

Report on NIF Forum Activity

Climate Choices: How Should We Meet the Challenges of A Warming Planet?

When people gather with friends, neighbors, and fellow community members to deliberate on shared problems, they often report that they are exposed to ideas and perspectives they hadn't previously entertained. They also often say that they leave the deliberative forums, not with completely changed minds, but "thinking differently" nonetheless.

Recent forums using the [Climate Choices](#) issue guide were no exception. In questionnaires returned after the forums, just under half of participants responded that they were "thinking differently about the issue." For example, one participant from an **Ohio** forum said, "I now realize that everything we do to address climate change has other effects." The questionnaires also show that slightly more than half of participants noted that they "talked about aspects of the issue they hadn't considered before." From a forum participant in **Connecticut**: "I hadn't considered the possibility of rushing into poorly researched energy sources and possibly causing more harm than good."

The *Climate Choices* issue guide was a joint effort of the [National Issues Forums](#) (NIF) and the [North American Association for Environmental Education](#) (NAAEE). NAAEE's interest in producing the issue guide relates to their [Environmental Issues Forums](#) (EIF) initiative, in which they hope to encourage a nationwide network to hold forums on issues that affect the environment. Since its publication in 2016, people have held forums using the *Climate Choices* guide in **Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio, and New Mexico**, among other locales. More than 25 climate choices forums have also taken place online using the [Common Ground for Action](#) platform.

Some of the more interesting forum reports we hear about occur when multiple organizations work to coconvene forums. This was the case for a late 2017 forum that took place in **Wichita, Kansas**. Representatives from three different organizations partnered to put on a forum to deliberate about the environmental challenges facing Kansas and the world at large: the [Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Engagement](#), the [Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams](#), and Kansas State University's [Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy](#). Included in the group of 15 were representatives from county and municipal government and professionals from the energy and agriculture sectors, as well as local retirees and students. In this group we see people wrestling with trade-offs in a number of the options. According to the convenors, the group was enthusiastic about option 2 (Prepare and Protect Communities) but worried that possible actions would do little to address underlying environmental issues. In talking about Option 3 (Accelerate Innovation), the group was concerned about the number of unknowns and uncertain prospects for success associated with trying to innovate our way out of the problem.

Another interesting area of activity was **Columbia, Missouri**, where there were another six climate choices forums. Led by Christine Jie Li of the University of Missouri's School of Natural

Resources, three of these forums were at the Columbia Public Library, two at a local Episcopal church, and one with local students on the University of Missouri campus. The convenors of the Missouri forums report that participants felt anxious about environmental threats but were eager to take action. One participant said, “When I hear about climate change, I often feel overwhelmed and hopeless. It is such a huge overarching issue that it feels impossible to solve.” Another said, “I am curious to know my fellow citizens’ ideas and to work toward a community-supported decision.” Convenors from Missouri reported an increase in hope among participants after the forums with one participant saying, “I feel better and more optimistic that people are thinking about this.”

This article is based on analysis by Kettering Foundation staff of reports made available by the National Issues Forums Institute.