

Climate Resilience & Climate Justice Convening



Climate Resilience Convening held at Cahokia Art Space and hosted by LISC Phoenix on June 11, 2024
Photo: Felipa Lerma

Leaders & Cultural Workers Present

Vanessa Nosie (San Carlos Apache), Amy Juan (Tohono O’odham), Collette Watson, Dr. Chip Thomas, Cristal Franco (Mojave), Daune Cardenas (Pascua Yaqui), Dr. Tamika Sanders, Darrell Marks (Diné), Pita Suárez, Kenny Wong, Dr. Jaqueline Barrios, Sharayah Jiménez, Diane “DeDe” Divine, Daryl Slim (Diné)

In June 2024, LISC Phoenix hosted the Climate Resilience and Climate Justice Convening. The event gathered grassroots organizers, cultural leaders, and institutional partners from Arizona. Its goal was to foster dialogue and relationship-building among leaders from diverse backgrounds, including Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and API communities. These leaders are actively engaged in promoting climate resilience and climate justice with a focus on equity. This report presents insights and lessons from the Convening, aiming to enrich the discourse and practices related to climate resilience and climate justice in the southwest region.

The Convening was held on the ancestral territories of the Akimel O’odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) Indian Communities also known as Phoenix, Arizona. The state of Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized Tribal Nations who are the sovereign governments of 27 percent of the physical land of Arizona.

The Convening was facilitated by Mary Stephens and Joseph Larios (InSite Consultants), and Jaclyn Roessel (GrownUp Navajo).



Small group discussions addressing solidarity across identities. Photo: Mary Stephens

INTRODUCTION

Arizona is on the frontlines of the climate crisis. With increasing heat waves, wildfires, and extended drought across the region, we are at a breaking point. Indigenous communities and climate activists from the region have long-identified colonial intervention as the historical and ongoing driver of the climate crisis. In order to face the grave challenges that lie before us we must courageously identify the production of climate change as a by-product of colonial extraction, land theft, and human enslavement. The connection between ongoing colonial entanglements and the climate crisis must be addressed before and in tandem with solutions. To ensure different political, environmental, and social outcomes, we must prioritize the perspectives, knowledges, research and practices of Indigenous people from across the globe.

Environmental inequalities resulting from racist zoning, water, housing, air quality, and urban planning policies are not new. As climate change reveals the historical and present-day failures of local, state, and federal governments to adequately support the resilience and safety of Indigenous, Black, Latinx, low-income, and people of color, it is clear that climate initiatives going forward must prioritize equity and justice if we are to create a better future for communities. In 2023, LISC Phoenix joined the Resilient Southwest Building Code Collaborative (RECI) project in a collective effort to transform building construction practices across the southwest to achieve highly efficient and climate-resilient buildings and communities while preserving affordability, regional characteristics, and advancing racial equity. As a leader in community development and community engagement practices, LISC Phoenix works with communities impacted by climate change through business development, climate resilience infrastructure, and educational programs. LISC Phoenix is committed to fulfilling its mission of “building resilient and inclusive communities” by directly supporting the leadership of Indigenous, Black, low-income communities, and people of the global majority to find self-directed solutions to face the climate crisis. The Climate Resilience and Climate Justice Convening is the first in a series of gatherings that support Indigenous and Black leaders on the frontlines of climate change. This report outlines the generative contributions and findings of the first Climate Resilience and Climate Justice Convening hosted by LISC Phoenix on June 11, 2024.

COMMUNITIES WHO ARE MOST IMPACTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE -- INDIGENOUS, BLACK, LATINX, WOMEN, UNSHELTERED -- MUST LEAD THE SOLUTIONS

- We need frequent conversations/gatherings that allow Indigenous, Black, and people of the global majority to learn about each other and make our own solutions and healing practices to face climate change.
- Indigenous communities should own the means of production (land, labor), and make the terms of the production for resilience. Tribes should not be obligated to private or State entities.
- Integrate expertise from desert tribes including the Tohono O’odham, Apache, Diné, Cucupah who have lived-experience and expertise adapting to desert environments.



Amy Juan discusses the ethical imperative of collaborative solutions and sharing funding / resources. Photo: Felipa Lerma

- When resources trickle down, it puts us in competition with one another. This dynamic creates conditions whereby communities must ‘fight’ for money – instead, funders should allocate funds without the administrative burden. Redistribute based on past performance and projects.
- Fund projects that we already have in our communities which address food, water, cultural sharing, plant knowledge (which are also climate issues) not just infrastructure and new houses.
- It feels so much safer and more productive to be in a room (or Zoom) when it’s more diverse and people share a connection to land that isn’t just about ownership and extraction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, REPAIR, AND HEALING OF COLONIAL ENTANGLEMENTS MUST BE A KEY PART OF CLIMATE RESILIENCE PRACTICES

- We must address already existing projects that aim to displace, exterminate, and terminate us; we must heal from these first. Then we can begin to work forward together with trust.
- There are no free-market solutions to climate collapse, there is only a communal way forward.

- The built environment is a very conservative/male environment, we must imagine new ways of building that are not centered in the same values of extraction/patriarchy/assimilation.
- Need for more exposure to tribal living models, normalize Indigenous knowledge in the built environment, not just for the “equity” grant cycle.



Kenny Wong, Chip Thomas, and Darrell Marks sharing ideas about ethical practice to face climate change. Photo: Felipa Lerma

- We must repair the harmful narratives we have been taught to believe about Blackness as part of repairing narratives of our relationship to the earth and land. BIPOC communities must define our own stories to face climate change.
- Live simply as if your feet are connected to the core of the earth and that is your flow.
- Tribes should not have to fight for our own land over and over again.
- Revisit natural, traditional building practices – for example, adobe building codes and other Indigenous building knowledge.

SPIRITUAL AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE MUST BE PRESENT IN CLIMATE RESILIENCE SOLUTIONS

- Spiritual, embodied, and ancestral connections and knowledge should structure and inform climate resilience and infrastructure solutions.
- Black-Indigenous knowledge and culturally specific practices should be integrated in climate health solutions, drawing from ancestral African and Native American spirituality as well as modern practices developed to survive and heal through colonization and genocide.

Dr. Tamika Sanders and Daryl Slim discuss why climate resilience is important in their communities. Photo: Mary Stephens



“We must share resources and expertise with those already doing great work; not fight each other over funding.”
- Amy Juan (Tohono O’odham)



Architect Shay Jimenez shares her knowledge about the built environment and need for diverse voices. Photo: Mary Stephens

- If elders are not at the planning table, our solutions will be misguided; creating safe space for elders necessitates learning to listen without an extractive intention.
- Technical solutions in infrastructure, data, text should find parallels in embodied and spiritual knowledge and technologies, otherwise they do not answer for the whole human experience.
- If a solution requires that we forget our spiritual or ancestral histories it is a colonial intervention and will bring more pain and ruin.
- Decisions made with an ethic of seven generations and grandchildren are the only decisions that will bring balance; quick fixes are extractive and misleading.
- We must heal our memories to heal ourselves, then build new healing memories.
- This is a matter of survival for all of us, and will take us all working together.

CONCLUSION

The Biden Administration has enacted the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which represents the largest investment in reducing carbon pollution in U.S. history. As Arizona and the southwest region of the United States contend with unprecedented heat waves, water shortages, and wildfires, it is critical that Indigenous communities, who are disproportionately affected by climate change, lead discussions, actions, and solutions related to this investment.

At LISC Phoenix, our approach to the climate crisis will be to prioritize the knowledge and expertise of local tribal nations, such as the Tohono O’odham, Gila River, Diné, Apache, Cucapah, Pascua Yaqui, Mojave, Hopi, and others in Arizona and New Mexico. This ensures that solutions are guided by tribal sovereignty and Indigenous climate resilience practices. Additionally, we will actively center Black, Latinx, and other disproportionately impacted communities in our engagement strategies without extractive intention. This commitment is essential to prevent the recurrence of historical exploitation, where private interests and government initiatives have prioritized climate resilience projects at the expense of Indigenous, Black, and communities of the global majority.

Collette Watson discusses Black ancestry as a guide to climate solutions. Photo: Mary Stephens



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LISC PHOENIX



Report written by Mary Stephens (InSite Consultants).
Notes compiled by Felipa Lerma (InSite Consultants) and Lisa Churchill (Climate Advisory).

Participants engage in relationship-building exercise facilitated by GrownUp Navajo. Photo: Mary Stephens

