

VOYAGE TO JUSTICE NEWSLETTER



Welcome to this **special issue** about the inaugural Voyage to Justice: Equity & Climate Justice Forum

Reflections from NOAA Deputy Administrator

What a privilege it was to participate in NOAA's inaugural **Voyage to Justice: Equity and Climate Justice Forum** in February! The Forum brought together NOAA employees and community representatives to engage in dialogue, relationship building, and strategy development. The open-mindedness of participants created an environment that enabled learning - and unlearning - together. I wanted to share some highlights:

In her keynote, Colette Pichon Battle spoke powerfully about the imperative to face the climate crisis equitably, challenging us to "level up," as we consider our roles in ensuring just climate solutions. Later, hearing our Federal colleagues echo Colette's message made me reflect on how easy it can be to distance ourselves from activists' messaging that challenge our institutional norms. When it comes to climate justice, it seems that perspectives we may have once dismissed as "too radical" are now becoming mainstream within the Federal government.

Hearing from community residents in Eastwick - the lowest-lying community in Philadelphia - underscored the urgency of collaborating with the communities we intend to serve. Our community partners' presence was felt not only in the plenary sessions, but in table conversations, breakout groups, and community cafes, where partners had the opportunity to present topics for small group discussions.

The breakout sessions also provided an opportunity to showcase innovative work - no matter how big or small - that is happening under the leadership of dedicated NOAA employees. Learning how NOAA colleagues at all levels put equity into action was inspiring to see.

This unique event would not have been possible without the leadership of Dr. Vankita Brown, Dr. Brittany King, and Briana Yancy. I am grateful to them for creating a space unlike any other I've had the chance to be a part of during my time at NOAA.

To all those who did not attend – I hope you reach out to your colleagues who were there to ask them about their experience and continue the conversation. For NOAA to embed equity in everything we do, advancing equity must be everyone's job. I look forward to growing this work with you.

Jainey Bavishi
*Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and
NOAA Deputy Administrator*




VOYAGE TO JUSTICE EQUITY & CLIMATE JUSTICE FORUM

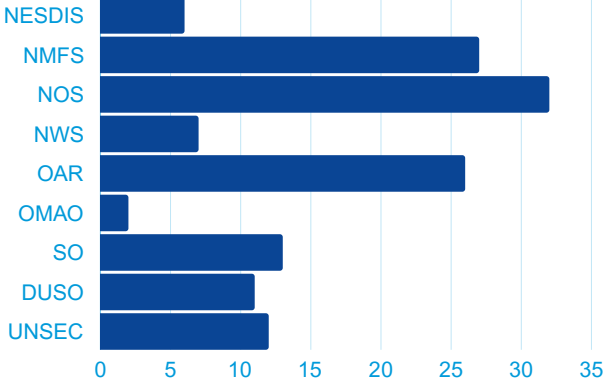
RECAP
BY THE NUMBERS



218
Attendees*



136
NOAA Employees
and Affiliates



Office	Count
NESDIS	5
NMFS	27
NOS	32
NWS	7
OAR	26
OMAO	2
SO	13
DUSO	11
UNSEC	12

70
Community
Partners



8
Plenary Sessions

9
Breakout Sessions


Over 60



Speakers & Facilitators



12
Federal Partners



20+ Session Planners,
Organizers and Volunteers

*Counts are based on the number of participants that checked in at registration

COLETTE PICHON BATTLE DELIVERS A POWERFUL KEYNOTE ADDRESS



Colette Pichon Battle is the co-founder and Vision & Initiatives Partner for Taproot Earth and is a former corporate lawyer. Internationally, Colette has received recognition for her outstanding use of the legal and judicial process to achieve environmental goals.

DID YOU KNOW?

Taproot Earth's legacy is rooted in the disaster recovery work in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina when the climate crisis was revealed in full force. In the backdrop of Black and Indigenous communities left out of federal recovery systems, the **Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy** emerged to provide relief and legal assistance to survivors across the region.

In the years that followed, frontline communities from the Gulf South to the Global South have witnessed more devastating storms, droughts, wildfires, heat, and land loss.

Taproot Earth was founded to create connections and power across issues, movements, and geographies.

Colette Pichon Battle kicked off NOAA's Voyage to Justice Forum with a powerful and inspiring keynote about the climate crisis and how each of us can tap into our humanity to save the planet.

She reminded us that we are all connected, but that fear, loss, and destruction caused by climate change has fostered a false sense of scarcity, urgency, and division amongst people. Referencing the United Nations' 2016 Paris Agreement, which ominously marked 2030 as the threshold of irreparable climate damage, she underscored the urgency of staying united in the face of adversity.

"Our selflessness toward each other and the planet can shift any trajectory," said Colette. "This is about survival, and no one should assume that just because they're not on the frontlines now that they are immune to these current and future losses."

She urged the audience to think about solutions that fall outside of our current systems, and warned that capitalism is the root of our collective loss of connection to other people and nature. Colette debunked the notion that overconsumption and dominance equate to prosperity for all. She cautioned that the solutions to our most imminent problems will never look like profiting from people, continuing to invest in gas and oil, sacrificing areas like the Gulf of Mexico, or ignoring indigenous knowledge. Humanity won't survive by continuing to live with an unjust and extractive approach to living on the planet. Colette contended that if we don't have access to natural resources we depend on like fresh air, healthy food and clean water, money won't matter.

Finally, she challenged everyone to identify the roles we play and to step out of our comfort zone to take on new roles. People on the front lines are fighting for their lives, but we can all help by becoming an ally, partner or being a part of the tribe. Colette encouraged everyone to bring their uniqueness and humanity to the table and use their skills to back up front-line communities.

In her closing message she asserted that our climate reality does not have to remain bleak. If we develop solutions grounded in equity, accountability, and justice, we can have a future that is both joyful and liberating for all.

USING LANGUAGE TO ADVANCE JUSTICE AND EQUITY

Language is one of our most powerful tools to advance justice and equity. If we're not cognizant, the language we use can cause more harm than good. During this 60-minute Using Language to Advance Justice and Equity in Conservation session, The Next 100 Coalition, Ocean Equity Collective facilitation partners discussed the historical environmental inequities that have prevented all communities from participating in environmental protection and conservation work – with people at the center – and those inequities that continue to impede the enjoyment of the ocean by all. Together, participants explored the significance of using language to advance justice and equity in our collective ocean conservation efforts.

The session leaders shared copies of the [Ocean Equity Collective: Language Guide](#), which provides examples on how to avoid using disempowering languages, as resources that can serve as a starting point for further discussion and collaborations.

“
Every word we use,
someone made up.”

Using the language of NOAA's FY 22-26 strategic goals as a foundation, session leaders coached participants on how to apply key language learnings in everyday work. This included ways to promote opportunities for engagement, collaboration, and future partnerships with communities of color and other marginalized and historically excluded communities.



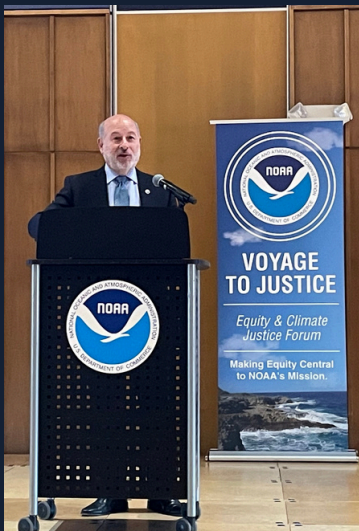
DID YOU KNOW?

The Ocean Equity Collective is an affinity program of the Next 100 Coalition, composed of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led and serving organizations and individuals who are dedicated to ocean conservation, protection, and appreciation. Their mission is to foster the next generation of ocean stewardship while elevating and creating a community-centered sustainability movement where all people can access and cherish the ocean and its ecosystems.

EQUITY IN ACTION: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FORUM

We embarked on a journey of exploration, dialogue, and action during plenary sessions that served as vibrant spaces where diverse perspectives converged, ideas flourished, and pathways to change were illuminated. Sessions illuminated the innovative strides being made by NOAA employees at every level. Witnessing how our colleagues put equity into practice was truly inspiring, reinforcing our commitment to advancing environmental justice across all fronts.

“Dr. Rick Spinrad unveiled NOAA’s First-ever Equity Statement”



This momentous event offered an unmatched opportunity to engage around crucial issues of equity and climate justice, which are integral to successfully executing our mission and delivering for all American communities. During his remarks, NOAA Administrator, Dr. Rick Spinrad unveiled NOAA’s first-ever **Equity Statement**. This statement, which builds on years of work with communities and tribes across the nation, is a crystallization of how NOAA’s approach to equity and climate justice will drive progress—throughout our organization. This equity statement means more than elevating equity as a strategic priority; it’s a reflection of our values, an intentional and explicit commitment to champion equitable access to data, products, and services to build climate resilience for all communities. Extensive work remains to address the injustices of past programs and policies and the tragic legacy of distrust and inequity that followed. “I am proud of NOAA’s recent progress and confident in our commitment to forging a future in which NOAA equitably serves communities across our nation.

-Dr. Rick Spinrad

“Discovering the Power of Community Collaboration”



During this plenary session, attendees screened the thought-provoking documentary **“Higher Ground: Restorative Science and Sustainability.”** This film, funded by NOAA’s Adaptation Sciences Program, delved into the endeavors of researchers from Drexel University as they navigated the neighborhoods of Eastwick in Philadelphia and the City of Camden, grappling with the impacts of climate change alongside local residents and leaders. The documentary provided a compelling narrative of community resilience and collaboration in the face of environmental challenges. Viewers witnessed firsthand the dedication of researchers as they worked hand-in-hand with citizens and municipal leaders to address the pressing issue of climate adaptation.

Following the screening, the plenary session continued with a dynamic panel discussion featuring Franco Montalto, Research Director of the Sustainable Water Resource Engineering Lab at Drexel University, and Eastwick United CDC Board members, Ted Pickett and Brenda Whitefield. Their perspectives shed light on the importance of community engagement and scientific research in shaping resilient, sustainable futures. The discussion served as a reminder of the power of collaboration and collective action in addressing environmental challenges by emphasizing the crucial role that each of us plays in advocating for change and fostering a more sustainable world.



"Insights from Federal Leaders: Advancing Equity in Climate and Environmental Justice"

The panel discussion featuring esteemed Federal partners, including Dr. Jalonne White-Newsome (The White House Council on Environmental Quality), Dr. Kristi Fedinick (The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy), Shalanda Baker (U.S. Department of Energy), Arsenio Mataka (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and Matthew Tejada (formerly U.S. Environmental Protection Agency), provided valuable reflections on advancing equity in climate and environmental justice. Their insights shed light on the pivotal role of Federal institutions in driving meaningful change. By emphasizing the need to adopt perspectives once considered revolutionary, they made it clear that the discourse around climate and environmental justice is evolving within the Federal government. This panel served as a poignant reminder of the importance of engaging with diverse voices and challenging institutional norms to create a more just and sustainable future.

"Climate Uncertainty and Sense of Place"

During this interactive session, NOAA employees were asked to join community members for round-table conversations on the impact of climate uncertainty on sense of place. Participants explored their sense of place and attachment to their "place" and explored how they would feel if they no longer had access to that place due to a climate disaster. While many said they would simply leave and find a new "place," it exposed a luxury and privilege that some communities simply do not have. This session allowed NOAA staff and community members to engage on a personal level as they considered the intersections of climate change and its impacts on their physical and mental well-being.

"Community Voices Take Center Stage"

Community engagement took on an interactive twist with the introduction of Community Cafés. Here, community partners stepped into the spotlight, pitching their innovative ideas for tackling environmental challenges. Attendees had the opportunity to select topics close to their hearts, engaging in meaningful discussions with peers and experts alike. From grassroots initiatives to groundbreaking solutions, the Community Cafés showcased the power of collective action and the diversity of voices driving change. This dynamic exchange reaffirms our commitment to fostering inclusive dialogue and amplifying community voices in the fight for environmental justice.

NOAA EMPLOYEE REFLECTIONS



Attending NOAA's Voyage to Justice: Equity & Climate Justice Forum drove home the fact that to be truly effective, NOAA's mission services must be delivered locally, deep inside the communities we serve. We have to walk the neighborhood streets, talk to the people who live there, and understand the specific challenges that they face. We must establish lasting relationships with community leaders that are built on a foundation of trust. Voyage to Justice was an inspirational reminder of the power of the NOAA mission to improve people's lives.

Dr. Steve Smith, Director, Office of Science & Technology Integration, NWS

The breakout sessions on "Indigenous Knowledge is Not a Myth" and the "Stories of Gullah Geechee" remain etched in my memory. I knew that NOAA has guidance and best practices for engaging and incorporating indigenous knowledge but the conversation in the breakout session reinforced why it's important. I knew only a little bit about the Gullah Geechee and am inspired to read more about them. Together, those sessions added to my determination to, at every opportunity, look at who is in the room, determine whose voice is missing, and demand that they be included.



Valarie Were, PhD, Social and Behavioral Science Program Analyst, NWS



The most important part of Voyage to Equity was bringing together community partners and federal employees to have candid discussions about the intersection of all our work in the equity space. I appreciated that community members were empowered to speak openly and share their experiences and the areas where the federal government does well or falls short. I spent a lot of time listening; however, it was also important to me personally to be able to exist in all my intersectionality in that space. Being able to relate to many of the people and situations in the room drove home WHY I come to work every day.

One of the most impactful takeaways for me was the overall frustration of communities around the extra work it takes to navigate different federal agencies and a lack of cohesive messaging and support. To that end, we are working within Sea Grant to build a Technical Assistance page on our website that will include Sea Grant resources and be a one-stop shop for communities looking for these kinds of resources. We intend to include links to similar pages and resources as well as descriptions so folks know what they're getting and where to go to get it. We hope this will decrease the load on the communities we serve and truly support their efforts toward climate equity and resilience

Amara Davis, Outreach Coordinator, Sea Grant/OAR

The conference managed to be challenging but also intentional in the development of a supportive community of practice within NOAA so that this work can continue. They (the organizers) did a great job of constantly re-centering our work priorities on the real life and real time impacts on the people we serve, and on making us examine the assumptions we bring to our work and decisions.



Dr. Danika Kleiber, Social Scientist, PIFSC/NMFS



"The Equity and Climate Justice Forum was eye-opening! It brought together brilliant minds from diverse backgrounds to highlight ongoing service equity efforts and areas for needed improvements. I brought several ideas from the Forum back to my unit (Weather Prediction Center), and we've begun taking steps to blend social vulnerability datasets and our excessive rainfall outlooks to highlight vulnerable populations under a heightened risk of flash flooding.

Dr. Ashton Cook, Meteorologist, NWS

The Voyage to Justice Forum provided an inspiring space for like-minded individuals to come together and dream of a collective future with environmental justice. Sharing this space with so many committed colleagues reinvigorated my drive to advance equity and justice in our agency and my belief that institutional change is possible. I am proud to work for an organization that is working to address environmental injustices and thankful to the organizing team for creating this space.



Since the workshop, I have been working with my office to develop an Equity and Environmental Justice Implementation Plan, sharing the information and inspiration I gained at the Forum with my entire team.

Michelle Chow, Resource Management Specialist, PIRO/NMFS



The Voyage to Justice Forum was one of the most powerful NOAA-hosted events I have attended in my 13-year career. This was an amazing opportunity to engage with and learn from those who are working on the front lines of communities who are being impacted by many of the coastal issues that drive our mission in NOAA. The event truly hit home the need for leaders like myself to drive us toward a more holistic view of our mission.

While our subject-matter experts can focus on the technical side of our science, it became much more clear how my leadership can drive stronger community partnerships to greatly enhance the impact of our work. The value of this forum is already paying off in terms of specific planning for research and resourcing of these efforts. I appreciate Ms. Bavishi and Dr. Brown's demonstration of transformational leadership in successfully planning and conducting this forum.

Dr. Lonnie Gonsalves, Division Chief, NCCOS/NOS

On behalf of the Voyage to Justice: Equity and Climate Justice planning committee, we would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to all the amazing speakers, trainers, volunteers, attendees, support staff and our co-sponsor The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. We could not have done it with all of you!

*Thank
you!*