

Society has talked about and reported on climate change from mostly a scientific perspective. It's when we balance people's stories with the science that we can begin to place the facts and figures into context, creating a relevance to our lives. Stories are how we make sense of the world around us, and when told from a personal perspective, they also have the ability to elicit an emotional connection, which is really important for finding the motivation to sustain engagement in solutions.

These aspects of listening and sharing personal stories were the focus of the Talk Climate Institute. The program was designed to equip people with the practical skills and tools to talk about climate change, going beyond the science to unpack the influential factors that inform our opinions, understanding misinformation campaigns, and learning strategies to influence behavior change.

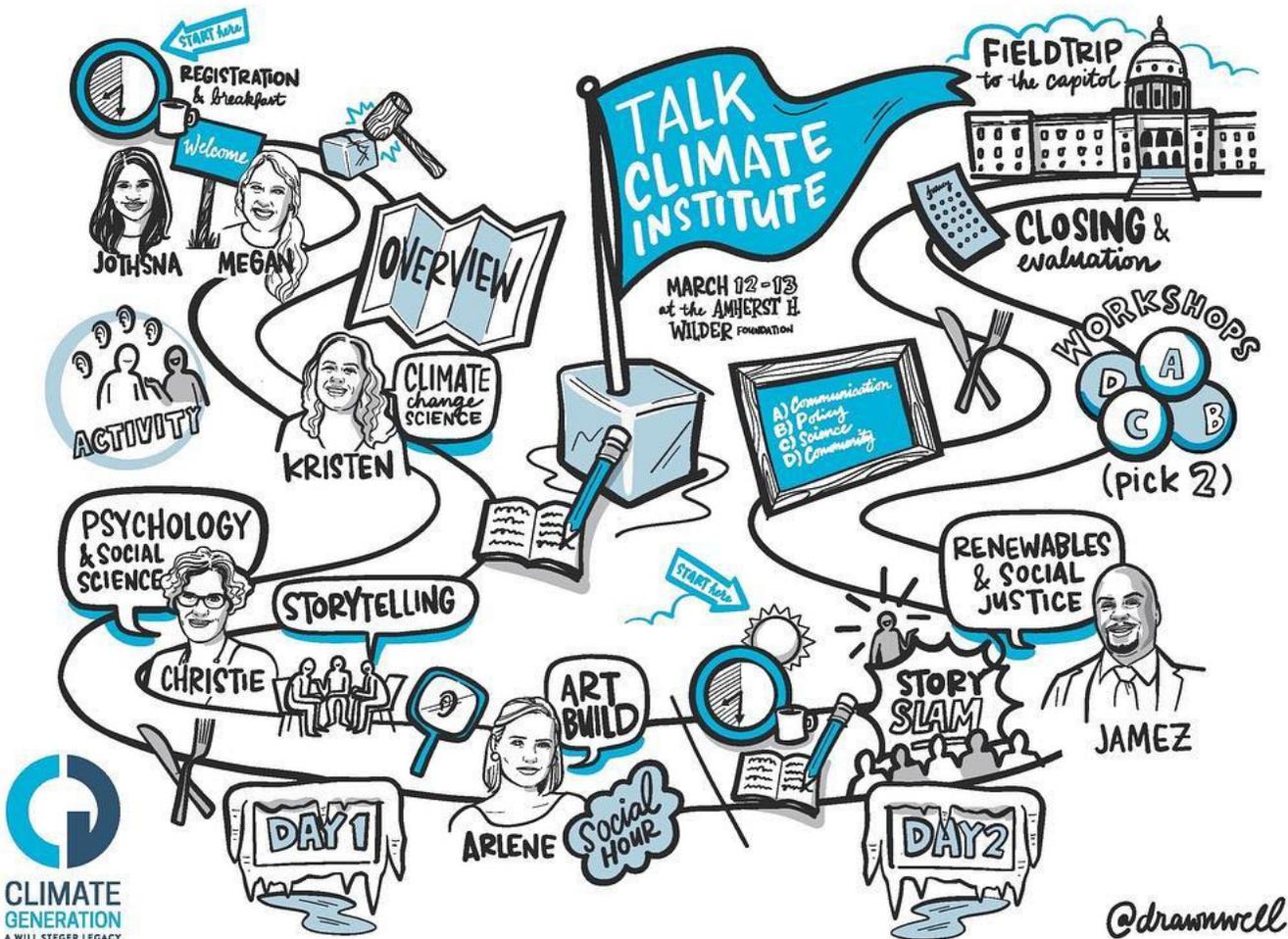
THE PLANNING PROCESS

Inspired by staff attending a training on the Art of Hosting, Climate Generation has developed a program planning guide (adapted from Art of Hosting resources) to help design and inform the development of Climate Generation's programs. The guide takes a thoughtful approach to designing a program, with careful attention to crafting the intent (defining the "need"

and “purpose”) of the program, rather than beginning with the program agenda itself. This initial phase includes research, constituent feedback, and meetings with partners to hone and test these elements of intent in the program design. We piloted the use of the program planning guide as a tool to design the Talk Climate Institute. Spending more time on the front end to define the “need” and “purpose” of the Talk Climate Institute set a clear bar from which to measure any further work in planning, allowing us to work more efficiently as the Institute approached.

NEED FOR THE TALK CLIMATE INSTITUTE

The reality of climate change is daunting, and understanding the data, trends, impacts and solutions can be overwhelming. In addition, we are currently in an era of misinformation about climate change, and unfortunately the issue - and even the science - has become politicized. The combination of these complexities makes well informed conversations about climate change relatively scarce: politics is often seen as a controversial topic, and climate change can seem risky to bring up when you don’t have “all the facts.” Yet opinions on climate change extend far beyond agreeing on the causes and consequences. Fundamentally our beliefs and behaviors stem from our unique identity, worldview, and value systems.



PURPOSE OF THE TALK CLIMATE INSTITUTE

A well informed citizenry who have the tools and confidence to understand and communicate about climate change to inspire engagement in solutions.

UNIQUE PROGRAM ASPECTS

- As facilitators, we made it clear that we were not the experts. Everyone attending was an expert in their story and experience. By leading with personal narrative as a key message, it created the sense that everyone had something to contribute to the conversation no matter what their background, level of education or experience.
- Understanding that rich conversations on climate change cannot occur without a diverse representation of communities taking part, we were intentional with our outreach efforts to go beyond our familiar audience and engage with new people by offering 10 scholarships specifically for people of color and those where cost would be a barrier to attending.
- The location of the Wilder Center in the heart of Saint Paul's Midway area, designed for community collaborations, was a great fit for the messaging of the Talk Climate Institute. Outreach efforts to organizations, residents and community groups in the Midway and Frogtown communities, near the Wilder Center in Saint Paul were a priority.
- Listening calls were offered to scholarship recipients, with the goal to learn about what they hoped to gain from the Talk Climate Institute. These calls helped to shape the program in a way that was more inclusive than we could have designed from our own insight. We were able to confirm that an offering of tobacco as a gift for sharing stories is appropriate for Native participants. We also extended an invitation to a Native American participant to share words of gratitude in the Ojibwe language during the program welcome. The invitation for listening calls helped to establish a tone of respect, and felt like an authentic way to build relationships with new constituents and potential partners.

- The program was designed to be transformational and equip participants with practical skills, tools and confidence to use beyond the Institute. Through a combination of personal journaling, small group work, and large group sharing participants practiced conversations with each other, crafted personal stories of climate change, and worked together to find ways to amplify their stories at the community level. Through a layering process of introspective reflection, facilitated discussions, and practice conversation, participants were moved to people to be emotional, vulnerable and connected to each other. The program and activities were intended to build a sense of community, trust, and a safe space to share at an open-mic style Storytelling Slam on the second day.
- The Storytelling Slam provided an intimate opportunity to share personal climate stories with each other, and was a fun, and engaging experience with laughter and tears. This was a favorite aspect of the Institute for many.
- Nearly 65% of people are visual learners, and given the complexity of topics covered; psychology, climate science, opinions, behavior change, and climate justice, we felt that it was important to provide visuals to deepen understanding. Lisa Troutman of Drawnwell LLC, captured the Institute live through illustrations, and created a visual agenda. The illustrations provided a fun and interesting way to deepen content, and has since been a helpful way to recap the Institute.



GEOGRAPHIC RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS



RIPPLE EFFECTS

The Talk Climate Institute was an impactful experience for participants, with overwhelmingly positive feedback. One of the most rewarding aspects has been the relationships built with new constituents and the authentic invitations from new partners to collaborate. The following are some ripple effects from the Institute:

- Inspired by a connection from a participant, Climate Generation has been invited to host a Talk Climate Institute in Pittsburgh in July 2018 in partnership with Carnegie Museum of Natural History and the Climate and Urban Systems Partnership (CUSP).
- New relationships with indigenous participants, including an invitation to show a film screening in collaboration with Honor the Earth.
- Several climate stories from the Talk Climate Institute have been featured on Minnesota Public Radio's weekly Climate Cast podcast.
- Inspired by a participant and staff member with local nonprofit, Metro Blooms, we will collaborate on a water and climate storytelling series in 2018 with Somali and African American communities in Brooklyn Center, Riverside Plaza, and North Minneapolis.

PARTICIPANTS MOST MEMORABLE ASPECT



TESTIMONIALS

"Thank you! This was the best conference I've been to in a long time. Needed this infusion of energy on climate change."

"I liked the variety of voices, excellent leadership, and the shared wisdom!"

"Shortly after the Talk Climate Institute, I was scheduled to give two climate change presentations ...adding my story gave my audiences an understanding of why I cared, provided them an opportunity to acknowledge my personal experiences, and put us all on the same level in terms of talking about the issue."

"The Talk Climate Institute helped me realize that the "why I cared about climate change" component - my personal story of how I am connected to the issue."

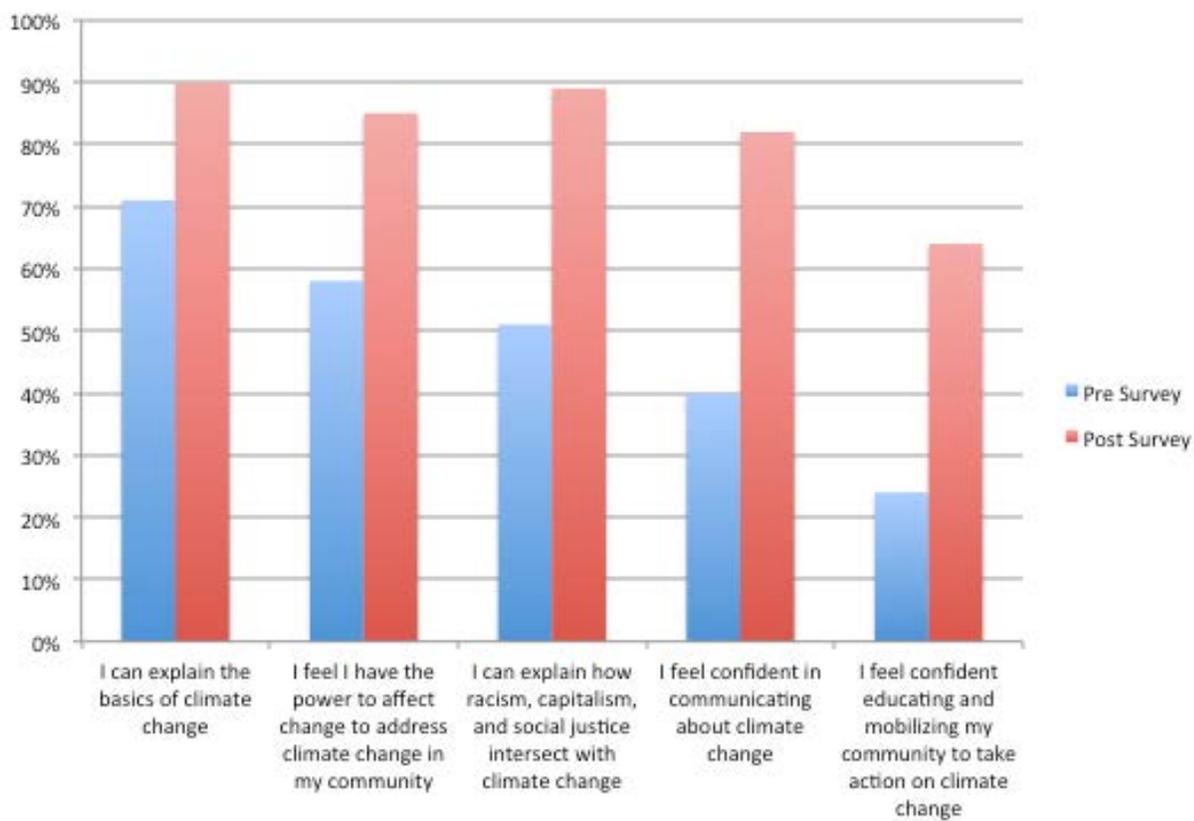
*"Thanks for this event, it really got my brain churning around this idea of adding a story element to climate communication. I've known for awhile that that's important, but I didn't realize how important it was to make the story *personal*. Thanks for making these conversations happen."*

"The most memorable part was listening to stories about how the climate, the trees, the glaciers have been affected by climate change. As a newcomer to MN, I found the stories moving because I didn't know in what ways MN is affected by climate change."

EVALUATION

Results from pre and post surveys showed a significant increase in participant's confidence in their ability to explain, mobilize, and communicate about climate change.

Percentage of attendees who have confidence in addressing issues on climate change pre and post Talk Climate Institute



Talk Climate Institute Participants Reported:

- ...Plan to tell their climate story to a friend, colleague, or family member (82%)
- ...Plan to use their climate story to communicate with an elected official (46%)
- ...Plan to tell their climate story to a stranger or someone they met (38%)
- ...Felt more connected to a community of support (96%)
- ...Made a personal connection to climate change (96%)
- ...Realized they had a story to tell (90%)

FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

