



Climate collaboration examines resilience across Great Lakes cities



Planet Detroit readers share a Waste-to-Table meal featuring dishes made from foods that would otherwise be thrown out. Participants learned about reducing food waste and the connection to fighting climate change. Photo credit: Nina Ignaczak of Planet Detroit.

After two years experiencing homelessness, a daughter of Mexican immigrants was relieved when she got an apartment in Chicago.

But as Borderless [reports](#), “when her basement apartment started regularly flooding, her dream

home suddenly became a nightmare. Almost every time it rained, she was up to her knees in water."

This examination of how more severe storms in Chicago have left residents vulnerable to flooding was part of an [Institute for Nonprofit News collaboration published in December 2022](#) exploring how Great Lakes communities are addressing climate change. Just as Borderless' article has opened the door for future events, reporting and resources for Chicago's immigrant communities, the four other newsrooms in the project collectively identified new opportunities for shining a light on solutions to critical environmental challenges.

The collaboration was managed under the editorial leadership of Nina Ignaczak of [Planet Detroit](#), with project management support from INN Director of Collaborations Bridget Thoreson. The participants were INN members [Tostada Magazine](#), [Energy News Network](#), [The Land](#), and [Borderless Magazine](#). This reporting was made possible with support from the Joyce Foundation.

Planet Detroit and Tostada Magazine teamed up in Detroit to [showcase how local restaurants are taking concrete steps to reduce food waste](#), which included hosting a special dinner to share innovative ways to keep food out of landfills with local residents.

In Cleveland, meanwhile, The Land [dove into early results](#) from a \$476,000 circular economy grant that aims to help grow jobs and businesses, reduce waste, and improve the environment.

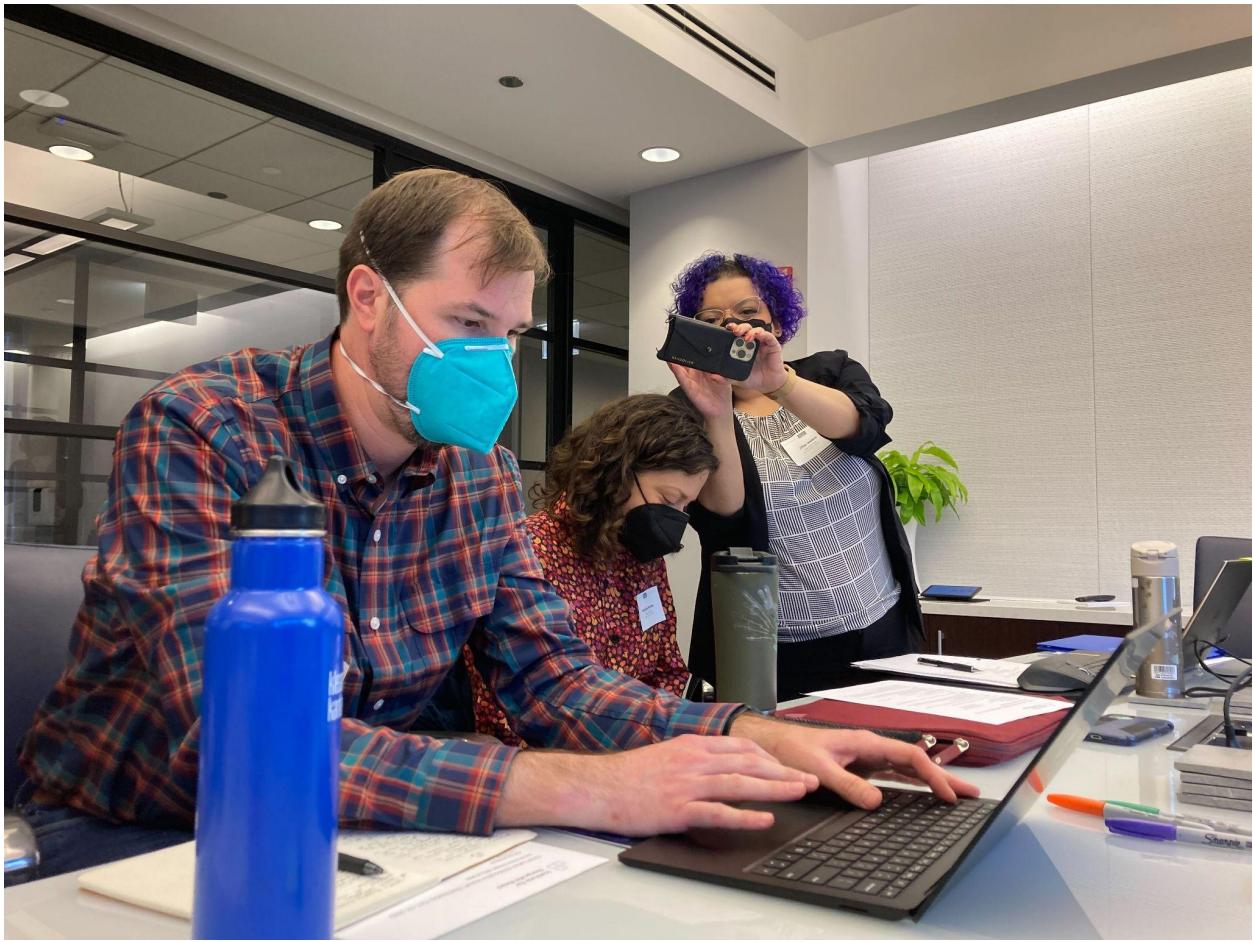
Lastly, Energy News Network [raised the importance of preparing the Great Lakes region's electric grid](#) for increasing demands due to climate change. Together, the stories provided a window into pressing concerns across the region while building the foundation for more coordinated efforts to inform the public about potential solutions.

Goals and process

Newsroom leaders identified several key objectives for their work on this project:

- Reach broader audiences with a meaningful stake in understanding climate change challenges and solutions in the Great Lakes region
- Produce reporting that leads to actions addressing the issues covered
- Build long-term partnerships with other organizations to support future projects

Leaders from participating newsrooms met in Chicago in October 2022 to discuss how best to pursue these goals through their reporting and audience engagement, discovering areas where their strengths could support other participants' needs. From there partners met individually with the project's editorial lead and project manager to track their progress toward publication, and convened for a debrief call in January 2023.



Dan Haugen of the Energy News Network, left, confers with Michelle Kanaar, center, and Jillian Melero of Borderless during the October 2022 Chicago collaboration kickoff meeting. Photo credit: Bridget Thoreson of INN.

"It's really refreshing to work with new people and have a chance to approach topics with different audiences in mind," said Dan Haugen, managing editor of the Energy News Network.

All participants could share relevant content from the series partners on their platforms, and brought in external republication partners to reach new audiences. In the two weeks following publication, all of the participating newsrooms' articles landed in the top 5 most read stories on their websites.

A number of factors created a compressed two-month timeframe from kickoff to publication for the series, which proved challenging for participants. The tight turnaround during the busy end-of-year season and the midterm elections made it difficult for participants to engage with each other deeply.

One newsroom reported they were more ambitious in their intention to include data analysis and visualization in the project, which they could not complete due to a family emergency with their

reporter. Future series will allow for more time for participants to not only complete their individual stories but engage with each other throughout the process.

“Journalism takes time, and collaborative journalism takes even more time,” Haugen said.

Project outcomes

In the initial weeks following publication, participants were able to report several immediate outcomes from their reporting. We plan to follow up to see what longer-term impacts are generated.

Objective: Reach broader audiences with a meaningful stake in understanding climate change challenges and solutions in the Great Lakes region

A total of 22 publications republished the series, including national outlets [Next City](#) and [Inside Climate News](#), and regional and local outlets in seven states including [Ideastream](#), [Great Lakes Now](#), [Signal Cleveland](#), [MinnPost](#), [Block Club Chicago](#), the [Wisconsin State Journal](#), the [Austin Weekly News](#) and [The Limestone Post](#). For the first time, INN participants posted the entire series on AP StoryShare to generate increased reach, generating views and downloads for republication from new outlets. The stories were also shared by the Covering Climate Collaborative and the Mississippi Agriculture & Water Desk with their collaboration members. See the [appendix](#) for a full list of outlets publishing series stories.

Community engagement work was built into the project from the outset. Planet Detroit and Tostada Magazine’s “Waste-to-Table” event was covered by both [CBS Detroit](#) and in an extended radio interview with local NPR station [WDET](#), which featured project participant Serena Maria Daniels, founder of Tostada Magazine, and a representative of nonprofit partner Make Food Not Waste.

In addition to restaurant and culture reporting, “I also look for opportunities to tell stories about food through other lenses,” Daniels said on the radio interview. “When we think about restaurants, the owners/operators/chefs have a lot of opportunity to really make an impact (when it comes to food waste).”

Their event attracted 25 attendees. Alessandra Carreon of host restaurant PizzaPlex said “the articles reenergized her passion for reducing food waste in day-to-day operations.” One of the dinner attendees said they were inspired to volunteer and donate by the food waste chef and by Make Food Not Waste’s mission.

“One of the things that I’ve always wanted to do with Tostada Magazine is be able to produce these live, in-person events so we can actually have conversations about issues instead of me just reporting or publishing stories,” Daniels said in the WDET interview. “Hopefully it will inspire (people) to start getting creative with their own kitchens, their own pantries, to use all these ingredients to their fullest capacity.”

Objective: Produce reporting that leads to actions addressing the issues covered

Series stories captured the attention of civic and journalism organizations, with shares on social media from groups including the League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland, Sustainable Cleveland, The Southwest Detroit Business Association, Community Renewal Society in Chicago, the Society of Environmental Journalists and WisBusiness.com.

A potential candidate for Chicago's 39th Ward alderman reached out to Borderless in response to the story, and was interested in planning an event. The newsroom plans to do more reporting on flooding, water management and larger environmental justice issues with the freelance reporter onboarded for this project. Borderless is conferring with the Metropolitan Planning Council to host an event in spring 2023 to discuss their flooding coverage, and to hear from the community about related concerns. Staff has also discussed creating a resource guide or flier to distribute at future events.

Objective: Build long-term partnerships with other organizations to support future projects

Participants also began planning separate collaborative projects as a result of their participation, including a new partnership between Planet Detroit and The Land on a citizen journalism training program to pilot The Land's community journalism class, Reporting From Where We Live. The aim is to ascertain interest in Detroit for more community journalism training. Planet Detroit got 38 applications for 5 seats in the class.

In the post-project evaluation, every newsroom participant reported meeting their goals. This series started a conversation between the outlets involved and with multiple audiences that we expect to drive more reporting on these significant issues forward in 2023 and beyond.

"I so appreciate the opportunity to work and connect with others in a field that can seem lonely at times," said Nina Ignaczak, the founder, publisher, and executive editor of Planet Detroit. "Meeting new colleagues and forming new relationships that will continue to bear fruit in the future was, for me, the best part of this engagement."

Appendix

Outlets that republished stories:

A total of 22 outlets republished stories from the series.

National
Ag Update
EcoWatch
Inside Climate News

Next City

Regional

Great Lakes Echo
Great Lakes Now

State

Illinois

Austin Weekly News
Block Club Chicago

Indiana

Limestone Post

Minnesota

MinnPost

Montana

Ravalli Republic

New York

Lockport Union-Sun and Journal
Niagara Gazette

Ohio

Athens Messenger
Cleveland Scene
Ideastream Public Media
Ohio Capital Journal
Signal Cleveland

Wisconsin

The Journal Times
Wausau Pilot & Review
Wisconsin State Journal
Wisconsin Watch

How did we find data?

We asked participants to provide engagement data from their sites and social accounts for web metrics and qualitative feedback via a survey.

For content distribution, we communicated directly with publishing partners and searched Google News alerts for variations of the series attribution and the first sentence of each story.

For social distribution results, we searched for social captures from CrowdTangle and Meltwater for the original stories posted on collaboration participant sites.

Collaboration participants



Lee Chilcote
The Land



Siri Chilukuri
Borderless



Serena Maria Daniels
Tostada Magazine



Dan Haugen
Energy News Network



Nina Ignaczak
Planet Detroit



Kathiann Kowalski
Energy News Network



Jillian Melero
Borderless



Bridget Thoreson
INN