

2020 USDN EDI Fellowship - Katia Carranza – City of San Diego CA



I am Katia Carranza, and I am from Mexico, but I grew up in Waukegan, Illinois. Climate change became my passion twelve years ago when I learned that anthropogenic activities are exploiting the world and its people. It made me feel responsible and compelled to take action. This global predicament also initiated my fascination with sustainability as it elucidated the interconnectedness of human and natural systems, and it continues to teach me that we have to work collaboratively, taking initiative to shape the direction of the world. Since then, I have worked to

uphold social justice and environmental stewardship in order to combat oppression in my communities; I majored in Ecology at Beloit College, and I have directed a variety of advocacy and developmental initiatives focused on climate change mitigation, fair trade, and immigrant rights. I am excited to be able to contribute to the City of San Diego's efforts to uphold the needs and voices of communities of concern in their next Climate Action Plan since the project embodies the equitable possibilities in sustainability, aiming to reduce environmental racism and re-distribute economic opportunities. The equitable experience I develop through this fellowship will inform my next two years as I pursue a Master of Environmental Management at Duke University.

Over these past three months, I have served as the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Fellow for the City of San Diego. My official title is Climate Equity and Community Engagement Fellow, and I work for the Climate Action Plan Team in the Sustainability Department. This professional program is directed by the Urban Sustainability Directors Network, and this summer, it placed seven young professionals in governments throughout the United States and Canada in order to increase equity and sustainability in the civic process.

When I found out about the position, I immediately applied because I had been searching for professional opportunities that focused on upholding equity in sustainability. I have contributed to a variety of environmental projects ranging from pollution prevention to waste reduction, and I have realized that while sustainability efforts often prioritize environmental and economic impact, they do not value social impact. Considering how I am an immigrant and how I grew up in an environmental justice community, affected by international systems of oppression, I understand that environmental and human exploitation are inherently linked at the root. Sustainability cannot be fully actualized without a holistic approach because, otherwise, we are only making the world sustainable for the most privileged people. I have, therefore, made it my goal to challenge environmental efforts with two questions “who are we making the world sustainable for?” and “how can we improve our impact on vulnerable people and environments in this global ecosystem?” This opportunity provided me with important experience for analyzing and upholding equity in sustainability.

My role was focused on developing an engagement guide for City departments with a focus on underserved people that are geographically concentrated in Communities of Concern. The project aims to address the historical legacy of disinvestment and disenfranchisement by empowering underserved people to guide the civic process and its projects throughout all stages.

The tool guides staff through the City's commitment to equity, the importance of equity, and practices for ensuring equitable engagement, and I also created a worksheet that would facilitate the employment of the guide. The weeks I spent developing these resources were instrumental in teaching me about equity and the civic process. I reviewed equitable engagement processes at other jurisdictions in addition to reports from research institutions in order to create an actionable and reliable action plan. The guide's development also required that I incorporate an equitable community-driven process, so I interviewed several internal departments and obtained feedback from local community-based organizations (CBO). Because CBOs have historically assisted underserved people, they provided important information regarding community needs and best practices for local equitable engagement. The staff and community input was instrumental in ensuring that the guide can be integrated into City processes, provides resources for implementation, and facilitates community-driven projects and policies.

When I had free time, I also took the initiative to contribute to other sustainability and equitable goals in order to expand my professional development. I assisted in coding and analyzing the responses to a forum where the community could provide feedback for the Climate Action Plan (CAP) revision. The project provided me with valuable insight for how social subjects could be missed without the proper equity training. Moreover, I compiled a resource to build the capacity for local stakeholders to provide informed and effective feedback to the CAP revision. In the tool, I outlined the context on different climate justice issues, and I reviewed and compiled equitable climate action strategies from other jurisdictions.

This fellowship was invaluable for teaching me how to assess sustainability efforts with an equitable lens and to develop a community-driven process that upholds community needs in order to develop environmental solutions. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to work with and learn from my talented cohort of fellows, the USDN staff, and San Diego's CAP Team. They were instrumental in teaching me about equitable practices employed throughout the country. In particular, I have benefited especially by working with my supervisor Roberto Torres, Climate Equity Specialist, as he has provided important guidance on governmental processes and community engagement. Although I already had equity experience before this fellowship, his mentorship has taught me important practices for ensuring the success of equitable projects.